Engaging Adolescents’ Interests, Literacy Practices, and Identities:

Digital Collaborative Writing of Fantasy Fiction

in a High School English Elective Class

DISSERTATION

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By

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates an elective English class, in which students in grades 10-12 collectively read and collaboratively wrote fantasy fiction in four groups. The purpose of the class was to have students consider the choices fantasy and science fictions writers, directors, and video game designers make when creating a fictional world. The students read fiction, watched movies, and discussed video games to consider how storyline continuity is established and maintained across media. Each small group of students created their own fictional world housed on a wiki, which consisted of collaborative writing, created and found images, and digital cartography. This study focuses on how the teacher, the students, and I supported and encouraged social practices related to collaborative writing, how the students worked together and apart with a shared set of tools to coordinate their collaborative writing, and how positional identities of authorship were related to how and why students wrote collaboratively.

This study is situated at the intersection of three areas of research: understanding relationships among students’ in- and out-of-school literacy practices, understanding how students accomplish collaborative forms of writing with online digital tools, and understanding how students’ positional identities are related to authorship. The study draws on three complementary theoretical frames that align with these three areas: New Literacy Studies, mediated discourse theory, and positioning theory. The methodology used is grounded in mediated discourse theory and includes two levels of analysis: at the
macro level, nexus analysis is employed to understand what discursive and non-discursive social practices are constructed and enacted and what relationships among those social practices support or thwart the collaborative writing; at the micro level, mediated discourse analysis is employed to understand how students take up available mediational means to take social action in order to accomplish the collaborative writing and how students position themselves and one another as authors, animators, and principals of the wiki pages that constitute the Building Worlds Project.

Findings indicate that the students’ histories with writing shaped what social practices they did and did not enact related to the writing of the project. The students demonstrated a concern for the ownership of their own and each other’s wiki pages. This concern for ownership was directly related to the most durable social practice of ‘posting writing to own wiki page’ which was commensurate with school-based social practices related to writing that the students reported in interviews. Findings also indicate that students’ social interaction, social relationships, and positional identities of authorship shaped how and why they took up mediational means in the ways they did when taking social action related to the writing of the project.

This study has implications for the field of literacy studies and writing research by demonstrating how students took up a digital tool, i.e., a wiki, to write collaboratively in ways that are commensurate and incommensurate with new literacies. This study also provides insight into how writing histories shape how writing is accomplished and how students negotiate authorship within social interaction and existing relationships.
DEDICATION

For my family, who supported me every step of the way.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would be remiss to present this study of collaborative writing without acknowledging the many people who contributed to and supported both the development of this study and my own personal development as a teacher, researcher, colleague, and human being. I have been extremely fortunate to grow alongside and learn from caring and supportive people who generously offered their guidance, shared their lives, and patiently helped me to find my own way.

During my graduate studies, two people have been a part of my development process for longer than they may care to admit. Caroline Clark and George Newell first worked with me as a pre-service English teacher in Ohio State’s M.Ed. program and later worked with me in my doctoral coursework and the writing of my dissertation. I would like to thank Caroline for her steadfast enthusiasm and support over the years and for modeling what it means to be a caring colleague, a reflexive practitioner, and a teacher who boldly challenges and supports her students. I also would like to thank George for providing his guidance and advice as I navigated my graduate studies and for his paternal concern for me as a husband and father leading my family on the graduate school journey.

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lives and regularly provided equal amounts of joyous comic relief and moments of parental frustration. I am pleased that we can finally stop playing ‘writing our dissertations’ and move on to other playful experiences together.
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Major Field: Education

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

John Carver\(^1\) is an English and drama teacher at Hanover High School; he teaches an elective English class called Swords and Spaceships. In this elective class that is offered to students grades 9-12, students who share an interest in fantasy and science fiction read literature in these genres and also collaboratively write their own fiction in order to consider the choices writers make when creating a fictional world. Swords and Spaceships is one of 14 English electives offered by the rural, Midwestern high school designed to encourage students to read and write in an area of interest that they share with their teacher. In the 2009 offering of Swords and Spaceships, John and the 22 students who enrolled in his semester-long class shared an interest in fantasy and science fiction, though they differed in their prior experiences with, and preferences for, the multiple media related to the genres, e.g., literature, movies, video games, role playing games, graphic novels, comic books.

The central component of Swords and Spaceships is the Building Worlds Project, which involved four groups of students each creating a fantasy world through collaborative writing, cartography, created and found images, and video game design. The project was housed on a wiki\(^2\), which provided a public website to which students, as registered users, asynchronously posted and edited their writing and other non-print

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\(^1\) Pseudonyms are used for the participants and the name of the school.

\(^2\) Wikispaces.com, a service that provides free wikis for educational use.
project components, e.g., maps, images, music, video. John and the students worked on the project across a semester. The majority of the content was posted to the wiki outside of class time though when one of the school’s computer labs or library was available, the class used school computers to work on the project during class time.

John’s elective English class represents a deliberate attempt to leverage students’ interests in fantasy and science fiction in order to engage them in problem-based, collaborative writing. John intentionally positioned the students as writers of fantasy and science fiction to have them consider how writers, moviemakers, and video game designers create and maintain the continuity of a fictional world. In this study I demonstrate how some of John’s students would take up these positionings and others would resist them. In this study, I conceptualize John’s teaching and his students’ world building at the intersection of three areas of research in the field of literacy studies: understanding relationships among students’ in- and out-of-school literacy practices (Scollon & Scollon, 2004; Street, 2000; Street & Street, 1991), understanding how students accomplish collaborative forms of writing with online digital tools (Leander & Prior, 2004; Norris & Jones, 2005; Prior, 2006; Scollon, 2001b; Wertsch, 1998), and understanding how students’ positional identities are related to their literacy practices (Davies & Harré, 1990; Gee, 2001; Harré & van Langenhove, 1991; 1999; Scollon, 2001b). Below, I explain in brief how this study is situated within each of these three areas of research and introduce my three research questions directly related to these areas.
Problem Statement

For the past 30 years, the field of literacy studies has been concerned with children’s and adolescents’ literacy practices across in- and out-of-school contexts (Heath, 1983; Hull & Schultz, 2001; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). Leading up to this time period was a gradual “social turn” away from behaviorist and cognitive conceptions of literacy that were primarily focused on the individual toward a social understanding of how reading and writing are part of social practices or activities in which people interact with one another (Gee, 2000). This social turn was facilitated by studies of literacy that demonstrated how reading and writing in the lives of youth and adults cannot be explained by a singular, narrow set of literacy skills associated with school. Rather, these early studies found that literacy is multiple, embedded in social processes and practices, and associated with a variety of domains, including home, school, commerce, and community (e.g., Heath, 1983; Scollon & Scollon, 1981; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Street, 1984; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988).

Drawing on this work, researchers affiliating as the New Literacy Studies\(^3\) (Barton, 1994; Gee, 1996; Street, 1995) began using an ideological understanding of literacy as situated social practices to understand how reading and writing have particular meanings and purposes and are related to particular domains and identities within and across particular contexts. This ideological model of literacy has helped explain how power relations among people and institutions are implicated when they bring multiple literacy practices to bear on a particular social occasion involving reading, writing, or

\(^3\) The adjective new refers to the then new approach to studying and understanding literacy as situated social practices as opposed to an autonomous, neutral set of skills. In this regard, New Literacy Studies represents a new paradigm for researching and understanding literacy.
related semiotic systems, i.e., literacy event (Bloome, et al., 2005; Street, 2005). When literacy practices are incommensurate with one another across home and school domains (Barton, 1994; Bloome, et al., 2000; Street & Street, 1991), the ideological model of literacy has helped explain how the relationships among people’s literacy practices map onto broader social structures and institutions, including social and economic inequities (McCarthey, 2000), which I explain in greater detail in Chapter 2.

More recent studies have provided the field of literacy studies with a phalanx of examples that acknowledge and validate the significance of adolescents’ literacy practices not typically associated with school, many of which involve digital tools (Mills, 2010). This research portrays young people as agentive and actively constructing literacy practices in relation to the following list of categories (which is neither meant to be exhaustive nor mutually exclusive): faith communities (Kelly, 2001; McMillon & Edwards, 2008); new literacies (Hagood, 2009; Kist, 2005; Knobel & Lankshear, 2007), popular culture and media production (Alvermann, 2002; 2010; Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003; Hill & Vasudevan, 2008; Kinloch, 2009; Mahiri, 2004; 2011; Morrell, 2004; Ranker, 2007; Vasudevan, Schultz, & Bateman, 2010), graffiti (Moje, 2000), multimodality (Pahl & Rowsell, 2006), instant messaging (Jacobs, 2004; 2006; Lewis & Fabos, 2005), fan fiction (Black, 2008; Thomas, 2006), and video games (Leander & Lovvorn, 2006; Steinkuehler, 2007). This body of research is significant because it has helped the field of literacy studies to re-conceptualize the literacy practices and agentive identities of adolescents (Alvermann, et al., 2006), to provide counter examples to deficit perspectives of youth based on narrow, decontextualized sets of literacy skills (Hill &
When considering the relationship between in- and out-of-school literacy practices, Hull and Schultz (2002) caution that the juxtaposition of the two has the potential of reifying a false dichotomy, one that “relegates all good things to out-of-school contexts and everything repressive to school” (p. 3). This dichotomous tension persists as critiques of the limited scope of in-school literacy practices sharpen and the studies of literacy practices not associated with school expand (Gee, 2004; Gee & Hayes, 2011). Through the studies in their edited volume that bridge in- and out-of-school literacies, Hull and Schultz (2002) argue against simply romanticizing out-of-school literacy practices and argue for the examination of how literacy practices overlap and complement one another across contexts. Further, they argue that when considering the relationships among literacy practices, context should not be oversimplified as a container, “which surrounds and therefore, of necessity, causes or influences or shapes” (p. 12). Hull and Schultz are wary of attributing too much significance to the place, i.e.,
in school or out of school, where a literacy practice is enacted and consider how literacy practices are enacted across time and space.

These considerations of how literacy practices are related to one another and the context in which they are enacted have been addressed in different ways in the field of literacy studies. The New Literacy Studies, for example, considers literacy as events enacted in particular times and places and situated in broader social practices, i.e., literacy practices (Barton, 1994; Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanič, 2000; Street, 2000). Though, literacy practices are considered neither to be bound nor to be determined by the time or place of the event in which they are enacted. For example, a literacy practice that is associated with the domain of school may be enacted at home, e.g., doing homework at the kitchen table (McDermott, et al., 1984). Likewise, a literacy practice not sanctioned by school may be enacted in the classroom, e.g., passing notes during class time (Finders, 1997). Additionally, literacy practices associated with multiple domains may be enacted simultaneously, e.g., instant messaging with a boyfriend while preparing for an exam (Jacobs, 2007). Therefore, the distinction between in- and out-of-school literacy practices concerns primarily the social relationships among persons implicated in the literacy practice, the roles they embrace, how the roles relate to the nature of the social institution (e.g., school, family) in which the literacy practice is located, and the relationship between the persons involved, knowledge, task, and the structuring of language. (Bloome, et al., 2000, p. 156)

Nevertheless, literacy studies researchers have critiqued the New Literacy Studies for primarily locating literacy practices in local contexts without giving enough consideration to how they are shaped by global forces (Brandt & Clinton, 2002). As well, they have been critiqued for considering context as singular, static places as opposed to plural social
spaces (Leander & Sheehy, 2004), or “multiple space-times [that] are invoked, produced, folded into one another, and coordinated in activity” (Leander & McKim, 2003, p. 224). These local/global and place/space-time critiques are especially salient in regard to literacy practices mediated by online digital tools (Jacobs, 2007), as global forces potentially shape how the tools are used in local contexts and as participants construct and coordinate online social spaces within and across multiple places.

This study investigates relationships among the literacy practices that students in John’s elective English class brought to bear on the collaborative writing of the Building Worlds Project and the literacy practices that John attempted to have his students take up, which were unfamiliar to most of the students. Some of the students’ genre-related literacy practices were associated with out-of-school activities such as role playing and video games; writing fantasy and fan fiction; reading novels, graphic novels, and comics; and watching and reading about television shows and movies. John attempted to leverage and build on these literacy practices in order to encourage students to take up collaborative writing of fantasy fiction using online digital tools, a literacy practice that is representative of new literacies4.

In order to make inductions about the literacy practices John and his students brought to bear on and constructed within the collaborative writing, I look closely at how

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4 Lankshear and Knobel (2006) define new literacies as socially situated literacy practices that involve both new technical tools and a new mindset for how those technical tools can be used. New literacies do not only involve print-based reading and writing, but also other modalities and semiotic systems. They use the adjective new to mark an ontological difference between literacy practices involving digital technologies that are representative of an old mindset, e.g., individual authority and expertise, and those that are representative of a new mindset, e.g., collective and distributed authority and expertise. They explain that using new technical tools with an old mindset, e.g., using a wiki to post individual student essays, does not constitute an example of new literacies; using old tools with a new mindset, e.g., using pencil and paper to co-author an essay, constitutes a peripheral case of new literacies; and using new technical tools with a new mindset, e.g., contributing to a collaboratively written article on Wikipedia, constitutes a paradigmatic case of new literacies.
they accomplished the collaborative writing using the online digital tools and related resources inside and outside of class time. This approach is consistent with New Literacy Studies, in which researchers investigate literacy events (Heath, 1983) in order to make inductions about the literacy practices at work in those events (Street, 2000). Also, consistent with sociocultural views of writing, I conceptualize writing as mediated social action that involves an array of sociohistorically provided resources (languages, genres, knowledge, motives, technologies of inscription and distribution) that extend beyond the moment of transcription and that cross modes and media (reading, writing, talk, visual representation, material objectification). (Prior, 2006, p. 58)

In an effort to position my research within sociocultural studies of writing (Leander & Prior, 2004; Prior, 2006), I set out to understand how John and his students coordinated online and in-person social interaction and took up mediational means, such as the online digital tools and popular culture resources, to collaboratively plan and write the Building Worlds Project. I also consider how the students took up an online digital writing tool that was new to them as they attempted to enact a literacy practice that was new to most of them, i.e., collaborative fantasy fiction writing.

When considering how the students shaped the collaborative writing through online and in-person social interaction, I take up another central concern in literacy studies: the relationship between identity and literacy practices (Gee, 2001; Moje & Luke, 2009; Rowsell & Abrams, 2011). Moje and Luke (2009) identify five metaphors for ways identity has been defined and researched in studies of literacy, i.e., identity as difference, identity as sense of self/subjectivity, identity as mind or consciousness, identity as
narrative, and identity as position. In this study, I use the metaphor of identity as position to consider how the students exercise agency to shape social interaction by engaging in reflexive and interactive positioning of themselves and one another (Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré & van Langenhove, 1991; 1999). Within and across related mediated actions, social positions are proposed, imposed, resisted, and taken up in ways that “constitute relations of hierarchy, distance, or perhaps affiliation” (Holland, et al., 1998, p. 128). The students exercise agency when positioning themselves and each other, but they also can be positioned in relationship to a group or institution. John intentionally positioned the students in his elective English class as capable readers and expert writers, and the students positioned themselves and each other within and across the collaborative writing groups. These positional identities were related to the mediated social interaction and the literacy practices involved with their negotiation and accomplishment of collaborative writing.

In this study, I use mediated discourse theory (Scollon, 2001b) to investigate John and his students’ collaborative writing as a nexus of practice, i.e., a constellation of commensurate and incommensurate social and literacy practices (Scollon & Scollon, 2004). I do so to understand how John and his students engaged, navigated, and attempted to change the nexus of practice related to the Building Worlds Project. I take this approach for the purpose of conceptualizing and understanding the relationships among the students’ literacy practices across the semester-long, elective English class while remaining responsive to the conceptual problems presented by local/global (Brandt & Clinton, 2002; Pahl & Rowsell, 2006; Street, 2003) concerns and place/space-time
critiques (Bartlett & Holland, 2002; Leander, 2008; Leander, Phillips, & Taylor, 2010; Leander & Sheehy, 2004). Mediated discourse theory provides a robust set of theoretical tools for making inductions from related chains of mediated social action to literacy practices, considering how space-time is implicated through the construction of sites of engagement, considering how global forces are at work in material conditions through the presence and acknowledgement of discourses-in-place, and considering the significance of John and his students’ identities as relational and reflexive social positionings within mediated action.

In the next section, I outline my research questions that take up these concerns of literacy practices, collaborative writing, and identity in John’s elective English class. The research questions name theoretical constructs from mediated discourse theory that I list in brief in this chapter and explain in greater detail in Chapter 2.

**Research Questions**

Below, I list the three research questions I take up in my analysis of the elective English class as well as John and his students’ collaborative writing related to the Building Worlds Project. The overall intent of asking these questions is to understand how John’s teaching and design of the elective English class supported the Building Worlds Project, as well as how and why John and his students wrote collaboratively in the ways they did. The three research questions are:

1. How do the teacher, his students, and I engage, navigate, and attempt to change the nexus of practice that constituted the Building Worlds Project?
2. How do the students’ social practices, mediational means, and social interaction shape how and why they coordinated their collaborative writing?

3. How are the teacher and his students’ positional identities related to how and why they wrote collaboratively for the Building Worlds Project?

For the first question, I use nexus analysis (Scollon & Scollon, 2004) to conceptualize and understand John’s elective English class as a nexus of practice, which John intentionally attempts to change through his teaching. This macro-ethnographic analysis, which I detail in Chapter 3, sets the stage for answering the second and third research questions. For questions two and three, I employ a complementary micro-ethnographic methodology, mediated discourse analysis (Scollon, 2001b), which I also detail in Chapter 3, to conceptualize and understand John and his students’ collaborative writing as mediated social action. I do so to consider how related chains of mediated action associated with the Building Worlds Project relate to the literacy practices that John and his students brought to bear on and constructed within the online and in-class collaborative writing. I also use mediated discourse analysis to consider identity as social positioning within mediated action to understand how social interaction and positioning shaped the collaborative writing of John and his students.

**Significance of the Study**

This study makes contributions to the field of literacy studies and writing research on empirical and theoretical fronts. Empirically, this study demonstrates how students take up online digital tools to complete a collaborative writing project. Through an investigation of the students’ writing posted to the wiki and their social processes of
planning and writing in class, I explain how their literacy practices, social interaction, and positional identities shape how and why they accomplished the collaborative writing. Theoretically, this study is a relatively new approach to studying collaborative writing, i.e., nexus analysis and mediated discourse analysis. This approach builds on the work of other researchers in related fields who have used mediated discourse theory to understand social processes and practices related to literacy (e.g., Jones, 2005a; Wohlwend, 2007; 2009a; 2009b). Below, I further explain how this study is situated in the fields of literacy studies and writing research along empirical and theoretical lines.

**Empirical Contribution**

This study contributes to a large body of writing research that has considered how students accomplish writing in interaction with their peers. Though not always referred to as collaborative writing, this research problem has been investigated along a continuum of perspectives indicative of the “social turn” in literacy research (Gee, 2000), i.e., from a cognitive perspective as collective problem solving in a task environment (Flower & Hayes, 1981); from a socio-cognitive perspective as negotiating conflict, constraints, and alternatives presented by the social context (Dauite & Dalton, 1988; 1993; Flower, 1994); and from a sociocultural perspective as distributed, mediated, and dialogic processes of invention (Dyson, 1993b; 1997; Prior, 2006; Razfar & Gutiérrez, 2003; Schultz & Fecho, 2000). Researchers concerned with collaborative forms of writing have investigated peer response groups (Dauite & Dalton, 1988; DiPardo & Freedman, 1988; Gere & Abbott, 1985; Freedman, 1992), collaborative planning groups (Flower, 1994), teacher-student writing conferences (McCarthey, 1992; 1994; Sperling, 1989; 1990; 1991; 1994), and
networks of students that involve multiple, often shifting, roles (Dyson, 1987; 1988; 1993b; 1997; 1999; Janda, 1990; Larson, 1999; Larson & Maier, 2000; Schultz, 1997; Sperling, 1995). Additionally, some researchers have sought to define and classify types of writing that are more or less collaborative (Ede & Lunsford, 1990; Forman & Cazden, 1985; Freedman, 1992; Haring-Smith, 1994).

In this study, I take up a sociocultural view of writing (Prior, 2006) to consider how the students negotiated the coordination of their collaborative writing related to the Building Worlds Project. Rather than attempt to determine what type of collaborative writing the students engaged in or the extent to which their final product met a collaborative ideal of co-authorship (Haring-Smith, 1994), I consider the students’ collaborative writing as social action that is mediated by a range of sociohistorically provided resources and that unfolds across the semester in relationship to the literacy practices students bring to bear and the literacy practices they construct.

Among these resources are the “technologies of inscription and distribution” (Prior, 2006, p. 58), which includes the wiki that the students used to post their writing, read each others’ writing, and communicate via page-specific discussion boards. Though the use of digital tools to facilitate collaborative writing in schools is not a new area of research (cf. Dauite, 1985; Dickinson, 1986), theorizing about the new literacies that potentially accompany these new digital tools (Baker, 2010; Coiro, et al., 2008) and survey and ethnographic data of adolescents’ use of these tools in out-of-school contexts (e.g., Ito, et al., 2009; Lenhart, et al., 2008) has intensified recent interest in the use of online digital writing tools in schools. This intensification is characterized by an
emphasis on promoting *new literacies* in classrooms in response to *new times* and the advent of *new digital tools* (Greenhow, Robelia, & Hughes, 2009; Kelllner, 2000; Leu, et al., 2009; Merchant, 2009). Furthermore, this intensification is manifest in policy statements and standards on writing instruction, adolescent literacies, and 21st century literacies, all of which seek to promote technology use, collaborative planning, and collective problem solving to prepare students for further education and the workplace (Common Core, 2010; IRA & NCTE, 1996; ISTE, 2007; NCTE, 2007a, 2007b, 2008; Partnership, 2008). Lastly, this intensification is evidenced by a number of recently published books that were written to encourage and support teachers to teach *new literacies* related to writing (Andrews & Smith, 2011; Beach, et al., 2009; DeVoss, et al., 2010; Gainer & Lapp, 2010; Herrington, et al., 2009; Hicks, 2009; Jacobs, 2011; Kajder, 2010; Kist, 2010; Wilber, 2010).

John attempted to engage his students in collaborative writing of the Building Worlds Project. The collaborative coordination and writing on the wiki was representative of *new literacies*, in that the collaborative writing involved a *new* approach to authorship that asked the students to work together to create a common fantasy world without inherent storyline contradictions, and the collaborative writing was mediated by digital tools, e.g., wiki, that were designed to accommodate asynchronous collaborative writing and sharing of common texts. In the fields of literacy studies and writing research, the rationales for teaching *new literacies* like collaborative writing include:
• leveraging literacy practices that are characteristic of students’ out-of-school activities with reading, writing, and related semiotic systems (Gainer & Lapp, 2010; Herrington, et al., 2009; Jacobs, 2011; Kajder, 2010; Wilber, 2010)

• creating new forms of social networks and relationships to support literacy practices related to writing development (Andrews & Smith, 2011; Hicks, 2009; Kist, 2010); and

• preparing students for workplaces and other participatory cultures that demand particular digital tools be used in particular ways (Beach, et al., 2009; DeVoss, et al., 2010)

For John, the purpose of engaging students in the collaborative writing of a fantasy world was to help students understand the choices and tensions with which fantasy and science fiction writers work when creating their fictional worlds. John leveraged students’ interests and literacy practices related to fantasy and science fiction in an effort to accomplish this goal.

Though collaborative forms of writing have not been completely absent from classrooms historically, the use of digital tools to mediate collaborative forms of writing in classrooms is a more recent research problem in the field of literacy studies. This study contributes to our understanding of how students negotiate new literacies in relationship to the literacy practices they bring to bear on collaborative writing. This study also contributes to our understanding of how students’ interests and literacy practices can be engaged in ways that support the new literacies we intend for them to take up. Lastly, this study responds to calls for sociocultural studies of writing that examine how contexts are
created “that support new participation structures, roles, rules, and collaborations”
(Englert, Mariage, & Dunsmore, 2006, p. 217).

**Theoretical and Methodological Contribution**

This study’s theoretical framework and methodology present a new approach to studying literacy practices in a high school classroom. In this study, I consider how John and the students wrote collaboratively using digital tools that were new to the students without making a priori assumptions about the technology’s affordances and literacy demands for “effective use” (Coiro, et al., 2008). Though I acknowledge that the literacy practices John was attempting to promote in his elective English class, i.e., collaborative writing, are representative of what the field of literacy studies refers to as new literacies, I do not use the definition of new literacies as a heuristic to evaluate John and his students’ literacy practices, as previous studies have done (e.g., Kist, 2005). In other words, this is not a study of how well John’s students achieved a preconceived ideal of new literacies to a greater or lesser extent, but rather it is a study of how the multiple literacy practices at work in John’s elective English class were related in commensurate and incommensurate ways. The purpose of taking this approach is to be responsive to the critique of the problems of reification and determinism within literacy studies (Street, 2000).

From a New Literacy Studies perspective of literacy as multiple, situated in social contexts, and framed within social, cultural, historical, and institutional practices (Street, 2005), in any given literacy event there may be multiple literacies that are brought to bear on that event. Researchers run the risk of reification when making one-to-one
associations between a particular literacy event and a particular literacy practice. For example, when considering how the students in John’s elective English class wrote collaboratively in a literacy event, I run the risk of falling into the trap of reification by simply characterizing literacy practices at work in the event as new literacies. Rather, I must acknowledge the multiple social and literacy practices that the students bring to bear on and construct within that literacy event. The students’ literacy practices may be associated with grade earning or maintaining friendships, and they may even be associated with both simultaneously in commensurate and incommensurate ways. Therefore, by identifying and understanding literacy practices as always multiple and hybrid, I avoid considering any literacy practice as a single, monolithic thing called new literacies.

A New Literacy Studies perspective also attempts to guard researchers against succumbing to technological determinism when considering digital tool use within literacy events. The new literacies perspective associates particular literacy practices with particular technologies, i.e., new ethos stuff and new technical stuff (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006, 2007; Leu, 2000). By definition, this pairing of stuff runs the risk of implying a kind of determinism by attuning researchers to idealized literacy practices that the digital tools afford by design. Lankshear and Knobel (2007) claim to guard against technological determinism by assigning “the ‘technical stuff’ to its proper place: as more of a ‘contingent enabler’ than a ‘primary mover’ or a ‘heart of the matter’” (p. 21). They argue that the new literacies ethos that “privileges participation over publishing, distributed expertise over centralized expertise, collective intelligence over individual
possessive intelligence, collaboration over individuated authorship…and so on,” (p. 21) existed in embryonic form until its potential was realized with new technologies. Lankshear and Knobel (2007) go on to explain that though the realization of this new ethos is actualized with the use of new digital tools, the new ethos is not dependent on the new digital tools. However, what is not clear from this conceptualization of new literacies is how individuals bring to bear existing literacy practices on these new digital tools and how new literacy practices are constructed with their use.

In this study, I consider new digital tools, such as a wiki, to be one of many possible mediational means taken up in social action. In my analysis of literacy events in which students use a wiki to post writing, I draw on Wertsch’s (1991; 1994; 1995; 1998) understanding of mediated action as the irreducible tension between an agent and mediational means. I do so to consider literacy practices mediated by digital tools as characterized by dynamic tension among various elements rather than as an undifferentiated whole in order to acknowledge the combined contributions of the agent and the mediational means. To avoid technological determinism, I consider the digital tool to be one among many of these mediational means at work within this tension. Other possible mediational means include such sociohistoric resources as everyday language and fantasy- and science-fiction-related genres, images, maps, movies, literature, video games, etc. (Prior, 1998).

Though both the New Literacy Studies and new literacies perspectives share a common sociocultural heritage grounded in ethnographic principles, and some scholars argue that the new literacies perspective “simply carries over the NLS argument about
written language to new digital technologies” (Gee, 2010, p. 172), I argue that the new literacies perspective is attuned to a particular idealized ethos or collection of social and literacy practices associated with particular technologies. I argue that this attunement to particular literacy practices that one can hope to find related to particular technologies works against an ethnographic perspective that does not operationalize a priori categories of new, peripheral, or paradigmatic literacy practices (cf. Lewis & Fabos, 2005). In this dissertation study, I use this argument to respond to calls for research on new, multi-, and multiple literacies (Alvermann, 2008; Moje, 2009) and the use of new technologies for teaching writing in high school classrooms (Juzwik, et al., 2006).

**Theoretical Assumptions and Key Terms**

In sum, I list below the theoretical and methodological assumptions, inclusive of key terms, that I use to guide this study. I list them here in order to introduce my overall approach to studying John and his students’ collaborative writing using the complementary theoretical frames, New Literacy Studies, mediated discourse theory, and positioning theory (explained in greater detail in Chapter 2), and related methodological approaches, nexus analysis and mediated discourse analysis (explained in Chapter 3).

1. Writing is a social action that is mediated by sociohistorically provided resources, or mediational means (Leander & Prior, 2004; Prior, 2006).
3. Writing is shaped by literacy practices that participants bring to bear on and construct within observable literacy events (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanič, 2000; Street, 1995, 2000).

4. The term ‘social’ implies common or shared meaning derived in part from a common history or shared set of past experiences (Scollon, 2001b).

5. The term ‘practice’ is used on two levels (Jones & Norris, 2005d; Scollon, 2001b; Scollon & Scollon, 2004):
   a. On an empirical level, ‘social practice’ is used to describe observable, related chains of discursive and non-discursive mediated action that are recognized by participants as repeatable patterns of action, and
   b. As an abstraction, I use ‘nexus of practice’ to describe how practices are linked as constellations that are recognized by participants as a durable set of linkages, may be considered a cultural model, e.g., literacy practice, and may map onto group membership, i.e., community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

6. Mediated action unfolds within a nexus of practice as sites of engagement, or time-space windows that are established through the intersection of the interaction order, participants’ habitus (Bourdieu, 1977; 1990), and discourses-in-place (Jones, 2005a; 2005b; Scollon, 2001b); any given literacy event may involve multiple, simultaneously occurring sites of engagement.
7. Agents actively construct sites of engagement through their attention structures, bringing particular mediated actions into focus for particular reasons (Jones, 2005a; 2005b).

8. The concept of nexus of practice is not bound by place or membership and includes a consideration of how practices may be commensurate or incommensurate within and across sites of engagement (Scollon, 2001b; Scollon & Scollon, 2004).

9. Mediated action involves interactive and reflexive positioning (Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré & van Langenhove, 1991), which indexes social identities that are produced and reproduced within a set of power relations and a nexus of practice (Scollon, 2001b).

**Outline of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is organized into six chapters. In this first chapter, I provided a brief introduction to the research site and the participants in the study. In subsequent sections, I outlined the problem statement and the three research questions, including a brief statement about how I plan to take up each one in my two levels of analysis, i.e., nexus analysis and mediated discourse analysis. In the previous sections, I outlined the empirical and theoretical contributions that the study makes to the fields of literacy studies and writing research, as well as brief statements about the theoretical assumptions I am making, inclusive of key terms particular to New Literacy Studies and mediated discourse theory.
Chapter 2 is a discussion of the theoretical framework of mediated discourse theory, which is complementary to New Literacy Studies, and the companion methods of analysis used in the study, i.e., nexus analysis and mediated discourse analysis. The chapter begins with an introduction to the New Literacy Studies, mediated discourse theory, and positioning theory in order to locate the theoretical assumptions listed in the previous section within these fields. I explain how these complementary theories guide the analyses and further explain key terms that I operationalize in my analyses. In this chapter, I also include a discussion of how I redefine two central constructs in New Literacy Studies in relationship to mediated discourse theory, i.e., literacy event as sites of engagement, literacy practice as nexus of practice.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology used in the dissertation study. I begin the chapter with an explanation of how I selected the site and the pilot study that I conducted the year prior to the dissertation study. I then introduce the nested contexts of Hanover High School; the English Department and electives; John’s elective English class, Swords and Spaceships; and the four collaborative writing groups. Next, I detail the methodology of nexus analysis and how it aligns with the first research question. Included in this detailing is a discussion of the data corpus and the filtering process involved in selecting focal groups and events for mediated discourse analysis. I conclude the chapter by explaining how I have adapted mediated discourse analysis for my purposes using a sample transcript. I also explain my process for looking microethnographically within and across events to answer the second and third research questions.
In Chapter 4, I take up the first research question at the macro level and present my findings of the nexus analysis of John’s elective English class. I explain how John (as the teacher), the students, and I (as the researcher) engaged, navigated, and attempted to change the nexus of analysis in his classroom. I detail the commensurate and incommensurate intersections of social practices that the students brought to bear on the collaborative writing project and the literacy practices John was attempting to model and promote. In particular, I investigate how the students resisted and tactically addressed the fourth assignment of the Building Worlds Project.

In Chapter 5, I take up the second and third research questions at the micro level by presenting findings for each of the two focal collaborative writing groups. For each group, I begin with more detail about the group including the members’ individual reported histories with writing. Next, I provide mediated discourse analyses of selected literacy events, in which focal group members are planning and writing for the project. I demonstrate how the selected literacy events unfold as conflicting, concurrent, overlapping, and shifting sites of engagement. Through the mediated discourse analysis, I detail findings related to the group members’ habitus, interaction order, and discourses-in-place in order to understand how they wrote collaboratively and engaged in reflexive and relational social positioning of themselves and one another.

Chapter 6 concludes the dissertation with a summary of key findings for each of the three research questions, including the implications of those findings for the field of literacy studies. I also include a discussion of theoretical and methodological considerations related to using mediated discourse theory, nexus analysis, and mediated
discourse analysis to investigate literacy practices across online and in-class events. I conclude the dissertation with a consideration of further questions in the interest of outlining a research agenda around collaborative writing mediated by digital tools.
CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This dissertation study draws on complementary theoretical frames: New Literacy Studies, mediated discourse theory, and positioning theory. I use New Literacy Studies’ social practice view of literacy to consider what literacy practices are at work in relationship to the students’ collaborative writing of the Building Worlds Project. I use mediated discourse theory to consider collaborative writing as mediated social action, as well as how related chains of mediated action constitute social practices over time. Lastly, I use positioning theory to consider students’ identities as relational and reflexive social positionings within mediated action and the nexus of practice. Below, I first outline each of these three theoretical frames, building on the theoretical assumptions stated in Chapter 1. I also provide definitions for key terms particular to the three theoretical frameworks and begin to explain how they are operationalized in the methodology, which is outlined in Chapter 3.

New Literacy Studies

The New Literacy Studies is a name used to describe a body and program of research that takes up a social practice view of literacy. This view of literacy is based on what Street (2000) refers to as the ideological model and is defined in opposition to earlier studies of literacy that were based on what Street refers to as the autonomous model of literacy. The autonomous model of literacy is based on the assumption that
literacy, or the ability to read and write, has effects on other social and cognitive processes “irrespective of the social conditions and cultural interpretations of literacy associated with programmes and educational sites for its dissemination” (Street, 2005, p. 417). This autonomous model has been disrupted by studies in psychology (Scribner & Cole, 1981), literacy studies (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Street, 1984), and ethnography of communication (Heath, 1983), which have collectively demonstrated how particular forms of literacy are situated in particular social arrangements, such as families, schools, faith communities, commerce, and workplaces. These multiple forms of literacy shape and are shaped by the social practices that are enacted within these social arrangements, as well as the shared understanding of the purpose and meaning of particular uses of reading, writing, and related semiotic systems.

Based on these observations about the socially situated forms literacy can take, Street (2005) defined the ideological model of literacy as a social practice, rather than an autonomous technical or neutral set of skills. Street argues that literacy is always “embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles” and framed ideologically in social, cultural, and institutional practices (p. 418). Following the ideological model as a departure from the autonomous model, literacy is reconsidered as multiple literacies\(^5\), or situated literacy practices that vary from one social arrangement to another. Researchers working with the New Literacy Studies’ ideological model of literacy observe literacy events in order to make inductions about what literacy practices are at work within that

\(^5\) My use of multiple literacies is not to be conflated with the term multiliteracies. The term ‘multiple literacies’ refers to the many socially situated forms literacy practices can take within and across contexts (Street, 2000, 2003). ‘Multiliteracies’ is a term coined by the New London Group (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) to redefine literacies in acknowledgement of the complexity and interrelationship of different modes of meaning, including linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, and spatial modalities.
event. However, researchers vary in terms of how they define literacy events and literacy practices and in terms of how they make inductions from events to practices (Bloome, et al., 2005; Street, 2000). Below, I provide brief explanations of how I define these two concepts within New Literacy Studies. In the subsequent section on mediated discourse theory, I revisit literacy events and literacy practices to make refinements for the purposes of analyses outlined in Chapter 3.

**Literacy Events**

Within New Literacy Studies, literacy events are generally defined as observable situations in which reading, writing, or related semiotic systems play a non-trivial role in the observed action. The purpose of investigating literacy events is to understand the observed action, the meaning participants give to those actions, and the ideological underpinnings that inform those actions in order to make inductions about the literacy practices at work within and across related events. However, researchers differ on how they conceptualize the relationship between people and the literacy practices they bring to bear on and construct within literacy events (Baynham, 1995; Bloome, et al., 2005; Bloome & Bailey, 1992; Jacobs, 2007; Street, 2000). In this study, I consider literacy events to be social occasions (Heath, 1983), which are constructed by the actions and reactions people take within them. People do not act and react in a vacuum; rather, they take action in relation to the material and social conditions of the event. For example, a teacher and her students in a classroom act with and react to one another in relation to the material arrangements and location of the classroom, as well as a negotiated understanding of the purpose and expectations of the social interaction that can or should
occur. However, the material and social conditions do not determine the action that takes place in a literacy event. Rather, people agentively co-construct the event in relation to these conditions; that is to say that they “concertedly act on their circumstances and act on and with the literacy practices that are given and available” (Bloome, et al., 2005, p. 6). Therefore, literacy events are best understood when we consider the social actions of individuals and the material and social conditions that shape those actions to be in dynamic tension with one another.

Literacy events may involve multiple social situations that occur simultaneously and that may be related to a particular action within an event. For example, a student who is participating in a class discussion about a novel may be acting and reacting within separate, yet related, social situations, such as providing a response to the teacher and maintaining status among her peers. To consider the social action of providing a response solely in either the social situation of a student-teacher interaction or the social situation of a student-student interaction is to misunderstand how the action may be simultaneously related to multiple levels or layers of social interaction (Bloome & Bailey, 1992). Likewise, in the case of people using networked digital tools to socially interact with people who may or may not be present in the event, understanding how their actions may be simultaneously related to multiple social situations requires a consideration of multiple channels of social interaction that extend beyond the physical context of the literacy event (Jacobs, 2007). Considering how actions within literacy events may be related to multiple, simultaneously occurring social situations can help reveal how people draw on different literacy practices to construct the event for multiple purposes. Later in
this chapter, I take up this concern in a discussion of mediated discourse theory’s concept of sites of engagement.

Literacy events are also not individual, isolated, one-off occurrences. Rather, literacy events are related to events that have occurred in the past, and they are constructed in anticipation of events that may occur in the future. Across events people construct and draw on literacy practices as a resource for making decisions about what action to take in consideration of the social and material conditions of the event. People who encounter a literacy event that is perceived to be very familiar to them based on their history with similar events may take particular social actions that they consider are appropriate. For example, a student who has a history of literacy events involving hand raising in response to a teacher’s question may raise her hand in a classroom literacy event, in which hand raising has not been established as a prerequisite for being called on to respond to a teacher’s question. Alternatively, people may encounter a literacy event that is unfamiliar to them because they do not have a history with similar events. In this case, people may draw on literacy practices that are approximate to what they perceive the expectations to be in order to inform their actions. They may also enact literacy practices that are resistant to what the expectations are, and they may also construct new literacy practices that will in turn inform how they take action in similar events in the future.

**Literacy Practices**

The concept of literacy practices is generally used by researchers in New Literacy Studies to describe how patterns of actions observed in literacy events are related to
broader social and cultural models that people bring to bear on those events and give meaning to them (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Street, 2000; 2005). Literacy practices by definition are ideological in that different people draw on different social and cultural models for how literacy should be used in particular social situations. The relationships among literacy practices and the people that enact them involve circulating relations of power, rendering some literacy practices as dominant and others as vernacular depending on the event in which they are at work. Researchers drawing from this understanding of literacy have demonstrated how certain literacy practices map onto particular domains of life, e.g., home, school, work, community (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Baynham, 1995; Heath, 1983; Street, 1984), and how people negotiate social situations in which their literacy practices are contested or marginalized, often by school which can privilege a narrow definition of literacy as the definitive type. Street and Street (1991) describe this marginalization of literacy practices and the people who enact them as “pedagogization,” or the rendering of non-dominant literacy practices as noncomplementary with school-sanctioned literacy practices (e.g., Heath, 1983) with a deficit perspective (McCarthey, 2000), or considering non-dominant literacy practices as “inferior attempts at the real thing, to be compensated for by enhanced schooling” (Street & Street, 1991, p. 143). Bloome and his colleagues (2000) named other possible relationships among literacy practices, such as oppositional, the out-right rejection of literacy practices as part of broader resistance to the dominant cultural group (e.g., Ogbu, 1991); assimilative, the adoption of literacy practices to become part of the dominant cultural group (e.g., Guthrie,
and *adaptive*, the recasting of literacy practices so that they are consistent with one’s own culture (e.g., Kulick & Stroud, 1991).

