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UMI
E-PALS:
EXAMINING A CROSS-CULTURAL
WRITING/LITERATURE PROJECT

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

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ABSTRACT

The growing interest in computer use at home and in the workplace has led to the incorporation of computer skills into the school curricula. While the benefits of including computers in the curricula, especially in the English classroom, are highly touted by many, few rigorous studies have been conducted to determine holistically the nature of networked English classrooms. In this study, all elements of a cross-cultural e-mail project involving the study of literature were examined to determine to what degree which elements affected student writing. Elements examined in this e-mail project included the opportunity to write for an authentic, non-native English speaking audience for authentic purposes, the opportunity for personal, collaborative response to the literature, the opportunity for peer-editing to occur in both large and small groups, and the opportunity to communicate via e-mail. Each element was examined to determine the extent to which it affected the outcome of student writing.

The data for this study included surveys, e-mail documents, interviews, observations and group peer-response sessions. Two high school literature classes, one in the United States and one in Moscow, Russia, read short stories by O'Henry and Anton Chekhov. The literature was read according to theme, allowing for four exchanges of letters between students. All literature was read in English, as the Russian students were attempting to practice their English skills. Each student was paired with a foreign peer, and throughout the course of a semester, the pairs engaged in e-mail conversations about
the literature, while also incorporating their own personal experience. Attention was paid not only to the content of the e-mail exchanges, but also the form. By using the local school system's rubric for holistic scoring, analysis of each of the e-mail exchanges was done to determine to what extent six focus group students accommodated their writing to suit their Russian peers as compared to comparative letters written to in-class, English-speaking peers.

At the end of the e-mail project, all students involved demonstrated an overall improvement in their writing based upon analysis using their school system's holistic scoring rubric. Careful document analysis concluded that the letters written by the six focus group students to their Russian peers paid stricter adherence to formal characteristics of language than comparative letters written to their in-class peers. Having a distant, authentic audience and the opportunity for such efficient exchanges via e-mail were cited by students as the key motivational factors for improving their writing. Students also appreciated the opportunity to have their letters peer-edited before they were sent to their Russian peer. Finally, students indicated that having the literature as a catalyst for discussion helped to guide their writing, providing them with a concrete topic from which to explore their responses. As a result of this project, the local students indicated that their Russian partners no longer appeared distant.

The results of this study indicate that using e-mail to collaborate with a distant audience can play an important part in increasing the motivation and skill levels of students in response-based writing and literature classrooms. However, it is important to note that factors such as peer-editing and collaboration during the writing/reading process can also be key factors in increasing the skill level of student writers.
In memory of my father, John E. Guroska
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

While I was certainly alone for the majority of the writing of this dissertation, I was never lonely. I was fortunate, as I have been throughout my entire life, to be surrounded by positive and supportive people throughout the course of this tremendous undertaking. I first wish to thank my advisors at Ohio State. I began my graduate studies under the advisement of Dr. Maia Pank Mertz, and throughout those studies, she has stimulated my intellect to the degree that I always wanted to keep pushing forward. Dr. Mertz, my “Mom-Away-From-Mom” has, for the past ten years, challenged me in her courses and consistently told me that I was a “smart, capable woman.” Perhaps that mantra has finally sunk in. Dr. Anna O. Soter is not only one of the most intelligent women I have ever known, but is also one of the most caring and sensitive about me as a whole person. Her scholarship led me down intriguing intellectual paths, and her poetry led me down intriguing spiritual paths. Finally, Suzanne K. Damarin introduced me to two things: my love of integrating technology into the classroom, and feminist science fiction. Who knew?

I am also indebted to “The Wearers of the Crown,” my friends since our first quarter in graduate school: Paige Furgerson, Todd Kenreich, Mark Letcher, Denise Morgan and Krista Stonerock. From pumpkin festivals to camping expeditions, parties on my patio to P&L 800, your friendship has helped me more than you could know. Together, we really can make a “P.”
My mother, Sandy “Stress” Gurosko and my husband, Chris, are the two constants in my life. Mother, thank you for putting up with me as an “inquisitive” child; Chris, thank you for putting up with me as an “inquisitive” adult. You both show the patience of Job.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the generous natures of Bill Gathergood and Todd Kenreich. Thank you, Bill, for opening your classroom and affirming for me that there are caring, creative teachers out there who are willing to take risks in the classroom. And thank you, Todd, for all of your help with peer debriefing. I enjoyed our many lunches together, during which we solved all kinds of problems.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"I'm gonna miss my chances for 'creative freedom.'
I'm gonna miss my audience."
Marty—on the final day of 8th grade

Overview: or How I Came to This Study

Before I present this dissertation, I feel it is necessary for me to share my background and my love of learning about students through what they write. Van Maanen (1988) suggests that qualitative researchers have three conventions to choose from when presenting their research: realist tales, confessional tales, and impressionist tales. In realist tales, authors take the voice of authority and are absent from much, if not all, of the text. Confessional tales view fieldwork as an interpretive act with authors very much present in the text, while impressionist tales take great artistic license in the use of dramatic recall, artistry, and literary standards. To begin, I would like to offer a confessional tale of how I came to this research project.

For five years, I taught 8th grade Language Arts in a rural Southern community. For each of those years, my students and I wrote—every day. We subscribed to what Nancie Atwell (1987) refers to as a “workshop” approach to writing. Using this approach, which has also been called a “process” approach (which will be discussed in greater detail later), my students and I wrote about topics that were close to us, topics on which we were experts. We collaborated, we drafted, we revised, we peer-edited, and we
performed. Together we wrote poems, short stories, and essays on everything from Abercrombie and Fitch to zoo visits. It was through such personal exploration that I got to know my students. Of course, we also did “school” writing as well—formal responses to literature and five-paragraph essays (to prepare for the end-of-grade writing test). But what we mainly did was write about what we knew.

We also wrote collaboratively. From the beginning, I encouraged my students to work together to create stories, plays and novels. At first, this was difficult. It was hard enough to ask them to pick their own topics, let alone “cheat” by working together! Even my colleagues were suspicious. One of my colleagues, after hearing what collaborative learning sounds like (a constant hum), suggested to the principal that I get my hearing tested. “Her students,” she complained, “are out of their seats and talking all of the time!” What she failed to see was that we were writing. In fact, we were writing a lot. And at the end of each year when the big writing test came around, much to my colleagues’ chagrin, my students consistently scored higher than any others. This, I believe, is because they saw themselves as writers.

At the end of each six-week grading period, our classroom turned into what I called a “coffee shop.” Our desks were pushed together to form tables, and tablecloths were spread over them. Coffee (decaf) and hot chocolate were brewed in the back of the class, accompanied by baked goods that the students volunteered to bring. Invitations were sent to homes and other classrooms to come hear us recite our favorite pieces of the grading period. It was time to share what we had been working on so diligently. Of course, sharing writing was completely voluntary, but, being eighth-graders, most everyone wanted to perform. Seeing and hearing an audience react to what they had
written was something rare and exciting for these students. For the first time, they bore witness to the power of their own words; and it was a satisfying feeling.

Each month, I asked students to pick their best pieces and, if they so desired, include them in our “Literary Letter” that was sent home to parents as well as to other schools. Throughout the year, their “final copies” of each piece they wrote were placed in a large notebook in the back of the room. This notebook was where I sent students who suffered from writers’ block to search for new ideas. Because of this, they were all familiar with one another’s work, and sometimes students would suggest to one another which stories to include in our monthly newsletters. At the end of each school year, I asked my students to choose their very favorite piece of writing to include in our year-end “volume” of student-authored literature. Once I had all of the pieces collected (in five years, only one student refused to publish their work), I had students type them up in a professional-looking format and sent them off to the printer to be copied and bound. Each year, upon the arrival of their final collector’s edition of the “Literary Letter,” we celebrated! Students signed each other’s volumes, and faces beamed with pride. Our final “coffee shop” was jubilant.

At the end of my final year of teaching, I received several notes from students. Many of them wrote things such as, “You made us learn when we didn’t know we were learning,” and “Most of us looked forward to coming to class each day, that especially means me!” But one student wrote, “You really seemed to care about me.” And how could I not? Through their writing, I knew these young adults, and in knowing them, I cared for them. I knew that Rob was a diehard Duke basketball fan, and I knew that Allison was very involved in 4-H and was proud of her prize-winning lambs. I
sympathized with Nikki who was suffering from a rare form of leukemia, and I knew
that, for Marty (whose quote opens this dissertation), an audience of his peers was
everything. I also knew that, through sharing their writing, these students knew each
other, too. And because their writing was shared, it was important to them. They truly
wanted it to be good.