These examples demonstrate that people not only draw on literacy practices to inform their actions, but they also play an agentive role in the reproduction of literacy practices, the hybridization of literacy practices, and the construction of new literacy practices. Along these lines, Bloome and his colleagues (2005) have sought to understand “how people in interaction with each other create, accomplish, adapt, adopt, reproduce, transform, etc., the social and cultural practices extant within a particular social scene” (Bloome, et al., 2005, p. 5). They do so not simply to describe the literacy practices at work in a given event, but to understand how people exercise agency to work with and against extant literacy practices to create “new histories, new social relationships, or new social identities, or even how they use extant literacy practices to reproduce histories, social relationships, and social identities” (p. 6). In this way, researching literacy practices can help us understand not only how literacy events and the social actions of the people within them are related to broader social and cultural forces at work, but also how people exercise agency through their actions that draw on and reconstitute literacy practices.

This research agenda is political in that it seeks to broaden our consideration of what literacy practices should be acknowledged and taken up in schools. The rationale for doing so is, in part, to support students in the adoption of literacy practices associated with success in school and advancement in a market economy by attending to the literacy practices they bring with them from other social and cultural domains (Bloome, 2001; 1985).
Finders & Tatum, 2005). To do so in ways that support the hybridization of literacy practices, rather than in ways that present school-sanctioned and non-dominant literacy practices as contradictory or dichotomous, can help students construct capable and agentive social identities in school that are not circumscribed by deficit perspectives based on a narrow predetermined, standardized set of literacy skills they have yet to attain (Mahiri, 2004; McCarthy, 1997; O’Brien, 2001; 2005). Therefore, this research agenda calls for understanding and conceptualizing the various multiple literacy practices students engage in and encounter.

Researchers have differed in terms of how they conceptualize how literacy practices are related and how they are enacted across related and unrelated literacy events. For example, researchers have conceptualized interrelated literacy practices: across a nexus of online and offline activities (Jacobs, 2007), across geographies (Vasudevan, 2009; 2010), as performances in relation to cultural norms (Lewis, 2001), as traveling from context to context via artifacts (Pahl & Rowsell, 2006; 2010), as primary and secondary Discourses (Gee, 1996), and as literacy networks across space-time (Leander, 2008; Leander & Lovvorn, 2006; Leander & McKim, 2003; Leander & Sheehy, 2004). Across these different approaches, literacy practices are conceptualized differently in regard to the agency of individuals and the agency attributed to the literacy practices themselves. In this study, people have agency but objects, artifacts, and literacy practices do not (Blackburn & Clark, 2007). People’s actions are mediated by objects, artifacts, and literacy practices, but these are not “actants” (Latour, 1987, p. 84 cited in Leander &
lovvorn, 2006); rather, objects, artifacts, and even literacy practices are mediational means.

In the following section, I explain how I use mediated discourse theory to reconceptualize the theoretical concepts literacy events and literacy practices that are central to New Literacy Studies. During the course of outlining the major theoretical concepts and assumptions of mediated discourse theory, I explain how literacy events are potentially comprised of multiple, simultaneously occurring sites of engagement, and I further refine literacy practice on the levels of social practice and nexus of practice. Though researchers have offered similar critiques of the concepts of literacy events and literacy practices (Bloome & Bailey, 1992; Bloome, et al., 2005; Jacobs, 2007) and mediated discourse theory is built on tenets derived from the New Literacy Studies (Scollon, 2001b), this study represents an initial attempt to explicitly argue for a complementary relationship between New Literacy Studies and mediated discourse theory for the purpose of studying adolescents’ writing in school.

**Mediated Discourse Theory**

Mediated discourse theory is an attempt to bring together related fields, such as sociolinguistics (Gee, 1996), sociocultural psychology (Scribner & Cole, 1981), critical discourse analysis (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997), New Literacy Studies (Street, 1984; 1995), and practice theory (Bourdieu, 1977; 1990), in order to conceptualize how social actions are accomplished at the intersection of discourse, practice, technology, and other mediational means (Scollon, 2001b). Mediated discourse theory presents theoretical tools and a methodology for understanding how
social actions constitute social practices over time, as well as how social practices are taken up within social actions. Scollon (2001a) states that mediated discourse theory serves the purpose of arriving at “a richer understanding of the history of practice within the habitus of the participants in that particular action” (p. 171). Central to this consideration is the relationship between social action and discourse; mediated discourse theory privileges neither social action nor discourse but rather considers discourse to be one of many mediational means with which people take action (Jones & Norris, 2005a). Similar to other approaches to conceptualizing discourse-in-use (Bloome, at al., 2005; Bloome & Clark, 2006; Gee, 1996), mediated discourse theory defines discourse as not only the language and semiotic resources that people use in social action but also the broader social, cultural, and historical processes to which their use is related.

In an effort to preserve the complexity of the relationship between social action and discourse, mediated discourse theory gives analytic primacy to mediated action (Wertsch, 1994; 1995) in order to understand how social actions mediated by discourse produce and reproduce social identities and groups within a nexus of multiple social practices and the trajectories of multiple histories (Jones & Norris, 2005a). This approach emphasizes that all actions are mediated through cultural and psychological tools, chief among them are what Wertsch (1994) refers to as voices or “the words, phrases, narratives and ‘ways of speaking’” (Gumperz and Hymes, 1986) that we borrow from the sociocultural environment to interact with others and construct our accounts of these interpretations” (Jones & Norris, 2005a, p. 5). Drawing on Bakhtin (1981; 1986), Wertsch considered these voices to be dialogic with the voices of others in order to
emphasize that not only is action transformed by tools, but that tools are also transformed by action. Mediated discourse theory takes up this understanding of mediated action to consider how action and discourse are mutually constitutive, focusing “upon the concrete, real-time social action to see these social actions as fundamentally discursive” (Scollon, 2001b, pp. 8-9).

Though a subtle distinction among approaches to studying discourse’s role in social action, Jones and Norris (2005b) differentiate between a consideration of discourse as action and discourse in action, both of which they use to further define mediated discourse theory. They argue that the discourse as action perspective, which is shared by the ethnography of communication (e.g., Hymes, 1986), interactional sociolinguistics (e.g., Davies & Harré, 1990), critical discourse analysis (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999), and the New Literacy Studies (e.g., Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Gee, 1996; Heath, 1983; Scollon & Scollon, 1981; Street, 1984), considers how language use is a form of social action. According to this perspective, people use speech and written language to take action on the world, manage their identities and relationships with others, and establish and maintain memberships in groups and communities. Mediated discourse theory shares this view, and I take up this perspective in the consideration of how writing is a form of mediated social action, which I explain in the next section.

However, mediated discourse theory also draws from a discourse in action approach in that discourse is considered as one among many possible mediational means taken up within social action. Researchers using mediated discourse theory are careful not to assume that social action can be understood through discourse or that certain forms
of discourse accompany certain social actions. Therefore, mediated discourse theory first considers the action being taken and secondly what the role of discourse is in those actions (Scollon, 2001a; 2001b). This ordering of questions broadens the window used to look into social action in consideration of how people use discourse in combination and dynamic tension with other mediational means, such as objects, gestures, sounds, and built environments, in response to an immediate social situation (Jones & Norris, 2005a). The *discourse in action* approach draws from New Literacy Studies to consider how the broader social and cultural structures interact with everyday social actions. To use Gee’s (1996) heuristic, mediated discourse theory attempts to understand “how discourse (with a small d), along with how Discourses create, reproduce and transform the actions that individual social actors (or groups) can take at any given moment” (Jones & Norris, 2005a, p. 10). In this way, discourse is not merely an ingredient in action, but rather discourse cycles through action as “verbal and textual tools working their way into practices, material objects, and the built environments in which we interact” (Jones & Norris, 2005a, p. 9).

**Writing as Mediated Social Action**

The unit of analysis of mediated discourse theory is mediated action. The focus is on the social actors as they are acting in order to understand how Discourses (Gee, 1996) are “instantiated in the social world as social action, not simply as material objects” (Scollon, 2001b, p. 3). Wertsch’s (1998) term, mediated action, is used to refer to the irreducible tension between mediational means and the agent of the action. The purpose of acknowledging this tension is to avoid over simplifying social action as determined by
the mediational means or wholly explainable by the action of the agent. Mediated action often involves multiple, often conflicting, goals (Leont’ev, 1981) “due to the fact that the goals of the agent do not map neatly onto the goals with which the mediational means are typically associated” (Wertsch, 1998, p. 34). Additionally, mediated actions unfold as participation in a broader social structure, i.e., cultural model, literacy practice, Discourse, and no such social structures exist without concrete, material action (Scollon, 2001b).

Following sociocultural theories of writing, I conceptualize the act of writing to be social mediated action that involves an array of sociohistorically provided resources, or mediational means (Prior, 2006). Writing not only involves the immediate acts of putting words on paper or typing words on a screen and the material or digital products of those acts but also the dialogic processes of invention (Bakhtin, 1981; 1986) that may involve in-person or online social interaction with other people (Prior, 2004). Therefore, when considering what social actions are to be included in my investigation of John and his students’ writing, I not only include acts of transcription, putting pen to paper or finger to key, but also related mediated actions that may include conversations explicitly or implicitly associated with the product that is produced and posted on the wiki.

**Authorship.** Along these lines, an expanded notion of authorship is necessary to conceptualize how multiple people, multiple actions, and multiple mediational means may be implicated in this broad definition of writing. As a heuristic, Goffman (1981) provided an expanded notion of speaker that involved three roles that are typically collapsed within that term. Applied to writing, the three roles are the *animator*, or the person who actually inscribes the words; the *author*, or the person who selects the
sentiments and the words; and the principal, or the person “who is committed to what the words say (Goffman, 1981). In the case of a lecture, a single person may enact all three of these roles. In the case of classroom writing related to individual notions of authorship, the animator and the principal may be the same person, but multiple authors may have contributed to the writing, including the teacher. In the case of collaborative writing in consideration of these expanded notions of authorship, these three roles may be distributed across multiple people, exchanged among group members, or consolidated in individual students for any given wiki page of the Building Worlds Project.

However, these roles are overly simplistic in that they do not account for intertextuality (Bazerman, 2004a) or the “dialogic influences of real or imagined audiences” (Prior, 2004, p. 170). Intertextuality refers to explicit and implicit relationships that a text has with other texts. In relation to a view of writing as mediated action, texts that were written prior to or during the writing of a given text may be considered to be mediational means that were taken up in the social actions involved with writing. A written text may have an intertextual relationship with a prior or anticipated conversation, as well. In the case of John’s Building Worlds Project, students explicitly drew on the writing and shared ideas of other students, fantasy literature, and popular culture as mediational means by including “recognizable phrasing [or] terminology associated with specific people or groups of people or particular documents” (Bazerman, 2004a, p. 88). Additionally, people may write for a real or imagined audience that influences what they write based on how the text will be read. For some of John’s students, the audience not only included the students in their writing group, the rest of the
class and the teacher, and their peers outside of class, but also an imagined readership that could access their writing online via the wiki.

As Prior (2004) states, these considerations of intertextuality and dialogic influences complicate the role of principal as many people may have a stake in what the words say and how they are read in a given text. In the case of John’s students, the role of principal is complex as individuals are both held accountable for their writing through a class grade and asked to maintain continuity across the storylines of the writing of group members. Therefore, a student may not only have an interest in what he or she is writing but also in what his or her group members are writing. Alternatively, a student may only have an interest in what he or she is writing and disregard what other group members are writing, potentially creating continuity conflicts. In both cases, the principal may be someone other than the person who posted writing on the project wiki. From this perspective, authorship is distributed, the role of principal is complex, and a myriad of social actions and mediational means are coordinated to produce a written text.

**Mediational Means**

A mediated action is carried out through mediational means. Wertsch (1998) defines two types of mediational means, or cultural tools: psychological and technical tools. Psychological tools are internally-oriented (Wertsch, 1985) and include “language; various systems for counting; mnemonic techniques; algebraic symbol systems; works of art; schemes, diagrams, maps, and mechanical drawings; all sorts of conventional signs; and so on” (Vygotsky, 1981, p. 137). Technical tools are externally-oriented toward an object of activity and shape action as a means of external activity (Vygotsky, 1978). For
example, a student writing a fictional story may draw on a psychological tool, such as a narrative arc, to plan and write, and the same student may draw on technical tools, such as an annotated and drawn representation of the narrative arc on paper or screen. Wertsch (1998) argues that psychological and technical tools both have a materiality with which these mediational means are incorporated into social action. This materiality may involve a physical mediated action, such as the drawing of the narrative arc on paper, or speech, such as when the narrative arc is explained. Wertsch (1998) explains that the material properties of cultural tools have implications for understanding internal processes, which can be

thought of as skills in using particular mediational means. The development of such skills requires acting with, and reacting to, the material properties of cultural tools. Without such materiality, there would be nothing to act with or react to, and the emergence of sociocultural situated skills could not occur. (p. 31)

However, Jones and Norris (2005c) argue that all cultural tools are also essentially semiotic; they argue that cultural tools, or mediational means, exist simultaneously in the world and in the mind of people, or what mediated discourse theory considers to be habitus (Bourdieu, 1977). Further, Jones and Norris (2005c) state

Just as psychological tools are made material through texts, utterances, practices, and identities, [technical] tools are integrated into psychological representations of social practices in the user’s habitus. In fact, it is only through being appropriated into the habitus as parts of social practices that objects become mediational means, as they arise as a codification or materialization of social practices (Scollon, 2001[b]). (p. 50)

For mediated discourse theory, the skills Wertsch refers to are conceptualized as social practices that aggregate in the habitus of individuals over a period of time through related mediated actions (Scollon, 2001b). This process of mediation works on both material and
psychological levels and involves both the sociocultural histories of a person’s habitus and the sociocultural histories of the mediational means.

Explicit and Implicit Mediation. Wertsch (2007) differentiates between explicit and implicit mediation in an attempt to bring clarity to the way Vygotsky (1981; 1986) used the term across his work. Explicit mediation involves the overt and intentional introduction of a mediational means within an ongoing stream of activity. The explicitness is characterized by the materiality of the mediational means, which can be observed as an agent encounters or is introduced to mediational means thus altering how the mediated action unfolds. Mediated discourse analysis, which I will further explain in Chapter 3, is primarily concerned with explicit mediation as observed mediation action is the unit of analysis.

On the other hand, implicit mediation involves the role of what Vygotsky (1986) referred to as social and inner speech in the mediation of human consciousness. Wertsch (2007) argues that implicit mediation is typically already part of the ongoing stream of activity that is brought into contact with other mediated actions. For example, internal mediation may involve language, which may not be purposefully introduced into mediated action but may already be at work before the onset of the stream of activity under consideration. Implicit mediation is much more difficult to analyze due to the often lack of material manifestation of the mediational means at work. Mediated discourse analysis may consider mediational means through people’s recollections and reflections on observed mediated actions, as they explain what mediational means they were drawing on to take a particular action.


**Affordances and Constraints.** The material properties of mediational means simultaneously afford and constrain different types of action. However, affordances and constraints should not be considered to determine any particular action, as agents can overcome some of the limits imposed by tools “through recontextualizing them or purposefully mixing them with other tools that offer different configurations of constraints and affordances” (Jones & Norris, 2005c, p. 50). Wertsch (1998) draws on Gibson’s (1979) notion of affordances as relational, ecological, and tendential. Gibson uses the example of a mailbox to demonstrate how it does not have any inherent affordances, but rather “affords letter-mailing to a letter-writing human in a community with a postal system” (p. 139). This example helps explain that a mediational means’ affordances and constraints are perceived based on a person’s individual habitus and based on the discourses-in-place that shape the operational conditions of the mediated action.

In this way, “mediational means are also carriers of social structures, histories, and ideologies in as much as they manifest certain patterns of affordances and constraints concerning the actions that can be taken with their use” (Jones & Norris, 2005c, p. 50). However, this is not to say that mediational means are “actants” (Latour, 1987) in the action, rather perceived affordances and constraints help us consider mediational means’ “potent effect on the dynamics of human action, including the power and authority relationships in it” (Wertsch, 1998, p. 65). For example, Jones and Norris (2005b) refer to the process of the *technologization* of mediational means in which objects are integrated into social practices in such a way that they are used to enact social identities recognized
as competence within particular communities and institutions. They explain that when technologized mediational means become standardized; they can be used to “exert such pressure on participants in communities that not only does their use signal ‘membership,’ but failure to use them or their ‘misuses’ provokes social disapproval” (Jones & Norris, 2005c, p. 51). I take up these concerns below in regard to the term discourse-in-place.

**Agency.** Mediated discourse theory draws heavily on Wertsch’s (1998) notion of the irreducible tension between agents and mediational means when explaining mediated action. Jones and Norris (2005b) extend this notion to consider how agency is always distributed and never an individual matter. They argue that agency is always something that is negotiated by individuals with their social world, and that action is “a product of the ‘tension’ between the agenda of the individual and the agendas embedded in the mediational means made available in the sociocultural setting and appropriated into the individual’s habitus as components of social practices” (p. 170). Mediated discourse theory draws from an adaptation of Burke’s (1969) grammar of motives as a heuristic for explaining motives from five points of view: scene, social actor (Burke’s agent), mediational means (Burke’s agency), mediated action (Burke’s act), and purpose. For Burke, motive can be attributed to any one of these five elements. For example, a student who is writing on a computer may explain the motive of her actions by: stating that she uses the computer because that is how everyone else is writing (scene), stating that she uses the computer to become more familiar with using it (social actor), stating that the computer is the only available option for writing at the moment (mediational means), stating that using the computer is just a part of her writing process (mediated action), or
stating that using the computer is the most efficient way to complete the writing task (purpose) (Scollon & Scollon, 2004). In each case, the student is the originator of her actions, even though she may attribute her motive to a different aspect of the actions under investigation. The purpose of using this heuristic is to understand how agents construct and perceive their agency within mediated action as well as how their agency is understood by others including the researcher.

However, I want to emphatically state a caveat when considering how agency can be conceptualized within Wertsch’s (1998) tension and Burke’s (1969) motives. Not all elements directly involved or indirectly implicated in mediated action are equal. Without the agent, there is no action. As Bloom and his colleagues (2005) state,

> although [people] must act within the events, contexts, and settings in which they find themselves, and although they must react to the actions of others and the social institutions of which they are a part, they nonetheless act on the worlds in which they live. (p. xvi)

Social practices do not endure without people. Mediational means do not have affordances and constraints without someone to perceive them and a nexus of practice to give them meaning. Literacy practices are not “actants”; rather, they shape action because there are people present who take them up (Blackburn & Clark, 2007).

**Site of Engagement**

Mediated action unfolds within social space called a site of engagement by those working with mediated discourse theory (Scollon, 2001b; Jones, 2005a; 2005b). Scollon (2001b) defines a site of engagement as a “real-time window that is opened through an intersection of social practices and mediational means (cultural tools) that make that
action the focal point of attention of the relevant participants” (p. 4). The purpose of using this theoretical construct is to acknowledge that social actions do not occur in objective moments or locations, but rather are “the results of orientation toward time and space that participants bring to interaction” (Jones, 2005b, p. 141). In any given event, multiple sites of engagement may overlap, simultaneously occur, or interrupt one another. Though people may be co-present in an event, share the same social space and moment in time, appear to be engaged in the same mediated action with shared cultural tools, they may or may not share a site of engagement. In other words, their social actions may be oriented toward different, multiple, or even simultaneously occurring sites of engagement. Each of these sites of engagement may unfold along a different timescale (Lemke, 2000). The theoretical construct of site of engagement provides a way to consider how “multiple space-times…are invoked, produced, folded into one another, and coordinated” within a given social or literacy event (Leander & McKim, 2003, p. 224).

![Diagram of site of engagement](image)

*Figure 1. Site of Engagement*[^6]

[^6]: From (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 20)
A site of engagement (see Figure 1 on page 45) is constructed through the intersection of the interaction order, a person’s habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) or historical body, and discourses-in-place (Jones, 2005b; Scollon, 2001b; Scollon & Scollon, 2004). Jones (2005a; 2005b) argues that people construct sites of engagement through their attention by bringing particular mediated actions into focus for particular reasons. Jones uses the term attention structures to describe people’s durable patterns of orientation that help them make selections and construct sites of engagement. In a complex social event with multiple, simultaneously occurring sites of engagement, a person uses their attention structures to bring different mediated actions in and out of focus. Below I explain each one of these elements and how they work together within a site of engagement. I also provide an explanation of how sites of engagement provide a productive consideration of literacy events.

**Interaction Order.** Mediated discourse theory takes up Goffman’s (1983) construct of interaction order as possible social arrangements that people use as mediational means to form relationships and take action in social interactions. People act differently depending on the social arrangement, e.g., alone, group, crowd, cue, and the social occasion, e.g., buying coffee, sitting in a classroom, consulting a doctor. People use interaction orders as shared conventions for displaying, giving, and getting attention (Jones, 2005a). By understanding what interaction orders are invoked during investigations of mediated action, researchers can distinguish between people who are merely co-present, i.e., occupying the same physical space, and people who constitute what Goffman (1983) refers to as a “with” or a “small group of two or more people who
are socially together, who have special rights to each other’s attention and who also have special rights to ignore and be ignored by others in their vicinity” (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 22).

For example, students in a collaborative writing group such as those in John’s elective English class may or may not constitute a “with,” and the group may be made up of many different “withs.” The students may draw on different interaction orders, e.g., classmates, friends, couples, to construct sites of engagement in which they take action related to collaborative writing. The heuristic of interaction order helps frame how particular students draw on their habitus to engage in particular types of relational and reflexive social positioning within mediated action. However, Scollon (2001b) explains that mediated discourse theory does so without engaging in essentialist explanations of those interaction orders. People who are alone, in a group, or in a crowd draw on interaction orders to initiate, construct, and maintain sites of engagement.

_Habitus_. Mediated discourse theory alternatively uses the terms habitus (Bourdieu, 1977; 1990) and historical body (Nishida, 1958) in order to define a durable and transposable set of dispositions that develop over time through personal experience. For clarity, I will use habitus in this study to cover both terms that are used interchangeably throughout discussions of mediated discourse theory. Here, I explain how mediated discourse theory redefines Bourdieu’s (1977) use of the term habitus in relationship to nexus of practice.

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7 Bourdieu’s (1977) term habitus is used in dialectical relationship with other constructs of his practice theory, i.e., field, and practice. For Bourdieu, practice is the result of the relationship between a person’s habitus (dispositions) and one’s capital (position in a field), within the current circumstances in a field (social arena). The terms are meant to be used in relationship to one another (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

8 Scollon & Scollon (2004) preferred the term historical body coined by philosopher Kitaroo Nashida to emphasize the embodied nature of consciousness.
Mediated discourse theory locates habitus in individuals as the aggregate of “a very large number of social practices, their linkages, and their systematic incommensurabilities” (Scollon, 2001b, 72). For Bourdieu, habitus is developed in relationship to a field (1977) or a universe of practice (1990), which researchers in literacy studies (e.g., Hill & Vasudevan, 2008; Pahl, 2008; Pahl & Rowsell, 2010; Rowsell, 2008; Zacher, 2008) have used to conceptualize different social and cultural domains, e.g., home, school, community. Rather than using Bourdieu’s term field, which Scollon (2001b) argues is mapped onto classes and groups as “presupposed, autonomous, bounded, and non-overlapping analytical entities” (p. 143), mediated discourse theory considers how an individual’s habitus is developed within and across multiple overlapping nexus of practice that may or may not map onto bounded social domains, e.g., home, school, community, and groups, e.g., middle class, gamers, straight edge. People draw from their habitus to determine what actions to take within a given site of engagement.

**Discourse-in-place.** The physical environment in which people take actions has the potential to channel attention and shape action based on the configuration and layout of the place, the available mediational means, and people’s social and cultural histories with similar places. Discourse-in-place is a term used by mediated discourse theorists to consider the “social meaning of the material placement of signs and discourses and of our actions in the material world” (Scollon & Scollon, 2003, p. 2). In any given place, rarely does everything in that place serve a single purpose. Therefore, people must selectively
foreground aspects of the place and available mediational means and background others as semiotic aggregates in order to take action (Scollon & Scollon, 2004).

Places like computer labs and classrooms in schools are often intentionally arranged to channel attention or to shape action. For example, computers in a computer lab may be situated in a panoptic arrangement (Foucault, 1977) so that the teacher can visually monitor each student’s computer screen. A student’s actions with the computer may be shaped by the fact that the teacher can see the computer screen; a student may even turn the monitor away from the teacher’s view in order to take a different action. In this way, the physical layout of the room and placement of mediational means has the potential to channel attention and shape action in part because of people’s histories and experiences in similar places located in their habitus. People draw on their habitus to help determine what is customary and what is unusual in a particular place, and people have the potential to change the place to facilitate the action that they intend to take.

In any given place, there are multiple discourses that cycle through that place represented by the physical surroundings and the available mediational means. To return to the computer lab example, the physical layout of the room, the placement of computer hardware and the presence of filtering software, and signage on the walls of the room represent different discourses, such as expected interaction orders between students and a teacher, surveillance and control of computer use, and appropriate behavior around computer equipment, i.e., no food or drinks allowed. These discourses are not solely located in a particular place, but rather cycle through a place on different time scales. However, some of these discourses are of little relevance to particular social actions, e.g.,
discourse of fire safety represented by the exit route posted by the door of the computer lab, and other discourses are directly relevant to the social action, e.g., discourse of assignments and grades represented by a due date written on the white board. In this way, mediated discourse theory is concerned with what discourses-in-place are both directly relevant and foregrounded in the social action under consideration (Scollon & Scollon, 2004). In this way, global discourses are considered in local contexts (Brandt & Clinton, 2002) not merely because they are present, but rather because they are explicitly implicated in the construction of a site of engagement when people take social action. For example, discourses-in-place of control and censorship may be implicated in the physical arrangement of a computer lab for teacher surveillance of computer screens and Internet filters that block content that is considered to be inappropriate for school by a county Internet service provider.

**Attention Structures.** Jones (2005b) argues that people construct sites of engagement through “fairly durable patterns of orientation towards different spaces and different timescales” (p. 151), which he calls attention structures. Jones argues that these patterns are “built into” the mediational means and physical surroundings (discourses-in-place), social practices and norms of interaction (interaction orders), and the habitus of individuals. People use attention structures as cultural tools to bring particular mediational means into focus in order to take social action. To return once again to the computer lab example, students may be asked to manage their attention⁹ in relation to

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⁹ Lankshear and Knobel (2002) consider how the distribution and management of attention occurs within an attention economy. They argue that attention is not an individual, cognitive attribute but rather a social commodity that is granted, withheld, or sought in social interaction. Lankshear and Knobel consider what attention structures are required to organize and maintain attention within and across different attention economies. Some scholars have expressed concern about how people manage their attention in relation to
both a site of engagement involving the computer to post to a discussion board and a site of engagement involving social interaction with the teacher. Students draw on attention structures based on past experiences interacting with a teacher in a computer lab and using a computer to participate in an asynchronous online discussion. Each of these attention structures involves particular orientations toward time and space, particular discourses, and particular interaction orders. A teacher may expect an immediate response to a question while maintaining eye contact, while a peer with whom the student is communicating with through the computer may expect a response within a time period they have established as appropriate.

The concept of attention structures reinforces the idea that people purposefully construct sites of engagement in order to take social action not by chance, but rather as convergences not just of social practices, but of individuals and their histories, of schemes, scripts and plans, of social identities, of architectural or software designs, and of the various Discourses we participate in with their patterns of fixing social relationships of power and of marginalizing certain kinds of social identities and practices. (Jones, 2005b, p. 153)

Attention structures serve as a helpful heuristic for understanding how students manage their attention in order to take particular social actions, especially when multiple streams of activity are present such as in John’s elective English class wherein students are planning and coordinating the writing of their fantasy fiction.

**Literacy Event as Sites of Engagement.** As previously explained, a literacy event is a social occasion that can be empirically observed and from which literacy practices can be inferred and conceptualized (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Baynham, 1995; Bloome, mobile, digital devices. Watkins (2009) argues that adolescents are developing continual partial attention as a result of access to and instant use of anytime, anywhere media, thus eroding the boundaries between leisure and non-leisure places. Turkle (2011) shares this concern arguing that an attention economy that has people tethered to their personal devices is taking a toll on their face-to-face human relationships.
et al., 2005). Though empirical units, literacy events are not objective moments and may be experienced differently by the participants involved. In an effort to establish a complementary relationship between New Literacy Studies and mediated discourse theory, I argue that literacy events are made up of multiple, possible sites of engagement. I make this argument in order to consider how any given literacy event may be comprised of multiple levels or layers of social interaction (Bloome & Bailey, 1992; Bloome et al., 2005), how social actions may be simultaneously oriented toward multiple activities (Engeström, 1987; Leont’ev, 1978), or in this case sites of engagement, and how multiple space-times are implicated within and across events (Leander & McKim, 2003). Sites of engagement also serve as a helpful heuristic for marking the boundaries of where an event begins and where it ends by considering how people draw on their attention structures in order to take mediated action in relationship to the interaction order, the discourses-in-place, and their individual habitus.

**Social Practice**

Mediated discourse theory defines practice at a narrower level than the New Literacy Studies (Street, 2000). Rather than consider practice as an abstraction, mediated discourse theory defines practice as related actions with a history. As explained in a previous section, the unit of analysis of mediated discourse theory is mediated action (Wertsch, 1998), e.g., clicking a computer mouse, which is considered to unfold as a site of engagement. When people coordinate related actions and that chain of mediated actions is repeatable, has a history for those involved, and is recognized by others, the chain of related actions is considered a social practice (see Figure 2 on page 53).
For example, the mediated actions of ‘clicking a computer mouse,’ ‘typing a username and password,’ ‘selecting a link,’ and ‘reading the computer screen’ may be coordinated to accomplish the social practice of ‘checking for updates’ on the class wiki in John’s elective English class. Embedded in social practices are beliefs, values, and emotions that frame the purpose of the social practice. Students may engage in the social practice of ‘checking for updates’ because they want to know what their classmates have contributed to the Building Worlds Project for the purpose of coordinating their writing. This social practice may be related to other social practices in commensurable and incommensurable ways within a nexus of practice.

Therefore, social practice is not a mass noun abstraction as with New Literacy Studies’ term literacy practice. Rather, ‘social practice’ is a count noun referring to

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10 From Scollon (2001a)
particular instances of coordinated mediated actions as sites of engagement (Scollon, 2001b). Social practices are observable and provide explanations for why people may take particular actions in particular social situations. For example, the mediated action of ‘clicking a computer mouse’ may be enacted within the social practice of ‘checking for recent updates’ or within the social practice of ‘playing a video game’. Mediated discourse theorists argue that mediated actions are only interpretable within social practices. Scollon (2001a) defines practice as

a historical accumulation within the habitus/historical body of the social actor of mediated actions taken over his or her life (experience) and which are recognizable to other social actors as ‘the same’ social action. (p. 165)

For mediated discourse theorists, social practices develop in the habitus of a person over time by engaging in similar chains of mediated actions for similar purposes. The social practice is an aggregate of a history of concrete, specific social actions that may not be exactly the same or occur in the same sequence, yet nonetheless lend themselves to a degree of predictability for the social actor as accumulations of similar actions taken for similar purposes. Therefore, practices are neither static nor structures of operations.

Nexus of Practice

Mediated discourse theory next considers how social practices are related to one another as a set of intersections or linkages that people come to recognize as a familiar set of related social practices. A recognizable set of intersections or linkages is called a nexus of practice. Scollon and Scollon (2004) define a nexus of practice as “the point at which historical trajectories of people, places, discourses, ideas, and objects come together to enable some action” (p. viii). A nexus of practice, like the related social
practices of which it is comprised, is “formed one mediated action at a time and is always unfinalized (and unfinalizable)” (Scollon, 2001b, p. 5). That is to say that a nexus of practice is unbounded and considers how most social practices “can be variably linked to different practices in different sites of engagement and among different participants” (p. 5).

For example, the social practices of ‘checking for updates’ may be linked within the nexus of practice with which John’s students collaboratively write their fantasy fiction, but that same social practice, or one with slightly different mediated actions, may be liked to a nexus of practice with which a student checks for status updates on Facebook. In this way, the social practice of ‘checking for updates’ is not bounded by a particular community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) or associated with a particular social domain, field (Bourdieu, 1997; 1990), or affinity group (Gee, 2004). Rather, the concept of nexus of practice allows for a consideration of how social practices are related to one another across different sites of engagement, unencumbered by presupposed social, physical, virtual, geographic, and spatial boundaries (Leander, Phillips, & Taylor, 2010). However, that is not to say that people cannot objectify a nexus of practice by associating a particular set of linkages with a particular bounded community into which a person can gain membership and have that membership revoked. The concept of nexus of practice allows for a consideration of how

a number of social practices intersect, never perfectly, never in any finalized matrix or latticework of regular patterns, but as a network which itself is the basis of the identities we produce and claim through our social actions. (Scollon, 2001b, p. 142)
Though, people are capable of making attempts to codify a nexus of practice and erect boundaries that allow some people in and keep others out. Mediated discourse theory merely allows first for a consideration of how social practices are linked (or not) within and across nexus of practice and second for a consideration of how a particular nexus of practice maps onto group affiliation or membership. In relationship to adolescents, nexus of practice allows for a consideration of how social practices can be linked across dichotomous domains, such as in school and out of school.

Below I use an example nexus of practice to explain relationships between social practices and people within a nexus of practice, as well as offer a reconsideration of the New Literacy Studies concept of literacy practices. Figure 3 on page 57 represents how social practices enacted by students in John’s elective English class are related. Each line represents a social practice. The lines have different thicknesses to represent the durability of the social practice across related sites of engagement. By durability, I mean that practices inevitably are of different strengths; “some will be new practices at the earliest stages of aggregation and others will be ones consisting of many, many actions over a long period of time” (Scollon, 2001b, p. 80). The thickest line represents the social practice ‘posting wiki to own page’ because that is the most durable social practice among the students in this example. The dotted lines represent the social practices ‘posting writing to group member’s wiki page’ and ‘reading group member’s wiki page,’ which were the least durable across the sites of engagement. When two lines intersect they are considered to be linked, or related, social practices. When a line does not intersect with another line, the social practice is not linked and therefore is not directly a
part of the nexus of practice even though it is present in the sites of enactment under consideration.

Figure 3. Example Nexus of Practice

**Relationships Among Social Practices.** Social practices are considered to be commensurate when they occur within the same or related sites of engagement and are the basis for the production of group membership or homologous habitus, which I explain further below. Scollon (2001b) identifies four possible relationships between social practices:

1. Unlinked. Social practices that have no relationship among them, but may be enacted simultaneously. For example, when students are simultaneously

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‘watching YouTube videos’ of the worst injuries in sports and ‘checking for updates’ on the wiki, we can say that these two social practices are unlinked in this particular nexus of practice, even though they are enacted at the same time across related sites of engagement.

2. Linked, but disruptive. Social practices may be linked to one another, but in such a way that one social practice disrupts the other social practice. For example, the social practices of ‘planning and coordinating the project’ and ‘posting writing to own wiki page’ may be linked because the students’ writing is related, but enacting one social practice may disrupt the other.

3. Linked, but not integrated. Social practices may be linked to one another, but not as a nexus of practice. For example, the social practices of ‘posting writing to own wiki page’ and ‘posting writing to group member’s wiki page’ may be linked, but not in an integrated way. The students may view the social practices within separate nexus of practice; one associated with “my writing” and one associated with “helping you with your writing.”

4. Linked and integrated. Social practices may not only be commensurate and linked but also be so closely related that their enactment has implications for another practice. For example, the social practices of ‘reading group member’s wiki page,’ ‘posting writing to group member’s wiki page,’ and ‘planning and coordinating the project’ may be so integrated that the enactment of one of the social practices is dependent on the others.
Social practices may be incommensurate and may not occur alongside one another for several reasons. Understanding why social practices are not related is helpful for considering why linkages are not established across nexus of practice or why group membership is exclusive. Scollon (2001b) outlines four problems that help explain the incommensurability of some social practices: simultaneity (inability to enact two practices at the same time), materiality/physicality (physical adaptation to one social practice precludes being able to enact another), structure (differences in semiotic systems of representation thwart the enactment of a social practice), and ontology (a given social practice may be ontologically at odds with other social practices).

**Homologous Habitus.** In Bourdieu’s (1990) revision of his theory of practice, he used the term homologous habitus to refer to habitus that two or more people share in common in relationship to the same social practice. Scollon (2001b) argues that rather than arising in “the objective conditions of common class, field, or other group membership” (p. 37) as with Bourdieu’s definition, homologous habitus can be conceptualized as shared within a nexus of practice. Homologous habitus is evident when two people unconsciously engage in the same social practice without thinking about it, talking about it, or considering why they are doing it. The mediated action of hand raising within the social practice of ‘requesting and granting permission to speak’ in many U.S. classrooms and other school-like sites of engagement, e.g., public meetings, serves as an example of homologous habitus. People seeking permission or an opportunity to speak in a classroom or in a public meeting may raise their hand without being prompted to do so. Likewise, the person leading the classroom or public meeting may acknowledge the
mediated action and call on a person with their hand raised without considering why they are doing so.

In sum, the constructs of social practice and habitus as well as nexus of practice and homologous habitus work with one another in the following way. A social practice does not lie in a particular mediated action, but rather in the historical chain of mediated actions from which the social practice is aggregated in the habitus of the individual. Any given mediated action may be a part of multiple chains of related mediated actions depending on the sites of engagement in which the action unfolds. The mediated action of ‘clicking a mouse’ may be related to the social practice of ‘checking for updates’ or for ‘checking for Facebook statuses.’ Similarly, a nexus of practice is not found in any particular social practice, but rather in the constellation of linked social practices that are recognized as a repeatable set of linkages among people who share homologous habitus. The social practice of ‘checking for updates’ may be aggregated in the habitus of individuals who have a history of writing with other people on a wiki. However, the social practice enacted by an individual may or may not be linked with other social practices enacted by others in shared sites of engagement, and therefore may or may not be part of the nexus of practice for every person involved.

**Literacy Practice as Nexus of Practice.** The concept of nexus of practice provides a productive reconsideration of the New Literacy Studies construct of literacy practice. As discussed previously, people read, write, and use related semiotic systems in particular ways for particular purposes in particular social occasions. New Literacy Studies considers these particular ways constitute social models of literacy that
participants bring to bear on literacy events and give meaning to them (Street, 1984; 2003). Researchers who investigate literacy practices consider not just what is being accomplished with literacy, but also the meaning that people give to their accomplishments, how they conceptualize literacy’s value, and the ideologies that surround its situated use (Baynham, 1995).

I argue that the concept of nexus of practice can be used to consider how social practices (defined at the empirical level as chains of related mediated actions) involving reading, writing, and related semiotic systems are linked within a constellation of discursive and non-discursive social practices. Further, I argue that the extent to which a nexus of practice involving reading, writing, and related semiotic systems maps onto a group of people or a domain of social life of a group of people determines whether the nexus can be considered to be a literacy practice (defined as an abstraction at the level of a social model) or not. Lastly, I argue that mediated discourse theory provides productive responses to the critiques of New Literacy Studies by considering how global discourses shape local contexts (Brandt & Clinton, 2002) through discourses-in-place, how literacy practices “travel” (Pahl & Rowsell, 2006) within the habitus of individuals and along linkages in related nexus of practice, and how social practices are enacted in relationship to time and space as multiple, simultaneously occurring sites of engagement across in-person and online social interaction (Leander & McKim, 2003; Leander & Sheehy, 2004). At the center of this argument is the agency of the individual who takes social action in dynamic tension with mediational means.
Positioning Theory

Scollon (2001b) accounts for identity within mediated discourse theory by arguing that social actions position people “in relationship to others who are engaged in that action and practice” (p. 15). Further, he argues that when people take social action they position themselves (reflexive positioning) and position others (relational positioning) as social actors within a nexus of practice, or as members of a group. Social actors or group members may position a person as a novice or an outsider if they enact a social practice inappropriately. Likewise, a person’s enactment of a social practice may go unnoticed because the actions are considered appropriate in relationship to the homologous habitus. Scollon (2001b) states that, “what is impossible is that no positioning occurs at all” (p. 141). However, mediated discourse theory is vague when it comes to conceptualizing how reflexive and relational positioning within mediated action produces identities within a nexus of practice. Therefore, I turn to positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré & van Langenhove, 1992; 1999) in order to consider how positioning occurs within discursive and non-discursive mediated action and stabilizes as identities within a nexus of practice.