The reason I share this information is twofold. As a teacher, student, and now
researcher, I operate under two main assumptions: first, I believe that collaboration is
beneficial to students, which is one reason that I came to my dissertation study.
Numerous studies have indicated that when allowed to collaborate, especially on writing
tasks, students’ skill and motivation levels increase (Bruffee, 1984; Roen, 1990; Rogoff,
1998; Vygotsky, 1978). In this study, students collaborated. They read, wrote, edited,
revised and explored together. Quite simply, “We learn and perform various tasks better
when we work with other people” (Roen, 1990, p. 5). Second, I believe that student
writing should be seen by an audience other than exclusively the teacher. I believe that
when students write knowing that their writing will be taken seriously and responded to
by their peers, they are intrinsically motivated to make that writing count. Wollman-
Bonilla (1999) suggests that:

Students need to write for an audience outside the classroom
and for functions of everyday life...Knowing that their writing
has the power to communicate to others and accomplish goals
engages children in writing and challenges them to work at
writing well. (p. 2)

While I had experienced collaborative writing and sharing with an audience other
than the teacher, I remained curious. I wondered what it was about sharing writing with
others that motivated my students. I wondered that if literature could be incorporated
into authentic writing tasks, how could that contribute to improved writing? I also wondered how technology could be used to further broaden students’ conceptions of authentic audience. In my study, these are the topics that I chose to examine more closely.

My study focuses on how writing about literature to an authentic, distant audience of peers influenced the quality of student writing for a class of high school juniors and seniors. The students involved in my study exchanged a series of four letters, via e-mail, with partners in a high school English/literature class in Moscow, Russia. In these letters, the students used the short stories of Anton Chekhov and O’Henry as catalysts for discussing and writing about both the literature and the culture that the literature represented. Each of the short stories dealt with a specific theme, and that theme became the catalyst for each exchange of writing. Therefore, students in my study were asked to respond to the short stories in a way that would help their Russian partners achieve a better understanding of the themes introduced, and vice versa. During my study, I also asked six focus students (representing both strong and weak writers) to compose four additional letters to in-class peers. These letters were used to determine whether or not students changed the way they wrote depending on who their target audience was, either their in-class peers or their Russian partners. In the following sections, I will explain the nature of the problem I have chosen to study, and how my study was informed by my theoretical framework. My rationale for selecting this study will also be discussed, identifying the gaps in the current literature. I will then describe the focus of my study, and the specific research questions used to guide my study.
The following sections provide a brief overview of the history of instructional approaches in composition. While a more coherent discussion will be provided in Chapter 2, I want to contextualize the situation in which the students in my study were writing. By briefly exploring how the field of composition has evolved, the reader will be better able to understand the context in which the students in this study were involved, and how that context affected the content of their e-mail project.

The Formalist Approach to Writing

From the 1940s to the mid-1960s, formalism dominated thinking about language, literature and composition (Nystrand, Greene & Wiemelt, 1993). During this formalist period, prescriptive grammar, usage, and rhetorical principles were emphasized, as was focusing on specific features of "model" texts (Squire & Applebee, cited in Nystrand et al., 1993). It was during this time that the five-paragraph theme gained popularity. This blueprint for composition consisted of an introductory paragraph, three paragraphs developing three points in the body of the paper, and a concluding paragraph. According to Nystrand et al. (1993), "This unique school genre...came to define the essay genre for a generation of American students" (p. 275).

Warriner (1950), in his text "English Grammar and Composition: Complete Course" describes what "good" writers do when composing:

A good writer puts words together in correct, smooth sentences, according to the rules of standard usage. He [sic.] puts sentences together to make paragraphs that are clear and effective, unified and well developed. Finally, he puts paragraphs together into larger forms of writing—essays, letters, stories, research papers.  
(Cited in Emig, 1971, p. 21)
According to Emig (1971), Warriner’s (1950) text was emblematic of the kind of composition instruction that was prevalent during this period. Student writers were taught to create “unambiguous, explicit texts by manipulating text elements, including topic and clincher sentences, usage, and syntax” (Nystrand et al., 1993, p. 276). In other words, no matter what the topic (or who the author) was, the text was molded to fit a preexisting shape. Standards and mechanical correctness were valued above all else, as formalism emphasized the following:

- Language is composed of objective elements organized into fixed systems.
- The meaning of texts is encoded in “autonomous” texts themselves and is explicit to the extent that writers spell things out.
- Written texts are more explicit than oral utterances.
- Texts are properly interpreted only when readers avoid inferences about the writer or the context in which the text was written.

(Nystrand et al., 1993, p. 278)

To advocates of formalism, composition focused mainly on the linear process in which one engaged on one’s way to a finished product. Also, formalism assumed the teacher as audience, as the idea of writing to anyone else was not considered (Nystrand et al., 1993). In formalism, writing an essay could be compared to following a recipe, which, if followed correctly, yields the same results each time. However, this view failed to acknowledge the individuality of the students, presenting a barrier between the students and their voices, previous life experience, and audience.

The Process Approach to Writing

From the late 1960s through the 1980s, formalist conceptions of composition began to be questioned. Researchers such as Moffett (1968), Britton, Burgess, Martin,
McLeod & Rosen (1975) and Flower & Hayes (1977) began to examine the idea of writing as a cognitive process, "arguing that writers never just 'write' but always write about something to someone" (Nystrand et al., 1993, p. 279, emphasis in original).

According to Moffett (1994):

> The so-called process approach amounts to no more than teaching writing as adult practitioners go about it. It is phasing composition into the recursive stages of mulling, looking around, conferring, drafting, seeking feedback, revising, and polishing that people who write for real purposes have always found themselves doing. Implementing the practitioner's way into schools did not depend on new research or new theory. The process approach was always there waiting for us. (p. 22)

Tobin (1994) agrees with Moffett in that the writing process approach is not new. By emphasizing the process that writers go through to produce text, the student choice and voice, revision, and self-expression, Tobin (1994) acknowledges that, for him and others, "it has come to mean a critique (or even outright rejection) of traditional, product-driven, rules-based, correctness-obsessed writing instruction" (p. 5).

Rather than encouraging a formulaic approach to composition, the process approach to writing loosened the reigns on the formalist's reliance on structure. Students began to think of themselves as writers as they were encouraged to "do" what real writers do: choose their own topics, write in their own voices, freewrite, collaborate, map, peer-edit, and collect finished pieces in portfolios (Tobin, 1994). Flower & Hayes (1980) began to question how writers made meaning, and utilized "thinking-aloud protocols" to actually "hear" what happens as students compose out loud. Berkenkotter (1981) used Flower & Hayes' (1980) method of "thinking-aloud protocols" to examine what a group of professors did when writing to a high school audience. It was indicated by both
Berkenkotter (1981) and Flower & Hayes (1980) that much is happening in the writer’s mind as he or she composes—namely, mental sketches of the writer’s audience are being formed and used to guide their rhetorical, organizational and stylistic decisions.

Changes in the Conceptualization of Readers

Also during the late 1960s through the 1980s, studies were being done to determine the cognitive processes of readers (Straw & Bogdan, 1990). From approximately 1800 to 1890, the process of reading was assumed to be an act of transmission, with text being viewed merely as a vehicle for the author’s meaning (Probst, 1990). To understand the meaning of a text, one had to understand the author—morally and philosophically. This theory of reading parallels the current-traditional, or formalist theory of writing, which viewed writing as a linear process: the transmission theory of reading assumed a linear transfer of information from the author to the reader.

From approximately 1890 to the late 1970s, a shift to the translation model of reading occurred:

During this period, the author increasingly faded in importance, and meaning was ascribed to text. The act of reading, instead of being a ‘reading of the author’ became a ‘reading of the text,’ and the purpose of learning to read was to learn the code in which meaning resided. The practices of this period can be characterized as translation: readers became puzzle solvers, translating the meaning of the text through their own ‘skill,’ either as readers or interpreters.

(Straw & Bogdan, 1990, p. 16)

In the translation model, readers acted as decoders, relying upon their skills, such as decoding and structural-analysis ability, rather than their knowledge of the author (Straw & Bogdan, 1990).
With the interest in cognitive psychology in other disciplines during the 1960s and 1970s, another major shift in thinking about reading and literary criticism took place. "In this movement, the result was an emphasis on more interactive theories in reading comprehension and structuralism...in literary criticism" (Straw & Bogdan, 1990, p. 16, emphasis in original). In the interactive theory, text lost some of its prominence in the act of reading, and the author again became more visible. However, along with the author, the reader also became important, "so that reading became characterized as a problem-solving (rather than a puzzle-solving) activity in which the author and reader shared both world knowledge and linguistic knowledge via the text" (Straw & Bogdan, 1990, p. 16).