Positioning theory is a consideration of how people position themselves and others through the use of discursive practices. Harré and van Langenhove (1991) provide a taxonomy of possible reflexive and relational positioning to be used as heuristics for understanding how people position themselves and each other in relationship to institutions and the moral order of speaking, in which discursive action is taken. Here, I use their taxonomy to consider how reflexive and relational positioning can occur within
both discursive and non-discursive mediated action and how positioning across sites of engagement is related to the production of identities within a nexus of practice. In this way, I am extending the analytical metaphors provided by positioning theory that were meant to be used for understanding discursive practices in order to consider how these tools can be used to understand positioning within mediated action and positional identities within a nexus of practice. First, I define Harré and van Langenhove’s (1991) taxonomy of possible positionings using mediated discourse theory. Second, I explain how these positionings within mediated action produce identities within a nexus of practice over time.

Harré and van Langenhove (1991; 1999) identify four types of intentional positioning based on two sets of criteria, i.e., self- and other-positioning, performative and accountive positioning. Self-positioning (what I call reflexive positioning) refers to how a person positions themselves in relation to others. Other-positioning (what I call relational positioning) refers to how a person positions others in relation to themselves. Performative positioning refers to an assertive and deliberate putting forth of a reflexive or relational social position that may be taken up or contested by others. Accountative positioning refers to reactionary reflexive or relational social positioning prompted by forced solicitation by an individual or an institution.

In Figure 4 on page 64, I provide a repurposed representation of Harré and van Langenhove’s (1991; 1999) taxonomy, which I use to explain how and why people may take discursive and non-discursive social action.
Below, I explain each of the four types of positioning in relationship to mediated discourse theory:

- **Deliberate Self-Positioning**: People deliberately position themselves in relationship to others within mediated action. Other people may take up this positioning, thus positioning themselves, or they may resist the positioning by attempting to position the other person. When a person engages in deliberate self-positioning he or she often does so to enact a specific social practice and locate him or herself within a nexus of practice.

- **Deliberate Positioning of Others**: People may deliberately position other people within mediated action. Those being positioned may take up this positioning, thus positioning themselves, or they may resist the positioning by attempting to self-position themselves differently. When a person deliberately positions others he or she often does so to reinforce a specific social practice and locate the other person

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Figure 4. Positioning Taxonomy

Below, I explain each of the four types of positioning in relationship to mediated discourse theory:

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- **Deliberate Positioning of Others**: People may deliberately position other people within mediated action. Those being positioned may take up this positioning, thus positioning themselves, or they may resist the positioning by attempting to self-position themselves differently. When a person deliberately positions others he or she often does so to reinforce a specific social practice and locate the other person

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11 Adapted from (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991, p. 400)
or people in relationship to the nexus of practice. A person may deliberately position another person as a novice or an outsider if that person did not appropriately coordinate action.

- Forced Self-Positioning: People may position themselves because they have been forced to do so by another person or an institution within mediated action. A person may be forced to account for his or her actions within a nexus of practice. Often this type of positioning is the result of a question, which requires a person to position him or herself in relationship to the nexus of practice.

- Forced Positioning of Others: People may position others because they have been forced to do so by another person or an institution within mediated action. A person may be required to position another person, as with providing testimony in court or may be compelled to position others in order to maintain his or her own positioning within a nexus of practice.

I use this taxonomy to consider how people engage in reflexive and relational social positioning within mediated action in order to claim an identity within the social practices that arise from these actions and the linkages among them.

**Identity within a Nexus of Practice**

Social practices develop through a sequence of mediated actions through which a person consolidates that practice in his or her habitus. In mediated discourse theory, habitus is conceptualized as an individualized aggregation of experiences with particular related chains of mediated actions. Within these numerous mediated actions, people engage in relational and reflexive social positionings. Over time and across related sites
of engagement these social positioning can constitute positional identities related to particular social practices and particular linkages with other social practices. However, a person’s positional identity in one nexus of practice may or may not be similar in another nexus of practice. Additionally, just as a nexus of practice is never finalized, so too are the positional identities that are claimed in relationship to them.

For example, a student within the example nexus of practice (see Figure 3 on page 57) may position herself (deliberate self-positioning) as an individual author of her own writing and resist positioning by others (deliberate positioning of others) as a reader of another student’s writing. This positioning may play out across discursive and non-discursive mediated actions as she makes it known to other students that she is only interested in her own writing. Across related sites of engagement in which students construct and enact the social practices of ‘posting writing to own wiki page’ and ‘reading group member’s wiki page,’ this student’s positional identity may be defined by what social practices she is and is not willing to enact in relation to the other students. Though the nexus of practice may be defined by a set of linkages in which these two social practices are linked, the example student may experience conflict between her individual habitus and the homologous habitus of the students engaged in the nexus of practice. However, that it not to say that her habitus and related positional identity is not related in a more commensurate way with another nexus of practice in which these two social practices are unlinked. By examining reflexive and relational social positioning within mediated action, we can begin to understand how a person comes to claim or be assigned a positional identity within a nexus of practice.

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Conclusion

In this chapter, I outlined the major theoretical constructs of mediated discourse theory and explained how they are related. In sum, the unit of analysis of mediated discourse theory is mediated action. Mediated actions unfold as sites of engagement and involve social positioning as social actors take particular actions for particular reasons. Sites of engagement are constructed at the intersection of the interaction order, discourse-in-place, and habitus. Over time, related chains of mediated actions constitute social practices, which are aggregated by individuals in their habitus as a durable set of dispositions for how the social practices are to be enacted and how they are related to other social practices. Social practices are related to one another as a constellation of linkages that is unfinalizable unless objectified and may or may not map onto a group of people. In Chapter 3, I explain how I operationalize these constructs in the interrelated analytic processes: nexus analysis and mediated discourse analysis.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Mediated discourse theory outlines two interrelated analytic processes that researchers have used to investigate mediated action on the micro level and nexus of practice on the macro level (Scollon, 2001a; 2001b; Norris & Jones, 2005; Wohlwend, 2008; 2009). On the micro level, mediated discourse analysis is an analytical tool used to consider how people take mediated action as sites of engagement, how people engage in relational and reflexive positioning within mediated action, and how related chains of mediated action constitute social practices over time. On the macro level, nexus analysis is an analytical tool used to map the constellation of linkages that constitute a nexus of practice in order to help explain how “historical trajectories of people, places, discourses, ideas, and objects come together to enable some action” (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. viii).

Specific to the study of the collaborative writing of John and his students, I use nexus analysis to consider the first research question:

1. How do the teacher, his students, and I engage, navigate, and attempt to change the nexus of practice that constituted the Building Worlds Project?

Nexus analysis allows for a consideration of how the students’ social practices related to the Building Worlds Project were linked and how John attempted to persuade students to
construct and link social practices associated with collaborative writing. I use mediated discourse analysis to address the second and third research questions:

2. How do the students’ social practices, mediational means, and social interaction shape how and why they coordinated their collaborative writing?

3. How are the teacher and his students’ positional identities related to how and why they wrote collaboratively for the Building Worlds Project?

I do so in order to consider how the students took mediated action to coordinate and construct social practices in order to accomplish the collaborative writing of the Building Worlds Project. I also consider how the students positioned themselves and each other within mediated action in order to construct identities within the nexus of practice.

In this chapter, I first explain how I came to select John’s elective class as a research site. Secondly, I provide a description of the nested contexts under consideration, acknowledging that the “context as container” metaphor is problematic (Leander, Phillips, & Taylor, 2010), yet nonetheless helpful for explaining how John’s class and his students are situated within Hanover High School. Next, I outline the details of the study, including how the pilot study informed the design of the full study and the logic of inquiry I adapted from mediated discourse theory to conduct the full study. I also include an explanation of my relationship with the participants in the research through the data collection and ongoing analyses of the data. Lastly, I detail the interrelated analytic processes of nexus analysis and mediated discourse analysis in order to explain how I rendered my findings, which I detail in Chapters 4 and 5.
**Site Selection**

By chance, I read about John’s fantasy and science fiction elective English class in an article posted to the online newspaper of a small Midwestern city on February 13, 2009. John taught English and drama at Hanover High School\(^{12}\), which is situated in a rural community that neighbors the small Midwestern city, in which I had lived and taught English prior to attending graduate school. The online newspaper article described the Building Worlds Project as involving student choice, collaboration and online writing. Based on this brief description, I became interested in learning more about John’s Swords and Spaceships class on several levels: as a novice researcher, I was interested in learning how these students’ literacy practices were mediated by digital tools; as a former English teacher and current graduate student in English education, I was interested in how the elective class was described as led by students’ interests in popular fiction not typically taught in high school English classrooms; and as a fan of fantasy and science fiction, I was interested in how the students were learning to collaboratively create a fantasy world.

I contacted John via e-mail immediately after reading the newspaper article to arrange an informal observation of his Swords and Spaceships class and an informal conversation with John and one of his students, Amelia. This conversation supported my hunch that John’s elective class was a potentially rich site for investigating how students’ interests in fantasy and science fiction were being taken up in school and how they were writing using digital tools in ways that were different from their other classes. I worked quickly to write a research protocol and secure the approvals to establish John’s elective

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\(^{12}\) Pseudonyms are used for the participants and the name of the school.
class as a research site in order to conduct a pilot study of the class with the hope of conducting a full study the next academic year.

**Nested Contexts**

In the following section, I provide descriptions of Hanover High School, the English Department, and John’s Swords and Spaceships class in an effort to contextualize the study geographically and historically.

**Hanover High School**

Hanover High School is situated in a rural school district five miles east of a small Midwestern city with which it shares an address. According to the building report card provided by the state department of education, 716 students were enrolled in Hanover High School in the 2009-2010 school year. 96.7% of these students were White, 34.7% of these students were economically disadvantaged, and 11.2% of the students had documented disabilities. The high school had a recent history of earning the state’s highest ranking designation by meeting all indicators and scoring 99.1 out of 120 points on the state’s performance index. In the 2009-2010 school year, the high school met annual yearly progress requirements.

The principal of the high school attended the school himself as a student, and the school district superintendent attended high school, taught social studies, and coached football in the neighboring city. According to John, the principal and superintendent had provided stable leadership over the years due in part to their investment in the community and local area. Both the principal and the superintendent were closely involved in providing leadership in curriculum and instruction, and according to John they allowed
the high school teachers to have a great deal of autonomy and input in regard to how the English classes were structured and what the content of those classes was. The principal and superintendent were supportive of the English department’s professional development, providing financial support to attend the 2008 National Council of Teachers of English Annual Conference as a department and return in 2010 to present their school-wide reading program in which they invited a writer of young adult literature to visit the school. The principal and superintendent encouraged innovation using digital technologies in the classroom. In the 2010-2011 school year, the principal and superintendent co-taught a high school elective class on globalization in order to pilot a one-to-one laptop program that they were considering for the high school.

**English Department**

The English department of Hanover High School was made up of five full time English teachers and a sixth teacher who split her duties with the foreign language department. The English classes at Hanover High School were tiered, i.e., Basic English 9-12, English 9-12, College Prep English 9-12. In response to a school-wide discussion about not offering enough elective classes for students to take, the English department developed 14 electives that students could take alongside their tiered track of English classes required for graduation. The English department designed these electives to leverage students’ interests in order to engage them in reading and writing activity, as well as match teacher interest with student interest in order to build relationships with students that involved reading and writing activity. Initially, John had proposed to the English department that the electives be used as substitutes for the 11th and 12th grade
graduation requirements for English. However, the consensus of the English department was that the elective classes be offered alongside the existing requirements.

All 14 electives were listed in the course catalog, and the elective English classes were offered based on enrollment. Each English teacher had his or her elective that they were interested in teaching, and the department distributed the classes to accommodate the offering of an elective. For John in the 2009-2010 school year, this meant giving up his planning period for a semester in order to offer Swords and Spaceships. Examples of electives that are taught regularly in addition to Swords and Spaceships include: Movies & Meaning, Performance Literature, Sports Literature, Transition to Post-Secondary Reading, Women’s Literature, and Gothic Literature.

**The Evolution of the Elective Class “Swords and Spaceships”**

John’s fantasy and science fiction elective English class is grounded in his own passion and enthusiasm for the genres across multiple media, including literature, movies, video games, comic books, and graphic novels. The class involves reading and writing fantasy and science fiction. John’s goal was to have students consider the choices writers, directors, and video game designers make when creating a fictional world. He encouraged students to consider how their own reading and writing processes were related when working on the Building Worlds Project. The first time John taught Swords and Spaceships was in the 2007-2008 school year. That year John encouraged students who he knew were interested in fantasy and science fiction to enroll in the class, and 11 students enrolled. The first year, the Building Worlds Project was an individual assignment, in which each student created his or her own fantasy world in writing.
The following 2008-2009 school year (the year I conducted the pilot study), John drew on that initial experience with the project to change it into a collaborative assignment on his class wiki. He made this change because his first group of students found it hard to sustain their authorship across the semester with many of them saying that they had run out of ideas. John thought that by making the assignment collaborative students would be able to share ideas and work together in ways similar to moviemakers, video game designers, comic book writers and editors, and teams of writers who work on a fantasy or science fiction book series. That year, the entire class of 12 students created a single fantasy world on John’s class wiki and added maps, drawings, and images found on the Internet. At the start of the year, John did not have enough students to offer the class according to the high school guidelines for electives, so John recruited students from study hall the first day of school in dramatic fashion by standing on a lunch table with a light saber and asking citizens of Earth to go on a journey with him into uncharted territory. This event helped spread the word about the class, as students who enrolled the following year referred to the event when asked how they became interested in the class.

In the 2009-2010 school year (the year I conducted the full study), the enrollment increased to 22 students. In response to this increased number of students, John adjusted the Building Worlds Project to allow four groups of students to each collaboratively create a fantasy world, thereby facilitating the development of four separate fantasy worlds. The project also expanded to include the use of more sophisticated freeware cartography software enabling students to create elaborate maps and landscapes for their fantasy worlds. A few students scanned and uploaded their drawn and painted artwork to
provide images to go along with their writing. In the last two months of that year’s class, the students designed video games based on their fantasy world using a free video game design engine. Using short stories, full and excerpted novels, and a video game (see Appendix A for a list), John encouraged his students to consider how stories are told differently across media.

At the end of the study, John said that he regretted the decision to have four groups of students each creating their own world. He said that he felt the class was disjointed compared to the previous year when the whole class was creating one world. The year following the study in 2010-2011, John returned to a single-world approach to the Building Worlds Project with the 24 students enrolled in the class. He also dropped the video game design component because he thought that the technical aspects of using the design engine thwarted some students’ interest in taking their stories into a video game format. As of this writing, 55 students were enrolled for the 2011-2012 school year resulting in the elective class being offered both semesters for the first time. John planned to continue taking a single world approach to the Building Worlds Project and was piloting a one-to-one laptop program, in which the students of Swords and Spaceships will have laptops to take home to work on the project.

**Pilot Study: Focusing on Social Practices**

In May and June of 2009, I conducted a pilot study of the last 4 weeks of John’s elective English class. I observed the class nine times and conducted interviews with 9 of the 12 students enrolled in the class. The class was composed of three females and nine males, grades 10-12, all of whom self-identified as white. In preparation for conducting
the observations and interviews, I read the students’ fantasy writing on the wiki in order to become informed about the world they were building, the separate regions about which the students wrote, the characters they created, and the stories they wrote individually and collaboratively. During the observations, I took field notes on what the students were discussing in class and on the social interactions among the students and the teacher, John. In the semi-structured interviews, I asked students to provide retrospective accounts of their collaborative processes of writing with other students in the class. I was interested in what social and literacy practices (Street, 2000) they associated with collaboration and how they enacted these social practices in relationship to the Building Worlds Project.

Across the nine interviews, the students identified a range of social practices and social interactions involved with their collaborative writing, such as negotiating and maintaining storyline continuity, sharing and protecting proprietary story elements, and considering what I then described as social capital when negotiating co-authorship. These social practices associated with collaborative writing interested me and helped to inform the development of my research questions for the full study around the following three issues: the coordination of social practices not typically associated with school, the social actions and interactions students engaged in with the aid of the digital tools in order to write collaboratively, and social positioning in relationship to negotiating authorship. These three issues were later developed into the three research questions that guided the full study.
Summer Meetings: Establishing a Collaborative Relationship

During the summer between the pilot study and the full study conducted the next academic year, John and I met several times in a coffee shop to record semi-structured interviews and informal conversations about his plans for the elective English class the following year. During this time, we planned two writing projects for submitting a co-authored article to an academic journal and a magazine on adolescent literacy. In preparation for writing these articles, we read and discussed an article Schultz (1997) wrote about her study of collaborative writing in an urban elementary school, an article Black (2009) wrote about fan fiction and identity, and a chapter Gee (2004) wrote about affinity groups. These articles framed our conversations about the pilot study and provided shared concepts for discussing how John was planning to teach Swords and Spaceships the following fall semester during the 2009-2010 school year.

Early that following semester, I met with the English department of five teachers to introduce myself and explain the study that I was conducting. During that meeting the English teachers expressed misgivings about the label digital native (Prensky, 2001) that they had heard being used with great frequency during their attendance at the 2008 National Teachers of English (NCTE) Annual Convention. The teachers related that this label was not representative of their students, who they described as variably familiar with digital technologies due to socioeconomic differences. They expressed concern that I was operating under a similar, naïve assumption about adolescents in the digital age and may use this perspective to view their students with a deficit perspective. In perhaps an example of forced self-positioning, I shared with the English teachers my own misgivings
in regard to this label and my own experiences teaching in the neighboring school district. This conversation framed how John and I approached our writing project for the magazine on adolescent literacy. We had been asked by the magazine’s editor to write about our teaching experiences with digital technology and 21st century literacies. John and I decided that our audience for the article included his fellow English teachers and the building principal, as they were aware we were writing together for publication.

In response to these considerations, John and I each recounted moments of our teaching in which we struggled to understand why students did and did not take up digital technologies in ways that we had hoped. I persuaded John to frame our article as a conversation between two teachers who were inquiring about their own teaching. I told John that I wanted to do so in order to position ourselves (and myself specifically) as fellow teachers working on our teaching practice in relationship to his colleagues in the English department. In hindsight, I was concerned with how the study and my relationship with John would impact his relationships with his fellow English teachers (White, 2011). In our estimation, our magazine article was well received after the principal circulated it to the entire high school staff via e-mail. I share these experiences in order to demonstrate how these summer experiences with reading articles and chapters and writing articles helped John and I establish a trusting relationship leading into the full study the following school year.

**Overview of the Study**

At the beginning of the full study in the 2009-2010 school year, I began developing a logic of inquiry (Gee & Green, 1998) based on mediated discourse theory,
which provides a set of heuristics that I used to narrow the scope of the available data for analysis in order to determine what mediated actions were significant and what social practices were relevant from the point of view of the participants (Scollon, 2001a). In Appendix B, I provide a schematic of the data collection and analysis for the entire study arranged hierarchically by the timescales constructed by the participants and me as the researcher. However, the schematic does not represent all timescales implicated in the study, but provides a useful tool for outlining the logic of inquiry operationalized in the study. In this section, I discuss the reflexive and relational positionings among the participants and me, the researcher. Next, I provide an overview of the data collection and analysis of the study in reference to this schematic.

**Researcher-Participant Positionings**

In my relationship with John, I deliberately positioned myself as a fellow English teacher. I intentionally shared stories of my own teaching, including issues that I struggled with or failed at addressing in my classroom, in order to minimize any perception that I held a privileged position as a graduate student researcher. I explained to John that questions about my own teaching had led me to my graduate studies and that I was interested in exploring related questions with him. I also considered how my work with John could be mutually beneficial within the limits of our time with one another. In this regard, I tried to create opportunities wherein we could write and present together about his teaching. This led to the publication of two co-authored articles and a conference presentation together. Although these activities ultimately benefitted me more than John professionally, John remarked that our time together gave him an opportunity
to reflect on his practice with someone who is invested in his teaching. He said that although he works in a very supportive school, his busy schedule as an English and drama teacher did not allow many opportunities to meet with his fellow English teachers.

Based on this relationship, I made deliberate attempts to position John as someone who is courageously exploring what is possible in an English class in regard to what the field of literacy studies refers to as *new literacies* (thus the pseudonym John Carver), but who is also realistic about the challenges and limitations involved with introducing students to new literacy practices and new digital technologies. For the most part, John accepted this positioning, though he was quick to acknowledge that there were many issues with collaborative writing that he had yet to resolve. For example, John reported not having determined the most appropriate way to assess collaborative writing, and that he was still seeking out different ways to encourage students to write with one another and ways to validate and support collaborative efforts in an education system that privileges individual work and grades. To date, John and I have maintained our relationship and are currently planning future projects working with one another around issues related to collaborative writing using digital tools.

In my relationship with the students in the pilot and full study, I deliberately positioned myself as an enthusiastic reader of their writing and a fellow fan of fantasy and science fiction. Even though I shared with the students that I had taught English in the neighboring school district, I tried not to position myself as an English teacher. I encouraged students to refer to me by first name, which was not customary in the school as teachers were referred to and addressed by either the use of an honorific and last name.
or just by last name. Students seemed to accept this positioning evidenced by referring to me by first name, though they were not always certain about how to position me as an adult in the school.

During the classroom observations, I sat off to the side and interacted minimally with students, often only talking with them before and after class. I never made any bids to speak during a class discussion, but I did not hesitate to respond if John invited me into a conversation. During interviews with students, I asked questions and shared what I was observing in class and on the wiki. I encouraged them to disagree with me or contest my account of an event because they were helping me paint a more representative picture of their experience. I deliberately positioned the students as partners in the research process by explaining what we could disconfirm together was just as important as what we could confirm. I also made every attempt to accommodate their schedules and respect their time. I let them know that if I approached them in their study hall to conduct an interview that they were more than welcome to let me know it wasn’t a good time. Students often did so, letting me know that they needed to finish their homework or talk with friends. There were a few students who were not very interested in talking with me, only one of these students, Isabella, was in one of the focal groups, which required more than two interviews. When I sensed resistance from students, I always offered them an out by rescheduling an interview or not conducting one.

**School Year as a Timescale**

The full span of the research process directly involving the participants was conducted at the end of the school year in May 2009 through the middle of the summer in
July 2010. The school year is an important timescale (Lemke, 2000) to consider for this study, because John drew on his experiences with the previous year’s class to plan the next year’s elective class. For this study, the pilot study and the summer meetings spent reflecting on and writing about the class is important to consider within a timescale of the previous school year. The start of the 2009-2010 school year marked a new opportunity for John to continue to adjust the elective class for the new students and rely on the leadership of two students, Roger and Clark, who were taking the class for a second time. Similarly, the start of the 2010-2011 school year marked a cessation in our conversations about the previous year’s class as John became busy with the preparations for the new school year and shifted his focus to his new students. Counting Roger and Clark, the new class included 6 females and 15 males, grades 10-12, all of whom self-identified as white with the exception of Isabella, who did not self-identify by race/ethnicity. For me, the start of the 2009-2010 school year marked an opportunity to investigate and understand how the project unfolded and how the students accomplished the collaborative writing associated with the project; to this point, I only had an understanding of the project and the class based on retrospective accounts by John and his former students.

**Data Collection and Selection**

My data collection and analyses were informed by a methodology I adapted that is outlined within mediated discourse theory (Scollon, 2001a; Scollon & Scollon, 2004). The methodology involves a series of four filters that organize and prioritize data collection in consideration of how the participants view the social practices and their linkages that are of interest to the researcher (see Figure 5 on page 83). This methodology
represents its own timescale. Although the filtering process is recursive and not intended to be sequential, the data collection and analytical processes informed when I visited John’s classroom for observations, when and how I video recorded, as well as whom I interviewed at what time. In some ways, the timescale of the methodology was at odds with the timescales associated with the social practices of the participants, as I would often ask them to provide an explanation of mediated action taken several days or even weeks prior to the interview.

![Data Filtering Process Diagram](image)

*Figure 5. Data Filtering Process*\(^{13}\)

\(^{13}\) Adapted from (Scollon, 2001a, p. 153)
In this section, I provide an overview of this methodology represented in Figure 5 and an explanation of how the filtering process informed my data collection and analysis decisions. Each filter represents a recursive process of collecting and considering four types of data, i.e., participants’ generalizations about their social practices, researcher observations of mediated social action, accounts of individual experience within a nexus of practice, and member checks with participants. Though the filters are not meant to be sequential, they do precede one another based on the level of specificity, starting broadly with a consideration of people and mediational means in the first filter and working gradually toward the identification of focal mediated actions for analysis. For my purposes, the first filter was most salient during the pilot study and summer meetings with John. The remaining filters were operationalized recursively throughout the remainder of the study the next school year.

**Filter One: Participants and Mediation**: The first filter is a survey of participants and mediational means for the purposes of identifying a research site and focusing on particular people taking particular action with particular cultural tools. Though Scollon & Scollon (2004) are not explicit about what “survey” means, the term is not used to refer to an instrument in statistical analysis. Rather, the Scollons use the term ‘survey’ in more colloquial way to refer to a detailed inspection or investigation meant to develop as complete a picture as possible from a person’s limited vantage point within a nexus of practice. For my purposes, ‘survey’ meant taking field notes and writing conceptual memos about what I was observing. These surveys often generated more questions than emergent answers as I sought to conceptualize how the mediated
actions I observed were part of social practices that existed before and endured after the observed moment in time.

The pilot study and the summer meetings with John constituted this initial survey of participants and mediational means. Led by my research interests related to understanding how students use digital tools to enact literacy practices associated with out-of-school domains, I determined that John’s elective English class would be an appropriate site for such a study. In particular, I was interested in how John was leveraging students’ interest in fantasy and science fiction in order to engage them in social practices related to collaborative writing using an online digital tool. I was convinced that such a study would be of interest to the field of literacy studies and the growing body of research around new literacies, which by most definitions are commensurate with the social practices John was promoting in his elective class. However, I quickly realized from the pilot study that the students were taking up and resisting the social practices associated with collaborative writing in complex ways. In response to this complexity, I began conceptualizing the study using mediated discourse theory because it provided a robust theoretical framework and analytical processes for understanding how and why social practices are related or unrelated.

**Filter Two: Scene Survey.** The second filter is a scene survey, which is meant to “narrow down the scope of the research to a few highly salient places or scenes, in which the actions we are interested in are taking place” (Scollon, 2001a, p. 156). This filter guided the data collection and initial rounds of analysis across the duration of John’s semester-long elective class. The second filtering process is guided by the questions:
what are the relevant mediated actions, where are they being taken, when are they being taken, and with whom are they being taken? Because my research questions were related to the collaborative writing that the students were doing for the Building Worlds Project, I began to narrow the scope of the data collection and initial analysis to focus on mediated actions related to the planning and writing of the project.

This filtering process involved making distinctions between class sessions devoted in part or in whole to the planning and writing of the Building Worlds Project and class sessions devoted to the other aspects of the class. I attended John’s class every day for the first four weeks of the fall semester. During this time, I observed John’s class and interviewed John and his students (see Appendix C for interview questions). In these interviews, they provided generalizations about what they typically do in class and accounts about what they did on specific days. Based on this data, I began to notice differences in the social practices, mediated action, and interaction orders that led me to classify different types of class sessions. I did so in order to prioritize my visits to John’s class, as my schedule did not permit me to be present for all 85 of the class sessions, and I wanted to focus my data collection on the planning and writing of the Building Worlds Project. Through this scene survey across the semester-long class, I identified three main types of class sessions. In Table 1, I provide a complete list of my classification and the quantity of these class sessions.

In the class sessions involving ‘reading, watching, and discussing fantasy and science fiction literature,’ the class met in John’s classroom with the students sitting in rows. In these sessions, John deliberately positioned himself as discussion leader by
posing questions and soliciting responses from the students. John encouraged students to share their ideas and experiences at length. He also positioned students as readers who were to provide evidence they had read and to share their opinions. The interaction order and social practices were indicative of dominant classroom discourse in which the teacher directs the conversation and decides who has speaking rights (Cazden, 2001).

Table 1.

Type and Quantity of Class Sessions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qty.</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Reading, watching, and discussing fantasy and science fiction texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hybrid Sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Reading, watching, and discussing of fantasy and science fiction texts &amp; Building Worlds (Collaborative Planning)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Building Worlds (Collaborative Planning and Writing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Building Worlds (Video Game Design)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Substitute Teacher (Independent Reading)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Course Maintenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Lock Down Drill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85</td>
<td>TOTAL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The class sessions involving the Building Worlds collaborative writing project were very different. Students often adjusted the physical arrangements of John’s classroom to facilitate group planning of their fictional worlds. During these sessions, the class also met in the library or one of the two computer labs in order to make use of the computers and access the project wiki. The interaction order and social practices were
quite different in these sessions. Students sat in groups and talked with each other about their fantasy worlds. John deliberately positioned himself as a resource to the students and approached them as a potential co-author interested in writing with them about their fantasy world. With two of the groups, John wrote storylines and regional profiles for their worlds. The students accepted this positioning. John polled the students near the middle of the semester about how they saw him as a teacher and most students said that they saw him as a facilitator or guide. One of the students, Erika, remarked that the class sessions devoted to the Building Worlds Project did not feel like school.

However, there were also hybrid sessions, in which the students both discussed the literature and planned their projects. Because John was interested in how the processes of reading fantasy and science fiction were related to the writing of the project, he regularly asked students to share experiences about how the reading was helping them think about their writing or how their writing helped them to consider what they were reading and how it was written. This type of questioning also appeared on the quarterly and end-of-semester assessments, in which John asked the students to reflect on how their reading and writing processes informed one another. In these hybrid sessions, students who were in the four groups sat near one another and talked to each other in addition to responding to John’s questions. These hybrid sessions did not involve using the project wiki to post writing and discussion comments.

The class sessions involving the video game design marked yet another type of class session. Because the video game design engine was only installed on six computers, not all students could work on the video game at the same time. Also, because of the
complexity and difficulty of learning and using the video game design engine, some students chose not to directly contribute to their group’s video game, while other groups designed multiple games. These class sessions marked a shift in the social practices and interaction order among and within the groups. Initially, John was the sole source of technical support, but gradually as students became more familiar with the design engine, they began to help each other.

By making these distinctions about different types of class sessions, I was able to make informed decisions about which days I observed John’s class and which days I did not. I regularly communicated with John about what he was planning for each class session, so that I could attend the sessions related to the Building Worlds Project, including the hybrid sessions. On the days I did not attend, I asked John to provide me with an account of what they had done that class session. Across the semester, I observed 54 of the 85 class sessions. I was only unable to attend 1 of the 19 sessions related to the Building Worlds Project due to a conflict with my schedule. Of these 54 class sessions, I video recorded 26 of them for further analysis. During this time, I also conducted follow-up interviews with all of the students (see Appendix D for interview questions).

**Filter Three: Event and Action Survey.** The third filter is an event and action survey. The purpose of this filter is “to identify the specific social actions taking place within the scenes we have identified which are of relevance to the study of mediated action” (Scollon, 2001a, p. 157). This survey is an ethnographic continuation of the scene surveys, because after the relevant scenes, i.e., class sessions, have been identified, the next step is to consider the main actions unfolding within these scenes. In the interest of
addressing my research questions, I used this third filter to identify literacy events in which the students were taking action related to the planning and writing of the Building Worlds Project. The purpose of identifying literacy events is to consider how mediated action unfolds as sites of engagement using mediated discourse analysis, which I explain in a subsequent section of this chapter. Considering sites of engagement involves understanding to which timescales the action is related. Additionally, the purpose of identifying literacy events is to identify similar social actions in order to understand how related chains of mediated action constitute social practices across events. To conduct this filtering process, I considered the action that I observed in the relevant scenes, i.e., class sessions related to the Building Worlds Project, the meaning that participants gave those actions in interviews, as well as the actions that were frozen\textsuperscript{14} (Norris, 2004) on the project wiki.

The project wiki includes a record of every change made to the wiki by time and date, including all updates made to wiki pages and their respective discussion boards. The wiki also features a revision history associated with each page allowing users to see previous versions of the page in time. These functions allowed me to determine when actions related to posting writing and discussion posts occurred, as well as what writing was associated with those actions. However, these functions of the wiki did not allow me to determine where someone was taking action (unless I was observing them) or how long they had spent using the wiki at any given time, the functions only made a record when someone clicked ‘save,’ thus freezing their actions in time. Additionally, once a

\textsuperscript{14} Norris (2004) uses the term \textit{frozen action} to refer to actions that are entailed in material objects and given meaning within a nexus of practice. For example, a hot cup of coffee on a table is a \textit{frozen action} in the sense that someone put it there or poured the coffee in the cup for the purpose of someone drinking the coffee. In this way, a \textit{frozen action} is material evidence that a particular action has occurred.
change was made to the wiki, e.g., writing posted to a page or a comment posted to a discussion thread, that change became available as mediational means for others to take action. The wiki allowed students to make their writing available to each other.

Because posting writing and discussion comments to the wiki requires the use of a computer, the actions frozen on the wiki represent when students had material access to a computer and used that computer to work on the project. Of the 19 class sessions devoted in whole or in part to the planning and/or writing of the Building Worlds Project, nine of these class sessions involved access to computers. Because John only has four desktop computers in his classroom, he would plan to use computers by either taking his class to one of the two computer labs, taking his class to the library, or on one occasion he brought a wireless laptop cart into his room. Outside of the time that John’s class met, students had varying degrees of access to computers in the high school and at home. Some students used computers in their study halls or signed out of a study hall to use the library computers in order to work on the project. Some students had access to their own or their family’s computer outside of school, though others did not.

In the interest of tracking what types of action were taken with the wiki at what times, I created a database in Microsoft Excel in which I recorded details about all 2,089 posts to the wiki during the collaborative writing component of the project. The planning and writing of the Building Worlds Project spanned from September 1st when John introduced the project to his students to November 27th when John asked the students to shift from writing to video game design (see the shaded area on the schematic in Appendix B). In this database, I recorded details such as date, time, username, page name,
and group membership. Additionally, I differentiated among frozen actions using a taxonomy that distinguished the type of action and the type of wiki page.

There were two main types of action frozen on the wiki: posting writing to a wiki page and posting a comment to a discussion thread that was associated with a wiki page. Posting writing to a wiki page involved editing an existing page or creating a new one. Each time a page is changed, the previous version of that page is archived in the page history for each wiki page stamped with time and date. Posting a comment to a discussion thread involved responding to an existing discussion thread or creating a new discussion thread. Each discussion thread was associated with an individual wiki page. To access these discussion threads, users of the wiki had to navigate to the wiki page and click on the discussion tab.

There were four types of wiki pages in relationship to the user (student). Early in my tracking process, I began noticing during observations and interviews that the students would refer to some wiki pages as “my page” and other wiki pages as “our page” or “our group’s page”. I also noticed that in accordance with the project wiki pages were associated with one of the four world-building groups. Other than wiki pages John had created to organize the four world-building projects, each wiki page that the students created belonged to a particular world and group. Therefore, I identified the following types of wiki pages in relationship to the two types of action that the students were taking: own page, member’s page, shared page, and non-members page. What these categories refer to is on which kind of page did a student take a particular action. In the database, I recorded the following possible actions detailed in Figure 6 on page 93.
Figure 6. Types of Frozen Actions.

I was interested in these types of social action because they were related to the collaborative writing of the project. Students posted writing on their own pages in order to provide descriptions of regions and characters, stories about their world, and historical documents from their world. Students posted on member’s pages, sometimes reluctantly, in order to contribute to what they were writing, make changes for the sake of continuity across their storylines and descriptions, or to edit for spelling or grammar. Students posted on shared pages primarily to organize their wiki by posting categorical links to the other pages based on the region of the world or to post writing about a common-world event or element, such as magic. Students rarely posted writing on non-member’s pages; the few exceptions included lighthearted vandalism of someone’s page or edits for spelling or grammar. Students posted discussion comments for a range of purposes including soliciting feedback from John or other students, sharing ideas and plans for a particular wiki page, and playful banter unrelated to the project, which John attempted to keep to a minimum. This taxonomy of frozen actions served as a helpful heuristic for understanding how the roles of authorship were distributed and how issues of ownership were negotiated.
Using this taxonomy of social actions taken with the wiki, I coordinated my field notes and video recordings of class sessions related to the project with a consideration of when an action was frozen on the wiki. Because the posts to the wiki are stamped with time and date, I could synchronize the class session clock time, the video/audio recording time, and the wiki time to better understand what actions were taken with the wiki within particular sites of engagement. This coordination informed open coding for social practices on transcripts of the video recordings, in which I coded social actions that I had come to associate with social practices, or related chains of social actions. In interviews and informal conversations with the students and John, I then asked them about particular actions that I had observed and could refer to on the wiki as frozen actions. For example, after reading writing posted to the wiki at a particular time and reviewing transcripts and video recordings of social action in which the writing was posted to the wiki, I asked students questions about what they had written and why they had written what they posted. In particular, I was interested in understanding their authorship role in the posting of the writing on the wiki.

Based on these conversations and my initial coding for social practices, I began to notice that the project-related assignments that John gave the students shaped what actions some students took with the wiki at certain times. This led me to consider how social actions, such as posting writing to the wiki, unfolded as sites of engagement that were related to timescales determined by the assignments. For example, in the time between when an assignment was given and an assignment was due, students would often attribute their social action to fulfilling the assignment requirements. In the time between
assignments, when John did not explicitly tell students what they should be doing, some students continued to develop their fictional worlds by posting writing and planning with group members, while others did not, sometimes asking, “What are we supposed to do now?” Below, I explain the five assignments John gave his students during the Building Worlds Project. I consider how these assignments served as a timescale that shaped social action (see Appendix B for the assignment timescale). In Table 2, I provide details about how many calendar days, school days, and class sessions related to the project there were during and in between the assignments.

Table 2.

*Building Worlds Project Assignments*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Calendar Days</th>
<th>School Days</th>
<th>Building Worlds Class Sessions*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assignment #1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional profile</td>
<td>Sept. 1-3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment #2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional profile cont.</td>
<td>Sept. 4-16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment #3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character profile</td>
<td>Sept. 17-23</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment #4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write in another region</td>
<td>Oct. 24-30</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment #5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical document</td>
<td>Oct. 1-4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment #4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write in another region</td>
<td>Oct. 5-14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment #5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical document</td>
<td>Oct. 15-25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment #4</td>
<td>Oct. 26-Nov. 3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment #5</td>
<td>Nov. 4-10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment #5</td>
<td>Nov. 11-12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment #5</td>
<td>Nov. 13-27</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The number in parentheses represents class sessions held with access to computers.
The students in Swords and Spaceships were arranged in four world-building groups, which I further explain in the next section. Each group created a separate fictional world. The first assignment was to develop a regional profile within the students’ respective fictional world. John encouraged the students to work together to plan what their world looked like and how their regions were related. John took this approach to world building, i.e., developing individual regions within a common world, because it had worked well with the previous year’s students. John also encouraged the students to provide details in their writing and include drawings and maps similar to Tolkien’s (1977) approach to world building in *The Silmarillion*, which they were reading as excerpts in class. The second assignment was to further develop this regional profile. Through comments John gave the students on the first assignment, he encouraged them to add more detail including physical descriptions of the geography and more information about the habitants of the places they described.

The third assignment was to create a profile for a character that lives in the region of their world. Prior to the start of the Building Worlds Project, John asked his students to consider characterization in *The Silmarillion*. He led the students through a personality quiz for the characters in *The Silmarillion*, in which students answered personality questions that aligned with particular characters. John used this exercise to demonstrate how fantasy and science fiction has archetypal characters that are derivative of mythology and Tolkien’s work. John also provided the students with other character building resources linked on the wiki that were related to role playing and video games. John encouraged the students to use these resources to create their characters.
The fourth assignment was given in response to something that John and I both noticed well into the project. The students were primarily writing about their own regions and characters and were not writing together about common elements of their worlds, despite the fact that John had been encouraging students to write collaboratively. Early in the project, John had encouraged students to read each other’s writing and write on each others pages in order to maintain continuity, which John defined as having no in-world contradictions. John’s goal was to have students consider how world building in fantasy and science fiction texts is often the result of a negotiated process among collaborators rather than the product of any one individual. John explained how even Tolkien’s world has been further developed by Peter Jackson’s movies. Therefore, the fourth assignment was to write in a group member’s region. John asked the students to contribute a story, description, song, poem, etc. in relation to what a group member had already written about their region and the characters that inhabit that region. In effect, John was attempting to extend the way the students conceptualized and engaged in writing as a collaborative process.

The fifth assignment was rather brief in comparison with the other assignments. On November 11th in a class session devoted to discussing Ender’s Game (Card, 1985), John told his students that he wanted them to create a historical document for their world, such as a song, poem, lament, prophecy, book excerpt, etc. The purpose of the assignment was to “fill in empty nouns,” referring to Ursula K. Le Guin’s (2005) use of “empty nouns” in reference to places and objects she had mentioned in a story but had
not explicitly defined. John told his students that they had one day in class with the wireless laptop cart to complete the assignment.

Considering the assignments as a timescale helped me consider how social actions frozen on the wiki were related to how and why a site of engagement was constructed during the nexus of practice related to the writing and planning of the building worlds project. Appendix E provides a representation of what type of social actions were taken in relationship to the assignment timescale. Mapping actions across the assignment timescale informed the identification of focal class sessions in order to identify literary events for mediated discourse analysis. I identified five focal class sessions wherein students had access to computers and were using the wiki to take social action related to the planning and writing of the Building Worlds Project. In the research schematic in Appendix B, I locate these five focal class sessions within the assignment timescale.

**Filter Four: Focal Groups.** Within mediated discourse theory, the fourth filter is identifying focus groups for the purpose of determining

the extent the identification of specific scenes, media, and actions have reliability and validity for members of the group under study, and…to understand how important or salient the categories which have been identified are for the population being studied. (Scollon, 2001a, p. 158)

Adapted for the purposes of studying the students in John’s elective class, I identified two focal groups among the four world-building groups. With these two groups, I conducted interviews in addition to the student profile (see Appendix C) and follow-up interviews (see Appendix D) that I conducted with all of the students. These additional interviews were conducted individually, in pairs and small groups, informally during observations, during data collection, and during data analyses after the end of the elective class (see
Appendix B). I also conducted semi-weekly interviews with John, some of which I audio recorded and transcribed and others involved taking field notes based on the conversation. The purpose of these additional interviews was to determine the extent to which my identification of scenes, events, types of actions, and timescales were salient to the students’ and John’s experiences and helped explain how and why they took particular actions. Below, I explain my selection process for choosing the two focal groups.

In the first few days after John introduced the Building Worlds Project on September 1st, the students began to form four groups based on existing social relationships and/or shared interests. The two smaller groups of three students each, i.e., Arterramar (är ter’ə mär) and Förvanskaad (för van’skäd), took shape quickly and were each recognizable as a group within the first two class sessions devoted to in-class writing and planning (September 4th and 5th). These two groups sat together and began defining a fictional world and discussing how each member would contribute to the world building. The two larger groups, i.e., Morwaleth (môr wä’leth) and Tine agus Oighear (tēn ā’gəs o’gər), of five and seven students respectively, were more loosely organized during the first two classes in the computer lab. By the end of that week, I was not convinced that the group that came to be known as Morwaleth was actually a group as the students sat in separate groups of two and three and did not communicate about the project. Two of the eventual members of the Morwaleth group had made bids to join other groups, but were not accepted by them because the groups were either not receptive to them personally or their ideas for the project. For example, Steve made a bid to join the Arterramar group, but they were not receptive to his ideas about vampires because
they too closely resembled the *Twilight* series of books and movies. Steve eventually joined the Morwaleth group, but was not immediately accepted by the group.

At the end of the first week of the project (the fourth week of the elective class), I selected two focal groups: Arterramar and Tine agus Oighear. To make my selection, I reviewed field notes taken during every class session those first four weeks, *frozen* actions on the wiki, student profile interviews, and video recordings of the three class sessions devoted to the planning and writing of the Building Worlds Project. My first selection criteria was group size; at the time of selection, I was interested in investigating how a small and a large group would coordinate social action in a collaborative writing project. I speculated that a smaller group would have fewer competing interests and motives than a larger group. Of the larger groups, I selected Tine agus Oighear because I became interested in the competing motives I observed across the seven group members initially. I did not select Morwaleth because their membership seemed to be contested among the group members; most of the time they appeared to be two separate groups, only acknowledging each other as one group when asked. Morwaleth also had yet to work together on the project by the end of the fourth week of the elective class. At the time of selection, John referred to Morwaleth as the group who had yet to select a name.

Of the two smaller groups, I selected Arterramar because each of the three members had a history with reading and writing fantasy. Two of the members came to the project with characters they had developed for unrelated, out-of-school activities involving writing fantasy fiction and table-top role playing games. I was interested in how their social practices related to these activities would intersect with the social
practices related to the Building Worlds Project. They presented an opportunity to investigate how social practices are linked across in- and out-of-school domains. I did not select Förvanskaad, even though they immediately began building what became the most elaborate of the four fictional worlds. At the time of selection, they functioned more as a dyad than a group. Roger, who was repeating the elective class and participated in the pilot study, worked closely with his cousin AJ, primarily out of school in the evenings. The third student, Brock, interacted very little with Roger and AJ and began writing a parody of the The Legend of Zelda franchise that was completely unrelated to the world Roger and AJ were building.

Table 3 (on page 102) presents the groups and details about the students who were members of the groups. Included is a tally of how many frozen actions were enacted by each group member, providing a sort of metric for comparing the number of actions taken on the wiki in comparison with other group members. Three students, Clark, Ellen and Jamie, were not in the groups because they had made special arrangements with John for enrollment in the class.

Another reason for selecting the two focal groups was pragmatic. Given the size constraints of the rooms in which John held the elective class and the limitations of my video recording equipment, I was only able to video record approximately half of the class at any given time. Additionally, I realized that a single microphone was insufficient for capturing overlapping talk amongst four groups working simultaneously. Because of these constraints, I used an external, omni-directional microphone to record one focal group and a separate audio recorder to capture the talk of the second group, both of
whom I could capture on video if I asked them to sit in particular areas of the room. The separate audio tracks for each group allowed me to create separate transcripts for each of the focal groups using the same video recording.

Table 3.

*Group Composition and Frozen Actions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Writing Posts</th>
<th>Discussion Posts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arterramar</td>
<td>Erika</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nico*</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zina</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Förvanskaad</td>
<td>AJ</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brock</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roger</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morwaleth</td>
<td>Carl</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Casey</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Helga</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kari</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tine agus Oighar</td>
<td>Beau</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brad</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greg**</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Isabella</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>James</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nate</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Group</td>
<td>Clark</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ellen</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jamie</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *Nico withdrew from school on October 12, 2009*
 **Greg enrolled in school on October 9, 2009**
The selection of these two focal groups proved to be appropriate decisions for considering how students coordinate social action and mediational means in order to construct and link social practices related to collaborative writing using the wiki. Förvanskaad would not have been an appropriate choice because AJ and Roger continued to work primarily outside of school and separate from Brock. Therefore, I would have been unable to observe social actions that were frozen on the wiki. Morwaleth continued to be a contentious group as Casey and Steve worked independently, though occasionally speaking to one another in class, while the rest of the group contributed to the project minimally (see Table 3 on page 102). The social actions of these two groups were part of the nexus of practice that made up the elective class. However, the commensurate and incommensurate relationships among their social practices as enacted in the five focal class sessions were not conducive for pursuing the research questions related to collaborative writing.

Selecting the focal groups is the last filter involved with identifying mediated action within literacy events for mediated discourse analysis. This filtering process represents a principled approach to making decisions about data collection, selection, and analysis that are grounded in the complementary theoretical frameworks of New Literacy Studies, mediated discourse theory, and positioning theory. In the next sections, I provide more detail about how I used nexus analysis and mediated discourse analysis to render findings that address the research questions.
Nexus Analysis: Considering Relationships Among Social Practices

Nexus analysis is an ethnographic process that involves the data collection and selection processes outlined above within three recursive analytical activities: engaging the nexus, navigating the nexus, and changing the nexus. Scollon and Scollon (2004) developed nexus analysis as a way of identifying social problems, understanding how social practices were linked in such a way to produce the social problems, and accounting for how the researcher has inevitably been part of altering the social practices being investigated. The Scollons (2004) used nexus analysis to study technology-mediated classes in Alaska in regard to the social problem of “discrimination and consequent lack of access to the educational, legal, medical, and other services to which Alaska natives were entitled” (p. 59).

Applied in this study, I am using nexus analysis not to study a social problem per se, but rather to study a pedagogical problem of how to engage students in collaborative planning and writing using digital tools by leveraging their interests in fantasy and science fiction. In this section, I outline how I took up nexus analysis in this study to address the first research question: How do the teacher and his students engage, navigate, and attempt to change the nexus of practice that constituted the Building Worlds Project?

Engaging the Nexus

The preliminary activity with nexus analysis is engaging the nexus of practice. This process involves a consideration of how the participants and the researcher approached the construction of the nexus of practice that constituted the Building Worlds Project. John, his students, and I each brought to bear our own histories with writing on
the social practices related to the project. In other words, we did not come to the project without experiences involving particular linkages of social practices aggregated in our individual habitus. Engaging the nexus of practice uses the data filtering process explained above to consider how the nexus of practice took shape and how linkages were established, as well as considering the researcher’s place with the nexus of practice under investigation. The identification of participants, scenes, mediational means, events, and social actions is not done from a remote position that has no direct relationship with the nexus of practice; rather the researcher considers how his or her engagement with the nexus makes him or her a part of the nexus of practice. The social actions involved with conducting the research invariably impact the social practices under investigation. Therefore, the goal of this activity is for the researcher to establish not only the participants, but also himself or herself within the identification process. In Chapter 4, I provide an explanation of how John, his students, and I engaged the nexus of practice that constituted the Building Worlds Project.

**Navigating the Nexus**

The second activity with nexus analysis is the navigation of the nexus, which involves mapping

the cycles of the people, places, discourses, objects, and concepts which circulated through this micro-semiotic ecosystem looking for anticipations and emanations, links and transformations, their inherent timescales, and to place a circumference of relevance around the nexus of practice. (Scollon & Scollon, 2004)
For the purposes of this study, I considered the following data when navigating the nexus of practice. My purpose was to understand how social practices were related at the onset of the project, as well as how new linkages were established within the project.

**Participant Histories.** In the initial student profile interviews (see Appendix C), I asked participants about their histories with writing in their classes in school, especially their English classes, and how writing was related to their interests outside of school. My purpose in asking these questions was to gain insight into the extant literacy practices they may have been bringing to bear on the Building Worlds Project. I used students’ histories to consider what social practices were aggregated in their habitus and how they would draw on their past experiences with writing and collaborating with other students to inform what social practices they took up or resisted related to the project.

**Timescale Identification.** Each element being mapped in nexus analysis, e.g., participants, mediational means, social practice, discourses-in-place, is potentially based on a different timescale. Therefore, I considered the timescales that the participants associated with explanations about their social actions and generalizations about their social practices. For example, the timescale of school year (see Appendix B) was significant for participants, as some of the students were in their senior year and other students were in their sophomore and junior years. Students referred to this timescale when explaining why they enrolled in the class and how their other school experiences compared with their experience in the elective English class. Similarly, the participants associated particular social actions that I observed or tracked as frozen actions on the wiki with a timescale shaped by the assignments. Students took different actions
depending on the assignment and whether or not there was an ongoing assignment at the time.

**Participant Generalizations.** I relied on participant generalizations about their social practices related to the Building Worlds Project to understand how these social practices may be aggregated in their habitus and related to the homologous habitus of their world-building group or the whole class. In particular, I asked participants to share generalizations about what social actions they typically took outside of class related to the project, as well as what meaning they gave to those actions (see Appendix D). For example, I was interested in learning how, where and why they used the wiki outside of the class sessions. I was also interested in learning how the social practices enacted within the project were related to other social practices in other domains of their lives.

**Observations of Social Actions.** In the 54 of the 85 class sessions I attended, I took field notes about social actions participants were taking in one column, and in a second column I wrote analytic notes about the possible meaning of those actions and how they may be related to social practices. I video recorded 9 of the 19 class sessions devoted in whole or in part to the planning and writing of the Building Worlds Project. After the end of the elective class during the nexus analysis phase of the study (see Appendix B), I used transcripts of the video recordings that were coordinated with the social actions, *frozen* on the wiki to code for social practices I had identified in my field notes. I used these coded transcripts to select five focal class sessions and to select literacy events within these five sessions in which there were intersections of social practices I wanted to investigate using mediated discourse analysis.
**Individual Experience.** In the interest of understanding how particular actions were related to social practices, I asked students in informal conversations and in interviews about particular actions they took. I was interested in determining how a particular action was related or unrelated to a social practice that I had identified in my coding of the transcripts. In these conversations students would either confirm or contest how I was describing their action to them. For example, I asked AJ about a particular comment he had posted on the discussion board associated with one of Roger’s wiki pages. I told AJ that I thought his discussion post was associated with the social practice of ‘proposing world-building ideas.’ AJ said that he and Roger had discussed the idea long ago on Facebook chat and that his discussion post was merely a reminder that he and Roger had yet to incorporate the idea and revise their respective storylines accordingly. For AJ, the discussion post was associated with the social practice of ‘maintaining continuity across storylines.’ Given that social actions may be associated with multiple, simultaneously enacted social practices and that it was not possible to inquire about every single social action taken, I sought out accounts of individual experience primarily when I was uncertain about my coding of a particular social action or when I thought an action contradicted a social practice to which I had associated it.

**Frozen Actions.** Considering the writing and discussion posts on the wiki as frozen actions, I analyzed each post to determine who was taking action on what wiki page. From this analysis, I identified different types of social actions (see Figure 6 on page 93) and charted those actions across the assignment timescale (see Appendix E). I did this for the whole class and each of the four groups in order to consider how the
social actions were associated with the assignments. I took these *frozen* actions and the
timescale with which they were associated when considering how and why an action was
taken during the focal class sessions. Additionally, I considered how these *frozen* actions
were related in chains of mediated action that constituted social practices over time, as
well as how social practices were related to one another.

**Content Analysis.** In an effort to understand how the social actions taken with the
wiki were related to the individual and collaborative writing that was posted as part of the
project, I conducted a content analysis of every wiki page associated with the project (see
Appendix F). Using the page history associated with each wiki page, I tracked how many
writing posts were made to a wiki page, how many *animators* (students and teacher) had
made those writing posts, how many discussion posts were made to a wiki page, and how
many discussants (students and teacher) made those discussion posts. Additionally, I
considered how the students were constructing intertextuality among the wiki pages, a
social practice that I associate with collaborative writing. In other words, I was interested
in how the students were taking action to incorporate each other’s ideas and establish
relationships between what they had written and what another student had written. For
John, the purpose of these social actions was to maintain continuity across storylines
within a single fictional world.

In this study, I define intertextuality\textsuperscript{15} as the use of “recognizable phrasing,
terminology associated with specific groups of people or particular documents”
(Bazerman, 2004a, p. 88). In regard to the project, John referred to this as “cross

\textsuperscript{15} For other definitions of intertextuality used in literacy studies, see Bazerman (2004a) and Shuart-Faris
and Bloome (2004).
referencing each other’s stuff” as an explanation of sharing ideas through collaboration (Interview, September 20, 2009). Within the world building groups, I considered two types of terminology used to construct intertextual relationships among shared and individual wiki pages. The first type is ‘common world references;’ these terms were commonly used in reference to the entire world. For example, terms like the name of the world, i.e., Arterramar, Förvanskaad, Morwaleth, Tine agus Oighear, or the name of a common world event, such as a fire or the raising of a floating island. The second type is ‘region-specific references;’ these terms were specific to a particular student’s region of the world, e.g., the name of people and individual characters who inhabited the region, storylines that were specific to the region.

For each wiki page, I coded for these two types of terminology used in reference to another student’s wiki page. For ‘common world references’ I coded any use of terminology that was commonly used across the entire world. However, when a term appeared more than one time on the wiki page, I only coded it once. Similarly, when a term was represented in more than one way, e.g., ‘the Great Fire’ and ‘the fire,’ I only coded for one instance. These references are represented in parentheses on the tables in Appendix F. For ‘region-specific references’ I coded for use of a region-specific term that was used by a student associated with another region. In other words, I coded for instances where one student made a reference to another student’s region. In my view, making a reference to another student’s region marks a deliberate attempt to construct intertextuality between texts. Consistent with the coding for ‘common world references,’
I only coded one instance of a term per wiki page even though the same or related term may have been used multiple times.

Coding for intertextuality helped me understand how the different types of writing posts were related to establishing intertextuality among wiki pages associated with a single fictional world. Considering who used ‘common world references’ and ‘region-specific references’ helped me understand the social practices with which particular social actions were associated.

Lastly, I considered the creation of hyperlinks to another student’s wiki page to be part of establishing intertextuality among the wiki pages. Hyperlinks contained ‘common world references’ and ‘region-specific references,’ but they were used variably to refer to other member’s wiki pages and a student’s own wiki pages.

**Member Check Interviews.** During the last part of the study when I was conducting and refining the mediated discourse analysis of selected literacy events in the five focal class sessions, I conducted member check interviews with students who were members of the two focal groups, Arterrmar and Tine agus Oighear (see Appendix B). During these member check interviews, I shared my analyses with the students asking them to confirm or disconfirm any claims I was making about the social actions. The students relied on their memories of those events, and in a few cases the actual video of those events, to consider the meaning and purpose of the social actions I was considering and their relationship to the social practices I had named. In most cases, students confirmed my analyses or admitted that they did not remember why they took a particular
action. In a few cases, the students provided an alternate explanation of an event, which helped me reconsider the social practices with which the event was associated.

**Changing the Nexus**

The third activity within nexus analysis is changing the nexus of practice. As mentioned in the introduction of this section, nexus analysis is intended to be used to identify and ultimately change a social problem through an understanding of how social practices intersect, how intersections enable the problem, and how to address the problem. Applied here to the pedagogical problem of collaborative writing, John made a deliberate attempt to change the nexus of practice through Assignment #4. Throughout the data collection and initial analyses of that data, I shared my hunches and thoughts with John. We both agreed that not all of the students were enacting social practices associated with collaborative writing that were characteristic of the students in the pilot study. Therefore, John attempted to change the nexus of practice by requiring students to write in another student’s region. Some of the students resisted this assignment, and others completed the assignment in interesting ways based on the social practices aggregated in their habitus.

In the next chapter, I provide an account of how I was situated as a participant in the nexus of practice and implicitly part of John’s effort to change it through my research process.

**Mediated Discourse Analysis: Considering Relationships Among Actions**

Mediated discourse analysis (MDA) is a microethnographic tool used within the broader ethnographic approach of nexus analysis (Norris & Jones, 2005). MDA considers how action and discourse are mutually constitutive, focusing “upon the concrete, real-
time social action to see these social actions as fundamentally discursive (Scollon, 2001b, pp. 8-9). MDA strives to privilege neither discourse nor social action, but rather to consider discourse as one of many available tools with which people take action. To do so, mediated action is given analytic primacy in MDA as the unit of analysis (Wertsch, 1994). When conducting mediated discourse analysis, I developed a transcription scheme based on the work of others working with mediated discourse analysis (Scollon, 2001b, Wohlwend, 2007) to understand how social action related to collaborative writing is accomplished as sites of engagement, how social action constructs and reconstructs social practices over time, and how people engage in relational and reflexive social positioning to forge identities within a nexus of practice.

In Chapter 5, I use this transcription scheme to present mediated discourse analysis of selected literacy events from the five focal class sessions, in which members of the two focal groups are planning and writing their respective projects. On page 114, I provide an example of the transcription scheme in order to discuss its components. In this brief event, John is attempting to recruit students to participate in NaNoWriMo.\textsuperscript{16} Two of John’s students, Nate and Carl, have signed up to be part of the novel writing. John shifts between multiple sites of engagement to acknowledge Nate and Carl, while attempting to get more students involved in the project. John attempts to encourage the students to participate with an after-school, late night novel-writing pizza party in one of the school’s computer labs. John also deliberately positions the students as all being capable of writing a novel in a month. John intends on writing a novel himself and wants to include as many people as possible in the project.

\textsuperscript{16} National Novel Writing Month, more information can be found at http://www.nanowrimo.org
Example Mediated Discourse Analysis Transcript

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Video Time</th>
<th>Mediated Action</th>
<th>Talk</th>
<th>Sites of Engagement</th>
<th>Social Positioning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2:14</td>
<td>John stands in front of the classroom and begins to address the class at the beginning of the class session in the computer lab.</td>
<td><strong>Teacher:</strong> Um, one of you has signed up to novel write with me.</td>
<td>John attempts to construct a site of engagement that includes the entire class. Some students acknowledge the attempt. Other students are looking at their computer screens.</td>
<td>John attempts to deliberately position one of the students as part of national novel writing month.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:16</td>
<td>Nate pumps his fist in the air. John raises his fist in the air in acknowledgement.</td>
<td><strong>Teacher:</strong> Power to the people, Nate. Are you going to do it?</td>
<td>Nate acknowledges John, and John attempts to construct a site of engagement with Nate.</td>
<td>John continues his attempt to position Nate as a novel writer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:18</td>
<td>Carl raises his hand. John turns to acknowledge Carl.</td>
<td><strong>Carl:</strong> I already signed up. <strong>Teacher:</strong> Did you sign up? What’s your user name and I’ll make you my writing buddy. <strong>Carl:</strong> cr33per206 <strong>Teacher:</strong> Creeper 206? Awesome.</td>
<td>Carl makes an attempt to construct a site of engagement with John by raising his hand and acknowledging John’s initial prompt. John acknowledges this site of engagement.</td>
<td>Carl deliberately positions himself as part of NaNoWriMo. John takes up this positioning and positions John as his writing buddy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:27</td>
<td>John turns back to talk to Nate. Nate acknowledges John by nodding his head.</td>
<td><strong>Teacher:</strong> I already made you my writing buddy, because I assumed that you used your username for the wiki. <strong>Nate:</strong> Yeah.</td>
<td>John shifts his attention back to the site of engagement constructed with Nate.</td>
<td>John positions Nate as his writing buddy. Nate takes up the positioning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:35</td>
<td>John shifts to address the entire class.</td>
<td><strong>Teacher:</strong> I have big plans for this. We are going to do a write night where we like have pizza and stuff and you guys come into school, like if we are down on our word counts and you can come and just write for like four hours.</td>
<td>John shifts his attention to the whole class making another attempt to construct a site of engagement with the whole class.</td>
<td>John positions the students as either part of NaNoWriMo or not, in an attempt to get more people involved in the after school writing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I use this transcription scheme to warrant claims about the social actions and positional identities within the events in relationship to the social practices that I have mapped in the nexus analysis of the elective class. Here, I explain the format and purpose of the transcription scheme that I have adapted for mediated discourse analysis. The first column of the transcription scheme marks the time for reference to particular rows of the transcript. In the second column, I provide an analysis of the mediated action taken. I do so in order to privilege (Ochs, 1999) social action as the first consideration in the analysis in accordance with mediated discourse theory that first considers the action and secondly considers how discourse is a mediational means in that action. In the third column, I provide a transcription of the talk during the mediated action, which I consider to be one among many discursive and non-discursive mediational means. In the fourth column, I provide an analysis of how the mediated action is unfolding as (sometimes multiple) sites of engagement by considering the interaction order of those present and absent in the action, the discourses-in-place that inform and shape the action, and the habitus of individuals who are present in the action. In the last column, I present an analysis of the relational and reflexive social positioning within the social action in order to consider what positionings are offered, imposed, taken up, and rejected to better understand the participants positional identity within the nexus of practice.

Rather than use turns in speaking to delineate the rows of the transcription scheme as with other approaches to discourse analysis, I consider shifts in the participants attentions structures in order to parse one mediated action from another. Determining a shift in participation structure involves the interpretation of gaze, gesture, proxemics, and
use of mediational means in an effort to consider how one mediated action is different from another. Unavoidably, the transcription scheme is reductive through my interpretive process of drawing on my own attention structures to interpret the social action within the literacy event. My goal of using this transcription scheme is to transparently present the warrants for my claims and my inductive process for considering how social actions constitute social practices within a nexus of practice.

**Literacy Event Selection**

In the third filter of the data collection and selection process, I identified literacy events within the five focal class sessions by coding for social practices on the initial transcripts of the video and audio recordings. I selected literacy events for mediated discourse analysis in which the participants were enacting social practices related to the planning and writing of the Building Worlds Project. In the selection process, I considered not only the social actions that I observed in the video recording, but also the social actions that were *frozen* on the wiki during the event. In Chapter 5, I present mediated discourse analyses of literacy events that are representative of the social practices of the two focal world-building groups.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I traced my process of data collection and analysis, which I represent in the research schematic in Appendix B. Mediated discourse theory presents a robust and complex set of theoretical constructs which are operationalized within nexus analysis and mediated discourse analysis. Though nexus analysis and mediated discourse analysis were developed by Scollon & Scollon (2004) to identify broad social and
cultural problems in order to affect change with an emic understanding of the relationship among social practices, recent scholars have used these analytic tools to consider issues and tensions in schools (Jones, 2005a; Wohlwend, 2007). Here, I use mediated discourse theory to understand how and why students took social action related to the collaborative planning and writing of the project, as well as how social practices implicated in the action that constitute them were related to other social practices in the lives of the students. For the purposes of summary and reference, I include a table on page 118 of my research questions, data corpus, analytic method, and processes of analysis.
Table 4.

Research Questions and Methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Corpus</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Data Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How do the teacher, his students, and I engage, navigate, and attempt to change the nexus of practice that constituted the Building Worlds Project?</td>
<td>-Field notes for 54 class sessions (26 video recordings)</td>
<td>Nexus Analysis (Macro level of analysis)</td>
<td>-Identify taxonomy of wiki pages</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-Student profile, follow-up, and member check interviews with students</td>
<td></td>
<td>-Identify taxonomy of frozen actions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Teacher follow-up and member check interviews</td>
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<td>-Identify assignment-based timescale</td>
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<td>-Database of all frozen actions taken on the wiki</td>
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<td>-Identify intertextual references made in wiki pages</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-Online project wiki with page revision histories and discussion boards</td>
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<td>-Identify enacted social practices within 5 focal class sessions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Artifacts from the class including handouts, readings, rubrics, etc.</td>
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<td>-Inductions made about durability and linkages of social practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How do the students’ social practices, mediational means, and social interaction shape how and why they coordinated their collaborative writing?</td>
<td>-Video recordings of 5 focal class sessions with separate audio tracks for 2 focal groups (see Appendix B)</td>
<td>Mediated Discourse Analysis (Micro level of analysis)</td>
<td>-Identification of literacy events involving planning and/or writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Student profile, follow-up, and member check interviews with students</td>
<td></td>
<td>-Interpretation of mediated actions taken, sites of engagement constructed, and relational and reflexive social positioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How are the teacher and his students’ positional identities related to how and why they wrote collaboratively for the Building Worlds Project?</td>
<td>-Teacher follow-up and member check interviews</td>
<td></td>
<td>-Inductions made of how mediated actions are constitutive of social practices identified in nexus analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Frozen actions on the wiki coordinated by time stamps with transcripts of video recordings</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 4

NE​XUS OF PRACTICE: SWORDS AND SPACESHIPS

In this chapter, I address the first research question by presenting a nexus analysis of John’s elective English class, Swords and Spaceships. Nexus analysis is operationalized at the macro level to map how social practices are related to one another in ways that help explain how and why people take particular social actions, as well as the meaning of those actions. Using nexus analysis, I answer the first research question, which I restate here for reference purposes:

- How do the teacher, his students, and I engage, navigate, and attempt to change the nexus of practice that constituted the Building Worlds Project?

The term ‘engage’ is used to consider how John, his students, and I brought to bear our own histories with collaborative writing on the social practices that John expected his students to take up when working on the project. John engaged the nexus of practice as a teacher who had taught the class before and wanted to replicate, to a certain degree, the social practices associated with the previous year’s project. The students each engaged the nexus of practice with different histories with writing, or habitus, that informed which social practices they enacted, took up and resisted. As a researcher, I had an interest in studying collaborative writing and through my data collection and early analysis processes began to identify and reinforce social practices I associated with
collaborative writing. All of this engagement helped shaped the nexus of practice under investigation.

The term ‘navigate’ is used to refer to the mapping process of determining what social practices were enacted at what times and how social practices were related to one another. By looking across the in-class observations of the students planning and writing the Building Worlds Project and the *frozen* actions taken on the wiki in and out of school, I use generalizations and recounts of specific actions by John and his students to conceptualize the nexus of practice at work in the elective class. The nexus of practice is a complex constellation of linked social practices that I explain in this chapter and represent visually in Appendix G. Nexus analysis is necessarily selective, as not all social practices implicated in each mediated action can be considered. The visual representation, though limited by two dimensions, provides a guide for understanding linkages among the social practices investigated in the study.

The term ‘change’ is used to consider how John made an explicit attempt to change the nexus of practice in order to have students enact social practices he associated with collaborative writing and how I made an implicit changes to the nexus of practice through my investigation and social interaction with the participants. In the sections below I outline each one of these processes that are not meant to be linear but rather are recursive, often simultaneous, processes taken in relationship to and within the nexus of practice. For mediated discourse theory, an important element of nexus analysis is considering how the research process is a part of the nexus of practice being investigated.
Engaging the Nexus

In this section, I provide an explanation of how John, his students, and I approached the project based on the different experiences and interests we were pursuing during the construction of the nexus of practice. All of us had prior experiences with writing that we brought to bear on the project. I first discuss how John planned for the project based on his experiences with the previous year’s class. Second, I discuss the multiple reasons why each of the students chose to enroll in the elective English class, as well as how they came to form the four world building groups. Lastly, I discuss how the pilot project shaped how I approached the full study of the Building Worlds Project.

Project Planning and Preparation

At the beginning of the elective class, John planned to allow the students to help set the direction of the class based on their interests in fantasy and science fiction. John planned to give the students choices about what texts they would read as a class. Early in the class, John polled the students to see if they were familiar with the works of Tolkien. Most of the students had seen the *The Lord of the Rings* movies (Jackson, 2001; 2002; 2003), so John decided to start the class as he had the previous year by using *The Silmarillion* (Tolkien, 1977) to demonstrate how Tolkien had created the world that the students had seen on screen. The previous year, the students had used excerpts from *The Silmarillion* as a model for laying the groundwork for the creation of a fantasy world. At the onset of the class the next year, John explained:

I guess I was really going to come in with sort of the same approach and try to recreate what we did last year in terms of laying the groundwork a little bit slowly, giving them some examples, start with a little bit of the beginnings of Tolkien's universe the same way we did last year...use that,
say, here's something you know, here's this background that led to this rich
world that you see on film and in books, and use that as a way to sort of
lay the groundwork for the project. (Interview, August, 29, 2009)

However, in the previous year’s class 12 students created a single fantasy world,
Erstellen (ˈɜr stɛlən), and John was concerned that this same collaborative process would
not be possible with 22 students. John thought that there would be too much writing for
all of the students to read; as a result, he began planning for the possibility that students
would choose to plan and write the project in multiple groups. To use terms from
mediated discourse theory, John was concerned that the same social practices that
constituted the previous year’s project would not be possible to replicate with a larger
group of students. John speculated that students would not enact the social practice of
‘reading group member’s wiki page’ if there were too many student-authored wiki pages
to read. Therefore, John was considering how best to group the students in order to enact
and sustain the social practices he had associated with the project based on the previous
year’s class.

John was also concerned with students’ social positioning at the onset of the
project. The previous year, some students positioned themselves as leaders and helped to
manage the development of the whole-class world building. Other students, who had
initially positioned themselves as reluctant writers or in support roles, changed their
positioning throughout the class to provide leadership for parts of the project. John said
that he learned from the previous year that some students may “shut down” if he
positioned them too aggressively as fantasy writers with expectations for producing a
large amount of writing and that some students benefit from being positioned as capable writers who are in need of support and encouragement. John stated:

I'm going to be real conscious this year of making it clear to the class, I understand that some of you in the beginning will be leaders, and some of you will not be as comfortable with this, all of that is okay. You know what I mean? If you want to jump in big and go for it, great. If you're not quite as comfortable, I get the sense that writing fantasy fiction is sort of a risk for some of these students, you know? That's not the social circles that they float in. So, maybe let them participate in a little bit of a more tangential way at the beginning if it works out that way, and see what goes from there. As we start writing, I want to make it clear to them that it is okay to ease their way into it. (Interview, August, 29, 2009)

John cited the example of one female student from the previous year’s class who was initially uncomfortable writing fantasy fiction. Through support and encouragement from John and other students, she became one of the key contributors to the project that year. Therefore, John was not only considering how students’ initial social positioning as writers could potentially impact their willingness to write for the project, but also that this positioning can change in relationship to John as the teacher and the other students in the project. John wanted all of his students to be positioned as capable writers who had important contributions to make to the development of a fantasy world.

John was also very explicit about his expectations during the first few days of the elective class. He was concerned that if some students did not take the project or the class seriously, they may detract from what other students could potentially contribute. On the first day of class, only eight students were present, a number John feared was too low to offer the elective class. Therefore, John went down to the large study hall in the cafeteria, as he had done the previous year, to recruit students to join the class. Followed by the eight students, two of whom were wielding light sabers, John announced to the study hall,
“Greetings students. I am here to rescue you from boredom” (Field Notes, August 24, 2009). John then proceeded to explain the class to the study hall students and ended his introduction to the class with, “Don’t come unless you are willing to read and write” (Field Notes, August 24, 2009). Seven students from study hall followed the procession back to John’s classroom where he formally introduced the class to the students and outlined his expectations for reading and what the Building Worlds Project involved.

Over the course of the first week, the class grew to 22 students. During that first week, John gave the students daily pop quizzes “to see who’s reading.” John repeatedly told students that they had made a choice to join the class, and though he would rather have them in his class than study hall, they had to actively participate in the discussion of the reading and the Building Worlds Project or he would ask them to leave. From the beginning of class, John was explicit about the social practices he expected students to enact in the elective English class. He repeatedly reminded them that they had made a choice to join the class and that choice involved taking on responsibilities for reading assigned fantasy and science fiction literature and completing assignments related to the Building Worlds Project. Failure to enact an expected social practice meant that a student would have to return to study hall, which did not happen.

Additionally, John was concerned that some students may be reluctant to write collaboratively for the project. Based on the previous year’s class, one of the forms of collaboration that John had come to expect in the project was the sharing of ideas, evidenced by references students made to region-specific terms and common world terms within their group. The purpose of this sharing is to create a fictional world that has
continuity, or no in-world contradictions across timelines and storylines. After the fourth week of class when Assignment #1 was due, John noticed that one of the groups, Arterramar, was sharing terminology, e.g., Dzivas, a name for a species of characters; Thygon, the name of a deity. However, the other groups were not doing so at the onset of the project. Therefore, John considered:

You know, maybe I need to do what I did last time, which was sort of make it a requirement to be posted on the wiki. You know for a while I had them do like a three or four posts a week, read each other's stuff, make some useful comments, sort of like artificially forcing them to read each other's stuff and hopefully some collaboration comes out of that. I don't know if I need to do that yet. I don't know that I needed to do it last year, but I thought I needed to do it.

For some of [last year's students] it was useful, for some of them it probably felt like that was busy work. ‘Ok, I'm going to get on there and say something about it just because I've been told to.’ Um, I felt like there is decent enough momentum so far [this year] that I haven't felt the need to do that, but that's something I'm willing to try again if it seems like people aren't really reading each other's stuff and talking to each other. (Interview, September 20, 2009)

John was not only concerned that students may not enact social practices commensurate with the collaborative writing he experienced the previous year, but he was also concerned that forcing students to post comments and writing to each other’s pages would be done only for the sake of completing the task and not for the sake of building a world with continuity. This is a tension that John would revisit when he made attempts to change the nexus of practice of this year’s students.

**Class Enrollment**

Based on student profile interviews (see Appendix C) conducted with all of the students, I learned about their reasons for enrolling in the class and their histories with
writing. In particular, I was interested in how their out-of-school interests and literacy practices were related to their decision to enroll in the class and what they hoped to accomplish during the class. Below, I explain these reasons and how they informed how the students engaged the nexus of practice associated with the Building Worlds Project.

Table 5 provides a reference for the multiple reasons for enrolling that the students cited.

**Table 5.**

*Class Enrollment*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Interest in Fantasy &amp;/or Sci-fi</th>
<th>Interest in Creative Writing</th>
<th>Interest in BW Project</th>
<th>Interest in Teacher</th>
<th>Needed a Class</th>
<th>Friend is Enrolled</th>
<th>Out of Study Hall</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Tine agus Oighear</td>
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**Interest in Fantasy and Science Fiction.** With the exception of Paul, all of the students enrolled in John’s Swords and Spaceships class were interested in fantasy and science fiction. Some of the students were more interested in one over the other. The students’ interests in these genres were variably related to watching movies; playing individual and networked video games; playing role-playing games; and reading books, comic books, and graphic novels. These shared interests allowed John and his students to leverage a shared body of knowledge related to the two genres. Almost without exception, the students shared an understanding of general terminology and features of the two genres, e.g., elves, dwarves, dragons, lasers, spaceships, warp speed. However, different students had different levels of expertise related to particular fantasy and science fiction franchises, e.g., *The Lord of the Rings, Star Wars, Diablo, Marvel, World of Warcraft*.

Students would often use their general knowledge and specific expertise within class when discussing the literature or planning the project. The students also used their knowledge in playful ways to determine who had more intimate knowledge of a particular aspect of fantasy or science fiction. In particular, Roger would often playfully test the knowledge of other students by intentionally making contradictions that only an insider would understand, e.g., a joke about a paladin necromancer. John would often rely on students’ general knowledge in order to make comparisons across genres, franchises, and media. John often asked the students if they were familiar with a particular character or characteristic and then explain how an unfamiliar character or characteristic was similar to a familiar one. These playful and intentional comparisons helped the students define the genres and understand how they are represented across franchises and media,
as well as consider how they would draw on these resources to create their own fictional world.

*Interest in Creative Writing.* A few students indicated that they were interested in taking the class because they had learned that it involved creative writing. AJ and Carl said that they always enjoyed the opportunity to write creatively in school, even though they did not do so out of school. On the other hand, Erika, Zina, and Clark had histories of writing creatively outside of school. Erika was actively writing fan fiction with friends she had met online and in person, and she was working on a fictional book series with her friends that involved all of them as characters who wrote about their fictional lives using shifting points of view. Zina had written her own fantasy stories, inspired by her brother who was working on a fantasy novel and was enrolled in John’s elective class the first year he offered it. Clark, who was enrolled in Swords and Spaceships for the second year as an independent study (jokingly referred to as Battleaxes and Battleships), was employing his interests in poetry and song writing to develop stories and characters from the Building Worlds Project the previous year into a concept album, complete with original music that he composed for the guitar. Roger, another student enrolled in Swords and Spaceships for a second time, had kindled his interest in creative writing with the previous year’s project and immediately set out to create a more in-depth world than Erstellen.

The remainder of the students reported that their experiences with writing were primarily grounded in school-based assignments in their English classes, though a few students acknowledged informal writing with friends and family outside of school. With
the exception of Erika, who wrote collaboratively with friends, and Roger and Clark, both of whom participated in the project the previous year, the Building Worlds Project represented the first time the students were asked to write collaboratively. Therefore, most of the students were being asked to take up social practices that were unfamiliar to them and even related in contradictory ways to the social practices aggregated in their habitus that were primarily based on individual authorship of school-based writing written for a single reader, the teacher, and for a grade.

**Interest in Building Worlds Project.** In addition to Roger and Clark’s familiarity with the project, other students had heard about the project through friends who took the class the previous year. James and Kate had heard about the project through close friends, and they were interested in participating in a project that was open-ended and allowed them the opportunity to create a fictional world with other people. Erika and AJ had also heard about the project through friends, and they were attracted by the opportunity to write creatively in a genre that they were interested in. For these students, the project marked a departure from typical assignments they had in school. They each said that they wanted to work on the project because it was not only related to their interests but also was a different way of writing with other students than their previous experiences in and out of school.

**Interest in Teacher.** Many students reported that they had John for another English class in the past or present. They explained that John is a supportive and caring teacher and generally fun to be around. As an English and drama teacher in Hanover High School, John interacts with students through not only his required English classes
and Swords and Spaceships, but also through drama-related elective classes and drama productions. John is also known to the students in the school as a teacher who on occasion had done some unconventional things, such as stand on a lunch table with a light saber to recruit students for Swords and Spaceships or play his electric guitar in the hallway when students are changing classes. When I asked John how he thought he may appeal to a broad range of students based on his various interests and activities in the school, he said:

I will say that I am very conscious of trying to make myself that [cross-over kind of] person. ...I feel as though that is a real advantage to me as a teacher, not just in this class but in all my classes. You know that first day of class, I always do like the who am I type of thing and I list all of those things. You know I try to find, hopefully, each kid in that class can find something, oh, I am like him in that regard, oh I like heavy metal music or I was in choir or I play football or I'm a video game guy, you know, so I'm real conscious to put that persona that you can be lots of different things, and hopefully that allows kids to feel comfortable in my classes all the time, not just in the Sci Fi class, um, so I don't know, I mean how much does that have...all I can say is that I hope that it has some impact that kids feel comfortable in my classroom…. (Interview, August, 29, 2009)

This is significant to note because the students who said they enrolled in part because of who John is as a teacher associated social practices and social interaction not typically found in the school with John’s teaching.