What the reader brought to the text, in terms of personal experiences and social knowledge, was now recognized, rather than merely what "skills" the reader possessed. Such interactive theories led to what Straw and Bogdan (1990) refer to as transactional theories, further enhancing the importance of the reader. In transactional reading theory, the reader takes an active role in the construction of meaning; the reader is no longer the meaning-getter, but the meaning-maker (Rosenblatt, 1978; Straw & Bogdan, 1990). The transactional theory of reading has parallels in the process approach to writing, where students are active meaning-makers as opposed to passive recipients of pre-determined knowledge. Both the transactional theory of reading and the process approach to writing recognize the value of the knowledge that students bring with them to the classroom, validating the links they are able to make between literature, their writing, and their lives. Students in my study read and wrote collaboratively to construct their own meanings with the text. By working collaboratively, they not only were able to draw upon their own knowledge to construct meaning, but also the knowledge of their peers, local and distant.
Attention to Audience

Traditionally, secondary students have written with the teacher in mind as their sole audience (Frank, 1992). Hence, the writing produced within the majority of school contexts has been found to be artificial and contrived (Britton et al., 1975). Berkenkotter (1981) argues that:

Unlike real world writing situations, which confront the writer with a variety of rhetorical situations and audiences with differing needs, school writing demands that the student must demonstrate [her] authority on a given subject. Small wonder that researchers have found students to be topic-bound. School writing stifles the development of audience representation because it precludes its necessity. (p. 366)

In their 1975 study of the development of writing abilities of students aged eleven to eighteen, Britton et al. collected over two thousand writing samples, of which 95% were written assuming the teacher as the main audience. “The overall tendencies of the sample suggest the dominance of the teacher audiences” (Britton et al., 1975, p. 137). Several other studies (Cohen & Riel, 1989; Frank, 1992; Keiser, 1991) have suggested that the lack of an authentic audience, or an audience other than the teacher, is due to a lack of authentic writing situations within the school context. Frank (1992) suggests that an authentic, or “realistic” writing task is one in which the audience addressed by the writer—not an independent rater or a teacher—determines whether or not the writer successfully transmitted his or her ideas to meet the reader’s needs (p. 279). When writing for real audiences of peers for real purposes, students take ownership in their work and improvement in the quality of their writing can usually be seen (Fey, 1998). In their 1998 study of a university/elementary school pen-pal project, Ceprano & Garan
discovered that when elementary students were paired with university partners, the
elementary students took ownership of their writing, wanting to make it as good as
possible knowing that it would be seen by an audience other than their teacher. These
"authentic literate interactions with ‘real’ partners" gave the young writers a reason to
improve their writing (Ceprano & Garan, 1998, p. 53). In my study, the students
involved wrote to authentic audiences outside the borders of their classrooms to the
extent that the American students wanted to model the correct use of English grammar
and usage for their Russian partners who were trying to learn English in an authentic
context. Therefore, the American students took great care to write clearly and correctly,
feeling personally responsible for “teaching” their partners the “right” way to write.

**Networked Computers in the Composition Classroom**

Much of the recent research on audience has been done in the field of computer-
mediated communication, or CMC (Bateman & Benson, 1999; Citrino & Gentry, 1999;
Cooper, 1999; Eldred & Hawisher, 1995; Fey & Sisson, 1996; Selfe, 1999). In CMC, students, either within the same class or at distant locations, participate in discussions
with the aid of networked computers (Eldred & Hawisher, 1995). CMC can either be
conducted synchronously, in real-time, or asynchronously, at different times. In my
study, given the difference in time zones between my location and Russia, the students
communicated asynchronously through the use of e-mail.

Communicating asynchronously through e-mail has been found to be an effective
way to get students, especially reluctant students or students trying to learn a new
language, into the conversation (Warschauer, 2000). In their study on an e-mail
exchange between English as a foreign language (EFL) and basic writing students at the
college level, Tillyer & Wood (2000) stated that electronic mail "acts as a confidence builder" that gives students the motivation of an authentic audience with which to correspond (p. 166). Having the time to perfect their writing through peer-editing before it is sent to their partners gave the participants in Tillyer & Wood's (2000) study a real feeling of confidence. In fact, the basic writers took their role as "teacher" of English quite seriously, thus learning far more than they would have using typical drill-and-skill grammar exercises (Tillyer & Wood, 2000). In my study, EFL and basic writers are also involved, as well as strong writers. However, the students who participated in my study were in high school rather than college, and were using literature as the catalyst for their e-mail exchanges.

In Tillyer & Wood's (2000) study, e-mail correspondence was chosen because of the non-threatening atmosphere it created:

E-mail correspondence, with its easy, conversational tone, provides a reason to write and a way to overcome...reluctance by allowing students to write in a non-threatening situation that seems natural, not 'artificial and strained.' (p. 167)

Kasper (2000) believes that when her students write on the computer to EFL students, "they spend more time on and give greater attention to the task of composing," in part because they find CMC "less threatening than face-to-face communication, so they take greater risks in their writing, leading to writing that is more syntactically and lexically complex" (p. 186). A portion of my study examined how writing for in-class peers differed from writing that was sent to the Russian students. I wanted to determine if
students were, in fact, more careful in terms of rhetoric/stylistic features as well as usage/mechanical features (see Appendix I for a sample) when they were composing for their Russian partners as opposed to their in-class peers.

In terms of the amount of student choice and using writing to make meaning, CMC shares many features of the process approach to writing. Figure 1 compares both the process and formalist, or product approaches:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Product</th>
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<tr>
<td>Recursive</td>
<td>Linear</td>
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<td>Freedom</td>
<td>Constraint</td>
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<td>Generating</td>
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<th>Pedagogy</th>
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<tr>
<td>Choice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student-centered</td>
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<td>Writing to learn</td>
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<td>Control</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher-centered</td>
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<td>Learning to write</td>
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Figure 1: A comparison of process and product approaches to writing. Adapted from Marshall, 1994, p. 50.

As Figure 1 illustrates, the process approach to writing encourages more student freedom and using writing as a way of discovering new knowledge, not just using writing as an end in itself. Process writing also lends itself to student collaboration while generating new texts. Because process writing encourages a student-centered pedagogy, it is appropriate to focus my study using a sociocultural theory of learning.

Theoretical Framework

I have chosen to examine my study through the lens of sociocultural learning theory. In sociocultural learning theory, it is believed that students learn most effectively
when they learn with and from others (Rogoff, 1998; Vygotsky, 1962). According to Vygotsky (1962), thought, or inner speech, is developed as a result of socialization:

> Thought development is determined by language, i.e., by the linguistic tools of thought and by the sociocultural experience of the child. Essentially, the development of inner speech depends on outside factors; the development of logic in the child...is a direct function of his socialized speech. (p. 51)

Vygotsky (1978) recognized that children’s learning begins long before they enter school, and that any learning a child encounters in school always has a previous history that is social in nature.

Rogoff (1998) claims that social, or cooperative learning enhances individual academic achievement. In fact, Rogoff (1998) discovered that both college and elementary aged students wrote and studied essays more effectively when working in pairs than alone, and that this cooperative advantage carried over to individual writing and comprehension tasks. Rogoff’s (1998) claims are an example of what Vygotsky (1978) called working within the zone of proximal development, which he defined as:

> ...the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (p. 86)

In other words, “What a child can do with assistance today she will be able to do by herself tomorrow” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 87). This is important for educators to understand, because by isolating students to prepare them for series of standardized exams, their learning may not be as meaningful as if they were being encouraged to
discover meaning for themselves with the assistance of peers. By working with peers, students can work to pull each other forward in their learning, by entering into what Vygotsky (1978) has identified as the zone of proximal development.

Vygotsky’s (1978) concept of the zone of proximal development, or ZPD, suggests that development proceeds through children’s participation in activities that are slightly beyond their competence with the assistance of adults or more skilled children. In my study, students are encouraged to work together to generate ideas for writing as well as peer-edit each others’ work before it is sent to their Russian partners. When such collaborative work occurs, the quality of student work tends to increase (Roen, 1990; Rueda, 1990). According to Bruffee (1984), “Students’ work tended to improve when they got help from peers; peers offering help, furthermore, learned from the students they helped and from the activity of helping itself” (p. 638). In my study, students worked collaboratively to produce writing that would be read by an authentic audience for an authentic purpose. In doing so, they assisted one another in making sure that their writing was suitable to be sent to Russia as a “model” of what correct English looked like.

Rationale

Having been an English teacher, I was greatly interested in all of the elements of this study: the writing, the reading of the literature, and the technology. Only a small number of studies have examined similar cases in depth (Bateman & Benson, 1999; Caswell & Wood, 1999; Citrino & Gentry, 1999), and of the studies I examined, none involved high school students writing to other high school students, and none involved an
extensive use of literature. It is in this context, high school students writing about literature via e-mail to distant, non-English speaking partners that a gap in the research exists.

In a study conducted by Caswell & Wood (1999), a middle school in the United States was linked via the Internet to a college classroom in Japan. The Japanese students, like the Russian students in my study, were interested in improving their English skills, and the American students were interested in learning more about Japan for a large project. During their study, Caswell & Wood (1999) had students exchange autobiographical narratives, a chronicle of eight days in each student’s life, favorite poems and songs, gift boxes, and responses to the reading of a fiction book about Japan. While literature was included in their project, it was not the focal point. In their study, Caswell & Wood (1999) stated that, “In order to move past the pen pal stage, [telecommunications projects] must be driven by the existing curriculum and have a clear focus” (p. 152). In Caswell & Wood’s study (1999), their grade-level unit on Japan drove the project. In my study, the existing curriculum of the two schools drove the project, as literature was already the focus of the classrooms’ course of study.