**Needed a Class.** Some students explained that they simply needed a class to complete their class schedule. Nico needed the class for football eligibility. Steve had dropped a class that did not interest him and enrolled in Swords and Spaceships because it sounded more interesting than the class he dropped. Ellen needed the class to graduate early, though she would later drop the class for reasons I was unable to determine. Paul and Isabella dropped pre-calculus with another female student; the three of them enrolled
in Swords and Spaceships because it was the only class with open spots during second period. The third female student was convinced by the pre-calculus teacher to rejoin the math class because of college-entrance requirements. For these students, the class met a need of earning a semester elective credit and was a preferable place to be second period compared to other classes. This is significant because the time the class was offered and what other classes were offered at the same time helped to determine who did and did not enroll in the class.

**Friend is Enrolled.** Some students explained that they enrolled in the class because they knew a friend was taking the class. These friendships mapped onto group membership, as these students joined the same collaborative writing group as their friends. AJ and Roger worked closely together; they are cousins and often went to each other’s houses to play video games. Helga said she joined the class because Kari and Carl were taking the class; the three of them ended up in the same group, Morwaleth, and interacted with each other more than with the other two members, Casey and Steve. Paul and Isabella are close friends and worked together to establish a common region in the fictional world Tine agus Oighear. Greg moved back to the community from Alaska on October, 9, 2009, and enrolled in the class in part because his girlfriend, Kate, was enrolled in the class. Kate convinced Greg to join her group, Tine agus Oighear. The two worked together closely, until they ended their relationship near the end of the class.

**Out of Study Hall.** A handful of students explained that they also simply wanted out of study hall. The study hall during second period is held in the cafeteria. Students are required to sit quietly at their tables doing homework or listening to their music on
headphones. When John recruited students from study hall on the first day of class, he addressed a desire for being someplace more preferable by saying, “Greetings students. I am here to rescue you from boredom” (Field Notes, August 24, 2009). All four students, Beau, Brad, Casey, and Jamie, said that they would rather be anywhere than study hall. Jamie, who had taken the class the previous year, begged John to be re-enrolled in the class as an aide. Jamie said that Swords and Spaceships was simply the best place to be second period in the high school. John agreed to allow Jamie to re-enroll as an aide.

**Group Formation**

The four groups that made up the elective class that year (see Table 5 on page 126) were formed during the first few days of the project. Some of the groups formed quickly, while others developed more slowly. Ultimately, how and why the groups formed would shape how the students engaged the social practices John associated with the project. The day before the first project assignment was given, John devoted a whole class session to group formation and planning. At this point, John was unclear if the students would form groups or not, but he encouraged them to circulate around the room to see what people were thinking about for their fictional worlds. A few students had posted comments to the discussion board associated with the main project wiki page with ideas they had. John encouraged these students to share these ideas with each other as they decided which ideas would work well to establish a fictional world. Below, I describe how the groups formed and began to engage the nexus of practice that would constitute the project.
\textit{Arterramar.} Erika and Nico both shared ideas with John that they had created for other purposes. Erika brought storyline and weaponry ideas from her fan fiction writing, some of which she had sketched out in drawings in her sketchbook. Nico brought a list of character descriptions that he had written for \textit{Advanced Dungeons & Dragons}, a table-top role playing game he had played with his family when he was younger. John suggested that Nico talk to Erika since they had ideas that seemed compatible. Zina had ideas of her own which she shared with Nico and Erika, both of whom were seated near her the first planning day in class. Steve made a bid to join the group with ideas for vampires, but his ideas were not accepted because Erika thought his vampires too closely resembled the \textit{Twilight} franchise, which she considered to be cliché. Steve ended up taking his ideas to another group. Erika, Nico, and Zina began working closely together to establish the three-tiered world later named Arterramar.

\textit{Förvanskaad.} AJ and Roger set to work immediately on the development of their world. They let it be known that they did not want anyone else in class messing with the world they were creating. Roger was motivated to create a more elaborate world than the one he had helped create the previous year. He said that he had to make compromises the previous year, which he did not anticipate having to make this year because he and AJ shared similar ideas. Brock was friends with Roger and sat in proximity to Roger and AJ as they discussed their ideas. Eventually, Brock was included in the group, even though he was developing a video game parody that was unrelated to the world Roger and AJ were building. Roger would later write a storyline that folded in Brock’s parody of \textit{The Legend of Zelda} franchise.
**Tine agus Oighhear.** Paul and Nate outlined two warring factions on the discussion board prior to the initial in-class planning session. The two factions were fire and ice (the meaning of the Gaelic name Tine agus Oighhear), and Paul and Nate began recruiting members to join the two factions based on existing friendships. Paul recruited Isabella, and Nate recruited Beau, James, and Kate, all of whom were friends to a greater or lesser degree. Eventually Brad and Greg would join the fire faction, stacking up against Paul’s ice faction. The only two females in the group, Isabella and Kate, decided that they would be princesses whom the males would have to protect. Isabella began writing about an ice princess, while Kate began writing about a fire princess.

**Morwaleth.** The group that later became known as Morwaleth took shape very slowly. Initially, Steve was the most enthusiastic about his ideas and organizing a group. After not having his ideas accepted by Erika of the Arterramar group, Steve began trying to organize Casey, Carl, Helga, and Kari into a group. Casey had many ideas of his own but did not openly share them with the other students. Carl, Helga, and Kari were all close friends and appeared to be more interested in talking about events and issues unrelated to the class. This frustrated Steve, who began working closer with Casey. At times, the group seemed to function as two groups. Steve initially created a wiki page called [Steve’s] Group, which would later become an organizing page for the fictional world, Morwaleth. The divide between Steve and Casey on one hand and Carl, Helga, and Kari on the other persisted to shape how their world building project developed.
Attunement to Specific Social Practices: Three Forms of Collaboration

Through the pilot study at the end of the 2008-2009 school year and meetings over the summer prior to the start of the 2009-2010 school year, John and I had identified social practices that we associated with collaborative writing. We did so in the interest of understanding how students wrote collaboratively during the pilot study, relying on retrospective accounts of their collaborative processes. We identified three salient forms of collaboration that the students described in interviews: negotiating and maintaining storyline continuity, sharing and protecting proprietary story elements, and social positioning in relationship to negotiating authorship. Below I describe each one of these social practices and how they shaped how John and I engaged the nexus of practice.

**Storyline Continuity.** John’s goal for the Building Worlds Project was for the students to read each other’s writing in order to establish relationships between characters and storylines and to work out any continuity conflicts. John defined continuity as having no in-world storyline or character contradictions, a characteristic of fantasy and science fiction franchises that have multiple writers, artists, and directors working across media. John wanted his students to have continuity conversations so that they could consider the choices that writers make when creating a fictional world in collaboration with other people. The students from the pilot study associated several social practices with storyline continuity that John and I would later expect to see enacted by the next year’s students. For example, resolving continuity issues involved such social practices as ‘reading group member’s wiki page,’ ‘planning and coordinating the project’ through in-class discussions, and ‘posting comments to group member’s wiki page.’
**Sharing Story Elements.** Another one of John’s expectations was that students would borrow ideas from one another and that those borrowed ideas would show up in each other’s writing. What John and I found during the pilot study was that some of the shared ideas were freely available for group members to adopt and adapt, but other ideas were proprietary and required negotiation, consent, and oversight for their use. This negotiation of how ideas were used throughout the fictional world involved such social practices as ‘reading group member’s wiki page,’ ‘planning and coordinating the project,’ ‘posting comments to group member’s wiki page,’ ‘editing spelling and grammar,’ ‘posting writing to group member’s page,’ ‘making common world references,’ and ‘making region-specific references.’ Therefore, John and I expected to see these social practices not only enacted but also linked together in integrated ways.

**Negotiating Authorship.** John and I learned from the pilot study that students took on different roles when negotiating authorship. Some students emerged as organizers, others emerged as continuity editors, and other students accepted and supported students in these roles. What a student contributed to the project often determined what roles he or she could take up and shaped who wrote with whom. Though I began using mediated discourse theory to reconceptualize role as social positioning, John and I expected certain students to position themselves as leaders and other students to accept or resist this positioning. We considered that the enactment of social practices to be related to these positionings, which may be negotiated along lines of friendship and pre-existing status and social positioning within the high school. For example, who
posted writing or discussion comments on whose wiki page may be shaped by the relational and reflexive social positioning among the students.

**Tensions with Attunement.** For John, he was planning on encouraging students to take up and construct social practices he had associated with the previous year’s Building Worlds Project. For me as a researcher, I was planning on looking for these social practices, documenting their enactment, and asking students about them. John and I were both attuned to particular social practices that we had associated with the world-building project and expected that the students would take up and enact. For John, this attunement was part of his teaching process of having students take up social practices related to collaborative writing and world building. For me, this attunement was a tension between documenting the social practices that were enacted and shaping those social practices through my data collection process based on what I was investigating and expected to see. I was also concerned that this attunement was related to what I argued against in Chapter 1 with studies of *new literacies* that are often attuned to a particular idealized ethos associated with particular technologies. During the data collection process, I attempted not to work from a priori assumptions about particular social practices accompanying particular mediational means, e.g., expecting students to post writing to each other’s pages merely because the wiki was designed with this affordance.

**Navigating the Nexus**

In this section, I provide my analysis of the social practices that the students enacted and how those social practices were related to one another as a nexus of practice. As explained in the previous section, I drew on the pilot study to consider specific social
practices that John and I had come to associate with the Building Worlds Project, but I used observations, interviews, and frozen actions on the wiki to determine if those social practices were salient for this class of students as well as what previously unidentified social practices emerged. The goal of this mapping process is to arrive at understandings of how and why particular social practices are linked in ways that enable certain social actions to be taken and thwart other social actions from being taken. John, his students, and I each navigated the nexus as we were constructing it, drawing on the nexus of practice to inform our actions related to teaching for John, related to project completion for the students, and related to conducting research for me.

Below, I describe the social practices that I came to identify in association with the project and warrant claims about their durability and linkages using the methodology of nexus analysis outlined in the Chapter 3. In Appendix G, I provide a visual representation of the nexus of practice. Though this visualization is inadequate in its attempt to portray in two dimensions the complexity of the relationships between social practices across time, it provides a rough road map for demonstrating categorization of social practices (color), durability (thickness of the lines), and linkages (line intersections). Though the use of intersecting straight lines to represent social practices is customary for researchers working with nexus analysis (Scollon, 2001a), straight lines are misleading because here they are not to be considered as continuous beyond the page, and they are overly simplistic because they limit the number of possible linkages. For my purposes, straight lines were adequate enough to demonstrate how the social practices associated with the project were linked in integrated and non-integrated ways. First, I
discuss the categories of social practices that I mapped. Second, I discuss integrated linkages that explain how the students accomplished the collaborative planning and writing of the Building Worlds Project.

**Planning and Coordinating**

The first social practice that I identified at the beginning of the project is ‘planning and coordinating the project’ (represented by an orange, dashed line in Appendix G). This social practice involved group member sharing ideas about the development of their fictional world and then making selections for which ideas would be taken up and which would not. As I explained above in the section on group formation, group membership was established primarily along friendship lines, but in the case of Steve his group membership was determined by how his ideas were received. Though John told the students that they could write in multiple groups if they wanted to, the students in the four world-building groups only planned and coordinated with their group members. This is represented in Appendix G by the orange line only intersecting with social practices that involved group members.

However, this social practice was comparatively not very durable as initial planning involving in-class conversations and online posts to the discussion boards among group members waned for some groups across the semester-long, elective class. Though the two smaller groups, Artermar and Förvanskaad, planned and coordinated their project consistently across the quarter, the two larger groups, Morwaleth and Tine agus Oighear, varied in terms of how and when they planned and coordinated. For example, the Tine agus Oighear group devoted several early class sessions to the
planning and coordination of their world, but as the project unfolded the members became less interested in coordinating what they were writing after their individual regions had been established. With the Morwaleth group, Steve made several early attempts to plan and coordinate their project, but the group as a whole never came to an agreement for how all their regions were related to one another. The result was a fragmented fictional world with very little storyline continuity.

**Reading**

Almost all of the students reported in interviews that they were reading their group member’s wiki pages, but very few students reported that they were reading non-group member’s wiki pages. These social practices, ‘reading group member’s wiki page’ and ‘reading non-group member’s wiki page’ are represented by blue lines in Appendix G. ‘Reading group member’s wiki page’ was a durable social practice, as students reported checking the recent update link on the wiki homepage to see if any of their group members had posted any writing or discussion comments. This social practice was very salient for the linking of other social practices related to the collaborative planning and writing of the project. Group members often prefaced conversations with one another by asking, “Did you read my stuff?” when planning and coordinating the project. ‘Reading non-group member’s wiki page’ was a social practice that was enacted sporadically throughout the project by only a few students, e.g., Casey, Roger, Nate.

**Posting Writing**

Of the four types of social practices associated with posting writing to the wiki pages (represented by black lines in Appendix G), ‘posting writing to own wiki page’
was by far the most salient and durable, constituting 66.6% of the writing-related frozen actions taken on the wiki (see Appendix E). This social practice involved creating and posting writing to a wiki page that was in most cases exclusively dedicated to a particular region or other region-specific detail. John encouraged the students to write together on a common wiki page in order to establish continuity in their world, but the students were quick to differentiate between their own individual wiki pages, i.e., “my pages” and wiki pages that they shared as a group, i.e., “our pages.”

The social practice ‘posting writing to shared wiki page’ made up 26.9% of the writing-related frozen actions taken on the wiki. Students used shared pages to plan and coordinate their world by defining and hyperlinking aspects of their world that were common across the individual regions. Shared wiki pages often featured maps to establish geographic relationships among the regions of the fictional world. ‘Posting writing to a member’s page’ only constituted 5.2% of the writing-related frozen actions. In general, students were resistant to posting writing on each other’s pages. In interviews, the students explained that they didn’t want to “mess with someone’s stuff.” John associated ‘posting writing to group member’s wiki page’ with collaborative writing. John acknowledged that the students were not posting writing on each other’s pages, so he gave Assignment #4 that required students to post writing in another student’s region. For all four of the groups, this social practice was enacted with the greatest frequency during Assignment #4 (see Appendix E). The students who did post on another student’s wiki page communicated with that student before doing so in order to propose an idea and get the page owner’s consent for posting writing on their page.
Very little writing-related actions involved ‘posting writing to non-member’s page’ (only 1.3% of the total writing-related actions). Casey and Roger were among the few students who read non-member’s wiki pages; the writing they posted to non-member’s pages were primarily grammar and spelling edits. These changes were typically done without the wiki page owner knowing in advance, and for some of the students this type of social action served as an intrusion and an annoyance. AJ engaged in some lighthearted vandalism of other member’s and non-member’s pages by posting a graphic that was a parody of The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air. This social practice was linked but not integrated in the nexus of practice.

**Posting Discussion Comments**

Another social action involving the wiki was the posting of comments to discussion boards associated with specific wiki pages. Each wiki page has a discussion board associated with it that allows any of the students to post a comment. Therefore, there were four types of social practices involving the posting of comments to the different types of wiki pages (represented by grey lines in Appendix G). The social practice of ‘posting comments to shared wiki page’ constituted 51% of comment-related social actions taken on the wiki (see Appendix E). These discussion posts were used primarily to propose and discuss ideas for incorporation in the fictional worlds that the groups were building. Initially, the shared wiki page that housed the greatest amount of discussion comments was the main project page that John had set up, “Building Worlds – Fall 2009” (see Appendix F). Almost all of the students enrolled in the class, including some of the students who were not part of one of the four world-building groups, posted
their initial ideas for the project, posted a question for John, solicited feedback from the class, or posted a comment when John asked for status updates on project development. As the world-building projects developed and more wiki pages were created for the four different fictional worlds, group members posted comments to shared pages specific to their group, with the exception of the Arterramar group. Some of these discussion comments were playful exchanges involving the trading of insults.

A comparably less durable social practice, students also posted comments to group member’s wiki pages, which accounted for 23.8% of the comment-related actions taken on the wiki. These discussion comments were typically made to provide encouragement and feedback to what a group member wrote on their wiki page. ‘Posting comments to own wiki page’ was even less durable at 15.9%, and primarily consisted of solicitations for feedback or a clarifying question to the group about a particular aspect of the fictional world. ‘Posting comments to non-group member’s wiki page’ was an infrequent comment-related action at 9.3%. However, Roger skewed the count during Assignment #3 (see Appendix E) by posting 22 comments to the Morwaleth group’s shared wiki page “My Land” in some playful banter that was trivial to the project. John asked Roger and the members of the Morwaleth group to stop.

**Making References Using Common Terminology**

John encouraged the students to use common terminology for characters, events, geography, etc. across the five assignments for the project. John considered this social practice to be an indication that the students were working toward continuity, the central design principle of the project. Based on my initial reading of all of the wiki pages
associated with the Building Worlds Project, I identified two social practices involved in using common terminology across the group member’s individual and shared wiki pages. The first is ‘making common world references,’ which were actions involving terms that were used to name a character, event, or place that was salient for most or all of the regions, e.g., the name of the world, the name of a deity, the name of a cataclysmic event. The second is ‘making region-specific references,’ which were actions involving terms that were used primarily in association with a particular region. At the end of the elective class, I coded all of the wiki pages with these two categories. In Appendix F, I represent these codes in the second to last column “References.” The number of common world references are in parentheses, ‘(W),’ and the number of region-specific references are without parentheses, ‘R.’ Considered as related chains of mediated actions, I represent these two social practices in the nexus of practice using green lines (see Appendix G).

**Editing Grammar and Spelling**

Within the world-building groups, students occasionally edited each other’s pages for spelling of common world terminology in an effort to ensure that a word was being spelled consistently throughout their wiki pages. The students used language translation websites, e.g., Google translate, to convert English terms into a foreign language, e.g., ‘Tine agus Oighear’ is Gaelic for ‘fire and ice.’ The use of foreign language words that were unfamiliar to the students led to inconsistent spellings that were later corrected by other group members. A few students took it upon themselves to edit for grammar and spelling on non-group member’s wiki pages. This linkage of social practices, i.e., ‘editing grammar and spelling’ and ‘posting writing to non-group member’s wiki page’ was not
always welcomed by the owner of the wiki page. Several of the students were irritated by the practice, and Casey posted an apologetic discussion comment on the main Building Worlds wiki page in a thread he started titled “Please don’t yell”:

My home computer has a spell check so if I end up on your page and you see that I have edited something, I have just corrected a misspelled word. thanks (Casey, September 17, 2009)

Casey’s discussion post indicates his awareness that editing someone’s wiki page may be considered as an intrusion but that his editing of their wiki page for spelling is an action that is meant to be helpful to the wiki page owner.

Mapping the Nexus

The process of mapping the nexus of practice involved a consideration of the linkages among the categorized social practices described above. I not only considered which social practices were enacted in direct relationship to one another but also the meaning that John and the students gave those social practices related in generalizations, i.e., what they typically do, and specific recounts of particular events during interviews and informal conversations. The purpose of doing so was to understand how John and his students constructed a nexus of practice associated with the project in order to accomplish the collaborative writing.

The most durable social practice was ‘posting writing to own wiki page’. Most of the students had little to no experience writing for any purpose other than an individual assignment or composition. With the exception of Erika, all of the students reported that the Building Worlds Project represented the first time they had been asked to write with other students in such direct ways. Students reported having worked on group projects
with a shared product, but they had not been asked to add writing to or base their own writing on what another student had written. Though, I suspect that the students may have had some prior experiences with collaborative writing that are comparable, I argue that the social practice of writing for a product that they have ownership of is well-established in their individual habitus and the homologous habitus of the entire class. When the students were working together on the project, there was never any confusion or dispute over a claim of ownership of a wiki page. To own a wiki page meant to create it, post writing to it, post and respond to discussion comments related to it, and to oversee its development. In Appendix F, I list the number of writing posts and writers for each of the 157 wiki pages associated with the four fictional worlds, 70% of these pages had one writer post writing to individually-owned and shared wiki pages.

However, the social practice of ‘posting writing to own wiki page’ was linked to the social practices of ‘making common world references’ and ‘making region-specific references’. In Appendix F, I list the number of common world and region-specific references for each wiki page. In Appendix H, I cross reference these numbers by the four types of social actions related to posting writing to a wiki page. I used the revision histories of each wiki page to consider which student made the reference on which type of wiki page. Almost all of the references were posted by students either on their own wiki pages or on shared wiki pages. Twenty-four references were made on a group member’s wiki page, and no references were made on a non-group member’s wiki page.

These descriptive statistics of the social actions taken on the wiki pages help explain how the social practice of ‘posting writing to own wiki page’ is not exclusively
associated with individual authorship. Rather in the sociocultural view of writing as mediated social action (Prior, 2006), ‘posting writing to own wiki page’ is associated with collaborative authorship in the sense that students were making intertextual references in their own writing using terminology that was commonly shared and specific to other individual students. By considering how these social practices are linked to one another, we get a better sense for how collaborative writing was accomplished during the project and involved other related social practices, such as ‘reading group member’s wiki pages’ and ‘planning and coordinating project.’

Another salient intersection involved the linkage of five social practices: ‘posting writing to shared wiki page,’ ‘posting comments to shared wiki page,’ ‘reading group member’s wiki page,’ ‘planning and coordinating the project,’ and ‘making region-specific references.’ The world-building groups used shared wiki pages to organize their regions in relationship to one another and define other key aspects of their fictional world. The students referred to these shared wiki pages as “our group’s page” or “our page” to signal that the group, not an individual, had ownership over the particular wiki page. Many of these shared wiki pages were used as indices of hyperlinks to other group members’ wiki pages. John encouraged the students to establish a hierarchical ordering and hyperlinking of their wiki pages, so that group members could organize pages by region and/or other cross-regional categories. In the early stages of the project, these shared wiki pages served as focal areas for social actions related to ‘planning and coordinating the project.’ Other shared wiki pages were used to develop a central concept or aspect of the fictional world that had implications for the development of the different
regions. For example, the Arterramar group had a shared wiki page devoted to defining
how magic was used in their world, the Förvanskaad group had a shared wiki page that
featured an elaborate map of their world, the Morwaleth group had a shared wiki page
that defined major characters, and the Tine agus Oighar group had shared wiki pages
that defined the regions of their two warring factions, fire and ice.

The integrated linkage of these five social practices is indicative of what the fields
of literacy and composition studies typically refer to as collaborative writing. The
students were working on a shared wiki page to coordinate and integrate their writing for
the purpose of planning and organizing the project. In some cases, the students posted
discussion comments to the shared wiki page to discuss issues that had implications for
most if not all of the regions of the fictional world. The students were also making
region-specific and common world references on the shared wiki pages to establish
intertextual relationships among their individually owned wiki pages (see Appendix H).

In interviews, students reported that they typically read a wiki page of another group
member if it was hyperlinked to one of the shared wiki pages.

In some cases, the social actions taken at the intersection of these social practices
resembled what Haring-Smith (1994) refers to as serial writing, which involves students
taking turns to work on a wiki page. Arterramar’s shared wiki page “MAGICKS!!” is an
example of serial writing. Zina created the wiki page to define how magic is used in each
of the three regions of the fictional world. Erika picked up where Zina left off and posted
writing to further refine, develop, and coordinate the use of magic.
In other cases, the social actions taken at this intersection resembled what Haring-Smith (1994) refers to as compiled writing, which involves students adding components of a text and retaining “some control over part of the final text” (p. 362). Tine agus Oighear’s shared wiki page “Cruacroi” is an example of compiled writing. Paul created a wiki page to define the ice region he shares with Isabella. On this page Paul posted a description in fulfillment of Assignment #1, which was to write a description of your region. Isabella also posted a description in order to meet the assignment criteria, as she explained in an interview. To differentiate the two descriptions posted to the shared wiki page, Paul and Isabella each added their initials at the bottom of their description. Therefore, even though the wiki page was shared and was later edited for spelling by Nate and Casey, the wiki page contained two separate, yet related wiki posts. When I asked Paul and Isabella why they put their initials at the bottom of their descriptions, they explained that they did so to help the teacher, John, give them a grade for the assignment.

Very few of the shared wiki pages resembled Haring-Smith’s (1994) ideal of collaborative writing, a form she calls co-authored writing and describes as “difficult (indeed, often impossible) to distinguish the work of one writer from another” (p. 363). With the revision history of every wiki page, knowing who posted what writing is not impossible. However, there were some shared pages wherein the posting of writing involved many rounds of revision of and addition to the writing on the page. AJ and Roger worked on a shared wiki page titled, “Forvanskaad History” that involved 48 writing posts by the two of them (and one by Casey to fix a spelling error) over many rounds of revision. When asked about the co-authorship of the shared wiki page, AJ and
Roger both said that they were not exactly sure whose writing was whose and that it did not matter so long as what was written was consistent with the rest of their fictional world.

Therefore, when mapping the nexus of practice I determined that the two most salient linkages related to collaborative writing on the wiki were the linkage involving ‘posting writing to own wiki page’ and the linkage involving ‘posting writing to shared wiki page.’ Identifying these linkages helps to explain how John and his students constructed and navigated the nexus of practice. In the next section, I explain how John attempted to change the nexus of practice because he was concerned that the students were not posting writing in each other’s region.

**Changing the Nexus**

Approximately half way though the semester-long, elective English class, John was growing concerned that some of the students were not collaborating as he had hoped. In an interview on October 6, 2009, John said that he was not worried about the Förvanskaad group because AJ and Roger were working closely together, but John did express concern for how Brock’s parody of *The Legend of Zelda* franchise was going to fit into the world AJ and Roger were building. John said that the Arterramar group was working well together and cited an example of the last time they were in the computer lab on September 29, 2009 (one of the focal class sessions) in which Erika, Nico, and Zina were working closely together to plan their regions in relationship to one another. In particular, John was excited about their moving portals idea that allows characters to transport to the three different regions. John thought the Tine agus Oighhear group had a productive planning day on September 29th, but he expressed concern that not all students
in the group may be part of the planning. John expressed the greatest concern over the Morwaleth group, which had not been working well together to plan their world despite Steve’s multiple attempts to get everyone in the group to agree on a direction for organizing their fictional world.

Based in part on these concerns and that John did not think that students were doing much writing about each other’s regions, he gave Assignment #4 on October 26, 2009 in an effort to change the nexus of practice. John asked the students to write in each other’s regions. The students resisted the assignment immediately. The following are excerpts from my field notes for that day with names substituted with pseudonyms.

When John introduced the next Building Worlds assignment to write in another person’s region, the students began to grumble audibly. Brad said that he was afraid to mess up another student’s writing. John responded to Brad by telling him not to worry because the writing can be edited on the wiki. If a student doesn’t like what’s there, they can change it. John then transitioned to talking about the movie.

...John began discussing the Building Worlds Project assignment again. The students were not happy about being required to write in someone else’s region, despite that John had told them about the ‘revert to previous version’ feature on the wiki that makes undoing changes easy. John told the students not to think of the assignment as messing someone else’s stuff up, but rather as awesoming it up. (Field Notes, October 26, 2009)

Initially, John’s students understood the assignment to be that they had to post writing to a group member’s wiki page. They considered this to be “meddling” or “messing” with someone else’s region. The day after the assignment was given, the students met in the computer lab. John had the following exchange with James and Beau at the beginning of class, loud enough for everyone to hear.

John: Allow me to reiterate, your task is to write in someone else’s region.
James: What if I don't want to?

John: Well, that’s your choice. There are consequences for not doing it.

Beau: Like bad grades.

John: Yeah, that would be one of them.

James: Death would be another. I’ve heard about how Mr. [Carver] punishes his kids.

When the students pressed John further about where they were supposed to post writing in another student’s region, John clarified:

I guess the answer is wherever is the best place to put it. If you need to make another link, and say this is, maybe you link from here and, you know, the story of this or whatever. It is just whatever makes sense. It could be, it could be expanding on what they’ve already written, it could be a new page that uses their ideas to tell something that you want. It could be a story, it could be expanding their ideas for what the region is, like who somebody is, maybe you tell more about a certain character that someone else would be like, ‘Oh, I think it would be cool if this character actually did this. Maybe you can tell his childhood or whatever. So, the options are wide open. It’s um, I’m just trying to get everybody to look at everybody else’s stuff. You know, so you are seeing what other people are writing and then go from there. Does that make sense? (Transcript, October 27, 2009)

John’s students were not comfortable with the social practice of ‘posting writing to group member’s wiki page;’ however, they were more comfortable with the idea of posting to a shared wiki page or creating a new shared wiki page.

Below, I explain how the students completed Assignment #4. In Chapter 5, I revisit this day in the computer lab to consider a particular event in which students negotiated this assignment with one another as group members and with John, as both a teacher and a potential co-author of their fictional world.
Table 6.

*Actions Taken to Fulfill Assignment #4*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Writing Posts</th>
<th>Assignment Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arterramar</td>
<td>Erika</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Created a new individually-owned wiki page, “Stones of speir”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nico</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zina</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Created a new shared wiki page, “MAGICKS!!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Förvanskaad</td>
<td>AJ</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Created a new shared wiki page, “Geography of Vatra”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brock</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Added section to shared wiki page, “Weapons”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roger</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Added section to shared wiki page, “Vatra”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morwaleth</td>
<td>Carl</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Added section to shared wiki page, “The Characters”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Casey</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Interwove writing on Helga’s wiki page, “My Land”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Helga</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Added section to Kari’s wiki page, “Imagination”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kari</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Added section to the shared wiki page, “The great fire”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tine agus Oighear</td>
<td>Beau</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Added section to James’ wiki page, “Nolahon”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brad</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Created a new individually-owned wiki page, “Titans of Twilight”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greg</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Added section to Kate’s wiki page, “Pozemku Nadvlady”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Isabella</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Added section to shared wiki page, “Feuer Konigin”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Added section to Greg’s wiki page, “Zerstorer”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Added section to shared wiki page, “The Forbidden Isles”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nate</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Created a new individually-owned wiki page, “The Rising Sun and Splitting Ways”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Group</td>
<td>Clark</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ellen</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jamie</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 details how the students took action in relationship to Assignment #4. Of the 17 students who completed the assignment, 8 of them posted writing on a new or existing shared wiki page, 4 of them created a new individually-owned wiki page to post writing about another group member’s region, and 5 of them posted writing to a member’s wiki page. The social practice of ‘posting writing to group member’s wiki page’
was not durable and across the quarter was primarily enacted during Assignment #4 (see Appendix E). The five students who did enact the social practice did so in ways that resembled what Haring-Smith (1994) refers to as compiled writing by somehow marking the writing they posted on a member’s wiki page as separate from that member’s writing.

For example, Helga of the Morwaleth group posted a section on Kari’s wiki page, “Imagination?” Helga marked her writing by using her name and an emoticon, “[Helga’s] Suggestions :D” (see Figure 7 below). Helga and Kari were close friends and sat next to each other in class. Even though Helga discussed what she was going to post with Kari, she still marked her writing with her name. In Helga’s post she made region-specific references to Steve’s, Kari’s, and her own region.

Figure 7. Screen Shot of an Excerpt of Helga’s Writing Post to Kari’s Wiki Page

Another strategy the students used was to create a new section on the group member’s wiki page with a title that named the purpose of the writing posted and separated the posting from the rest of the group member’s writing. Steve, Beau, Greg, and Kate used this tactic to complete Assignment #4. Steve posted an elaborate section about a group of people native to Casey’s region, the Vesilapset, making region-specific references to different aspects of Casey’s region (see Figure 8 on page 155). Similar to Steve, Beau posted a section on James’ wiki page that described the geography of the
clouds on which James’ people, the Elohim, dwell. Beau’s geographic description used region-specific references to describe aspects of James’ region that he had only mentioned by name.

**The Vesilapset**

The people of the east called the Vesilapset could see the great fire and the smoke coming from it. They did not know if they should help the land of the west because their civil war was still going on. But Posiedon said that we may need allies against our foes. So, even though many were against it the king and a small fleet went to the land of the west to help them. Their ships were small and mostly used for fishing. They were made of strong wood with blue sails and the king had the golden net with him for he knew that he would have to fight the great shark to get to their land. The net was a gift from the sea to the vesilapset so they could help the people of the west. For this was when the shark had no master and would kill anyone who came into his land. The king also took the great orb because it gave the holder power over the waters. He was going to use it to control the

*Figure 8. Screen Shot of an Excerpt of Steve’s Writing Post to Casey’s Wiki Page*

Greg and Kate were dating at the time, which led to playful antagonism through posting on each other’s wiki pages. In class, Greg and Nate teased Kate that they were going to make the two invincible dragons that guarded her fire princess, Feuer Königin, no longer invincible so that the princess could be defeated. Kate teased that she was going to write a love story between Greg’s main character, Zerstorer, and her fire princess. Below is a conversation in class on October 27, 2009:

- Nate: I’m going to make it so that the dragons become vincible.
- Kate: That’s what [Greg] is saying. They’re not, no they will always be invincible.
- Nate: By the time this group’s done with them, they’ll be vincible.
- Paul: Actually, they’ll probably be dead.
- Kate: No, my dragons. His shadow person is going to be in love with my fire princess.
- Greg: She is completely controlling my thing.
Nate: I’m going to kill your dragons.

Kate: No, you’re not.

Greg: I want to kill them. Can we both kill them?

Nate: You kill them, and I’ll bury them.

Kate: One’s name is zudikas and the other’s name is iznicinat. They’ll kill you.

This playful exchange demonstrates that the social practice of ‘posting writing to group member’s wiki page’ involved negotiation and consent. Nate and Greg were teasing Kate that they were going to change a fundamental aspect of her region of Tine agus Oighear, and Kate was not willing to let that happen. Several days later, Greg posted a history of her fire princess in a separate section on her wiki page, and the dragons remained invincible. On the other hand, much to Greg’s disapproval Kate posted a love story on his wiki page creating a storyline that brought Greg’s and Kate’s main characters together (see Figure 9 below). Despite Greg’s resistance to this storyline, he did not change it.

**The Love Story of Zerstorer and Feuer Königin**

The only person or creature that has ever survived Zerstorer and remained sane was Feuer Königin, the amazing fire princess of Talún Bás Flery. She saw him for the first time when she was walking through a desert wasteland of lava rivers that was completely unknown to her. When Zerstorer first laid eyes on her, he got a feeling that he had never felt before. He wasn’t quite sure what exactly it was because he felt it deep within his heart and the only feeling he had ever recognized in his heart was hate. Zerstorer had never encountered such a beautiful thing in his life. He wasn’t sure what to do or say because he didn’t want to look like an idiot in front of her, so he just went and hid in his

Figure 9. Screen Shot of an Excerpt of Kate’s Writing Post to Greg’s Wiki Page.

Casey used a different tactic that approached what Haring-Smith (1994) refers to as co-authorship, an ideal form of collaborative writing, and what Lankshear and Knobel (2007) consider a paradigmatic case of new literacies. Casey posted writing to Helga’s wiki page that elaborated existing sections of her page, interweaving his writing with hers.
For Haring-Smith (1994) and Lankshear and Knobel (2007) the ideal of collaborative writing is achieved based on the extent to which distinctions between two or more author’s writing are not clear and may be unknown. However, Casey departed from this ideal by using a bold font to differentiate between his and Helga’s writing (see Figure 10 below).

_The Land and Its Features_

Ok, so Kamatayan rocks at life. It’s purple and dark all the time. There is a river of dead people blood. It runs through most of the country. Sometimes it rains blood. When someone dies, they get transported to this land and the blood gets drained out of them and it rains all across the land and drains into the Bloody River. The Kan Nehir (Bloody River), flows higher when it rains. The dead corpses flow down the river and go into the Cova Zumbi (Zombie Cave). In this cave, the corpses are brought back to life but yet they are still dead. This happens from some magic called Hayet. The Kan Nehir flows beneath the fort of Herscher Morts and his wife. It is 34,000 miles long and it ends at the Cova Zumbi, the zombie cave. Sometimes the creatures sit by the river and try to snatch up some of the dead bodies that float near the edge of the river, the creatures are so hungry they would risk their lives for food.

_Figure 10._ Screen Shot of Casey’s Writing Post to Helga’s Wiki Page

Paul posted writing to a wiki page that Nate had created called “The Forbidden Isles.” Nate had only posted the following statement on the wiki page, “These isles are obviously forbidden... we need to write more.” Despite that Nate’s statement appeared to be an invitation for group members to post writing to a shared wiki page, Paul was uncertain if he should post writing to this wiki page or not. Nate was not present at the beginning of the class session on October 27th, and Paul asked John if he could post to this wiki page:

Paul: Mr. [Carver]

John: Yes.

Paul: I have a question. [Nate] made this page, it’s called The Forbidden Isles but nobody’s written in it yet.

John: Yes.
Paul: Can I write in it?

John: Sure, that’s great. That was one of those empty nouns like Ursula Le Guin would have, right? He threw it out there, and yeah that’s perfect.

Paul then posted writing to what he considered to be Nate’s wiki page; Paul posted a paragraph under the statement Nate had originally posted. When Nate arrived late to the class session, Paul attempted twice to tell Nate that he was writing on the Forbidden Isles wiki page. Later in the period, John told Nate that he suggested that Paul post writing to the wiki page.

John: [Paul] is writing about the Forbidden Isles, which you just like mentioned.

Nate: Yeah, see he said I created them, but that was kind of like a collaboration of a bunch of morons.

John: Collaboration with a bunch of morons?

Paul: Hey, I was part of that collaboration.

John and Paul had both assumed that the Forbidden Isles was an individually owned wiki page, which required consent before posting writing to it. Nate, with characteristic sarcasm, stated that it was a shared wiki page, implying that anyone in the group could post to the wiki page. Nate did not take credit for creating the Forbidden Isles, but rather gave credit (albeit sarcastically) to the members of the Tine agus Oighear group for coming up with the idea. Nate was merely the *animator* (Goffman, 1981), or the person who created the wiki page.

At the end of the period, Paul asked John how he would know who wrote on the Forbidden Isles wiki page so he could get credit for Assignment #4. Despite the fact that this class session took place well into the project, Paul was not aware of how the wiki
revision history worked with usernames. John told Paul that he could look at the revision history and know that Paul had posted the writing. A couple days later, Nate posted a discussion board comment to the Forbidden Isles wiki page, teasing Paul for not knowing about how the revision history worked (see Figure 11 below). Neither Nate nor Paul posted any further writing to this wiki page, which I classified as a shared wiki page for the purpose of calculating the number and type of social actions related to posting writing to the wiki.

Who wrote this?

![Screen Shot of Nate’s Discussion Post](image)

Figure 11. Screen Shot of Nate’s Discussion Post

These examples help demonstrate that the students enacted different social practices depending on their perception of the type of wiki page to which they are posting writing, i.e., “my page” (own), “our page” (shared), “your page” (group member’s), and “their page” (non-group member). Most of the students chose not to enact the social practice of ‘posting writing to member’s wiki page.’ Some of these students resisted because they did not want to meddle or mess with another student’s region. All four groups considered the regions of their fictional worlds to be individually owned and managed, and Assignment #4 presented a challenge to this ownership. For some students the social practice of ‘posting writing to member’s wiki page’ was incommensurate with the social practices of posting writing to ones own or a shared page. The students who did enact the social practice of ‘posting writing to member’s wiki page’ did so tactically,
taking mediated action involving the marking of the writing to differentiate “my writing” from “your writing.” Below, I argue that this reluctance to post writing to a member’s wiki page and the tactical social actions taken when doing so are a result of a conflict in the students’ individual habitus and the homologous habitus of the class.

**Resistance to Social Practice**

I argue that the durability of the social practice of posting one’s own wiki page is related to commensurate linkages with other school-based literacy practices that the students described in interviews, e.g., writing individually-authored essays, narratives, and journals. These social practices are aggregated into the habitus of the individual students, and to the extent that students enacted the social practice related to writing in similar ways across the project, the class had a shared sense of homologous habitus. Posting writing to a shared wiki page was a less durable social practice during the project, but one that was commensurate with the social practice of writing on one’s own wiki page. Students typically posted writing to shared wiki pages in order to organize and define their individually owned wiki pages. Students referred to these shared wiki pages as “our pages” and reported feeling comfortable posting writing to these pages for the sake of organizing their project and making their individually owned wiki pages accessible to the group through hyperlinks.

‘Posting writing to a group member’s wiki page’ represented a less durable, and in some cases new, social practice for the students. They were unaccustomed to posting writing to a wiki page that was considered to be owned by another student. I argue that this social practice was not only less durable compared to posting writing to one’s own
and shared wiki pages, but that it also presented a conflict in students’ habitus. This new
social practice was incommensurate with the social practices that they had aggregated in
their habitus that involved clear distinctions between ‘my writing’ and ‘your writing.’
The students who enacted the social practice of ‘posting writing to group member’s wiki
page’ did so by creating a separate section on the wiki page, i.e., Steve, Beau, Greg, Kate,
or by marking their text in some way, i.e., Helga, Casey.

For John, the students’ initial resistance to Assignment #4 ran contrary to the
social practices he had hoped that they would take up. John wanted the students to post
writing on their own and each other’s pages in order to consider how the writing related
to building a fictional world is not necessarily the product of an individual, but rather the
outcome of a collaborative process. John’s goal was for the students to consider how
multiple writers, directors, artists, and game designers come together to work in
collaborative ways on a fantasy or science fiction franchise, such as The Lord of the
Rings or Star Wars. The continuity of the fictional world takes precedence over
ownership of ideas and particular aspects of the world. John considered the enactment of
the social practice ‘posting writing on a group member’s wiki page’ to be evidence of this
collaborative process.

For me as a researcher, the students’ resistance to Assignment #4 brought to the
fore the problems with bringing to bear a priori assumptions about what social practices
are typically associated with collaborative writing. For example, if I used Haring-Smith’s
(1994) categories of serial, compiled, and co-authored writing to consider the students
collaborative writing of the Building Worlds Project, I would be led to conclude that the
students did not achieve the ideal of co-authored writing and therefore accomplished a lesser form of collaborative writing by posting writing on individually owned and shared wiki pages. Likewise, if I used a new literacies perspective (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006), I would be led to conclude that the students were enacting literacy practices that were “old wine in new bottles” and not indicative of a new ethos because of the durability of the social practice of ‘posting writing to own wiki pages.’

However, from a sociocultural perspective (Prior, 2006), the students’ writing on their own, shared, and members’ wiki pages was collaborative to the extent that the students used each other’s writing as mediational means for their own writing. This sociocultural consideration led me to consider the intersection of the social practices related to posting writing with the social practice related to making intertextual references (see Appendix H). These linkages of actions related to posting writing and making references provide a more nuanced consideration of how collaborative writing was accomplished and help to conceptualize how writing is collaborative.

When considering the comparative data in Appendix H, the Arterramar group primarily posted writing to individually owned wiki pages and made common world references. Comparatively, this group did not make as many region-specific references, partially explained by the withdrawal of Nico from school part-way through the semester. For Arterramar, their collaborative writing was characterized by the intersection of ‘posting writing to own wiki page’ and ‘making common world references.’ The Förvanskaad group also primarily posted writing to individually owned wiki pages, but their collaborative writing was characterized mostly by the intersection of ‘posting
writing to shared wiki page’ and ‘making region-specific references.’ The Morwaleth group started off as fragmented and as a result their fictional world lacked continuity. The group primarily posted writing to individually owned wiki pages, yet surprisingly their collaborative writing was characterized by both the intersection of ‘posting writing to member’s wiki page’ and ‘making region-specific references’ and the intersection of ‘posting writing to shared page’ and ‘making region-specific references.’ Tine agus Oighear posted almost equally to their own and shared wiki pages, making both region-specific and common world references. I argue that each one of these linkages for the four groups constitutes a salient form of collaborative writing. Rather than attempt to determine the extent to which these linkages achieved a preconceived ideal of collaborative writing or new literacies, I attempted to demonstrate how the groups wrote collaboratively within a nexus of practice.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I took up the first research question by considering how John, the students, and I engaged, navigated, and attempted to change the nexus of practice that constituted the Building Worlds Project. I argue that students engaged the nexus of practice by bringing to bear social practice aggregated in their habitus based on prior experiences with writing primarily in school. This engagement led students to construct a nexus of practice in which the most durable social practice was ‘posting writing to own wiki page’ and intersected with other social practices in complex ways. John attempted to change the nexus of practice by asking students to post writing in each other’s regions. Initially, the students resisted when they understood the assignment as requiring them to
post writing to another student’s wiki page. In response to this resistance, John clarified that they could post on the wiki page that they determined was most appropriate for their contribution to the particular region. Most students chose not to post writing on a group member’s wiki page, but those who did do so enacted tactical social actions that differentiated between students’ writing on the same wiki page.

These findings suggest that collaborative writing is shaped by social relationships and perceptions of ownership. The students in John’s elective English class took social action related to the planning and writing of the project based on their understanding of the purpose of a particular wiki page and their relationship with those who had a stake in that wiki page. The students who posted writing on a group member’s wiki page did so after having a conversation with the member, or in the case of Paul having a conversation with John, the teacher, in which they enacted the social practice ‘planning and coordinating the project’ in order to get consent for posting writing to the member’s wiki page. In Chapter 5, I present a mediated discourse analysis of literacy events during Assignment #4, in which members of the Arterramar and Tine agus Oighear groups enacted ‘planning and coordinating the project’ prior to enacting the social practice ‘posting writing to member’s wiki page.’ This analysis reveals how students took social action with and in relationship to one another within the nexus of practice detailed in this chapter.
CHAPTER 5
MEDiated ACTION: PROJECT PLANNING AND WRITING

In this chapter, I address the second and third research questions by presenting mediated discourse analysis of a planning and a writing event for each of the two focal groups, Arterramar and Tine agus Oighear. Mediated discourse analysis is operationalized at the micro level in order to make inductions about how mediated actions are constitutive of social practices identified in the nexus of practice. I also use mediated discourse analysis to interpret how and why mediated actions are taken, how sites of engagement are constructed, and how identities are forged through relational and reflexive social positioning. The purpose of this analysis and interpretation process is to answer the following research questions, which I restate here for reference purposes:

• How do the students’ social practices, mediational means, and social interaction shape how and why they coordinated their collaborative writing?
• How are the teacher and his students’ positional identities related to how and why they wrote collaboratively for the Building Worlds Project?

In Chapter 4, I explained how the world-building groups formed and the reasons that the students cited for enrolling in the elective English class. Here, I provide a closer look at particular group members as they collaboratively plan and write for the project. For both focal groups, I provide more details about the group’s social practices within the nexus of
practice and locate those social practices within the selected events as related chains of mediated action.

Arterramar

Erika, Nico, and Zina created a fictional world that is made up of three separate regions that are connected by a system of moving portals. Erika’s region is an underwater city called Verfluchten, Nico’s region is land-based plains called Thesis, and Zina’s region is a floating island named Speir. Each region features specific characters, who cannot exist in their non-native region for very long. The characters can move through the portals, but must find another portal to return to their native region before they perish. Nico brought characters that he had created for *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* to incorporate into his region. The group used many of these characters across the three regions, most notably the god Thygon.

Erika brought to bear her experiences with writing fan fiction and fantasy with her friends; Erika was accustomed to working with a group of writers and understood the importance of having storyline continuity. Zina had a history of talking about fantasy and science fiction that she was reading and writing with her brother; Zina was eager to share her ideas with Erika and Nico. The three students reported that the project represented the first time they had an open-ended opportunity to write creatively with other students in school. They each recounted experiences with writing in school that involved writing primarily for the teacher in response to a specific prompt.

Each of the group members reported working on the project at different times and places. Erika reported that she worked on the project wiki primarily after school,
reserving her seventh period study hall for completing her homework. Erika said that she had to compete with siblings for use of the family’s computer until she proved to her parents that she was not writing fan fiction, which they regularly interrupted, but that she was writing for a school assignment, which they did not interrupt. Nico reported that he worked on the wiki during his first period study hall by going to the library to use a computer there. Nico also reported using a computer during his tutoring time sixth period after he had completed his work; Nico was assigned tutoring time with a special education tutor per his Individualized Education Program (IEP). Nico said that he did not have any access to a computer outside of school. Zina reported that she worked on the project both during her fifth period study hall and at home. All three of the group members reported that they made use of the in-class planning and writing sessions devoted to the project for working on their fictional world.

These generalizations about when the group members typically worked on the project were supported by the time and date stamps of writing and comments posted to the wiki, which I recorded in a database and used to create a scatter plot of when the group members were posting (see Appendix I). The reason this is significant for the Arterramar group is that they often had to discuss during class sessions who had read which pages of the project wiki and who was prepared to have a planning conversation about a particular aspect of their fictional world. Nico made extensive use of his first period study hall to read what the other two group members had posted and used free time during his school day to find a computer to work on the project. Erika and Zina had access to family computers outside of school, and though they had to coordinate with

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17 Swords and Spaceships met during second period, 8:28 – 9:09 a.m.
family members for the computer’s use, they were able to work on the project with more regularity than Nico. The Arterramar group posted to the wiki both during and in between assignments (see the assignment timescale represented by dashed lines in Appendix I). Below I provide more details about the social practices that the group enacted within the nexus of practice.

**Group Social Practices**

The Arterramar group primarily posted writing to individual and shared pages. Very few writing posts were made to group member’s pages and no writing posts were made to non-group member’s pages. The group made some use of the discussion comments during the first few weeks of the project, but then did not post many discussion comments for the remainder of the project. In Appendix E on page 279, I list descriptive statistics for the writing and discussion posts the Arterramar group made across the assignment timescale. Assignment #4 marked a change in the writing posts for the group with seven writing posts made to a group member’s wiki page. In Appendix F on pages 283-290, I list the number of writers for each of the wiki pages that made up Arterramar. Most of the wiki pages were individually owned and only had one animator. However, the group did post to shared wiki pages, some of which were created after Nico withdrew from school on October 12th, e.g., “MAGICKS!!.”

The group made more region-specific references than common world references. The region-specific references used were typically the names of creatures and characters who came through the portals, e.g., Lykos, Gataki, Kajeeta. The common world references used were typically the names of the regions and aspects of the world that
were common across the regions, e.g., magic, portals, and deities. Interestingly, Erika and Zina continued to develop Nico’s region after he withdrew from school by posting writing about Nico’s region, Thesis, on shared wiki pages. Nico’s ideas and characters were still in circulation, even though he was no longer physically or virtually present in the group. In Appendix H, I list the number of intertextual references for the Arterramar group by wiki page type. This table not only indicates that most of the references were region-specific, but that most of the references were made on individually owned wiki pages.

The frozen actions taken on the wiki, observations, and both generalizations and recounts of specific events by the participants, helped me understand the following about the social practices the Arterramar group enacted to accomplish the collaborative planning and writing of the Building Worlds Project:

• Most of the writing that made up Arterramar was posted to individually owned wiki pages with region-specific references;

• Planning and coordinating the project primarily took place in class, and the group made very little use of the discussion comments;

• The shared wiki pages were used primarily for organization purposes to hyperlink to the region-specific pages and for defining aspects that were common to the fictional world; and

• Reading group member’s wiki pages was often done in class prior to a conversation that involved planning and coordinating the project.
In the next two sections, I present mediated discourse analysis of a planning event and a writing event in which these social practices are enacted. The purpose of this is to present a representative literacy event through which chains of mediated actions are related to constitute the social practices and their linkages described above.

**Planning Event: “Yeah, But I Haven’t Read It Yet”**

The following event took place during one of the focal class sessions during Assignment #2, September 29th (see Appendix B). On this day, the computer labs were not available, so John reserved the computers in the library. The computers are situated as rows of two computers set perpendicular to the wall, so that one person sits with their left side to the wall and the other person sits with their right side to the middle of the library. A second set of computers is situated along the same wall, so that the people sitting at these computers are facing the wall. All of the computer monitors are within view of the circulation desk and are presumably arranged so that the librarians can monitor student computer use. Zina is seated on the inside of one of the two-person rows with the wall on her left side and Erika is seated on the outside. Nico has pulled a chair up to Erika’s computer, so that he is facing Erika and Zina.

At John’s request, the group was organizing their wiki pages by creating a shared page called “Arterramar” to post links to their individually-owned, region-specific wiki pages. Nico was helping Erika and Zina with the technical aspects of creating a new wiki page and posting links. Once the new page was created and the hyperlinks were established, the group turned its attention to planning and coordinating the project.
In the following planning event, Nico is sharing what he has written about the portals with Erika, while Zina is working on an individually-owned wiki page. Erika reads what Nico has posted and detects a continuity conflict with what she has written about the portals. The conflict has to do with the difference between Erika’s idea of portals that move to random locations at regular intervals and Nico’s idea of a village that guards one of the portals. During this conversation, Erika and Nico are enacting the social practice of planning and coordinating the project as they resolve the continuity conflict. Zina attempts to share her own ideas with Erika and Nico, but Erika acknowledges that the social practice of ‘reading group member’s wiki page’ is in conflict with ‘planning and coordinating the project’ with Zina. In this mediated discourse analysis, I demonstrate how two conflicting sites of engagement unfold and how Erika, Nico, and Zina engage in relational and reflexive positioning of themselves and one another.
Transcript 1. Arterramar Planning Event, September 29, 8:54 – 8:57 a.m.

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<td>22:46 (8:54)</td>
<td>Erika is seated at a computer. Zina and Nico are seated on either side of Erika, looking at her computer screen. Zina is seated at her own computer. Nico is seated in a chair next to Erika without a computer. Nico points to Erika’s computer screen. Erika uses the mouse to click on Nico’s wiki page “regions of map.”</td>
<td><strong>Nico:</strong> Did you see my portals? Go to my thing. Oh, no go to my regions. Go to the regions. Right there is what they guard and everything. <strong>Erika:</strong> Ok, yeah, cause I have... <strong>Nico:</strong> Like my portals are deep in a mountain. The Kajeeta built their village around a stone building...</td>
<td>Nico is directing Erika’s attention to his wiki page in an attempt to construct a site of engagement wherein Nico’s wiki page serves as mediational means for Nico to tell Erika about his portal idea. Nico establishes an interaction order in which he is the speaker and Erika is the listener; Nico maintains this order by talking over Erika.</td>
<td>Nico deliberately positions Erika as a group member who listens to his ideas and reads his wiki page. Erika takes up this positioning.</td>
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<td>23:23</td>
<td>Zina leans back from looking at Erika’s computer screen. Erika and Nico continue to look at Erika’s computer screen.</td>
<td><strong>Zina:</strong> I think I'm going to make on, um... <strong>Nico:</strong> ...that lead directly to your world. <strong>Erika:</strong> You have... ok, so there's a confrontation that I'll have.</td>
<td>Zina attempts to construct a new site of engagement by redirecting Erika and Nico’s attention. Nico continues to talk to Erika, and Zina abandons her attempt. Erika acknowledges Nico’s idea and identifies a continuity issue.</td>
<td>Zina attempts to deliberately position herself as a group member who shares ideas, but this positioning is not taken up by Erika or Nico. Erika deliberately positions Nico as a group member with whom she has to resolve a continuity conflict.</td>
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<td>23:35</td>
<td>Zina turns away from Erika and Nico and looks at her own computer, using her mouse to click on wiki pages. Erika uses the mouse to click on her wiki page “history.”</td>
<td>Alright. Ok, let's go. In mine, the history, or wait a minute, how did I have them in there? Yeah, the portals, they, they um, they, like in mine…</td>
<td>Erika maintains the site of engagement and directs Nico’s attention to her wiki page to identify the continuity conflict. Zina redirects her attention back to her computer screen.</td>
<td>Erika deliberately positions Nico as a group member who listens to her ideas and reads her wiki page. Nico takes up this positioning.</td>
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<td>23:35 (8:55)</td>
<td>Erika takes out a pen and her notebook and draws a picture. Nico looks at the picture as Erika is drawing. Zina continues to look at her computer screen.</td>
<td>Ok, like say you've got my world and there was four different portals somewhere in each level of the world. They don't move, but what I was gonna do is I was gonna have it since mine, like I was going to have it, even in Thesis, there's a portal, like the three portals on Thesis and there's one in Speir, they move. They move position is what I was going to have it because...</td>
<td>Erika introduces new mediational means by using pen and paper to draw a representation of the portals across the three-tired fictional world. Nico takes up this mediational means by watching Erika draw the relationship among the portals.</td>
<td>Erika maintains her positioning of Nico.</td>
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| 24:11       | Nico points at Erika’s computer screen and gestures with his hands as he talks. Erika looks at Nico as he is talking. Zina continues to look at her own computer screen. | **Nico:** Oh yeah, they can move, but then only the ones they found though, because they built their village around it.  
**Erika:** Well it still moves, though.  
**Nico:** Yeah  
**Erika:** Yeah, yeah. So it doesn't stay in the same place, like once in every so many months this one will move and this one will move and that one will move.  
**Nico:** Yeah | Erika and Nico maintain their interaction order. Nico points to Erika’s wiki page “history” as mediational means for their conversation about the mobility of the portals. | Nico takes up Erika’s positioning. |
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<td>24:30</td>
<td>Erika uses the computer mouse to scroll down her wiki page “history.” Nico looks at her computer screen. Zina continues to look at her computer screen.</td>
<td><strong>Erika:</strong> Because what I had if, well in the history I had it, so he didn't want these ones getting up to the other worlds and living there. So what he did was say that they could not survive on Thesis or Speir for so long. So then he also had it that way they'd have to try and find, if they were going to go up into Thesis and Speir, which he didn't say they couldn't, they just can't live there forever, they would end up eventually dying because of the environment, so blah blah blah it just wouldn't work. So they've got to try and find them.</td>
<td>Erika and Nico maintain their interaction order. Erika uses the mouse to refer to specific details of her wiki page “history.” She refers to Thygon, a god that Nico created and is a common deity in Arterramar.</td>
<td>Erika maintains her positioning of Nico.</td>
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<td>24:55 (8:56)</td>
<td>Nico picks up the computer mouse and clicks on a link. Erika continues to look at her computer screen. Zina maintains her gaze on her own computer screen.</td>
<td><strong>Nico:</strong> If you go…if you go to, um…</td>
<td>Nico introduces new mediational means by using the mouse to access his wiki page, in which he outlines the history of his region.</td>
<td>Nico deliberately positions Erika as a reader of his wiki page.</td>
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<td>25:06</td>
<td>Zina turns to face Erika and Nico to share a story idea, but turns to face her computer screen when interrupted.</td>
<td><strong>Zina:</strong> I think, OK, well I’m thinking for like…</td>
<td>Zina attempts to construct a new site of engagement, but is stopped short by Nico talking to Erika.</td>
<td>Zina’s proposed self-positioning as sharing group member not taken up by Erika and Nico.</td>
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<td>25:07</td>
<td>Nico uses Erika’s mouse to change Erica’s screen to his wiki page, “Thesis history”.</td>
<td><strong>Nico:</strong> Basically why I put it there is because if you read this there’s a war is going on, during the history of this world, if you read it.</td>
<td>Nico uses Erika’s computer to direct her attention to his digital text.</td>
<td>Nico positions Erika as a reader of his writing.</td>
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<td>25:18</td>
<td>Looking at her screen, the wiki page “Speir” Zina talks to Erika and Nico.</td>
<td><strong>Zina:</strong> For like my first chapter or whatever, I think I'm er, my first like actual action, I think I'm going to have</td>
<td>Zina attempts to construct an interaction order of speaking with Erika and Nico while using her digital text as a mediational means.</td>
<td>Zina re-proposes her positioning as sharing group member.</td>
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<td>25:23</td>
<td>Nico looks away from the group toward Roger who is making faces into the video camera. Erika and Zina continue to look at their computer screens.</td>
<td>one of the Senoves, um, I'm going to have them take with them when they go,</td>
<td>Erika, Nico, and Zina each operate within unrelated sites of engagement.</td>
<td>Neither Erika nor Nico take up Zina’s self-positioning.</td>
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<td>25:31</td>
<td>Zina turns to face Erika and Nico. Erika looks away from her screen at Zina’s screen and then looks back at her screen. Nico looks away toward another group and then quickly back at Erika’s screen.</td>
<td>like have you guys read the description of the Senoves? <strong>Erika:</strong> No, not yet. I haven't, I didn't read much on the creatures or nothing yet.</td>
<td>Zina shifts her attention to construct an interaction order with Erika and Nico. Erika temporarily shifts her attention from the digital text she was reading to the one on Zina’s screen.</td>
<td>Erika acknowledges Zina’s self-positioning as a sharing group member. Erika positions herself as a reader of the groups’ writing (who has yet to read the digital text to which Zina refers).</td>
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<td>25:40</td>
<td>Zina looks back at her screen to refer to her wiki page “Speir” while talking to Erika and Nico.</td>
<td><strong>Zina:</strong> Ok, well. They're like, um, they've been around for I don't know how long,</td>
<td>Zina re-constructs an interaction order of speaking with Erika and Nico while using her digital text as mediational means.</td>
<td>Zina continues to position herself as sharing group member.</td>
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<td>25:46</td>
<td>Zina turns to face Erika. Erika and Nico are looking at Erika’s screen at the digital text, “Thesis history.”</td>
<td>but they pretty much, like,</td>
<td>Zina makes another attempt to construct a face-to-face interaction order, but Erika remains focused on her screen.</td>
<td>Zina emphasizes her positioning by attempting to have Erika acknowledge her self-positioning.</td>
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<td>25:49</td>
<td>Nico looks away. Erika turns to face Zina.</td>
<td>they're rocks, but way back when they weren't rocks. They like were transformed to rocks because they didn't want to attract attention. And um, now…</td>
<td>Nico shifts his attention to another group. Erika takes up the face-to-face interaction order proposed by Zina.</td>
<td>Erika acknowledges and accepts Zina’s self-positioning and Zina’s positioning of her as a listener.</td>
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| 25:59      | Teacher approaches the group. Nico faces the teacher as he approaches. Zina turns to look at the teacher. The teacher acknowledges the researcher. Erika looks at the teacher briefly, then back to Zina. | **Teacher:** Is there a laptop on top of there?  
**Nico:** Recorder.  
**Teacher:** Oh, it’s you.  
**Zina:** And now… | A new site of engagement is introduced by the teacher, which interrupts the site of engagement shared by Zina and Erika, and includes the researcher. Erika shifts her attention to the teacher. Zina attempts to repair the disrupted interaction order with Erika. | The teacher introduces a familiar set of social positions; the teacher asks a question of the students expecting a response. Zina and Nico acknowledge this positioning. Erika acknowledges the teacher’s positioning. |
<p>| 26:05      | Erika looks back at Zina. Nico looks away from the group. | And now, um, they can travel and stuff, but like the ancient Senoves is what keeps, um, Speir afloat because they do like an infinite dance sort of deal under it which keeps Speir afloat. But then the down dirt Senoves, they're, they are free of that, um, | Erika again takes up Zina’s proposed face-to-face interaction order. Nico shifts his attention away from the group. | Erika and Zina resume their positioning as listener and sharing group member, respectively. |</p>
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<td>26:23</td>
<td>Nicole turns to look at Zina and Erika. Zina is facing Erika and Nicole. Erika briefly looks at her screen at Nicole’s wiki page, “Thesis History.”</td>
<td>Nico shares the site of engagement, briefly.</td>
<td>Erika and Zina maintain their interaction order; Erika shifts her attention momentarily to her screen. Nico shares the site of engagement, briefly.</td>
<td>Erika and Zina maintain their positioning as listener and sharing group member, respectively. Though, Erika’s attention is divided.</td>
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<td>26:38</td>
<td>Erika looks away from Zina toward Erika’s computer screen, sitting back in her chair.</td>
<td>Erika shifts her attention to her screen disrupting the site of engagement she shared with Zina. Erika’s action shaped by her habitus of reading before discussing, related to her fan fiction writing.</td>
<td>Erika resists the positioning as listener and resumes a positioning as reader of Nico’s digital text.</td>
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<td>26:41</td>
<td>Erika looks back at Zina.</td>
<td>Zina: I’m thinking that I’m going to have them take, um, like maybe a young Senove with them one time like one of the young, or maybe like get a group of, you know, a trio, maybe like one Lendajar, one Slibinor, and one Senove</td>
<td>Erika shifts her attention back to Zina and repairs the previous face-to-face interaction order.</td>
<td>Zina reasserts her social positioning of Erika as listener, continuing to share. Erika acknowledges and takes up this positioning, again.</td>
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<td>26:51</td>
<td>Nico looks away from Erika and Zina.</td>
<td>when they are younger and have them all go down, or maybe, I thought maybe I would have, um, Lendajar and the Slibinor, have them, some of them be born without,</td>
<td>Nico resists the interaction order established by Zina and Erika.</td>
<td>Nico does not take up the social positioning of listener.</td>
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<td>26:59</td>
<td>Nico picks up the mouse and turns it over to look at the bottom, then uses the mouse to move the cursor around Erika’s screen.</td>
<td>they are not born with their actual shape, they are born as a caveman, and they have not been able to access their shape yet sort of deal. And then that'd mean like they know it, oh well maybe we belong in Thesis sort of deal.</td>
<td>Erika and Zina maintain their interaction order. Nico shifts his attention to Erika’s mouse in an effort to restore his site of engagement with Erika.</td>
<td>Nico actively resists the social positioning of listener proposed by Zina.</td>
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<td>27:20</td>
<td>Erika looks at her screen to read Nico’s wiki page, “Thesis history.”</td>
<td>Then um people kind of shun them a little bit. And then a Senove who was one of their friends, like he would say hey let's go to Thesis sort of deal. And that'd be, like, a storyline. <strong>Erika:</strong> I got to read. I got to read, I got to read.</td>
<td>Erika shifts her attention back to the site of engagement with Nico that involved reading his digital text.</td>
<td>Erika resists the positioning as listener and asserts a self-positioning as reader.</td>
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</table>
| 27:26      | Zina turns away from Erika and Nico to look at her own screen. | **Zina:** Ok  
**Erika:** [laughs] | Zina acknowledges Erika wanting to read and shifts her attention to her screen. | Zina acknowledges and accepts Erika’s resisting of the positioning as listener. |
**Conflicting Sites of Engagement.** In the presented event, Erika, Nico, and Zina shared common physical surroundings, i.e., two computers in the library, and engaged in similar mediated actions with common tools, e.g., they read and talked about the writing on the wiki pages, yet they constructed two conflicting sites of engagement. Nico had spent time the previous day on a school computer outside the elective class working on his wiki pages for Thesis, and he wanted Erika to read his wiki page, “regions of map.” Nico was proposing that a village in his region guards one of the portals. Erika was willing to read Nico’s wiki page; Erika brought to bear the social practice of ‘reading group member’s wiki page’ as a prerequisite for enacting the social practice ‘planning and coordinating the project’ when constructing a site of engagement with Nico. Erika and Nico’s shared site of engagement was oriented toward a particular space-time. Nico had posted the writing to the wiki page the previous day, and he wanted Erika’s approval of what he had written before developing the storyline further. Nico has limited opportunities for using a computer; therefore, it was important to him that he received feedback as soon as possible. Nico’s only time to speak with Erika was during the time the elective class met. In this event, Nico impatiently waited for Erika to read his wiki page and resisted Zina’s attempts at constructing a separate site of engagement by talking over her at 23:23 and 25:07 in Transcript 1. When Zina does manage to construct a new site of engagement, Nico loses interest and starts looking around at the other groups.

Zina made several attempts to share her ideas verbally with Erika, i.e., 23:23, 25:06, and 25:18 in Transcript 1. Each attempt was an effort to construct a site of engagement in which talk was the primary mediational means. Zina was referring to her
wiki page, “Speir,” but she did not ask Erika or Nico to read the writing she had posted. Zina often shared her ideas with talk rather than by asking her group members to read her wiki pages. Across related events in the five focal class sessions, Zina’s use of talk for enacting the social practice ‘planning and coordinating the project’ shaped the sites of engagement she constructed related to the planning and writing of the project.

Erika was caught between the two conflicting sites of engagement. On one hand, she wanted to read Nico’s wiki page, “I got to read. I got to read. I got to read” (27:20 in Transcript 1), and on the other hand, she was not prepared to discuss Zina’s ideas because she had not read what Zina had posted, “Yeah, but I haven’t read it yet, so…” (26:38 in Transcript 1). At times, she seemed to maintain what Jones (2005a) refers to as a *polychronic attention structure* by simultaneously dividing her attention between the two sites of engagement. At 25:31 in Transcript 1, Erika briefly acknowledges and rejects Zina’s attempt to construct a site of engagement related to ‘planning and coordinating the project’ and mediated by talk. Similarly, between 26:23 and 27:20, Erika shifts her attention structure between the two conflicting sites of engagement, ultimately repairing the site of engagement with Nico by the end of the event.

Next, I present another selected event in which Erika and Zina are working toward meeting the requirements for Assignment #4. After presenting this event, I look across the two events to make inductions about how the group members planned and wrote for the project and engaged in relational and reflexive social positioning.
Writing Event: “Just Do What You See Is Best”

The following event took place during one of the focal class sessions during Assignment #4, October 27th (see Appendix B). On this day, the elective class met in one of the school’s computer labs. The computers were arranged in rows, divided down the middle by a walkway. On either side of the walkway, there were three computers for a total of six computers for each of the four rows. The teacher’s computer was situated behind the rows, so that the teacher could see all of the students’ computer screens. During this class session, Erika and Zina sat in the back row near the teacher’s computer. Nico had withdrawn from school by this time.

Erika and Zina were working on their assignments for the project. Zina was creating a map with the cartography software AutoRealm; John had given her permission to design a map in fulfillment of Assignment #4 as Zina intended on creating a map of all three of the regions, starting with Erika’s region, Verfluchten. Zina would later abandon the map making because she could not install the program on her home computer. After this class session, Zina decided to create a new shared wiki page, “MAGICKS!!” to fulfill the requirements for Assignment #4 (see Table 6 on page 153).

In the following event, Erika is writing the individually-owned wiki page “Stones of speir.” To do so, Erika is asking Zina for advice and feedback on her ideas for magic stones that are put to use in Zina’s region, Speir. Zina is busily working on creating a map of Verfluchten, only occasionally asking Erika for details about Erika’s region, Verfluchten. As they work alongside each other at their computers, Erika makes several attempts to construct a site of engagement with Zina around Erika’s writing of her wiki
page “Stones of speir.” Zina acknowledges each attempt and divides her attention between the map she is designing and the questions that Erika is asking about Speir. Unlike Erika in the previously discussed event, Zina manages to take social action within two concurrent sites of engagement.
Transcription 2. Artterrmar Writing Event, October 27, 8:46 – 8:50 a.m.

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<td>17:47 (8:46)</td>
<td>Erika turns away from her computer screen to face Zina. Zina is looking at her own computer screen.</td>
<td><strong>Erika</strong>: OK, Zina. This is what I was thinking, OK? Alright, for your, this like, the stones, OK, most of your creatures, or your Dzivas in Speir are magicable, correct?</td>
<td>Erika attempts to construct a site of engagement by redirecting Zina’s attention with questions about how magic is used in Zina’s region.</td>
<td>Erika deliberately positions Zina as the principal of the region Speir and a group member who plans and coordinates the project.</td>
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<td>18:03</td>
<td>Zina turns away from her computer screen to face Erika.</td>
<td><strong>Zina</strong>: Are what?</td>
<td>Zina acknowledges Erika’s attempt by answering her question.</td>
<td>Zina accepts this positioning.</td>
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<td>18:08</td>
<td>Zina turns back to look at her own computer monitor. Erika continues to face Zina.</td>
<td><strong>Erika</strong>: OK, that's what I'm saying, like, I got this from, if you've, you've read Cirque du Freak, OK?</td>
<td>Erika attempts to maintain the site of engagement, despite the fact that Zina has turned her attention back to her computer screen.</td>
<td>Erika reasserts her positioning of Zina as a group member who plans and coordinates the project.</td>
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<td>18:22</td>
<td>Zina turns to face Erika.</td>
<td><strong>Zina</strong>: Mmm hmm.</td>
<td>Zina momentarily acknowledges Erika, dividing her attention between two sites of engagement.</td>
<td>Zina momentarily accepts this positioning.</td>
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| 18:27      | Zina turns back to face her computer screen. | **Erika:** The only thing is with magic, that's what thinking, and now I need like a coming of age, like a Dziva...  
**Zina:** Fifteen  
**Erika:** Fifteen? Ok, fifteen. Thank you. | Erika maintains her attempt to construct the site of engagement with Zina. Zina divides her attention between two sites of engagement, anticipating Erika’s next question with an age. | Zina accepts the positioning by Erika. |
| 18:36      | Erika turns to face her own computer screen. Both Erika and Zina are looking at their computer screens. Erika gets out her notebook and writes in her notebook. | **Zina:** [laughs] Sounds good.  
**Erika:** Alright, um, I have to figure out, ahhh, need to write notes. Noootes!  
**Erika:** Ok, ummm.  
**Erika:** Ok, question. Oh, I haven't read it all, nevermind. That would, understand. | Zina attempts to end the site of engagement by saying, “Sounds good” and shifting her attention back to her computer screen. Erika introduces new mediational means for planning and coordinating the project, writing notes in her notebook. | Erika continues to position Zina as a group member who plans and coordinates. Zina resists this positioning to a certain degree in an attempt to get back to her own writing. |
| 20:14      | Erika gestures for Zina to come closer to her. Zina gets up out of her chair and goes over to look at Erika’s computer screen. | **Zina:** OK come here for a quick question. Explain that to me, like it's the, it represents the newcomers of, is that like one of your countries in your place?  
**Zina:** Yeah.  
**Erika:** OK, I need to know who all is in there. | Erika constructs a site of engagement by asking Zina to come closer to her and look at Erika’s computer screen. Erika needs to know specific information about Zina’s region in order to complete Assignment #4. | Erika reasserts her positioning of \textit{Zina as principal of Speir}. Zina accepts this positioning. |
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<th>Talk</th>
<th>Sites of Engagement</th>
<th>Social Positioning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cont.</td>
<td>continued</td>
<td>Zina: I don't know. I don't think there is any, going to be anyone else, because if there is anyone else then it won't be such a mystery when the go to Thesis or anything.</td>
<td>continued</td>
<td>continued</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Erika: I know, but who's like in there, like the way I have it is the stones, they're used as a homing device for the true Dzivas that were born in Speir.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Zina: OK, that's good.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Erika: Yeah, so whoever is in here that was born in it, like I need to know.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Zina: Oh, that would be Slibinor, Lendajar, and the Senoves.</td>
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<tr>
<td>21:03</td>
<td>John approaches the group and asks Zina a question. Zina turns away from Erika’s computer to face the teacher. Erika continues to look at her computer screen.</td>
<td>Teacher: Hey, Zina did you get my...</td>
<td>John attempts to construct a site of engagement with Zina. Zina acknowledges the attempt. Erika does not.</td>
<td>John deliberately positions Zina as a writer of the project by finding and sharing a resource for making family trees for characters that will help the reader (John) understand the relationships among Zina’s characters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video Time</td>
<td>Mediated Action</td>
<td>Talk</td>
<td>Sites of Engagement</td>
<td>Social Positioning</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| cont.      | continued      | **Teacher:** I just wondered if that would be a tool for you...  
**Zina:** Yeah for that family...  
**Teacher:** ...because what you got on the page is a little confusing...  
**Zina:** Yes, I...  
**Teacher:** ...visually. | continued | continued |
| 21:18      | John turns to walk away, and Zina turns to face Erika’s computer screen. Erika turns to face Zina. | **Erika:** See I've already got these because, see look...  
**Zina:** OK?  
**Erika:** ...the fire, like, ruby one is for these guys.  
**Zina:** OK?  
**Erika:** The sky blue is for these guys. And the green, I was thinking whatever else, like, they've got these right here, but...  
**Zina:** OK, that's pretty much the only other people I guess, well that could probably be all the other Dzivas, cause other Dzivas come later, you know what I'm saying? | Erika reconstructs the site of engagement with Zina by directing her attention to her computer screen. Erika suggests to use Nico’s characters to resolve a continuity issue. | Erika reasserts her positioning of Zina as the principal of Speir and a group member who can help her resolve a continuity issue. Zina accepts this positioning. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Video Time</th>
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<th>Talk</th>
<th>Sites of Engagement</th>
<th>Social Positioning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| cont.      | continued      | **Erika:** So, it would be like anyone other, not the...  
**Zina:** Yea, anyone not born.  
**Erika:** OK, well then how would that? It'd just be, no, because, we'll use the, we'll use the kitty peoples, because that's the only other way I think, because like see to do that, I mean, that would be hard. | continued | continued |
| 22:16 (8:50) | Zina turns to face her own computer screen. Erika turns to look at her own computer screen and types on her wiki page “history continued.” | **Zina:** Just do what you see is best.  
**Erika:** Alright. We'll go for it. | Zina shifts her attention to her own computer screen. | Zina deliberately positions Erika as principal and author of Speir. Erika accepts this positioning. |
**Concurrent Sites of Engagement.** In the presented event, Erika and Zina each have their own computer and are taking different social actions, even though they are both enacting the social practice ‘planning and coordinating the project.’ Erika writes on her wiki page, “Stones of speir,” and in her notebook in the process of and in future preparation for enacting the social practice ‘making region-specific references.’ Erika wants to make references and write a storyline that do not present any continuity conflicts for Zina’s region, Speir. At 20:14 in Transcript 2, Erika asks Zina for particular details about which creatures (Dzivas) are native to Speir, positioning Zina as the principal (Goffman, 1981) or her region, or the person who is committed to what the words say. Zina accepts this positioning and replies with the three Dzivas of the Slibinor, the Lendajar, and the Senoves. Erika also makes several attempts to direct Zina’s attention to her wiki page in order to have her read what she has written, e.g., at 20:14 Erika asks Zina to “Come here for a quick question,” at 21:18 Erika says, “See I’ve already got these because, see look….” For Erika, the social practice of ‘planning and coordinating the project’ is closely related to the social practice of ‘reading group member’s wiki pages.’ Erika acknowledges that Zina is the principal of the region of Speir, even though Erika is the animator, the person who inscribes the words, and the author, the person who selects the sentiments and the words, of the individually-owned wiki page, “Stones of speir.”

Ultimately, after Zina has answered several of Erika’s questions, Zina tells her to “Just do what you see is best” at the end of Transcript 2. In effect, Zina is positioning Erika as a principal, animator, and author of the wiki page by giving her consent to write what she thinks would be best. After the conversation between Erika and Zina in the
above event, Erika spent the next 16 minutes writing on the wiki page “Stones of speir.” The writing highlighted in green was posted at the time stamp (October 27, 2009, 9:06 a.m.). The sentence not highlighted in green was posted 3 minutes before the event. The first paragraph includes the different colored stones that Erika asked Zina to read about at 21:18 in Transcript 2. The second paragraph describes the coming of age ceremony that Erika discussed with Zina at 18:27 in the transcript. The conversation in which Erika and Zina enacted the social practice ‘planning and coordinating the project’ was taken up in the writing that Erika posted to the wiki page.

![Figure 12. Screen Shot of Erika’s Writing Post to “Stones of speir”](image)

Zina’s comment to Erika at the end of the event marks both her trust in Erika as principal to write about Speir in ways that will not contradict what Zina has written and her acknowledgement that she is no longer sharing the site of engagement with Erika. Zina is happy to help Erika, yet eager to get back to her computer and work on designing the map.
Habitus

Erika, Nico, and Zina each brought to bear social practices aggregated in their
habitus that shaped the action within the event. Erika had a history of writing fantasy
fiction with her friends at school and writing fan fiction online with friends. Erika
reported that her writing for these purposes involved the reading of each other’s writing
before discussing ideas and offering suggestions. With her friends at school, Erika passed
around a series of notebooks in which she and her friends were writing fiction that
featured all of them as characters. With her friends online, Erika read her friends’ writing
and posted feedback through the website or communicated directly via instant messaging
or e-mail. Erika’s habitus shaped the mediated action within this event and across related
events that involved the social practice ‘planning and coordinating the project.’ In the
first event, Erika wanted to read Nico’s wiki page before discussing the portals with him.
In the second event, Erika wanted Zina to read her wiki page so that he could have a
conversation about the stones in Zina’s region, Speir. For Erika, the social practice of
‘reading group member’s wiki pages’ is not only durable but also linked and integrated
with other social practices related to the planning and writing of the project.

Nico had a history of creating characters for Advanced Dungeons & Dragons.
Nico was typically was a player in the role playing game working through an arranged
scenario or dungeon by a Dungeon Master, who planned and orchestrated the role playing.
In the early stages of the project, Nico presented the group with a list of characters he had
previously created and began working them into the fictional world within his region,
Thesis. Erika and Zina began using the characters as well in storylines that involved
multiple regions. Nico reported that he sought out Erika’s advice about his characters and their activities to make sure his ideas “meshed” with the plans for the fictional world, Arterramar. Though I did not have the opportunity to discuss these events with Nico because he withdrew from school a few weeks later, Nico’s history with role playing games suggests that he was positioning Erika in a way similar to the way he described the role of a Dungeon Master, seeking her approval for his ideas within the boundaries established by the design principle of continuity.

Zina had a history of writing fantasy fiction with her older brother. However, Zina and her brother wrote separately, writing individual stories that were not related to one another. They often discussed their stories, and on rare occasions, Zina’s brother permitted her to read his stories, but her brother never read the stories that she wrote. For Zina, talking about fantasy story writing without directly reading someone else’s writing was a social practice that she had aggregated into her habitus and was evident in not only the presented events, but also across related events in the five focal class sessions. However, Zina did report reading what her group members had written; though, she did not consider ‘reading member’s wiki pages’ to be a prerequisite for ‘planning and coordinating the project’ as Erika did. For Zina, ‘reading group member’s wiki page’ was linked to the other social practices related to planning and writing the project, but not in an integrated way.