In another study linking students via networked computers, Citrino & Gentry (1999) linked three middle school classes in Utah, Alaska and Kuwait. Throughout the school year, these three classrooms shared personal histories with one another in an attempt to understand one another’s cultures at a deeper level than what could be read from a textbook. They were asked to interview family members, as well as share their own stories in order to build new knowledge about one another. At the end of the project, one student wrote:
It's interesting to me how we are so similar and so different at the same time. It seems like there are parts of culture that we somehow inherit just because we're part of the human family, and other parts that we possess because of the place we live. (Citrino & Gentry, 1999, p. 121)

Students’ own poetry was the catalyst for discussion between high school and community college students in a study conducted by Bateman & Benson (1999). The project was deliberately left open-ended as the students themselves were responsible for creating their on-line discussion. “No formal objective or goal beyond having students discuss poetry on line, in writing, was posited” (Bateman & Benson, 1999). At the conclusion of their study, Bateman & Benson (1999) suggested that the peer audience and the freedom to choose what to write, and how they related personally to what others wrote, encouraged all writers involved to write with greater clarity and adherence to basic grammar and spelling conventions.

In the e-mail project that I investigated, the students used stories written by well-known authors as a catalyst for weaving in their own stories through their responses. They learned a great deal about the culture of their partners, and of their own, but they went about it in a different way from the studies previously mentioned. For example, both of the classes in my study consisted of same-age high school students as opposed to cross-age studies involving college students with either high or middle school students (Bateman & Benson, 1999; Caswell & Wood, 1999). Also, literature was used in my study as the catalyst for in-depth writing as opposed to the students’ own writing (Citrino & Gentry, 1999) or a comparison of culture through day-to-day activities (Caswell & Wood, 1999). This combination of same-age high school students responding to literature written by well-known authors is what I was interested in exploring.
Focus of the Study

My study focused on a double-block world literature class of juniors and seniors at a large suburban high school. While the focus of the class itself was on literature, writing was also an important component and was integrated into many aspects of the curriculum, not merely as a tool for assessment. My study examined this class as one particular case (Merriam, 1988) which merited in-depth investigation, focusing on how writing about literature to an authentic, distant non-native English speaking audience influenced the quality of student writing. To determine what constituted “quality” student writing, I used the ninth-grade rubric for holistic scoring used throughout the Riverside City Schools (see Appendix C). Based on this rubric, I designed my own categories of descriptive categories (see Appendix I) to examine both rhetorical/stylistic and usage/mechanical features of students' writing. These categories helped me to determine what differences (if any) were present in writing that was geared toward in-class peers versus writing that was geared toward the Russian students.

Within my particular study, because a process approach to writing was adopted, several factors could have influenced the students’ writing. In order to view my study as a holistic event, I examined what role large and small group discussion about the literature played in the composing of students’ written texts. I also examined how collaborative writing and large and small group peer-editing sessions played a part in creating the final written products. Finally, I investigated the role that the technology itself played throughout the project. In Chapter 3, I will provide details about the design of my study as well as the specific context within which my study took place.
Research Question

In order to study how writing about literature for an authentic audience via e-mail influenced student writing, the following research question was used to guide my research:

When given the opportunity to write for a distant, non-native English speaking audience, to what extent do each of the following affect the outcome of student writing:

- The opportunity for personal, collaborative response to selected literature in the form of large and small group discussions with writing to distant peers as the ultimate goal
- The opportunity for peer-editing to occur before any letter is sent to distant partners
- The opportunity to correspond about the literature via e-mail

In order to examine this question, I studied a local high school class whose teacher has been involved with cross-cultural e-mail reading/writing projects for nearly ten years. Throughout these projects, the teacher noticed that when his students had the opportunity to write for distant peers, their motivation level, and skill level, increased. Therefore, I found this case to be particularly well suited to what I wanted to examine.

From January through May, 2000, I used a case study methodology to examine the e-mail project in depth. According to Creswell, (1998) “A case study is an exploration of a ‘bounded system’ or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (p. 61). Creswell (1998) goes on to explain that this “bounded system” is bound by time and place, and it is the actual case being studied, such as a program, and event, or a classroom. In my study, the case is the actual e-mail project, which includes a limited
number of students (the two classrooms, n=32) and lasts a limited amount of time (one
semester). Within the local class, I chose six students and asked them to serve as my
“focus” students. With the help of their teacher, and in accordance to how they
responded on a pre-project survey, I chose three students who considered themselves to
be “strong” writers, and three students who considered themselves to be “weak” writers.
I selected these two groups of students for comparative purposes. In addition to writing
letters to their Russian partners for each of the four literature exchanges, these students
were asked to write additional letters to in-class peers. These additional letters were to be
written about the same topics as the letters to their Russian partners, depending upon
which short stories were being considered at the time. By comparing what students did
(or did not do) for partners who spoke the same language and shared the same culture
versus partners who spoke a different language and lived in a different culture, I could
examine how students accommodated their writing depending upon their audience.
During my study, I asked the focus students to work collaboratively to determine what
changes they would make when writing to an in-class peer as opposed to their Russian
partner. My assumption was that by editing their letters with their peers, the focus
students would produce writing that was of a higher quality than writing that had been
produced alone (Rogoff, 1998). To my knowledge, no other study has addressed this
specific gap in the research, where high school students have utilized e-mail to write
about literature.

Summary

This study reflects my interest in student writing and sharing via networked
computers. In Chapter 1, I provide a brief overview of my study including how I came to
my study, the nature of the problem, how my theoretical framework influenced my interest in this particular case and my rationale for choosing the study. I also discuss the focus of my study, and introduce the specific research questions. In Chapter 2, I will provide a review of the literature related to my study. In Chapter 3, I will outline the methodology, procedures, and instruments I used in collecting data for this study. I will also give a more detailed description of the context in which this study took place. Chapter 4 is a discussion of the results of my data analysis, and in Chapter 5 I will draw the study to a close, summarizing my findings, discussing implications for students, teachers and teacher educators, and offer suggestions for future research.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Overview

This chapter provides, in six sections, a review of the literature most relevant to the concerns of my study. The first section will survey studies of audience awareness and analysis and how such factors affect student writing. The second section will examine the role that peer-editing can play when practiced in the writing classroom. Next, I will provide a brief overview of the various ways students can respond to literature, with a focus on written responses. Section four examines the role that computers have played in composition classrooms over the past ten years, and also their possibilities for shaping instruction in the future. In section five, I focus on how English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms have been incorporating technology into their curricula, and how composition classrooms might benefit from the experience of the EFL classrooms. Finally, I will turn a critical eye towards the use of technology in schools, cautioning my readers that while the possibilities of technology infusion in the classroom are exciting, problems still remain when deciding how to use technology in the most effective way.

The Effects of Audience Awareness/Analysis on Student Writers

“Audience analysis,” according to Ede (1984) is a term that refers to “those methods designed to enable speakers and writers to draw inferences about the experiences, beliefs, and attitudes of an audience” (p. 140). Ede (1984) also reminds us
that audience analysis dates back at least to Aristotle, and his awareness of needing to know one’s audience in order to persuade them. In the following section, I will examine several approaches to the study of audience, including studies of writers’ cognitive development of audience awareness (Kroll, 1978), studies of writers’ audience analysis and awareness during composing (Berkenkotter, 1981; Flower, 1979), the relation between audience awareness and syntactic and lexical features (Crowhurst & Piche, 1979; Smith & Swan, 1978) and studies of audience as discourse community (Bruffee, 1984).

Cognitively Based Research on Audience Awareness

To examine cognitively based research on audience awareness, I begin with the work of Jean Piaget (1926) and Lev Vygotsky (1978). Each claim that speech is something we internalize as children. This internalized speech forms the basis of our thoughts, and we continue to draw upon this speech in adulthood. Where the two psychologists differ concerns how that speech is internalized. According to Piaget, young children are largely impervious to social influence because of their egocentrism (Rogoff, 1998, p. 685). Egocentrism is a cognitive state in which the cognizer “sees the world from a single point of view only—his own—but without knowledge of the existence of other viewpoints or perspectives, and...without awareness that he is the prisoner of his own” (Flavell, 1963, p. 60). In order to be able to communicate effectively and overcome their egocentrism, “children must gradually develop the ability to decenter, or imagine the viewpoints of others” (Ede, 1984, p. 145). This concept of decentering is crucial to the success of my study, for if the students fail to take their Russian partner’s viewpoint into account, learning and cultural awareness may not be achieved.
The task of decentering is difficult for a child to accomplish in written communication (Kroll, 1978). This viewpoint is supported by Crowhurst & Piche (1979) who suggest that "variations in syntactic complexity for different audiences appear much later in writing than in speech" (p. 106). Thus, some indicators of complexity may be apparent in this study due to the fact that the participants are secondary students, and the communication between students is entirely written.

In contrast to Piaget's (1926) concept of egocentrism is Vygotsky's (1962) concept of inner speech. For Vygotsky (1962), the social context that surrounds the child from the first days of life forms the basis for his or her inner speech, which later leads to thought. "Thought development is determined by language, i.e., by the linguistic tools of thought and by the sociocultural experience of the child. Essentially, the development of inner speech depends on outside factors: the development of logic in the child...is a direct function of his socialized speech" (Vygotsky, 1962, p. 51). According to Trimbur (1987), "Inner speech is voiced egocentric speech gone underground, internalized as silent verbal thought" (p. 213). Therefore, what Piaget (1926) claimed as impossible, that children (due to egocentrism) were incapable of accepting the viewpoints of others actually forms the basis for what Vygotsky (1962) believed: that thought developed as a result of social interaction, not in spite of it.

This argument of whether thought is a result of "inner" or "outer" forces forms the basis for one of the features that dominates discussion about composition. Trimbur (1987) recognizes this "inner/outer" debate in composition studies, and states that:

According to this metaphor, inside is the writer's knowledge, imagination, and reasoning faculties. Outside is the real world
and the writer's audience. Writing involves moving material from the inside to the outside...Writing, many teachers, researchers, and theorists assume, begins inside, in the inner speech of private verbal thought, and is only gradually transformed into the outer written speech of public text.

(Trimbur, 1987, p. 211)

Trimbur's (1987) idea of public and private text is similar to other researcher's conceptions of the same "inner/outer" metaphor. For example, Flower (1979) has written about the same concept with her "writer-based" and "reader-based" prose, with writer-based prose used to express ideas close to the author, as opposed to reader-based prose, which takes the needs of a distant audience into consideration. Britton et al. (1975) noted a distinction between the expressive and transactional functions of language, where expressive language is more personal as opposed to transactional language, which is used for transmitting ideas to distant audiences. Emig's (1971) examples of reflexive and extensive models of writing also incorporate the "inner/outer" metaphor of private vs. public language.

In her discussion of "writer-based prose," Flower (1979) claims that many of the problems associated with college student's writing is a result of trying to transcribe inner speech. "Writer-based prose is a verbal expression written by a writer to himself and for himself. It is the record and the working of his own verbal thought" (Flower, 1979, p. 19). In contrast to writer-based prose is Flower's concept of reader-based prose, "...a deliberate attempt to communicate something to a reader" (1979, p. 20). The concept of reader-based prose illustrates one of the goals of the e-mail project in my study: focusing writing to a specific audience with distinct needs. In comparing the two composing styles, Flower claims that "In its language and structure, reader-based prose reflects the
purpose of the writer's thought; writer-based prose tends to reflect its process” (1979, p. 20, emphasis in original). Flower (1979) suggests that skilled writers are able to overcome their egocentrism and create, through reader-based prose, a context between writer and reader, taking into account the needs of the reader (Flower, 1979). In the case of my study, the needs of the Russian students who were learning to write English must be taken into consideration. Therefore, the American students had to develop a consciousness of reader-based prose.

Similar to Flower's (1979) writer- and reader-based prose are Britton et al.'s (1975) functional categories of communication, with each category assuming a different level of audience awareness. In their first category, Britton et al. (1975) recognize transactional language, language that is used to get things done, language that is concerned with an end outside of itself, used to inform, persuade or instruct. Informing is the goal for the students in my study—to inform one another of their cultures through the use of the literature and how it relates to their own personal experiences. This category would be analogous to Trimbur's (1987) "public" text, or Flower's (1979) reader-based prose, in which nothing is assumed and contexts are clear and shared. Britton et al.'s (1975) second category of language, that is, the expressive function, is language that is close to the self, revealing the speaker, or writer, verbalizing his consciousness, displaying his close relationship with the reader (Britton et al., 1975). This expressive category of language, which may not be very explicit or structured, is analogous to Trimbur's (1987) private verbal thought and Flower's (1979) writer-based prose. Britton et al. (1975) argue, as do Crowhurst & Piche (1979) that children as speakers gain a sense of this public audience because the hearer is a reactive presence, but “...children as
writers have more difficulty because the ‘other’ is not present” (Faigley, 1986, p. 43, emphasis added). This concept returns to the difficulty of decentering that Kroll (1978) emphasizes. According to studies of cognitive writing development (Crowhurst & Piche, 1979; Smith & Swan, 1978) the ability of writers to decenter develops at a later age for writing than for speech. Many schools deny students the opportunity to practice decentering skills by assigning pre-determined topics to be written to one person: the teacher (Britton et al., 1975). My intention in this study was to challenge the barrier of the teacher as sole audience for student writing. In the e-mail project under examination in this study, the readers, although they are at a distance, are a reactive presence. The Russian students respond, via e-mail, to what their American partners write. Thus, these students must develop the ability to decenter in order to understand what their partners are writing to them.

For Vygotsky (1962), socialization is always already present, and accounts for the cognitive development of children. As Trimbur (1987) argues:

For Vygotsky the language of inner speech condenses in extremely compressed form the language of our conversations and relations with others. The process of writing, thus, cannot be merely a matter of moving from the inside to the outside as the ‘inner/outer’ metaphor portrays it. Instead, Vygotsky’s work suggests that the outer world of public discourse has already entered as a constitutive element into the inner world of verbal thought. (Trimbur, 1987, p. 215)

It is this concept of socialization that is germane to my study. In a later section, I will argue that knowledge is socially constructed, and that by working together in a collaborative context students can benefit from the knowledge that each of them brings to the classroom.
Audience Awareness/Analysis During Composition

In this section, I will examine the numerous studies that have been conducted to compare what skilled as opposed to unskilled writers do with regard to audience during the composing process (Berkenkotter, 1981; Crowhurst & Piche, 1979; Ede, 1984; Flower, 1979; Flower & Hayes, 1980). Two studies illustrate the differences in the composing process of skilled writers vs. the composing process of less experienced or poor writers. Both Berkenkotter (1981) and Flower & Hayes (1980) discovered that skilled writers were able to conjure a mental sketch of their audience, while poorer writers remained in a literal, topic-bound frame of mind, "...that is, could not think beyond the content of their essays" (Berkenkotter, 1981, p. 388). According to Flower & Hayes, (1980) "One of the most powerful strategies we saw for producing new ideas throughout the composing process was planning what one wanted to do to or for one's reader [with one's audience in mind]" (p. 27). In my study, the students involved also had to make such decisions with the benefits to their audience in mind. However, rather than having to conjure a mental image of their audience, their audience was authentic and responsive, thus their letters to one another should demonstrate a high level of audience awareness. In a study conducted by Ceprano & Garan (1998), university students developed pen-pal relationships with local elementary students. Because all students involved in that project had authentic, reactive partners, their motivation to write well and to serve the needs of their partners increased throughout the semester.

As stated earlier, the writing process of skilled or experienced writers varies from that of less skilled or less experienced writers (Ede, 1984; Flower & Hayes, 1980). The concept of being able to conjure a mental image of one's audience is just one of the
features in the process of more experienced writers (Frank, 1992). In a study conducted by Flower & Hayes (1980), a “think-aloud protocol” (p. 23) was used, where experienced writers and college freshmen verbalized their thinking process as they composed essays on identical prompts. In their study, Flower & Hayes (1980) concluded that the more experienced writers made more references to their audience than novice writers. The more experienced writers also created goals to ensure that their audience was addressed. In my study, I incorporated a variation of a thinking-aloud protocol (what I call a “peer-response session”) at the end of the project to determine exactly what appropriations students made in their writing when writing to a non-native speaker of English as opposed to their native-speaking American peers. Rather than utilizing a thinking-aloud protocol, which is designed to “hear” the thought process a single writer engages in when writing, I wanted the focus students in my study to work as a team, as they did in class, so I could listen to how they went about making changes in order to send their letters to their distant partners. This peer-response session will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 3.

It has also been found that with less experienced writers, revising and editing tends to take place at the surface level as opposed to at the content level (Frank, 1992). More experienced writers are also likely to be purpose-oriented (Clevinger, in Ede, 1978), meaning that they tend to ask what about the audience is most likely to be important in light of the speaker’s purposes. This is akin to Flower’s (1979) concept of reader-based prose, where the writer is able to take into consideration the needs of her audience. In a study conducted by Mabrito (1991), less experienced college writers were paired with both less and more experienced college writers through e-mail to assist in
peer-editing each other's work. Mabrito (1991) discovered that the less experienced writers took more risks in their writing knowing that others would see it. This study also discovered that the motivation to improve mechanical and usage errors increased as a result of having a reactive audience with which to share their writing (Mabrito, 1991). This study has a direct correlation with mine, as e-mail is also used to connect reactive, authentic audiences. Knowing one's audience was also useful in a study conducted by Petko (1991) where an authentic audience was specified prior to four writing assignments in a ninth grade composition class. A positive correlation was observed between audience specification and motivation to write. "Knowing their audience helped motivate students to write more effectively and to analyze and revise their writing more frequently" Petko, 1991, p. 37).