Consistent with the rest of the elective class, the most durable social practice for Erika, Nico, and Zina was ‘posting writing to own wiki page’. Despite the fact that these students did have out-of-school experiences with writing that intersected with the social
practices supported in John’s classroom, they reported that almost all of their school-based experiences with writing involved the writing of an individually-authored text in response to a specific prompt for a narrow audience (most often the teacher). They reported that the Building Worlds Project marked a departure from these school-based experiences in that they were writing with and for one another, even though they primarily posted writing to individually-owned wiki pages.

**Interaction Order**

The interaction order consisted of a series of bids for attention by the group members. Rather than a three-person *with* (Goffman, 1983) that worked in concert to plan and coordinate a writing project, the Arterramar group’s interaction order involved many brief moments in which the *with* typically consisted of Erika and one of the other group members. Nico and Zina rarely worked together without Erika as a mediator, and they were most often making competing bids for her attention across the focal class sessions (though Nico was only present for two of the five focal sessions, see Appendix B). In turn, Erika also made bids for the attention of Nico and Zina.

In the first event, Zina primarily made bids to construct an interaction order by making proclamations about her intentions for her wiki pages to the group as her audience, e.g., “I think I’m going to make…” (22:23 in Transcript 1), “I think, OK, well I’m thinking…” (25:06), “I think I’m going to have…” (25:18), “I’m going to have…” (25:23), “I’m thinking that I’m going to have them…” (26:41). Zina was looking for acknowledgement of her ideas as she planned aloud. In the same event, Nico makes bids for Erika’s attention, attempting to establish an interaction order that involved directing
Erika to his wiki pages and asking her to read them, e.g., “Go to my thing. Oh, no go to my regions. Go to the regions” (22:46 in Transcript 1), “If you go…if you go to… (24:55), “…if you read it” (25:07), “Just read that real quick” (25:14). At 26:59 in Transcript 1, Nico picked up the mouse and began manipulating Erika’s computer in an effort to redirect her attention.

In the second event, Erika attempted to establish an interaction order based on questions and answers, wherein Zina’s answer to Erika’s question leads Erika to ask another question, e.g., “your Dzivas in Speir are magicable, correct? (17:47 in Transcript 2), “Most of your Dzivas in Speir are magicish, correct?” (18:03), “if you’ve read Cirque du Freak, OK?” “The blood stones? (18:08), “Fifteen?” (18:27), “Ok, question” (18:36), “Is that like one of your countries in your place?” “I need to know who all is in there,” “…who’s like in there,” “like I need to know” (20:14), “You means like these would be OK?” (21:03), “you know what I’m saying?” “OK, well then how would that?” (21:18).

Each of the group members drew on different interaction orders in an attempt to construct a with. Zina used a proclamation-audience interaction order, Nico used a directive-compliance interaction order, and Erika used a question-answer/acknowledgement interaction order.

Discourse-in-Place

The discourse-in-place also shaped the mediated action within the two events. Both the library used in the first event and the computer lab used in the second event are configured so that individual students use individual computers in school-appropriate ways. The computer screens face a central observation location for monitoring computer
use. In the library, the screens face the circulation desk. In the computer lab, the screens face the teacher’s desk in the back of the room. Because of this arrangement, students must sit beside each other, rather than across from one another. This configuration makes it possible for one student to lean over and look at the computer screen of the student sitting beside them, but it does not make face-to-face interaction convenient because students must look away from their computer screens. When Nico was not present, this configuration did not present an issue for Erika and Zina, who always sat next to each other. However, when Nico was present he had to arrange himself to be in proximity of the other two group members.

The discourse-in-place of monitoring and control did not end with the configuration of the rooms. The computers had constraints and blocks placed on them disallowing students to visit inappropriate or social network websites or to install free software that the students used to design maps and landscapes for their fictional worlds. However, Nico worked with Casey to devise workarounds that allowed them to bypass the constraints placed on the computers and the school network. For example, Casey figured out how to use Microsoft Word to move installation files to protected directories in the computer so that the mapping software would run properly. These types of workarounds enabled Zina to create her map of Verfluchten in the second event.

**Collaborative Planning and Writing**

The Arterramar group operated as three individuals who had ownership over their regions yet were invested in coordinating their writing so that there were no continuity conflicts across the storylines. Erika was the most attentive to continuity issues. She
reported reading all of the group’s wiki pages and working with Nico and Zina to resolve any issues, e.g., moving portals, magic stones. Erika also sought out opportunities to write about her and Zina’s regions in ways that established continuity across all of the three regions. For Erika, the primary mediational means for collaborative planning and writing was the writing on the wiki pages, to which she referred when talking with Zina and Nico. Erika preferred to have read a wiki page before discussing its contents or its implications on the rest of the fictional world.

Although Nico’s time with the group was cut short by a family illness that caused him to withdraw from school, Nico contributed characters early in the project that became central to all three of the regions. Nico worked most closely with Erika, though Zina incorporated many of Nico’s characters and continued to write about Nico’s region, Thesis, several weeks after his departure. For Nico, the primary mediational means for planning and writing the project was the wiki pages; like Erika, Nico stressed the importance of having his writing read by his group members.

Across the planning and writing of the project, Zina preferred to discuss and write about issues that were central to her particular region. Zina regularly demonstrated a willingness to change what she had written in her region based on what another group member had written in their region. For Zina, the primary mediational means for planning and writing the project was talk; unlike Erika and Nico, Zina preferred to talk about her ideas by declaring her plans and working through any conflicts that were identified in discussions about continuity.
A quick glance at the descriptive statistics for Arterramar in Appendix E on page 279 might suggest that the Arterramar group was not very collaborative. Most of the writing posted to the wiki was done so on individually-owned wiki pages, and most of the writing posted to shared wiki pages was done in a manner described by Haring-Smith (1994) as compiled writing. However, a closer look at the mediated action involved in the planning and writing of the individually-authored wiki and a look at the intertextual references in the text that was written reveals a collaborative process behind these wiki pages.

For example, Erika’s individually-owned wiki page, “Stones of speir,” involved the social practices ‘reading group member’s wiki page,’ ‘planning and coordinating the project,’ ‘making common world references,’ and ‘making region-specific references.’ Erika planned and coordinated what she wrote about the stones based on what Zina had already written on other wiki pages and her conversation with Zina in the second selected event. A content analysis of Erika’s wiki page, “Stones of speir” (see Appendix F on page 283), reveals that she made four common world references, i.e., “Speir,” “Dzivas,” “Stones of Power,” “magick,” and three region specific references, i.e., “Slibinor,” “Lendajar,” “Gataki.” Erika’s wiki page did not achieve Haring-Smith’s (1994) ideal of co-authored writing. However, Erika’s wiki page was co-authored in the sociocultural sense that her writing involved social actions that were mediated by Zina’s wiki pages and her conversation with Zina in the second event. In other words, Erika’s individually-owned wiki page involving only one writer posting writing to the wiki would not have
taken shape in the way it did without the availability and reading of Zina’s wiki pages and the in-class opportunity to speak with Zina about her plans for the Stones of Speir.

**Positional Identities**

The Arterramar group engaged in deliberate relational and reflexive social positioning, in which the group members were considered to be the *principals* of their particular region and collaborators who were ready and willing to read another member’s wiki page, provide feedback, and discuss storylines and aspects of the fictional world that were common across the regions and specific to a particular region. For the most part, tensions arose when group members were attempting to position themselves and each other in a particular way that conflicted with the way other group members were positioned in an existing site of engagement. For example, in the first event Zina made multiple attempts to position herself as a group member who shares ideas, but this positioning was not taken up by Erika and Nico because they shared a site of engagement involving the reading and discussing of Nico’s wiki pages. That is not to say that they resisted Zina’s deliberate, reflexive positioning outright as there were many instances in which they took up this positioning, but in particular moments in which mediated action was taken particular positionings were offered, imposed, taken up, and rejected for particular reasons.

Across the five focal class sessions, Erika primarily positioned herself and was positioned by the group members as someone who read their wiki pages, respected group member’s ownership of their regions, and was concerned with storyline continuity. Erika often initiated conversations about continuity issues and positioned Nico and Zina as
group members who were responsive to such concerns. Zina primarily positioned herself as the principal and author of her region. Zina reported that though she did read the other group member’s wiki pages, she was primarily concerned with the writing of members that directly related to hers. On occasion, Erika would position Zina as a group member who was concerned with continuity issues across the entire fictional world, and Zina would resist this positioning in order to focus on the development of her particular region. Nico was primarily concerned about the aspects of the fictional world that he had introduced or about which he had written. Nico positioned himself as a group member who had a stake in these aspects and sought opportunities to discuss how these aspects were being taken up in Erika’s and Zina’s regions. Erika and Zina typically positioned Nico as someone who had ideas to share that were useful for the development of the fictional world, i.e., characters.

**Tine agus Oighhear**

The Tine agus Oighhear group is made up of two warring factions, each with a princess. Paul and Isabella represent the ice faction. Beau, Brad, Greg, James, Kate and Nate represent the fire faction. Situated in the middle of the two factions is John’s region, Balaine, which is inhabited by maritime people who remain neutral\(^\text{18}\). Paul and Isabella’s region is named Crucroi, a land of ice and snow complete with an ice castle where the princess, Ledova Kralovna, lives. The fire region is known as Talun Bas Fiery and is a land of “fire, ash, death, and all things that are evil.” This region has distinct areas of which group members have ownership. Beau’s area is known as Lahinguvali, where slumbering gods dreams make up the reality of Tine agus Oighhear. Brad’s area is known

\(^{18}\) As the teacher, John decided to stay neutral among the warring factions.
as Zemlju Nindza, where ninjas protect the forest around the fire princess’ fortress. Greg and Kate share a city known as Pozemku Nadvlady, where the fire princess, Feuer Konigin lives in a fortress protected by two invincible dragons. James’ area is in the sky and is known as Nolahon, where the Elohim live atop of clouds and protect those below. Nate’s region is a cavernous lair known as Cerna Vrazda, where the sorcerer Feadfaidh Seosamh dwells. Despite the narrative arc of the warring factions that was leading to the ultimate destruction of the fictional world, most of the members of the group described the regions as disjointed and largely unrelated to one another.

The group members of Tine agus Oighear reported that they had very little experience with writing fiction, let alone writing fantasy fiction. For Paul and Isabella, who were taking the class primarily because they needed an elective credit, the project represented the first time they had written fantasy fiction, though they had read some fantasy and science fiction and watched movies related to the genres. For the other group members, their interests and experiences with fantasy and science fiction were grounded in video games and movies. Beau, Greg, James, Kate, and Nate were active gamers who played fantasy-related video games online and on game consoles. Beau, James, and Nate regularly shared anecdotes about their game play and made references to a history of video games they had played throughout their experience. John has a history of playing video games and is an active gamer when time allows, so these three students and John often shared stories about playing particular games, e.g., Final Fantasy. Brad emphatically stated that he was not a gamer and that he had only read a few fantasy-related books. For all of the group members, the class and the project represented the first
time they were asked to write fantasy fiction with other students, and for some of them this was the first time they were being asked to write fiction in school.

The group members reported working on the project wiki primarily when there was an assignment given and primarily during class session devoted to the Building Worlds Project. All of the group members had access to a computer at home, but not all of them used their home computers to regularly post writing and discussion comments to the project wiki. These generalizations made by the group members in interviews were supported by the time and date stamps of writing and comments posted to the wiki, which I used to create a scatter plot similar to the one for the Arterramar group. At a quick glance, the scatter plot for the Tine agus Oighear group (see Appendix J) looks much different that the scatter plot for the Arterramar group (see Appendix I). The posts to the project wiki of the Tine agus Oighear group primarily occurred during the assignments and after-school posts were not regular and trailed off after the initial enthusiasm for the project waned.

**Group Social Practices**

The Tine agus Oighear group primarily posted writing during assignments, and the posts were made primarily to individual and shared pages. Very few writing posts were made to group member’s pages, with the exception of Assignment #4, and only two writing posts were made to non-group members’ pages across the project. The group made use of the discussion comments on the shared wiki pages. In Appendix E on page 282, I list descriptive statistics for the writing and discussion posts the Tine agus Oighear group made across the assignment timescale. 93% of the writing posts and 80% of the
discussion posts were made during assignments (compared to 65% of the writing posts and 55% of the discussion posts for the Arterramar group).

In Appendix F on pages 283-290, I list the number of writers for each of the wiki pages that made up Tine agus Oighear. Many of the individually-owned wiki pages had more than one writer, and the shared wiki pages that were devoted to the organization and coordination of the fictional world had the most number of writers. Likewise, most of the discussion comments were posted to the shared wiki pages. The group members did not use very many common world references, but they did use region-specific references suggesting that certain students were reading the wiki pages of other group members and incorporating region-specific aspects into their writing. In Appendix H, I list the number of intertextual references for the Tine agus Oighear group by wiki page type. This table demonstrates that like the Arterramar group most of the references were region-specific, but unlike the Arterramar group most of these references were made on shared wiki pages.

Using the same approach as I used for the Arterramar group, I considered the frozen actions taken on the wiki, observations, and both generalizations and recounts of specific events by the participants to understand how the social practices enacted by the Tine agus Oighear group were related and constituted the collaborative planning and writing of the Building Worlds Project. I made the following inductions about the Tine agus Oighear group:

- Most of the writing that made up Tine agus Oighear was posted to individually-owned wiki pages with region-specific references;
• Planning and coordinating the project occurred early in class and then waned as the project unfolded, the group made very little use of the discussion comments;

• The shared wiki pages were used primarily for organization purposes to hyperlink the region-specific pages and for defining aspects that were specific to particular regions;

• The posts to the wiki were almost exclusively made to fulfill assignment requirements, but Nate, the most prolific writer of the group, was an exception;

• Group members reported not regularly reading the writing of other members, unless they were friends or their regions were related in some way; and

• Group members planned and coordinated the project in multiple withs, but almost never as a whole group.

Using the same approach as I took with the Arterramar group, I present mediated discourse analysis of a planning and a writing event in which some of these social practices are enacted. Because the Tine agus Oighear group often did not work together as an entire group, the literacy events that I have selected across the five focal class sessions do not involve all of the group members. The purpose of the analysis is to present representative events that I was able to capture on video in which to understand how these social practices were enacted as related chains of mediated action.

Planning Event: “What Am I Supposed to Be Doing?”

The following event took place the same focal class session as the one depicted in Transcript 1 on September 29th. The Tine agus Oighear group is in the library and split between a group that is sitting at a table near the center of the room with no computers
and a group that is sitting at the row of computers that faces the wall. Beau, Nate, and Brad are seated at the table and are drawing a map of the fictional world. They are drawing the map in order to determine the geographic location of the group members’ regions. Paul and Isabella are seated near one another at computers with their backs to the group at the table. Likewise, James and Kate are seated near one another in the same row of computers with their backs to the three students making the map. At this point in the elective class, Greg has yet to enroll in Hanover High School and has not yet joined the class.

At the table, Beau and Nate were actively drawing the map and making decisions about where the regions were located in relationship to one another. Beau and Nate asked the other group members where they had described the location of their region for their regional profile for Assignments #1 and #2. Greg is looking at Beau and Nate making the map but is not part of the map-making process. Paul was browsing websites unrelated to the Building Worlds Project, and Isabella was looking at homecoming and cheerleading pictures on the local online newspaper. James and Kate were working on the project wiki by adding to their regional profiles for Assignment #2.

The event takes place at the very beginning of the class session. Prior to the social action described in Transcript 3, Nate had asked Paul where his region was located, and Paul said his region was located in the East. This led Nate to locate his own region in the West. Also, Beau asked James where his region was located, and James told Beau that his region was located in the sky. Unsure what to do next for the project, Paul asked Nate, “What am I supposed to do be doing right now?” and Nate replied, “I don’t know, what
ever makes you happy.” Paul’s repeated requests for direction from Nate and the
‘planning and coordinating of the project’ with the map continues to unfold in the event.
Transcript 3. Tine agus Oighear Planning Event, September 29, 8:34 – 8:35 a.m.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Video Time</th>
<th>Mediated Action</th>
<th>Talk</th>
<th>Sites of Engagement</th>
<th>Social Positioning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4:04 (8:34)</td>
<td>Beau, Nate, and Brad are seated at a table. Paul is seated backwards at a computer set against the wall. Paul is looking at the other three who are using paper and pencil to draw a map.</td>
<td><strong>Paul:</strong> Oh, so today we're making the map?</td>
<td>Paul recognizes that Beau and Nate have constructed a site of engagement with a map as mediational means. Paul makes an attempt to join them.</td>
<td>Paul deliberately positions himself as part of the map making process.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 4:05 | Beau turns to face Paul in order to speak with him. Nate turns to face Kate in order to speak with her. Kate turns away from her computer screen to face Nate. | **Beau (to Paul):** We're just trying to get started.  
**Nate (to Kate):** Kate, Kate. Is your little city in like the middle, the north or the south?  
**Paul (to Beau):** So, what am I supposed to be doing? What am I supposed to be doing?  
**Beau (to Paul):** What Myspace are we on?  
**Paul (to Beau):** No, what am I supposed to be doing?  
**Kate (to Nate):** Farthest north.  
**Nate (to Kate):** Farthest north? Ok. | Two overlapping sites of engagement are constructed simultaneously. Beau acknowledges Paul’s question and constructs a site of engagement with Paul. Nate attempts to get Kate’s attention in order to construct a site of engagement with her. | Beau acknowledges Paul’s reflexive positioning and deliberately positions Paul as not having a central role in the map-making process. Paul in turn positions Beau as a group leader who can provide direction for what Paul should be doing with the project. Nate positions Kate as the principal of her region who has a say in where her region is located in proximity with the other regions of the fictional world. Kate takes up this positioning. |
<table>
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<tr>
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| 4:22       | Kate turns back to face her computer. Seated by Kate, James raises his arm to shoot an imaginary energy wave at Nate. Beau and Paul continue to talk. | **James (to Nate):** Kamayamaya wave.  
**Beau (to Paul):** Oh, I was finding out what side you want to be on, like you know what part of the map.  
**Nate (to Beau):** Alright, well...  
**Paul (to Beau):** I want my place to look like a diamond.  
**Beau (to Paul):** A diamond?  
**Paul (to Beau):** A diamond. | James attempts to get Nate’s attention. Nate does respond, but attempt to re-establish site of engagement with Beau. Beau and Paul continue to share a site of engagement discussing the shape of Paul’s region. | James attempts to position Nate as willing to goof around with attack moves from Dragonball Z. Nate does not take up this positioning. Beau positions Paul as a group member who provides input but is not directly part of the map-making process. Paul positions himself as principal of the region he shares with Isabella. |
| 4:31       | Paul turns to face his computer screen. Beau looks at Nate and Greg, who are facing him. | **Beau (to Nate):** A diamond.  
**Nate (to Beau):** A diamond. Like this kind of a diamond or like diamonds are forever diamond? | Beau establishes a new site of engagement with Nate but without Paul. | Beau and Nate deliberately position one another as leaders of the group who confer about the wishes of group members. |
| 4:43 (8:35) | Beau turns to face Paul, who has his back turned to him. Nate turns to face Paul and traces a diamond in the air. Paul turns to face Nate. James turns to face Beau and asks him a question. Beau turns to face James. | **Beau (to Paul):** Like a perfect diamond?  
**Nate (to Paul):** Paul, Paul.  
**James (to Nate & Beau):** You guys got any ideas?  
**Nate (to Paul):** Diamond or like | Beau attempts to construct a site of engagement with Paul & Nate. Nate makes an attempt as well. James makes an attempt to construct a site of engagement with Nate & Beau. These attempts result in two simultaneously unfolding sites of engagement between James & Beau and | Beau and Nate position Paul as the principal of the region he shares with Isabella. Paul takes up this positioning. James positions Beau as a leader of the group who can provide him with ideas for his region. Beau takes up this positioning and positions himself as author of James’ region. |
diamond? another between Nate & Paul.

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**James (to Beau):** For like people, cause I'm not good with names. I can't, you know, you've seen me on [inaudible] how I try to think a name up.

**Paul (to Nate):** Like...

**Beau (to James):** Call them the Elohim.

**Nate (to Paul):** Like is it a diamond that you make out of cardboard or a diamond that Toria wants on her ring?

**James (to Beau):** Elohim? Is that been tooken?

**Beau (to James):** No.

**James (to Beau):** I think that's been tooken, because that sounds like a good name.

**Paul (to Nate):** Like, I can do this, or like this, oh wait, hold on.

| 5:06       | Paul gets up out of his chair and walks over to the table where Beau and Nate are seated. Paul draws on the map. James turns | **Beau (to James):** Elohim stands for the bearers of light or the light bearers; it's the Hebrew name for God. | Paul uses the map as mediational means to draw his region. James begins to type based on the ideas that Beau | Paul deliberately positions himself as part of the map-making process. |
Paul (to Nate): [makes sounds when drawing on map] shared with him for naming characters in his region.

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<tr>
<td>5:15</td>
<td>Beau gets up out of his chair and walks over to where James is seated in front of his computer. Paul continues to draw on the map, while Paul and Greg look at his drawing.</td>
<td>James (to Beau): Ok, come here.</td>
<td>James request Beau’s attention to look at what he is writing, and Beau accepts. Paul and Nate continue to share a site of engagement as Paul uses the map to draw his region and locate the castle on the map.</td>
<td>James positions Beau as an <em>author</em> of this region. Beau accepts this positioning and positions James in return as someone who is need of help with spelling. Paul positions himself as a group member and <em>principal</em> of the ice faction who is staking his claim on the geography of the fictional world. Nate accepts this positioning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>James (to Beau): Spell it.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beau (to James): Want me to tell you how to spell it?</td>
<td>Paul (to Beau): [inaudible] and there's going to be a castle, a castle so big that [inaudible]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beau (to James): E-L-O-H-I-M</td>
<td>Nate (to Paul): Alright</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5:30</td>
<td>Nate gets up from his chair and goes over to a computer. Paul slams the pencil down on the table. Beau continues to look at James’ computer screen as James types.</td>
<td>Paul (to Nate): So what am I supposed to be doing right now?</td>
<td>Nate leaves Paul to construct a new site of engagement with a computer as mediational means. Paul recognizes this departure from the previous site of engagement.</td>
<td>Paul positions Nate as a leader of the group who can tell him what he should be doing with the project.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
**Overlapping Sites of Engagement.** In the presented event, the group members constructed multiple overlapping sites of engagement. The central site of engagement involves Beau and Nate making the map. They situated themselves in the center of the room at a table and as they were making the map and as they needed more information they turned to ask their fellow group members questions. They also provided advice to other group members by providing suggestions. At 4:04, Paul makes a bid to join Beau and Nate including himself in the “we.” However, Nate considers the “we” or the *with* to be Beau and himself. Later in the event at 5:06, Paul becomes part of the map-making process by taking control of the pencil and drawing his diamond-shaped region on the map. This new information, i.e., the location and shape of Paul’s region, leads Nate to go to one of the computers and access the project wiki to check the regional profiles against what he has just learned from Paul. Nate’s departure from the table ends the planning event, but Nate would later return to the table and resume making the map with Beau.

During the unfolding of this site of engagement, both Beau and Nate divert their attention to other overlapping sites of engagement. At 4:05, Nate turns to Kate and asks her where her region is located, while Beau answers Paul’s question. At 4:43, James attempts to construct a site of engagement with Beau and Nate, which leads Beau to work with James on his writing and Nate to continue the conversation with Paul. Across these overlapping sites of engagement Paul asks Nate and Beau what he is supposed to be doing and neither one of them give him a directive.

This overlapping of sites of engagement was typical for the enactment of the social practice ‘planning and coordinating the project’ during the beginning part of the
project. Beau and Nate were considered to be leaders by the other group members, but they never took up this positioning in ways that brought the group together. Throughout the project, Nate described himself as a reluctant leader who was more than willing to help other group members with their writing. When I asked Nate if he was the leader of the group he said in an interview:

I don't like to take credit for stuff like, I don't like to toot my own horn, I guess, but like I kind of would have to be, if you had to choose someone, 'that's the leader,' I would have to pick myself because everyone in the group they try and write, kind of thing, but like if someone needs that push, I'm that push, or if someone needs a tie, I'm the tie-in kind of thing, I tied [Mr. Carver] into my [region], his [region] is clear down in the south and my [region] is clear up in the north, so I mean it's just it feels like I just have to keep it all together, and if I was just gone for a week, I would come back and nothing would be done. (Interview, November 4, 2009)

Rather than directing the whole group, Nate and Beau worked with individuals on particular aspects of the fictional world. John commented that he thought the map-making of the Tine agus Oighear group was a good sign that they were starting to work together and develop some continuity within the fictional world that seemed to have a wide variety of characters and story elements. The map that Beau and Nate started during this class session was never finished and remained a pencil and paper drawing tucked in Beau’s notebook, never making it into digital form to be shared on the project wiki.

In the next event, Beau and James are working together as a with during Assignment #4. I provide an analysis of this event as representative of how the students in the Tine agus Oighear group wrote collaboratively with other group members. In a similar approach as with the Arterramar group, I then look across these two events involving Tine agus Oighear in order to make inductions about how the group members
enacted social practices related to the planning and writing of the project and positioned
themselves and one another.

Writing Event: “What Do You Want Added On Here?”

The following event took place during one of the focal class sessions during
Assignment #4, October 30th (see Appendix B). This class session was held in the same
computer lab as the event depicted in Transcript 2 for the Arterramar group. James, Beau,
and Nate were seated in one of the half rows of three computers. Isabella was sitting in
the row in front of them with a computer between her and Casey of the Morwaeth group.
Greg and Kate were seated in the row behind James, Beau, and Nate. Paul was absent for
this class session. During this session, Greg and Kate were working on each other’s wiki
pages (see Table 6 on page 153). Isabella worked briefly on a shared wiki page and spent
the rest of the class session looking at volleyball pictures and reading articles on the local
online newspaper website. Nate was working on an individually-owned wiki page for the
assignment. Beau and James were working on wiki pages that were related to the other’s
region. Beau was working on James’ wiki page, “Nolahon,” and James was working on a
new individually-owned wiki page, “The Slumber of the Gods” that dealt directly with
Beau’s region.

Prior to this event, James tells Beau, “I’m doing like a back story on the
slumbering gods.” As principal, Beau then begins to outline some possible storylines that
James could write. However, as author James makes some suggestions, which Beau
thought would be good and to which he gave his approval. James suggested that one of
the gods was an outcast like Lucifer. Beau said, “Yeah, that sounds cool. I never really
thought about that.” Leading up to the event that I analyze below, James asks Beau several questions about what he should write that would be appropriate for Beau’s region. James maintained his positioning of Beau as principal and his reflexive positioning as author. In turn at near the end of the event below, Beau positions himself as author of James’ wiki page and positions James as the principal of his region. At one point during the class session Beau explicitly asks James, “What do you want added on here?”

This event is representative of how many of the group members of Tine agus Oighear enacted the social practices related to planning and coordinating the project and posting writing to the wiki. Beau and James shift between several sites of engagement and position each other and themselves as principal and author respectively. At times, they are discussing the storylines of their regions. At other times, they are reading and typing silently at the same time. And at other times, they are teasing each other and mock fighting. Identifying particular literacy events amongst the times when Beau and James are teasing each other is difficult because the moments when they are working on the project are brief, sporadic, and fleeting. The event I present below is a representative example of how the two shifted among multiple sites of engagement.
Transcript 4. Tine agus Oighear Writing Event, October 30, 8:45 – 8:53 a.m.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Video Time</th>
<th>Mediated Action</th>
<th>Talk</th>
<th>Sites of Engagement</th>
<th>Social Positioning</th>
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<tr>
<td>18:23 (8:45)</td>
<td>Beau and James are seated next to one another. They are both looking at their computer screens.</td>
<td><strong>Beau</strong>: Ok, I'm going to add a bunch of crap to yours. My brain's bubbling. Um, isn't this your place, Cruacroi? No. No. Nolahon, that's yours aint it? This?</td>
<td>Beau and James share a site of engagement that shifts from working on the project to discussing unrelated matters.</td>
<td>Beau positions James as a group member whose wiki pages he can post writing to.</td>
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</table>
| 18:49 | Beau turns to face James. James turns away from his own computer screen to look at Beau’s screen. | **Beau**: This one yours?  
**James**: Yeah, the one with really small paragraphs. I don't have much back story, so [inaudible]  
**Beau**: [inaudible] [yawns]  
**James**: I know that's what I was telling him [inaudible]. Nate knows. | Beau is using the wiki pages as mediational means to determine ownership. His intent is to post writing on one of James’ wiki pages. | Beau positions James as the owner of a wiki page. James accepts this positioning. |
| 19:12 | James turns back to face his computer screen. Beau continues to look at his computer screen. | | Beau and James are both reading from their respective computer screens, constructing two overlapping sites of engagement. | Beau and James position themselves as readers of each other’s wiki pages. |
**James**: What?  
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<td>19:41</td>
<td>Beau turns to face James.</td>
<td><strong>Beau:</strong> I tell my teacher I'm dyslexic, she thought that, she was like, Oh, I am so sorry. And I was like, yeah sometimes I say things backwards and write words backwards. She's like, Ooh. I was like, are you going to cry?</td>
<td>Beau shifts the purpose of the site of engagement to tell a story about tricking a teacher into thinking that he is dyslexic.</td>
<td>Beau deliberately positions himself as a prankster who makes light of learning disabilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20:08</td>
<td>Beau turns to face his computer screen. James continues to look at Beau.</td>
<td><strong>James:</strong> Girls think that's cute when I say words right, when I say words wrong. I was like [inaudible] painting, or no was it yinger fainting. She said, no it's nail painting, something like that. Painting nails, nainting pails, something like that. And she was like, Ahh, that’s so cute. And I was like don’t. Don’t every say that again.</td>
<td>James takes up this shift in purpose to tell a story of his own about receiving attention from girls for misspeaking.</td>
<td>James deliberately positions himself as someone who receives attention from girls as a result of misspeaking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20:30</td>
<td>James grabs Beau. Beau turns to look at him and brushes off his hand.</td>
<td>And then I tore your muscles off. <strong>Beau:</strong> [laughs] <strong>James:</strong> Hey, it will work.</td>
<td>James shifts the purpose to simulate a combat move from a video game.</td>
<td>James positions Beau as someone with whom he can physically touch and as someone who will understand his video game references.</td>
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<td>(8:47)</td>
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<td>20:35</td>
<td>James puts his head down and makes a sniffing noise. Beau looks at James momentarily and then back at his computer screen.</td>
<td>Look at your hand, it's like all red [inaudible]. <strong>Beau:</strong> [laughs]</td>
<td>James continues to joke around about the damage he has done to Beau’s hand.</td>
<td>James continues to position Beau as a friend with whom he can mock fight. Beau takes up this positioning.</td>
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<td>Video Time</td>
<td>Mediated Action</td>
<td>Talk</td>
<td>Sites of Engagement</td>
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<tr>
<td>20:46</td>
<td>Beau and James both look at their computer screens.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Beau and James are both reading from their respective computer screens, constructing two overlapping sites of engagement.</td>
<td>Beau and James position themselves as readers of each other’s wiki pages and writers in each other’s region.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21:16 (8:48)</td>
<td>Beau and James both look at their computer screens and type.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Beau and James resume the construction of two overlapping sites of engagement.</td>
<td>Beau and James position themselves as readers of each other’s wiki pages and writers in each other’s region.</td>
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| 21:47      | Beau continues to look at their computer screens. James turns to look at Beau. | **Beau:** I don't even know where to start. Like there is so much open room for this, like you kind of, you like...  
**James:** I knew that someone else was going to write in there, so I left room in there.  
**Beau:** No, what I'm trying to say is, like, you didn't give any like background to it, you're just like OK, you kind of told what the place was, and like to a point who was there, like I can create characters, I can create a geographical description.  
**James:** That was the whole point.  
**Beau:** I can, I mean I can come up with history. | Beau constructs a site of engagement with James through which he shares his frustration of not knowing what writing he should contribute to James’ wiki pages. | Beau positions James as *principal* of the wiki site and himself as an *author*. James takes up this positioning. |
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| 22:16 (8:49) | James reaches over and taps a key on Beau’s keyboard. Beau bends his head backward in his seat. | **James**: That's it. [clicks Beau’s keyboard]  
**Beau**: Nooo.  
**James**: That made it suicide.  
**Beau**: [laughs] suicide | James uses Beau’s keyboard to close the window he was working in. | James positions himself as someone who can close windows on Beau’s computer. Beau accepts this positioning. |
| 22:23 | James and Beau look back at their computer screens and type. |  | Beau and James resume the construction of two overlapping sites of engagement. | Beau and James position themselves as readers of each other’s wiki pages and writers in each other’s region. |
**Beau**: Unleashed. He leashed out at [laughs] | James maintains his site of engagement and constructs another simultaneously with Beau to comment on his word choice of “leashed” on the wiki page he is writing. | James positions himself as someone who needs assistance with word choice. |
**Beau**: It's got to be perfect. I want this to be epic. | James shifts to construct a site of engagement to shove Beau and distract him from his typing. | James positions Beau as a perfectionist. Beau accepts this positioning. |
<p>| 22:54 | James and Beau look back at their computer screens and type. |  | Beau and James resume the construction of two overlapping sites of engagement. | Beau and James position themselves as readers of each other’s wiki pages and writers in each other’s region. |</p>
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| 23:20 (8:50) | James turns to look at Beau. Beau turns to look at James. | **James**: I’m trying think of his name [laughs] Ton-Ton-Tibby [laughs] should I name him that?  
**Beau**: No  
**James**: Why?  
**Beau**: I want it to be epic dude.  
**James**: What about Ton-Ton-Valkor? Malesh Von Carnage.  
**Beau**: Von Carnage?  
**James**: Malesh Von Carnage.  
**Beau**: Maybe like, Val-e or Vale Van Carnage [inaudible] yeah just like that.  
**Beau**: Ven  
**James**: You said Van  
**Beau**: Ven Carnage | James and Beau stop typing to construct a shared site of engagement in which they discuss the details of the page that James is writing. | James positions Beau as the principal of Beau’s region. Beau accepts this positioning and positions himself as author and James as animator of the individually-owned wiki page. |
<p>| 24:34 (8:51) | James and Beau begin swinging their arms at each other. | | James shifts back to mock fighting with Beau. | James continues to position Beau as a friend with whom he can mock fight. Beau takes up this positioning. |</p>
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James: Yeah, kind of try to explain like the geography.
Beau: What do you want it to look like? I was thinking like, I know it's like a floating city in the sky.
James: It's supposed to be like, it's only supposed to be a temple, like a dojo, like with many dojos around it. These are like traditional samurais. Like, they won't have a city. It's kind of like a temple...
Beau: Do they eat or anything?
James: No. No, they don't has to eat.
Beau: So, they're like almost beings. | Beau and James resume the construction of two overlapping sites of engagement. | Beau and James position themselves as readers of each other’s wiki pages and writers in each other’s region. |
<p>| 24:59      | Beau turns to look at James. James turns to look at Beau. | Beau proposes to shift back to the previous site of engagement. James and Beau stop typing to construct a shared site of engagement in which they discuss the details of the page that Beau is writing. | Beau positions James as principal and owner of his wiki page. James accepts this positioning and positions Beau as an author of his wiki page. |</p>
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<td>cont.</td>
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<td>James: No, they don't do nothing. They don't even look. They don't have eyes. They don't have arms or legs or penises. Beau: They're just like blobs that sit there, like peace keepers. James: Yeah, pretty much. Oh! [laughs] That's perfect. Beau: So it's dojos? James: Kind of, like a temple with dojos. Beau: So they got one giant temple? Like the island itself is a temple? James: It's like this, the island is a temple and then, and yeah, the towns around it are like dojos. That's where [inaudible]. Straight? Beau: Yeah.</td>
<td>continued</td>
<td>continued</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26:13 (8:53)</td>
<td>James and Beau look back at their computer screens and type.</td>
<td>Beau and James resume the construction of two overlapping sites of engagement.</td>
<td>Beau and James position themselves as readers of each other’s wiki pages and writers in each other’s region.</td>
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Shifting Sites of Engagement. James and Beau shifted among multiple sites of engagement involving reading and writing, teasing and mock fighting, and planning and coordinating the project. At first glance, it may appear that James and Beau did not accomplish much in terms of posting writing to the project wiki. However, both Beau and James were writing during the event and posted their writing to the project wiki after the event ended. At 8:45 a.m. (18:23 in Transcript 4), Beau identified James’ wiki page “Nolahon” as a place to post writing in order to fulfill Assignment #4. At the end of the class session, Beau clicked save to post his writing to the wiki and freeze the social actions he took within and across the selected event. Figure 13 on page 221 is a screen capture from the revision history of the “Nolahon” wiki page. The highlighted green text is the writing that Beau posted. The text that is not highlighted is writing that James had posted to the wiki page, and the highlighted red text is the writing that Beau deleted. Beau deleted James’ spelling error, for which he made fun of James at 19:27 in Transcript 4. Beau enacted the social practices ‘reading group member’s wiki page’ and ‘posting writing to member’s wiki page’ by creating a new section on James’ wiki page and adding a heading to the existing text to differentiate the two sections.

Similarly, James had told Beau that he was going to write a back story on the slumbering gods at 8:32 a.m. At 8:37 a.m., James created a new wiki page titled “The Slumbering of the Gods,” and by the end of the class session James had posted writing to the new wiki page (see Figure 14 on page 222). At the end of the selected event, James was asking Beau for advice on what to name a particular character. Beau suggested to
name him “Vale Ven Carnage” at 23:20 in Transcript 4. James takes up this suggestion and incorporates the name into the first paragraph.

Figure 13. Screen Shot of Beau’s Writing Post to “Nolahon”

Despite the fact that James and Beau shifted among sites of engagement and were seemingly not enacting social practices related to the project when they were teasing and mock fighting each other, both of them were posting writing to the wiki toward fulfilling the requirements for Assignment #4. For James and Beau, the social practice related to planning and writing the project were linked but not directly related to social practices
associated with their friendship. James and Beau, as well as this particular event, are representative of how the Tine agus Oighear group worked on the project along lines of friendship. Below, I provide more a broader look at the entire group.

Habitus

The group members of Tine agus Oighear did not have any previous experiences writing fantasy fiction nor working on an open-ended collaborative project such as the
Building Worlds Project. However, the group members did bring to bear school-based experiences with writing and friendship-based experiences with the fantasy genre. Paul and Isabella enrolled in the class to earn course credit. They were accustomed to completing assignments in order to earn grades and course credit. Paul and Isabella enacted social practices related to the planning and writing of the project in ways that were linked with school-based social practices of grade and course credit earning. In a follow-up interview, Isabella explained:

I only do it when we have an assignment. Like I'm into it, but not that much into it until I'm assigned to do something…I don't get on [the wiki] until we have to. (Interview, November 5, 2009)

When there was an assignment, Paul and Isabella met the minimum requirements. After an assignment was complete, Paul was often uncertain what he should do next, and when no one gave him a directive he sat next to Isabella who typically looked at pictures, read articles on the local, online newspaper, or played solitaire.

Beau and Nate began planning the project early in the class, drawing from their experiences with video games to plan out the fictional world and shape the narrative arc of the world to a final “end game” of global destruction. However, when the group members did not demonstrate the same amount of enthusiasm they stopped planning the fictional world together. Nate shared his frustration with me in interviews that his group members were not interested in issues of continuity and were content with writing in their individual regions. After Beau and Nate stopped planning the fictional world together, Beau worked minimally on the project, though he repeatedly stated that he wanted his writing to be “epic.” Nate turned his focus to the development of his own wiki pages.
becoming the most prolific writer of the group (see Appendix F on page 289). Nate also worked with the teacher, John, when his group members were not interested in planning and coordinating the project.

Social practices associated with dating and friendship, such as teasing, mock fighting, sitting in close proximity to one another, also shaped how the group members enacted social practices related to the planning and writing of the project. Aggregated in the habitus of the individual students were social practices that shaped how two friends, such as Beau and James, should work together in a classroom on a collaborative project, and how a dating couple, Greg and Kate, should work together to plan and write for the project.

**Interaction Order**

The interaction order of the Tine agus Oighear group was a series of two- to three-person *withs* based on friendship. Across the focal class sessions, the students arranged themselves physically in the classroom as separate *withs*. Due to limitations of my video and audio recording equipment, I often could only capture one *with* per class session with an omni-directional, external microphone. Below, I describe some of these *withs*:

- Paul and Isabella interacted almost exclusively as a *with*. Paul was often the mediator between Isabella and other group members, as Isabella did not often interact directly with other people in the class.
- James and Kate interacted as a *with* prior to the arrival of Greg. James and Kate were friends and often sat next to each other and shared personal stories.
• Greg and Kate interacted as a \textit{with} immediately after Greg’s enrollment in the class and school. The two were dating and often sat in close proximity to one another, speaking softly so that others around them (and my recording equipment) could not hear what they were saying. Occasionally, Brad would join them as a three-person \textit{with}.