Several studies (Berkenkotter, 1981; Crowhurst & Piche, 1979; Kroll, 1978) draw a correlation between age/cognitive development and the level of audience awareness. In his study on how well children could repeat directions to a game in both oral and written modes, Kroll (1978) concluded that "the crucial factors in an investigation of audience awareness are not the salient characteristics of audiences, but the constructive process operative in the mind of the writer" (p. 279-80, emphasis added). Similar studies (Crowhurst & Piche, 1979; Flower, 1979; Smith & Swan, 1978) have concluded that the ability to "decenter" (Kroll, 1978) and become aware of an audience does not happen until a child is older, in high school or beyond. "Most cross-grade studies of children's writing report no significant changes in students' writing when addressing the same topic to different audiences. Significant audience effects did not appear in the writing of students until they had reached the end of high school or the beginning of college"
(Cohen & Riel, 1989). Such attention to the age of the writer also correlates with Vygotsky’s (1962) concept of inner speech representing the egocentric speech of childhood existing in the mind of an adult. However, Cohen & Riel (1989) argue that the lack of audience effects in classroom writing with younger students may have less to do with the cognitive development of the child than with the way composition is taught. “The lack of audience effects found in classroom writing may be an artifact of the way that children are taught to write and not a lack of developmental readiness to adapt their writing to specified audiences” (Cohen & Riel, 1989, p. 147).

Finally, when one considers audience awareness in writers, one must consider the type of writing that has been assigned. The type of writing that consistently shows the most conscious awareness of audience is persuasive (Berkenkotter, 1981; Britton et al., 1975). In a study conducted by Berkenkotter (1981), the frequency of audience consideration was highest for persuasive writing, with 95% of the writers attending to the specific needs of their audience. “Audience differences were most clearly evident in the mode of argument. A likely explanation is that argument demands greater attention to audience than either narration or description” (Crowhurst & Piche, 1979), with the goal of persuasive writing being to change the mind of the audience. The type of writing that was found least likely to attend to audience needs was narrative, which most closely correlates with Flower’s (1979) writer-based prose, where the specific needs of the audience may not be crucial to the writing task at hand. However, in a study conducted by Wollman-Bonilla (1999), elementary students used family message journals to exchange narrative writing with family members, usually parents. In that study, Wollman-Bonilla (1999) determined that real functions and audiences were central to
student ownership of writing. In my study, students will also be engaged in writing that serves real functions and is directed towards a real audience, one that is both authentic and reactive. However, in my study, the students are in high school, and their writing revolves around literature, not daily activities in the classroom.

**Audience Awareness and Syntactic and Lexical Features**

Studies have shown that syntactic complexity of sentences increases with grade/age in both free writing and controlled rewriting (O’Hare, 1973; Smith & Swan, 1978; Crowhurst & Piche, 1979). In these studies, the determining factor for sentence complexity was the t-unit (Hunt, 1968) which is defined as a main clause plus any subordinate clause or non-clausal structure that is attached to or embedded within it (Hunt, 1965). In the Crowhurst & Piche study (1979), writing prompts consisted of pictures shown to students in grades 6 and 10. The students were asked to respond in three different modes (narration, description, and argument) to each of the slides, one set being written to their “best friend” and one set being written for their “teacher.” No significant difference was found between audiences in grade 6, while more difference was found between audiences in grade 10, suggesting that “variations in syntactic complexity for different audiences appear much later in writing than in speech” (Crowhurst & Piche, 1979). Smith & Swan’s study (1978), which used a similar procedure, also concluded that students in grade 6 did not distinguish audience levels at the level of words per t-unit. Their study, however, also tested college freshmen and upper classmen to see if any difference in audience awareness could be syntactically detected. According to words per t-unit and words per clause, college freshmen could only distinguish audience awareness at levels at or below their own level, while upper
classmen were able, to a small extent, make some adjustments to a “superior” adult audience. This confirmed O’Hare’s (1973) study that syntactic complexity increases with grade/age.

In my study, the Rubric for Holistic Scoring for the Riverside City Schools, rather than the t-unit, was used to assist in the analysis of complexity among student letters. This measure allowed me to determine what kinds of accommodations students made when they knew that there were language/cultural differences between them and their audience. Quality indicators such as use or avoidance of slang, assumed or lack of assumed shared cultural context, and formality vs. informality of register were considered in determining how students tailored their writing to a distant audience of non-native English speaking peers.

**Studies of Audience as Discourse Communities**

Often knowing whether or not an audience is a member of one or more discourse communities can help to focus the writing task. Discourse communities are groups of people who share the same understandings, and who may interpret a text in the same way due to similar contextual or cultural experiences. “That shared understanding is the basis of the confidence with which they speak and reason” (Fish, 1980). Fish goes on to explain that “[this] is why it is so hard for someone whose very being is defined by his position within an institution...to explain to someone outside it a practice or a meaning that seems to him to require no explanation, because he regards it as natural” (1980, p. 321). For example, in my study, students were keenly aware of any slang language or cultural assumptions they used in their letters to their Russian partners and found ways to avoid their inclusion so that the meaning of their letters was clear and free of ambiguity.
Faigley (1986) states that “writing in college is difficult for inexperienced writers not because they are forced to make the transition from ‘writer-based’ to ‘reader-based’ prose but because they lack the privileged language of the academic community” (p. 47). An example is the differing languages and background experiences that children bring with them to school, and troubles they could face if the language of their homes does not match up with the language of the classroom (Delpit, 1992). For Delpit (1998), membership in certain discourse communities hinges upon issues of power, and the rules are set by those who are in powerful positions. “Success in institutions—school, workplaces, and so on—is predicated upon acquisition of the culture of those who are in power” (Delpit, 1998, p. 486). The culture of the upper and middle classes is often quite different from poorer cultures, and as a result, those students who are poor come to school at a disadvantage. “The upper and middle classes send their children to school with all the accoutrements of the culture of power; children from other kinds of families operate with perfectly wonderful and viable cultures but not cultures that carry the codes or rules of power” (Delpit, 1998, p. 486). Thus, for some students, academic writing remains difficult and mysterious. In my study, the students determined their own discourse communities where one culture was not more powerful than the other. The students in both classrooms were on equal footing in terms of their knowledge of the authors and their relationship with the content of the stories. In the field of composition studies, Freedman (1987) suggests that “learning to write is not simply skill acquisition, but it is also learning to enter into discourse communities which have their own rules and
expectations” (p. 3). Students in my study had the opportunity to create among themselves a language community in which it was their responsibility that meanings were clearly shared and all viewpoints were valued.

Kenneth Bruffee (1984) provides a useful description of the goals of most college teachers, stating that teaching students to write using “normal discourse” (a term he attributes to Richard Rorty), or discourse that professionals in varied fields use in their everyday language, is central to a college curriculum. According to Bruffee (1984), “Not to have mastered the normal discourse of a discipline, no matter how many ‘facts’ or data one may know, is not to be knowledgeable in that discipline. Mastery of a knowledge community’s normal discourse is the basic qualification for acceptance into that community” (p. 643). According to Bruffee (1984), it is often through the negotiations of various discourse communities that knowledge is created. Researchers such as Delpit might agree that it is the responsibility of the academy to ensure that students are versed in these various discourse communities so that their voices can add to this creation of knowledge. According to Kaufer & Carley (1994), “what you know makes a difference with whom you are likely to interact, [and] whom you interact with, furthermore, will likely make a difference in what you know” (p. 14). The cross-cultural nature of this study will help in the creation of a more astute student, one who is aware of the various interpretations of the literature at hand. It is my contention that the more viewpoints students have to consider, the broader and more inclusive their own viewpoints will become.
The Role of Peer-Editing on Students’ Writing

Research has indicated that having students participate in peer-editing activities can be highly beneficial (Beachy, 1992; O’Donnell, 1980; Weeks & White, 1982). According to Beachy (1992), peer-editing can be defined as, “fellow students help[ing] one another to improve their compositions through the editing process” (p. 209). One of the advantages of using peer-editing in the composition classroom is that it takes a large part of the editing responsibilities away from the teacher and places them on the students. In this way, teachers feel as if they can assign more writing without dreading a feeling of suffocation (O’Donnell, 1980). With more time to spend on writing, students can have more opportunities to write and practice the skills that they are learning. Also, because they no longer carry the burden of editing every composition, teachers have the freedom to move around the room helping individual students who may need extra assistance (O’Donnell, 1980).

An increase in student confidence is another reason to employ peer-editing in the composition classroom. “In acting as editors, students gradually become more confident of their own writing” (O’Donnell, 1980, p. 7). And there is an increase in confidence not only with strong writers, but with weaker writers as well (Beachy, 1992). The strong writers get to gain a sense of expertise when paired with weaker writers, and the weaker writers get to learn from both seeing and talking about positive examples of the writing of their peers. According to O’Donnell (1980), “In acting as editors, [weaker] writers gradually become more confident of their own writing” (p. 7). Within peer-editing situations, writers begin to influence each other, and this, according to Wells (1992) is essential for all good writers.
Because peer-editing requires students to exchange writing with peers, their audience no longer consists solely of the teacher. Therefore, when students write for peer-editing, their motivation level to do well tends to increase (Beachy, 1992; Weeks & White, 1982; Wells, 1992). As O'Donnell (1980) states:

The young writer gradually becomes aware that he is not merely trying to satisfy Teacher, but that he is attempting to communicate with an audience, an audience of peers who, in many cases, matters more than Teacher. (p. 7)

Weeks & White (1982) remind us that having both an authentic audience and an authentic purpose increase students’ motivation to write. In my study, both an authentic audience and an authentic purpose were built in. The American students wrote to their Russian partners (who responded with writing of their own) about personal reactions to the literature read as opposed to artificial writing prompts often found in composition classes. Such authentic writing situations help to give students a sense of ownership of their writing (Weeks & White, 1982), because students are now authoring themselves into what they write.

Finally, the idea of instant feedback is appealing to young writers involved in peer-editing situations (O'Donnell, 1980; Weeks & White, 1982). In a study designed to compare the writing of students who received both teacher and peer feedback as opposed to only teacher feedback, Weeks & White (1982) found that the students who were also getting peer feedback appreciated the immediacy. For some writers, allowing several days to pass before returning edited papers was too long. Once papers were returned, students often felt disconnected from the paper’s original context, and the editing marks were simply marks that did not carry with them much meaning (Weeks & White, 1982).
However, when students were able to meet with their editing groups immediately after a writing session, the context was still fresh in their minds, and corrections made more sense (Weeks & White, 1982). Fey (1993) discovered similar outcomes in a study conducted with college students enrolled in a basic writing course that was connected by e-mail. The students became more interested in receiving immediate feedback from their in-class peers due to their desire to be understood by their partners. Prompt peer-editing that occurred before the e-mail exchanges took place were appreciated by the students involved (Fey, 1993). Overall, Fey (1993) and Weeks & White (1982) found that there was moderate improvement in student writing when students had the benefit of writing for both their teacher and their peers. In my study, students had the same opportunity to edit one another's letters first before their teacher read them and sent them to the Russian students. In my study, the local students were not only writing for peers in their own classroom, in terms of peer-editing, but also for peers at a distant location. Also, unlike Fey's (1993) study, the students involved in my study were using literature, not their day-to-day experiences, as a catalyst for their writing.

Studies in Response to Literature

As stated previously, my study is unique in that it examined how students used literature as a catalyst for writing for authentic purposes. By responding in writing to the short stories, the students had a purpose, or a format, for their letters. Their writing became a tool for meaningful exchanges of ideas and opinions. In order to be understood by their Russian peers, the local students had to become more deliberate writers, more aware of conventions such as grammar, usage, and making cultural assumptions that may confuse their partners. The local students also had to connect with the literature on a
personal level in order to share deeper insights with their partners, and thus more thoughtfully consider the similarities and differences between the two authors. In the following section, I will first provide an overview of reader response theory and how it relates to my study. Then, I will discuss why studying literature from other cultures is important for students to do. I will then examine the role of discussion, or “talk” in a reading/composition classroom, and how such student-centered discussion changes the dynamics of power between teachers and students, and how writing as a way of knowing can result.

An Overview of Reader Response Theory

James Britton et al. (1975) suggest that language serves three primary functions: expressive, transactional, and poetic. In the transactional mode, they argue that readers take on a participant role—that is, the reader reads a text in order to take something away, such as with reading directions. In the poetic mode, they argue that readers take on a spectator role—that is, readers read simply to enjoy the text. According to Britton et al. (1975), expressive language is the first to develop in children, and is the kind used most often in our daily communication with others. “It is language which is close to the self and which depends on shared context of understanding” (Beach & Marshall, 1991, p. 19). From the expressive mode, language can move in one of two directions. It can either become transactional, geared towards “getting things done,” (Beach & Marshall, 1991) such as studying a textbook or reading an instruction manual, or it can become poetic, which invites the reader to assume the role of spectator with regard to what they are reading (a novel or poem) or hearing (someone’s vacation story). This spectator role has also been suggested by Louise Rosenblatt, who states that, “The reader is usually cast as
a passive recipient, whether for good or ill, of the impact of the work” (1965, p. 4).

However, simply because a reader is the recipient of a work of literature, he or she is not necessarily passive. “While we may remain in a spectator role when reading literature,” argue Beach & Marshall (1991) “witnessing rather than actively participating in the events literature presents, the experience of responding to literature is by no means passive. It involves the active participation of the reader” (p. 20). There is much cognitive work to be done when a reader approaches a text. According to Rosenblatt:

The reader...is not passively receiving an imprint of an already-formed “object” encased in the text. Nor is the reader merely a distanced spectator. Readers’ feeling that they are looking on at the characters and situations of a novel does not contradict the fact that they have themselves called forth those scenes during the transaction with the text. They have had to draw on their individual past experiences of language and of life to provide the raw materials for this new experience. Hence, we are also participants, having ourselves created the scenes that unroll before us.

(Rosenblatt, cited in Beach & Marshall, 1991, p. 22)

The text, then, acts as a stimulus for the reader, regulating what it is that the reader will call to the forefront of his or her attention during the reading act (Rosenblatt, 1978). What is or is not called to the reader’s attention depends upon current circumstances in his or her life at the time of the reading. Rosenblatt (1978) suggests that, “We select what we want from our environment depending upon what we are already preoccupied with” (p. 17). Thus, a student who has recently suffered a loss in the family may be more sensitive to issues of loss brought up by text than a student who has not recently suffered such circumstances. It is for this reason that the same piece of text can be seen anew if read at different points in one’s life. “The poem, then, must be thought of as an event in time,” (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 12) an event that is created partially
upon the current state of the reader as well as his or her past experiences. This idea of contextually based text is not new. Bakhtin (2000) used the phrase “heteroglossia” to describe the primacy of context over text:

At any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions—social, historical, meteorological, physiological—that will insure that a word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions. (p. 428)

Therefore, rather than being a passive spectator, the reader is actively involved in creating a new experience each time a text is explored. “The reading of a text is an event occurring at a particular time in a particular environment at a particular moment in the life history of the reader. The transaction will involve not only the past experience but also the present state and present interests or preoccupations of the reader” (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 20). The students involved in my study looked closely for words and concepts that they wanted explained, or that they explained themselves. Since the students knew that they were working with students from another culture, they had a heightened awareness of ideas in the text (idioms, customs, and vocabulary) that needed to be more fully explained to their partners in Russia. Reading from this cultural perspective (Beach & Marshall, 1991) added yet another critical lens through which to explore the literature at hand.

Reader response theories come in many different forms, but essentially, “The text is seen to interact with the reader who brings all his/her experiences (cultural, social, cognitive, emotional, literary, linguistic) to bear in the engagement with the text. A central question in reader response and related theories is ‘who is the reader’” (Soter, 1999, p. 8)? In reader response theories, the text is not ignored, but rather enhanced by
what the reader brings to it. "In the molding of any specific literary experience," argues Rosenblatt, "what the student brings to literature is as important as the literary text itself" (1965, p. 78). It is important, according to Rosenblatt (1965) that teachers use the text to keep their students on track when examining a work of literature. The text, rather than be used as a springboard for aimless stream-of-consciousness associations, should be used as a guide, a place to return to again and again during a class discussion. It should not, however, be used to restrict students’ ideas, but rather as a catalyst for their development. In my study, the literature was used as just that, a catalyst from which complex social and cultural discussions were launched.

Why Study Literature (From Another Culture)?

The literature read in my study gave the students an authentic purpose for which to write. Through their writing, the students were able to gain valuable insights into the culture of their distant partners. "Is not the substance of literature everything that human beings have thought or felt or created" (Rosenblatt, 1965, p. 5)? Rosenblatt put it simply: no other subject lends itself so well to connecting with students on a personal level. One might be hard pressed to recall enthralling conversations about human nature breaking out during an algebra or chemistry class. "I would argue that the powerful connections students make between their reading and their living are central to the study of literature" (Nolan, 1990, p. 11). Those connections are a place to start, a place from which to invite students in for a deeper analysis of the text, and how what the author "does" through vocabulary, form and tone evokes such responses. But conventions such as "plot," "characters," and "theme" can be discussed only after an "aesthetic" (Rosenblatt, 1978) reading of the text has occurred. As Rosenblatt (1978) explains, in aesthetic reading, the
reader is concerned primarily with what happens *during* the actual reading event. "In aesthetic reading, the reader’s attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text" (p. 25). Aesthetic reading is done in opposition to "eferent" reading, (Rosenblatt, 1978) in which the reader is primarily concerned with what he or she will *carry away* from the text (such as information to be studied for a test). Unfortunately, most of the reading done in the classroom focuses on the eferent stance, or whatever can be reduced to a multiple-choice or short-answer test. “In our schools, the emphasis in the teaching of reading is almost entirely on the eferent stance” (Rosenblatt, 1965, p. 79). However, in my study, this was not the case. Reading done for this e-mail project was done on both levels. On one level, the students were reading from an aesthetic stance, reacting and connecting to the literature on a personal basis. On another level, they were reading from an eferent stance, looking for specific concepts and phrases that may require further explanation for their Russian partners. They were then involved in writing that strived for clear communication with students from another culture, writing that could not be reduced to a scan-tron test.