• James and Beau interacted as a \textit{with} primarily after Greg’s arrival. The two were friends and often engaged in teasing and mock fighting, typically initiated by James.

• Beau and Nate interacted as a \textit{with} early in the project as they were planning and coordinating the fictional world. However, once enthusiasm for the project waned they began to work independently of one another.

These interaction orders directly shaped how and why the students worked on the project with and separate from one another. Nate described these \textit{withs} as mapping onto cliques in the high school:

Since my group is so diverse, there is like the different, certain people have their own cliques in school. Everyone knows that whether or not they want to admit it, but it is really prevalent in our group. Like, there's [Paul] and [Isabella], they're their clique. And then there's like [Greg] and [Kate], who, they've been dating for years, so they have their clique, and James and [Beau] are kind of part of it. And [Brad] is just, he's just trying to be part of it. He wants to do this, it's just that sometimes he doesn't know how, kind of thing. So, it kind of feels like we have so many cliques in our group that it kind of splits it up, and I just feel like on a regular day basis I could be split apart from everyone and I have to struggle to keep them all together, kind of. Sometimes I feel like I have to babysit more than I have to help write a project, because some of the stuff they get into is just ridiculous.

... I mean I've known [Paul] since we were little and I've known most of them, I grew up with most of them because it is a small school, small town, you know basically everyone. There could be some correlation there that
I'm missing but when you are in this class you are either, you want to be or
you don't want to be...and it's like some people let go of their clique and
they write, because it is something that they really do want to do like deep
down secretly...or they just don't want to fall outside their clique because it
is high school and people care about their cliques, so they do what they
have to do and they withhold everything else because they don't want to be
an outcast I guess. (Interview, November 4, 2009).

The fact that Paul and Isabella came into the class from pre-calculus as a with shaped
how the factions were divided, geographically isolating Paul and Isabella to the ice region.
The saliency of these interaction orders was also manifest in some of the group member’s
decisions for whose region they were going to write for Assignment #4. Beau and James
wrote in each other’s regions. Greg and Kate wrote in each other’s regions. Isabella wrote
in the region she shared with Paul.

Discourse-in-Place

The discourse-in-place of the library and computer lab thwarted the whole-group
planning and coordination of the project. Because Tine agus Oighear had eight members,
the group members had to sit apart from one another if they wanted access to a computer.
As discussed with greater detail in regard to the Arterramar group, the library and
computer labs were arranged for individualized work on a single computer. If the
students wanted to sit as a group, they had to forego the computers in the library and sit at
the tables, which Beau, James, and Brad did during the planning event detailed in
Transcript 3. In the computer lab, it was not possible to sit as a group, although I did ask
the member of Tine agus Oighear to sit on the same side of the room so that I could
capture them on video. The discourse-in-place of the library and computer lab supported
the two- and three-person interaction order, as two or three people were the maximum
that could sit next to one another. Often a *with* was shaped by who sat directly next to each other at the computers.

**Collaborative Writing**

Like the Artermara group, Tine agus Oighear operated as individuals who had ownership of and *principal* interest in their regions, though some of the regions were shared such as the ice region shared by Paul and Isabella and the city Greg and Kate shared. With the exception of Nate, this group was not as concerned as the Artermara group was about continuity conflicts across the storylines. Nate had proposed a narrative arc that would lead to the destruction of the entire fictional world, but the other group members did not take this up in their writing. Most of the group members reported only reading the wiki pages of group members who wrote about regions directly related to their own or of group members with whom they were friends. Again, Nate was the exception in that he attempted to read all of the group member’s wiki pages.

In reference to the descriptive statistics for Tine agus Oighear in Appendix E on page 282, there was almost an equal number of writing posts to individually-owned and shared wiki pages. At first glance, this might suggest that the Tine agus Oighear group wrote collaboratively; however, the content analysis in Appendix F (see pages 289-290) reveals that not all of the group members were posting writing to the shared wiki pages. The wiki pages with the most amount of writers involved were primarily the organizational pages, on which group member posted hyperlinks to their individual and shared regions. The majority of the individually-owned wiki pages had one * animator*, though there were individually-owned wiki pages on which a friend of the owner posted
writing. Most of the group members made common world references, i.e., most often the names of the world or the factions, but not all of the group members made region-specific references indicating that some of the group members were actively reading other group member’s wiki pages and others were not.

**Positional Identities**

The Tine agus Oighear group engaged in deliberate relational and reflexive social positioning, in which group members were considered to be owners and principals of individually-owned wiki pages and friends who shared an interest in fantasy and science fiction. The social interaction between Beau and James is characteristic of how the members of Tine agus Oighear positioned one another during writing events that involved writing in and about each other’s regions. Beau and James positioned each other and themselves as the principal of their own region, characterized by Beau’s statement, “I want it to be epic, dude,” (23:20), and as authors of each other’s region, characterized by Beau’s statement, “What do you want added on here?” (24:59).

Early in the project Beau and Nate seemed to position themselves as the leaders of the group who were actively planning the geography and narrative arc. The other group members seemed to accept this positioning responding to their requests for information and going to them for advice. However, as the project unfolded Beau and Nate positioned themselves as individual writers of the project, despite the fact that many of the other group members continued to position them as leaders, a positioning that they began to resist.
Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented mediated discourse analysis of four events selected from the five focal class sessions for the two focal groups in order to address the second and third research questions.

Collaborative Writing

The second research question asked:

- How do the students’ social practices, mediational means, and social interaction shape how and why they coordinated their collaborative writing?

For the members of both the Arterramar and Tine agus Oighear groups, ‘posting writing to own wiki page’ was the most durable social practice and the most commensurate with the other school-based social practices involving writing that the students described that they enact in their other classes. Both groups also primarily made region-specific references, indicating that they were enacting the social practices of ‘reading group member’s wiki pages.’ For the Arterramar group, region-specific references were made involving all three of the members’ regions. For the Tine agus Oighear group, region-specific references were made primarily in relation to the wiki pages of group member’s friends, or with whom they constituted a with.

The Arterramar group enacted the social practice of ‘planning and coordinating the project’ consistently across the project and even continued to develop and plan in regard to Nico’s region Thesis after he withdrew from school. On the other hand, the Tine agus Oighear group’s enactment of planning and coordinating waxed and waned depending on the particular assignment. The map that was sketched out initially was
never finished, and most group members did not take a direct interest in another group member’s region until Assignment #4. Both groups used the shared wiki pages for organization purposes, but the Arterramar group primarily used the shared pages for aspects that were common to the entire fictional world, while the Tine agus Oighear group primarily used the shared pages to define aspects that were specific to particular regions. The Tine agus Oighear group simply had comparably less common-world references in use other than the names of the world and the regions that the Arterramar group.

The members of the Arterramar group regularly asked each other if they had read each other’s pages. For Erika and Nico the social practice of ‘reading group member’s wiki page’ was often considered to be a prerequisite for enacting the social practice of ‘planning and coordinating the project.’ However, this was less the case for Zina, who was primarily interested in discussing her own region and anything related to it regardless of whether or not someone had read her wiki pages. The Tine agus Oighear group marked a stark contrast to the Arterramar group in regard to reading each other’s wiki pages. Several of the group members admitted in interviews that they did not read the wiki pages of members with whom they were not close friends; the exception was Nate who attempted to read all of the group members’ wiki pages.

Across the two groups, the students differed in terms of what mediational means were primary during the planning and writing of the Building Worlds Project. For Erika, Nate, and Nico, the primary mediational means was the writing posted on the wiki, to which they referred when planning and coordinating in class and which they considered
as they wrote their own and shared wiki pages. For the other group members, talk was the primary mediational means with which they took social action related to the project. For many of the members of the Tine agus Oighear group, without the opportunity to talk with their friends about the project in class, they were less likely to post to the wiki unless they were required to do so by John’s assignments. Zina was a bit of an exception in this regard; though she preferred to talk about her region, she was content to take social action related to the project without the opportunity to talk with her group members.

Most of the students acknowledged that the wiki afforded the availability of other students’ writing to be used as mediational means for their own writing. Although many of the students in the Tine agus Oighear used only certain friends’ wiki pages as mediational means for their own writing, all of the group member’s claimed that they had little opportunity in their other classes to read the writing of their fellow students, unless it was for the purposes of peer editing for grammar and spelling. In this way, ‘reading group member’s wiki page’ was a new social practice for some students, partially explained by the newness of other students’ writing being made available to them for reading and the uniqueness of a teacher encouraging them to read other students’ writing.

For the Arterramar group, Erika was central to the interaction orders that were constructed among the three group members. Typically, Erika, Nico, and Zina interacted as two-person withs with Erika as one of the people. I attribute this in part to Nico’s and Zina’s preference for talking about their own region and Erika’s willingness to have conversations about any one of the regions and the fictional world as a whole for the sake of maintaining continuity and identifying instances were contradictions needed to be
resolved. The collaborative planning and writing of the Tine agus Oighéar group was largely shaped by the multiple *withs* that constituted their interaction order, characteristic of their friendships that existed prior to the start of the class and in many cases persisted well after the class was over.

**Positional Identities**

The third research question that I addressed in this chapter was:

- How are the teacher and his students’ positional identities related to how and why they wrote collaboratively for the Building Worlds Project?

John intentionally positioned the students as capable readers and writers of fantasy and science fiction, though as I explained in Chapter 4, John was responsive to the fact that students had different levels of interest and involvement with the project. Though John emphatically stated at the beginning of the class that enrolling in the class meant meeting his expectations for reading fantasy and science fiction literature and writing for the Building Worlds Project and failure to do so meant being sent back to study hall, John understood that students like Paul, Isabella, and Brad would participate minimally and other students like Erika and Nate would become leaders. John was considerate of the fact that for some students this was their first opportunity to write fantasy fiction, and he did not want to thwart any enthusiasm for reading and writing in the genres that could be kindled by the elective class or by other experiences at a future time. John positioned all of the students as capable of writing fantasy fiction and working with group members to establish a fictional world with continuity. John read all of the students’ writing and
expressed genuine enthusiasm about their ideas, often giving them encouraging feedback
in class about a particular aspect of their region.

John also looked for opportunities to write with the students and position himself
as an *author* in their region. John positioned the students as *principals* of their regions
and encouraged them to organize their writing in such a way that he could perhaps “jump
in” as an *author* in their fictional world. The acceptance of this positioning by some
students led John to create individually-owned wiki pages in the Förvanskaad and Tine
agus Oighear groups, in which John created his own region within their fictional world as
the *principal* and the *author* of those regions. Interestingly, John did not post any writing
to wiki pages owned by the group members, though he did post hyperlinks on some of
the shared wiki pages to associate his pages with the groups’ fictional world.

Along similar lines, the students engaged in deliberate relational and reflexive
social positioning as *animators, authors*, and *principals*, as well as readers, listeners,
planners/coordinators, sharing group members, and friends to accomplish the
collaborative writing. Some of these social positionings were forged into positional
identities across the project. For example, Erica was consistently positioned and
positioned herself as a reader, planner/coordinator, sharing group member, and *principal*
of the fictional world. These social positionings led Erica to be a central member of the
Arterraramar group who was primarily concerned with in-world continuity. Alternatively,
Isabella consistently positioned herself and was positioned by others as an *author* of her
region, but not a *principal*, and as a friend to Paul, but not to other students in the class.
The social positionings, which Isabella did and did not take up, shaped how she
participated in the collaborative planning and writing of the project. When someone wanted to know something about Isabella’s region, they asked Paul because he was positioned and positioned himself as *principal* of the particular region.

In the next and final chapter, I discuss some of the implications of the findings presented in this chapter and Chapter 4. I do so not only to locate the study in the field, but also to consider how this study helps teachers, researchers, and others invested in writing instruction and development consider how they can support students who write collaboratively using digital tools.
CHAPTER 6
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

At the onset of the full study of John’s elective English class, I was prepared to investigate how John leveraged students’ out-of-school interests and literacy practices in ways that were grounded in problem-based collaborative writing with digital tools. This investigation was informed by a pilot study that gave John and I much about which to be excited. The students in the pilot study described in retrospect their experiences with collaborative world building as involving: maintaining storyline continuity, sharing and overseeing the use of story elements, and negotiating authorship based on social roles (or what I later came to understand as social positionings). I was then, and still am now, interested in how an elective English class tailored to students’ interests in fantasy and science fiction can provide opportunities for students to read and write in familiar genres and see themselves and each other as confident readers, prolific writers, and builders of fictional worlds. I was then, and still am now, interested in how students take up digital tools such as a wiki to coordinate their writing and broker collaborative writing opportunities. I was then, and still am now, interested in how a group of adolescents socially position themselves and each other as they address the design problem of storyline continuity within and across their writing; in particular my interests were and are focused on how social positioning impacts authorship.
During the course of conducting the full study, analyzing and reanalyzing the data, and meeting with John for official and unofficial purposes, I have arrived at a new understanding of how discursive and non-discursive social practices are related, a new conceptualization of collaborative writing, and a new understanding of how authorship is negotiated within social interaction. However, I also have developed new research questions based on what I did not or could not learn from the full study. In this final chapter, I explain how my findings have led to these new understandings and conceptualizations, how these new understandings and conceptualizations are related to the work of others in the field of literacy studies and writing research, and what questions may inform future research agendas.

**Durability of a Social Practice**

In this study, I argued that some of the students’ social practices related to the project were more durable than others. I defined durability as the extent to which a social practice had been aggregated in individual habitus and/or group homologous habitus. I relied on students’ generalizations about past experiences with writing in and out of school, nexus analysis based in part on the frequency of related chains of *frozen* actions that constituted social practices that are linked with other social practices, and mediated discourse analysis of enacted social practices within literacy events related to the planning and writing of the project. Based on these analyses, I argued that ‘posting writing to own wiki page’ was the most durable social practice and was linked to other social practices, such as ‘planning and coordinating the project,’ ‘reading group
member’s wiki pages,’ and ‘making region-specific references’ and ‘making common world references.’

I am confident of my understanding of the durability of the social practice of ‘posting writing to own wiki page’ within the nexus of practice that constituted the Building Worlds Project. However, I am less confident of my understanding of how this social practice is linked and integrated with the school-sanctioned literacy practices that students described in interviews. Almost without exception, the students described past experiences with writing in school that involved individual authorship of writing in response to a prompt given by the teacher, who served as the primary, and often sole, reader of the writing. The students explained that they typically did not have the opportunity to read each other’s writing, with the exception of peer editing workshops. Therefore, my argument of the durability of the social practice of ‘posting writing to own wiki page’ is based on a sense of ownership of one’s own writing aggregated in the habitus partially through these school-sanctioned literacy practices.

The problem with this argument is that I was not present for the enactment of social practices related to writing in the students other classes. My study was focused on the Building Worlds Project, and I primarily came to know the students and their writing through the social actions taken during the class sessions devoted in part or in whole to the project and through the frozen actions taken on the wiki. I relied on the participants’ generalizations of past experiences to argue that this durability had a history reaching back into their prior experiences with writing in and out of school. Along these lines, I also argued that Erika’s experiences with writing fan fiction online and fantasy fiction
with friends shaped the social practices she enacted during the Building Worlds Project. Similarly, I relied on Erika’s generalizations of these experiences and did not investigate her online fan fiction or the series of notebooks she kept with her friends for writing fantasy fiction.

By acknowledging these limitations, I understand that an argument about the durability of a social practice would be stronger if I had also investigated these past experiences with writing. This acknowledgement leads me to consider what I could learn about students’ social practices related to collaborative writing if I investigated their writing across time and across in- and out-of-school experiences. I wonder what more I would learn about Erika’s writing of the Building Worlds Project if I had followed Erika and her friends as they wrote fantasy fiction together. Likewise, I wonder what more I would learn about the students’ resistance to posting on each other’s wiki pages if I had followed them in their other classes where they were enacting social practices related to writing.

I also wonder what happens to the social practices related to writing beyond the Building Worlds Project. I wonder if students’ experiences with writing for the project impacted how they will write in the future, both in and outside of school. Anecdotally, I have learned that Roger is now in college and has found a fellow undergraduate who shares his interest in fantasy fiction and world building. The two are currently working on building a fantasy world that they are writing collaboratively on a wiki. However, I wonder about the other students and how the elective English class and the project have impacted how they enact social practices related to writing in their other school classes.
and in their out-of-school experiences. I wonder if any of them are more likely to seek out peers for help on their own writing or if they are more likely to share their writing with others.

A future research agenda geared to these interests would consider how a social practice was linked and enacted across multiple nexus of practice over time. For example, how does a student like Erika enact social practices related to collaborative writing across the nexus of practice that constitute: online fan fiction writing, writing fantasy fiction with friends, the Building Worlds Project, and writing for English class and other content areas. I wonder if there are social practices that transcend these nexus and are linked in ways that make them more or less likely to be aggregated in individual and/or homologous habitus. To frame this question in mediated discourse theory: what is the *ontogenesis* of a social practice (Scollon, 2001b) and to what extent is its aggregation in habitus and related durability supported by multiple nexus of practice over time? To frame the question more plainly: how do students come to write in particular ways and how do particular in- and out-of-school experiences and pedagogies support that writing over time and across contexts and domains?

**Resistance to New Literacies**

In this study, I also argued that some of the social practices enacted during the project were characteristic of what the field of literacy studies defines as *new literacies* (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). In particular, I argued that the social practice of ‘posting writing to group member’s wiki page’ was indicative of a paradigmatic case of *new literacies* because it met both criteria used to define *new literacies*. On one hand, the
social practices involved a new digital tool, i.e., wiki, that affords registered users to asynchronously post writing to any page on the wiki. On the other hand, the social practices involved what Lankshear and Knobel (2006) define as a new mindset, or ethos, that privileges collective and distributed authority and expertise, such as that found on some pages of Wikipedia, wherein multiple people have posted writing and edited each other’s writing on a particular topic. John asked his students to post writing to each other’s wiki pages for Assignment #4 with the hope that the description and narrative that resulted would be more developed and elaborate than if only one student had posted writing on a particular page. John wanted his students to consider how the writing related to the project did not have to be the product of an individual, but rather could also be the outcome of a collaborative process, indicative of how multiple writers, movie directors, and video game designers work collaboratively on a fantasy or science fiction franchise.

As I demonstrated in Chapter 4, John’s students resisted the social practice of ‘posting writing to group member’s wiki pages.’ Those who did enact this social practice in fulfillment of Assignment #4 did so tactically by marking their writing as different from the owner of the wiki page in some way. I am confident in arguing that most of the students objected to the assignment out of a sense of ownership over their own wiki pages and a respect for the ownership of their group members’ wiki pages. I suspect, but am not certain, that the Morwaleth group enacted this social practice more than the other groups, because, as a fragmented group, they did not have the same sense of respect for the ownership of each other’s wiki pages as the other groups did. Unfortunately, I was
not able to determine why they enacted the social practices that they did for Assignment #4. These observations lead me to wonder if the students were and were not enacting the social practice of ‘posting writing to group member’s wiki pages’ because of social relationships with particular group members or if they were objecting to the mindset associated with distributed authorship and new literacies. In other words, did some of the students object to the assignment because of relationships with their group members, and/or did the students object to the idea of “messing with someone else’s stuff” irrespective of whose stuff it was? The answer to the former question may indicate the significance of social relationships when attempting to broker collaborative writing opportunities; the answer to the latter question may indicate the significance of how the students have come to understand what writing is, what it does, and how it is done. The students may have social practices related to individual authorship aggregated in their habitus (and the homologous habitus of the class) based on a history of writing as an individual, as well as acknowledgement and a grade for that individual writing.

A future research agenda based on these questions might consider what is the mindset/ethos (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006) or what are the literacy practices (Street, 2000) that are explicitly taught, supported, acknowledged, and validated within school and to what extent are they commensurate or incommensurate with social practices related to collaborative writing, such as ‘posting writing to group member’s wiki page?’ A research agenda based on this question would not operationalize a priori categories such as old, peripheral, new, and paradigmatic (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006), but rather seek to understand how social practices are linked in particular ways to support certain
types of writing and authorship and thwart other types of writing and authorship. The goal would be not to privilege collaborative writing over individual forms of writing, as I argue the *new literacies* perspective does, but rather to understand what social practices related to writing are enacted when, under what circumstances, with whom, for what purposes, and with what mediational means, including but not limited to digital tools.

**Sustainability of a Nexus of Practice**

In this study, I demonstrated how John attempted to construct with his students (and me as a researcher) a nexus of practice based on the experiences of the students in his previous year’s elective English class. John’s primary concern during the first few weeks of the 2009-2010 school year was how he was going to support the development of a single fictional world with 22 students. John was interested in replicating the nexus of practice that he and 12 students constructed during the Building Worlds Project of the 2008-2009 school year, but he was concerned that the same social practices, such as ‘reading group member’s wiki page’ may not be sustainable with such a large number of students posting writing to the project wiki.

I was only present for the last four weeks of the 2008-2009 edition of the elective English class and did not document how John and his students constructed the nexus of practice that semester. I only know of that year’s class through the retrospective accounts of John and 9 of the 12 students. I did not conduct a content analysis of the *frozen* actions on the wiki for that year either. Therefore, I cannot claim to know how the two classes (the pilot study and the full study) compared as nexus of practice. I cannot claim to know how they were similar or different or how they took shape in different ways because of
the students involved and the social practices that they brought to bear on the project. However, after coming to an understanding of how the four world-building groups in the 2009-2010 class enacted different social practices that were linked in different ways, I suspect that the 12 students of the 2008-2009 elective class went about developing their fictional world within a nexus of practice that was different that any of the four world-building groups in the 2009-2010, though I cannot say what exactly those differences are.

These considerations leave me wondering how a nexus of practice is constructed in any given classroom from year to year. I suspect that in some cases the nexus of practice is fairly rigid and takes shape in very limited ways irrespective of the social practices that students bring to bear on the classroom. I also suspect that in other cases the nexus of practice takes shape differently depending on who the students are and what literacy practices they bring to bear. As a former English teacher and current teacher educator, I advocate for the latter; that is, I argue that any given classroom should be responsive to whom the students are and what social practices they bring to bear on that classroom. A future research agenda would consider how a nexus of practice in a classroom is constructed from year to year, or even across different sections of the same class in a given school year. Such a study would be supportive of the research outlined by the New Literacy Studies that seeks to understand how students’ literacy practices can be validated and leveraged within classrooms.

**Conceptualizing Collaborative Writing**

Collaborative writing has been defined in different ways and for different purposes across theoretical perspectives. In this study, I conceptualized collaborative
writing within a sociocultural perspective, which considers all writing to be collaborative in that writing never involves a single individual in a vacuum, but rather involves “an array of sociohistorically provided resources” (Prior, 2006, p. 58). My concern in this study was to understand how the students accomplished collaborative writing in regard to their social practices and social interaction. I did not consider how the collaborative writing of the Building Worlds Project supported or thwarted the learning or writing development of any one student in particular.

Previous studies drawing from cognitive and socio-cognitive perspectives have considered how collaborative writing supports individual, cognitive development in writing (Dauite & Dalton, 1988; 1993). The cognitive perspective considered how social interaction served as instructional support within collective problem solving (DiPardo & Freedman, 1988; Flower & Hayes, 1981), and the socio-cognitive perspective reconsidered how the social and cultural context informs how participants develop cognitive abilities (Flower, 1994). In this study, I took up a sociocultural perspective to consider how social context is not limited to a set of challenges that writers negotiate when writing, nor something that is taken in and filtered through cognitive processes (Brandt, 1992), but rather something that writers themselves help to create through their writing as mediated social action (Nystrand, Greene, & Wiemelt, 1993; Nystrand, 2006; Prior, 2006). In other words, I was concerned not only with how John’s students engaged and navigated the nexus of practice as context to accomplish their writing but also how the participants constructed the nexus through the enactment of social practices related to collaborative writing. My emphasis was on the social aspects of writing by considering
how social practices were constituted of related chains of mediated action and how social practices were linked within a nexus of practice. However, that is not to say that in the study no cognitive processes were involved in the composing process and no writing development took place. I simply did not explicitly take up questions about these issues in the study, though I discuss how the study is related to these issues below.

Therefore, a possible research agenda would consider what students were learning during the collaborative writing and how collaborative writing supported their individual writing development. For example, in this study I considered how continuity conflicts presented opportunities for students to enact social practices associated with collaborative writing, such as ‘planning and coordinating the project’ and ‘reading group member’s wiki page.’ A future study concerned with the narrative writing development of individual students and their understanding of the genres related to fantasy and science fiction could consider how these continuity conflicts presented an opportunity akin to what Daiute and Dalton (1988) refer to as productive cognitive conflict that can potentially present opportunities for students to develop their writing.

**Positional Identities of Authorship**

In this study, I also considered how students engaged in relational and reflexive social positioning during the focal class sessions. I considered how these positionings forged identities over the course of the project in relationship to different forms of authorship, i.e., *principal, animator, author*. For example, I considered how these forms of authorship were at times consolidated in the relational and/or reflexive positioning of some students, e.g., Erika in Transcript 2, and were at other times distributed across the
positioning of individuals, e.g., James and Beau in Transcript 4. Within the two focal groups, I have a good sense of how these and other positional identities were forged during the project. What I do not have a clear understanding of is how these positional identities are proposed, imposed, resisted, and taken up in the students writing experiences outside of the elective English class. I speculate these social positionings are not fixed and are subject to change within a different nexus of practice and within social interaction with different people. However, a future research agenda would consider how positional identities of authorship are forged and re-forged across nexus of practice and within sites of engagement involving different social relationships.

**Relatedness to Writing Research**

Next, I consider how the social practice view of writing that I used in this study is related to other research on writing informed by different perspectives. As I explained in my problem statement in Chapter 1, this social practice view is concerned with writing not as a technical skill that can be easily transferred and applied across contexts but rather as particular ways of using writing to take social action, ways that may be commensurate or incommensurate across contexts and domains. The purposes of taking up this social practice view is to understand how the writing we ask students to do in classrooms is shaped and informed by social interaction and social practices aggregated into their habitus and to understand how social practices involving writing, such as those associated with *new literacies*, are constructed, taken up, and/or resisted by students within and across contexts and domains. This view of writing is related to three areas of writing research identified in recent literature reviews (Dyson & Freedman, 2003; Juzwik, et al.,
how literacy functions within and across contexts, processes of composing, and writing development. In the next three sections, I explain how this study is related to these three areas of writing research and how the questions identified above are related to these areas.

Literacy Within and Across Contexts

Writing serves different functions and takes on different forms within and across different contexts (Heath, 1983; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Scollon & Scollon, 1981). School is but one of these contexts, and teachers of writing can gain insight into how students are using writing in other aspects of their lives by providing opportunities in school for students to demonstrate and share their out-of-school literacy practices. One of the purposes of doing so is to understand how bridges can be built across contexts and how teachers can help students take up new forms and functions of writing in relationship to the ones with which they are already familiar (Camitta, 1993; Dyson, 1993a; 1993b; 1997; 1999; Finders, 1997). This was the explicit purpose of John’s elective English class. John provided opportunities for students to demonstrate and share their out-of-school social and literacy practices, e.g., Zina and Erika’s experiences with fantasy fiction writing, Nico’s experiences with table-top role playing games, Clark’s experiences with song writing, Beau and James’ experience with fantasy video games.

However, this study demonstrated that the students’ writing was not only shaped by social practices associated with out-of-school domains but also social practices related to writing that were associated with the contexts of their other high school classes. John attempted to have his students take up social practices related to collaborative writing that
were characteristic of *new literacies*. John’s students resisted these social practices in ways that suggested that they were bringing to bear social practices aggregated in their habitus based on experiences of individual writing for a narrow audience in their other high school classes. This is significant to the field of writing research in that there is a need to understand not only how writing functions and takes on different forms across in- and out-of-school contexts but also how social practices related to writing differ among classroom contexts of the same or different content areas (O’Brien, et al., 1995; Moje, 2002; Moje, et al., 2004). Therefore, conceptualizing these different contexts as distinct nexus of practice provides a way to understand how social practices related to writing are linked in commensurate and incommensurate ways across multiple nexus of practice as well as how a particular nexus of practice is or is not sustained across contexts. Helping students and teachers understand how writing is and is not related across classroom contexts would benefit pedagogies designed to demystify content-specific literacy practices and provide a way to consider how literacy practices among classes within the same content area are related.

**Processes of Composing**

Writing is also accomplished in different ways and for different purposes within and across different contexts. Writing researchers have sought to understand how writing is accomplished by conceptualizing the writer within the context of their writing and the act of writing as a goal-directed, problem-solving process. Flower (1994) expanded on earlier cognitive conceptualizations of the writing process (Flower & Hayes, 1981) to account for both cognitive and social interactive processes at work during writing that
help explain how writers are influenced by their social and cultural contexts and the role of the reader in “contributing to the meaning of writer’s texts” (Sperling & Freedman, 2001). Based on Flower’s (1994) research of a diverse group of students’ collaborative planning and writing over a period of five years, she developed a theoretical framework for conceptualizing, and a vocabulary for describing, how writers construct meaning through an active process of negotiation involving social expectations of the social and cultural context, discourse conventions at work within the context, and the writer’s own goals and knowledge.

Though Flower’s (1994) conceptualization of the processes of collaborative planning and meaning negotiation is more structured than the processes and social interaction of John’s students, the socio-cognitive process model provides a framework for understanding how students can potentially scaffold (Applebee, 1984; Vygotsky, 1978) each other’s writing in a process of shared problem solving (Freedman, 1987) in which a partner (supporter) assists the writer (planner) in his or her constructive processes. To use John’s students as an example to illustrate Flower’s (1994) model, the members of the world-building groups were engaged in a process of constructing negotiated meaning that involved taking into consideration:

- both the official social expectations of the writing established by John, e.g., create a fantasy world with other students, maintain storyline continuity, and the range of unofficial social expectations held individually and collectively among the students, e.g., friendships, social positioning;
• discourse conventions established by popular culture and literary fantasy genres, e.g., writing stories that are “epic” (not cliché) and include conventions of fantasy fiction; and
• the students’ own goals and motivations for working on the Building Worlds Project and writing with and for each other, e.g., writing fantasy fiction, spending time with friends, escaping study hall, earning a course grade.

However, Flower’s (1994) conceptualization of collaborative planning assumes that the writer is ultimately the animator, author, and principal (Goffman, 1981) of their writing, though Flower acknowledges the potential for dialogic voices (Bakhtin, 1981) that writers may have to negotiate within the construction of meaning. In this study, I demonstrated how the students in John’s classroom distributed these positionings among group members and at other times consolidated these positionings within an individual writer. In Chapter 5, I demonstrated how Erika took action as animator and author of her writing, but positioned Zina as the principal of what she wrote. Zina resisted this positioning telling Erika to “Just do what you see is best” (Transcript 2), thus positioning Erika as animator, author, and principal of her writing. I also demonstrated how James and Beau positioned each other as principal of their respective regions and negotiated the positioning of author by requesting explicit word choices and resolutions of continuity issues, even though they acted as the animators of writing posted on each other’s wiki pages.

Therefore, this study demonstrates that the role of the ‘supporter’ in the composing process may be more complex than someone who assists in the constructive
processes of the writer. Flower’s (1994) ‘supporter’ potentially may assume the positioning of author to a greater or lesser extent by assisting with word selection and other decisions in the planning and inscription processes. Additionally, the teacher potentially may assume the positioning of principal in cases wherein the students are not particularly invested in their writing and are completing the writing task for the purpose of earning a grade. Positional considerations of authorship drawing on Goffman’s (1981) framework can provide more nuanced understandings of the composing process that extend beyond the static roles of ‘supporter’ and ‘planner’ (Flower, 1994).

**Writing Development**

Writing takes on different forms and serves different functions across contexts. Research on writing development has included considerations of how writers develop and expand their repertoire of genre-specific writing practices and “their understanding of how text forms and functions position authors in particular stances toward the experienced world and toward anticipated readers (Bakhtin, 1986)” (Dyson & Freedman, 2003, p. 981). Genre is considered to not only include the form and function of a text but also a kind of social participation (Bakhtin, 1986) in a genre system (Bazerman, 2004b) or Discourse (Gee, 1996) within which a text is produced through the enactment of particular social and literacy practices (Scollon, 2001b; Street, 1984) and identities (Gee, 1996; Moje & Luke, 2009). For example, researchers have identified essayist prose (Lillis, 2001; Scollon & Scollon, 1981) as a writing genre associated with school that involves

a particular kind of unity, where the emphasis is on one main point or theme; a particular kind of relationship between writer, text, and reader,
where the text is expected to stand alone; a particular kind of language, that is, the standard version of a language. (Lillis, 2001, p. 79)

Researchers have contrasted essayist prose with genres associated with popular and youth culture (e.g., Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999; Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1994; Dyson, 1997; 1999) as well as genres associated with family and community communicative experiences (e.g., Flower, Long, & Higgins, 2000; Lee, 1993) in order to consider how students can develop an awareness and dexterity (Carter, 2008) for writing for particular purposes within and across different genres, such as genres associated with academic literacies (Lea & Street, 1998).

In John’s elective class, he asked his students to consider the choices fantasy and science fiction writers, movie directors, and video game designers make when designing the fictional worlds in which they compose their stories. John’s students read fantasy and science fiction, watched fantasy movies, and discussed fantasy video games (see Appendix A), and they also wrote fantasy fiction and designed fantasy video games. John asked his students to reflect in writing and in class discussions on how stories are told (and how they were telling stories) in different ways within and across these media. In terms of writing development based on becoming more familiar with genre-specific writing practices, John was asking his students to consider the genre set, or the “collection of types of texts someone in a particular role is likely to produce” (Bazerman, 2004b, p. 318), of a writer or video game designer by positioning his students as writers of fantasy fiction and designers of fantasy video games. Additionally, John was also asking his students to consider the genre system, or the multiple genre sets of “people working together in an organized way, plus the patterned relations in the production, flow,
and use of these [texts]” (Bazerman, 2004b, p. 318), of fantasy and science fiction franchises such as *The Lord of the Rings* and *Star Wars* that involve writers, movie makers, and video game designers who engage in transmedia storytelling (Jenkins, 2006). Through the students’ world building involving collaborative planning and writing, cartography, and video game design, they were in effect constructing a genre system in which the texts they used and produced served as meditational means for particular social actions. John’s elective class serves as an example of how students can develop their writing by working within particular genre sets and systems in order to understand how particular people in particular roles write in particular ways for particular purposes.

For Bazerman (2004b), genre systems are defined as part of activity systems (Engeström, 1987) in order to consider “what people are doing and how texts help people do it” (p. 319). In regard to the approach used in this study, genre systems can be considered as part of a nexus of practice in which the production, flow, and use of texts can be understood as outcomes and means of mediated actions that constitute social practices. In this way, writing development can be understood as the intentional enactment of social practices related to writing that are linked in commensurate ways within a nexus of practice that constitutes a particular endeavor, such as working in a particular work place or learning in a particular institution. A future research agenda based on this conceptualization of writing development would investigate students’ understanding of the demands of a particular genre system through the establishment of a nexus of practice in which students learn to enact particular social practices related to writing for particular purposes.
Conclusion

I conclude this study with more questions than answers in regard to the social practices and processes related to collaborative writing. I hope to continue to work toward refining my analytical approaches of studying collaborative forms of writing and, perhaps more importantly, to bring my work in closer dialogue with the work of others who have conceptualized writing in similar and different ways. My goal is to continue to seek opportunities to study collaborative writing mediated by digital tools toward these ends.
REFERENCES


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Steinkuehler, C. (2007). Massively multiplayer online gaming as a constellation of literacy practices. *eLearning, 4*(3) 297-318


## APPENDIX A:
### FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION TEXTS

The following is a list of fantasy and science fiction literature that the students collectively read in John’s semester-long, elective English class during the 2009-2010 school year.

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<th>Work</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>“The First Report of the Shipwrecked Foreigner to the Kadanh of Derb”</td>
<td>Short Story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J.R.R. Tolkien</td>
<td>Silmarillion</td>
<td>Excerpts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J.R.R. Tolkien</td>
<td>The Hobbit</td>
<td>Excerpts</td>
</tr>
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<td>Peter Jackson</td>
<td>The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King</td>
<td>Movie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ursula K. LeGuin</td>
<td>A Wizard of Earthsea</td>
<td>Novel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orson Scott Card</td>
<td>Ender’s Game</td>
<td>Novel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bethesda Softworks</td>
<td>Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind</td>
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RESEARCH SCHEMATIC

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<td>Swords and Spaceships Class</td>
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<td>Meetings with</td>
<td>[Observations, Interviews &amp; Content Analysis]</td>
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<td>[Mediated Discourse Analysis &amp; Member Check Interviews]</td>
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<td>Interviews]</td>
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<td>May</td>
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Building Worlds Project Timescales

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<th>Assign. #2 Sept. 24-30</th>
<th>Oct. 1-4</th>
<th>Assign. #3 Oct. 5-14</th>
<th>Oct. 15-24</th>
<th>Assign. #4 Oct. 26-Nov. 3</th>
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<td>(Oct. 27)</td>
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Note: Parentheses represent class sessions held with access to computers.
APPENDIX C:

STUDENT PROFILE

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

• What motivated you to sign up for the Swords and Spaceships class?
• Why did you decide to stay after the first week?
• What other students in the class did you know before having this class with them?
• Who are some of the people in the class with whom you will work on the Building Worlds Project?
• Have you done similar writing or reading and writing before this class?
• What are some of your interests? (reading, writing, viewing, gaming, activities, sports…)
• What types of writing and reading have you done in other English classes?
• What are you looking forward to the most in this class?
• What are you hesitant about or not looking forward to in this class?
APPENDIX D:

STUDENT FOLLOW-UP

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

• Describe your involvement with the Building Worlds project up until now. To what extent has the project become a part of your daily routine? What do you find yourself doing with the project from day to day?

• Does working on the Building Worlds project still feel like a new way of writing or does it feel like a very familiar way of writing? How so?

• How comfortable are you with working on the wiki in any of the following tasks? How new are/were these tasks to you?
  o Creating a new page
  o Posting/editing writing
  o Posting images/pictures
  o Creating links between pages
  o Reading/posting to the discussions
  o Using the map or terrain software

• What motivates or dissuades you from working on the project on a daily basis?

• Where and with whom do you typically work on the project?

• How is working on the project related to other activities (e.g., talking with friends, writing, computer use, school work, gaming, reading and viewing fantasy texts)?

• What has been your role in your group? How is your group changed by your presence or absence in the building of your world?

• What does this project mean to you? (e.g., fun, exciting, routine, an obligation, chore, boring) Has the meaning of the project changed for you over the first nine weeks?

• How is working on this project similar to or different than other writing you have done (in or out of school)? How does your interaction with your peers and teacher compare to other similar or different situations?
APPENDIX E:

WIKI-RELATED ACTION TYPES WITHIN ASSIGNMENT TIMESCALE

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Note. This table includes the wiki use of the 22 students and the teacher.
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Note. This table includes the wiki use of the 3 members of the Arterramar group. One member, Nico, withdrew from school on October 12.
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| Member’s Page       | -         | 1         | -         | 1         | -         | 3          | 2          | 3          | -         | -         | -          |
| Shared Page         | 13        | 16        | 3         | 4         | -         | 7          | 6          | 2          | -         | -         | -          |
| Non-Member’s Page   | -         | 1         | -         | 2         | -         | 24         | 1          | -          | 2         | -         | -          |
| **TOTALS**          | 13        | 18        | 3         | 12        | -         | 34         | 10         | 7          | 2         | -         | -          |

Note. This table includes the wiki use of the 3 members of the Förvanskaad group.
## Descriptive Statistics for Morwaleth

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| **Discussion Posts to Page Type** |           |            |             |             |          |           |            |                |          |            |            |
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| Member’s Page  | -         | -          | 2           | 18          | 7        | 54        | 5          | 1               | -        | -          | -          |
| Shared Page    | 13        | 13         | 3           | 7           | 2        | -         | 12         | 9               | -        | -          | -          |
| Non-Member’s Page | 1     | 1          | -           | -           | -        | 1         | 6          | 1               | 1        | -          | -          |
| **TOTALS**     | 13        | 16         | 5           | 33          | 11       | 98        | 27         | 11              | 1        | -          | -          |

Note. This table includes the wiki use of the 5 members of the Morwaleth group.
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#### Writing Posted to Page Type

#### Discussion Posts to Page Type

Note. This table includes the wiki use of the 8 members of the Tine agus Oighear group. One member, Greg, enrolled in the class on October 9.
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### APPENDIX H:

**POSTING WRITING & INTERTEXTUAL REFERENCES**

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APPENDIX I: ARTERRAMAR WIKI POSTS
APPENDIX J: TINE AGUS OIGHEAR WIKI POSTS

Class Session 2nd Period

8:28 - 9:09 am