The opportunity to connect personally with literature is certainly an important reason for its inclusion in the curriculum. Reader response theory allows for this personal connection, understanding that through such a connection, deeper issues can be unearthed. “It’s when readers ‘connect’ their own experiences to the materials in the text that the interactions between reader and text become most evident” (Beach & Marshall, 1991, p. 31). Drawing upon past experiences, readers transform the ink spots on the page into a set of meaningful symbols (Rosenblatt, 1965, p. 25). However, students, due to
their youth and relative inexperience, cannot be expected to have experienced as much as adults, and therefore literature is a wonderful way to live vicariously through the lives of others.

Being sensitive to our needs can also cause readers to become sensitive to the needs of others. As Rosenblatt (1965) argues:

Prolonged contact with literature may result in increased social sensitivity. Through poems and stories and plays, the child becomes aware of the personalities of different kinds of people. He learns to imaginatively ‘put himself into the place of the other fellow.’ He becomes better able to foresee the possible repercussions of his own actions in the life of others. In his daily relations with other people, such sensitivity is precious. Through literature the individual may develop the habit of sensing the subtle transactions of temperament on temperament; he may come to understand the needs and aspirations of others; and he may thus make more successful adjustments in his daily relations with them. (p. 176, emphasis added)

Such skills of transference from characters encountered in a book to people encountered in real life could be valuable. By becoming exposed to a wider variety of people, students may develop more understanding of difference.

Introducing students to a wide variety of people and ideas through literature comes at an appropriate time in the lives of many secondary English students. At this stage, students are emerging from the black and white way of seeing things as children and are increasingly able to detect the “shades of gray” so apparent in the adult world (Purves et al., 1990). “Towards the end of high school, students develop an ability to see abstraction and generality; they begin to grasp concepts central to ideology, such as liberty and rights; they develop a sociocentric perspective, able to see ‘the big picture’” (Smagorinsky, 1990, p. 13). During this time, they are just beginning to form opinions about the larger issues in life. While their perspectives of adolescence are sure to change
throughout adulthood, a foundation is being laid. That is why it is important to introduce as wide a variety of ideas, concepts and cultures as possible at this time before the concrete has permanently set. “[The adolescent] has probably not yet arrived at a consistent view of life or achieved a fully integrated personality” (Rosenblatt, 1965, p. 31). In my study, the idea of expanding the horizons of the student was taken one step further by the introduction of e-pals—real students living in the culture from which a portion of the literature has come. Because of this connection to real people on the opposite side of the globe, the students here in America had a unique opportunity to connect on yet another level with the literature. By connecting to their Russian partners, the local students could ask questions not only about the literature, but the culture from where it came. In addition to conducting activities such as the “author’s chair” (Graves & Hansen, 1984) where students ask questions of the “author,” (played by another student) the students in my study had the ability to play “culture chair.” They could now, through e-mail technology, ask their distant partners questions about the cultural context that could explain for them why the authors made the choices that they did in the literature.

The Role of Discussion in a Response-Centered Classroom

In my study, discussion about the literature played a key role in student writing. It was my contention that by using discussion as a pre-writing activity, the students would have a deeper well of knowledge from which to draw when it came time to respond to their distant peers. By being exposed to the ideas and opinions of their in-
class peers, I anticipated that the local students would demonstrate more detailed writing, writing that was richer than it would have been had they worked individually to analyze the literature.

The atmosphere in which the students in my study worked could be called response-centered. "In a response-centered classroom," argue Purves et al., (1990) "there is as much student talk as teacher talk" (p. 76). However, in classrooms that do not focus on students' responses, that is not usually the case. In many typical literature classrooms, there is a definite pattern to the talk that occurs. Such a pattern may consist of turn-taking, where the teacher acts as the mediator between student comments. In this question/answer/evaluation model (Beach & Marshall, 1991) the conversation may go something like this:

Teacher: So, what do we learn about the protagonist?
Student: That he’s not as brave as everyone thought he was?
Teacher: Well, in a way. Who else can add to that thought?
Student: That he was torn between his two families?
Teacher: Yes, that's certainly part of it. Anyone else?

And so the conversation goes with no real student-to-student interaction.

Another pattern of classroom talk that is evident in many literature classrooms is what Barnes (in Beach & Marshall, 1991) calls the transmission model, where information about a topic (novel) is transmitted from the teacher to the student in the form of a lecture. "This means not only that students will read certain established, canonical texts but that they will read them in certain ways; that is, they will learn to locate in those texts the kinds of meanings that other educated people have found in them" (Barnes, in Beach & Marshall, 1991, p. 58). But Barnes suggests an alternative to the transmission model—the interpretation model. In this view, the goal is not for the
teacher to transmit knowledge directly to the students, but rather for teachers and students to explore a topic collaboratively (Beach & Marshall, 1991). By allowing students the opportunity to talk directly to one another and not have to go through the teacher for each comment, a richer discussion can take place, one in which the interpretations of the students can develop in light of what their classmates have to say. This, in turn, can lead to richer writing, writing that is more detailed and rhetorically appropriate for their target audience. By listening to one another's original ideas before hearing what the "experts" have to say, students can connect on a more personal level to the literature, and perhaps change their views based upon what their peers have said. In this context, "Speech makes available to reflection the process by which [students] relate new knowledge to old" (Barnes, in Beach & Marshall, 1991, p. 58). With the presence of e-pals available, as in my study, classroom "talk" is taken to another level, allowing the students a new classroom configuration in which to interpret and reflect upon the literature, and thus a more varied selection of ideas upon which to write.

A third pattern of traditional classroom talk involves the teacher asking what Beach & Marshall (1991) refer to as "pseudoquestions," questions for which the teacher already has an answer. "They range from requests for the retrieval of literal facts ("What is the setting of the story?") to questions meant to lead students toward interpretations or generalizations that the teacher has already formed" (Beach & Marshall, 1991, p. 54). Warshauer Freedman (1992) refers to these types of questions as "known-answer" questions, which deny students the opportunity to develop ideas on their own (p. 74). To
aid in the production of "real" questions, questions the students have for which there is no predetermined answer, research has shown that it is advantageous for students to work in small groups (Beach & Marshall, 1991; Phelan, 1990; Warshauer Freedman, 1992).

When working in small groups, students have a better chance of having their ideas heard, for fewer people mean more opportunities to speak. Some research suggests allowing small groups of students to generate questions after reading a story or play helps them to think through what was just read in a way that is active, yet non-threatening (Beach & Marshall, 1991; Phelan, 1990). While generating their own questions, without the direct control of the teacher, students are able to use their own language as a way of "...welding new knowledge to old in collaboration with their peers" (Beach & Marshall, 1991, p. 62). In my study, such questions were actually put into writing and sent to far-off peers in anticipation of a reply that would make clear whatever confusion existed.

Again, another configuration of the classroom is made possible through the use of e-mail.

Small groups are also important for getting students used to articulating their ideas in a clear and meaningful way—something they may not get a chance to do in a larger group situation. According to Probst:

The group, because it consists of others whose inchoate lumps are different from mine, compels me to define my own more carefully, and thus see how I differ from those around me.... It is the group that gives one the sense of uniqueness—without others, the individual remains indistinguishable, an image without a contrasting background. The varying perspectives that may emerge in discussing a literary work with a class fill in that background for the individual, helping her see more precisely where she stands.

Again, another layer of complexity is added when students from another culture are added to the classroom mix via e-mail. In writing to such an authentic audience, students are encouraged to make sense out of what it is they read in order to discuss it intelligently, one-on-one, with a student from another culture. This may be more difficult for the student who is used to writing for the teacher, who generally knows what the student is trying to say, and can therefore fill in the gaps that another student could not. Thus, allowing students the freedom to talk among their peers, to generate questions, and to make sense of literature using their own language and experiences can help to ensure a deeper understanding of themselves and their world through writing about literature.

**Writing as a Way of Knowing**

Discussion is a good starting point in dealing with literature, for it allows a forum for the exchange of ideas and opinions. However, writing can also be a good starting point for eliciting response. Writing does not have to be used only as a means of evaluating what a student has learned; it can also be used as a way to come to that learning (Rosenblatt, 1965). According to Purves et al., (1990) “Writing is a social activity with both an intrinsic purpose for writing and an audience of readers that helps determine the outcome.” In the current study, writing follows talk as a way of wrestling with the issues found in the literature—but it is also more. It is through writing that the students are connecting with their distant peers. Not only does the writing have to be free of mechanical errors, it also has to be clear so that ideas are exchanged as the author intended. There is great intrinsic motivation when writing to cross-cultural e-mail partners, for the audience is real (and responsive) and the writing is composed without the direct aid of the teacher, allowing the students to use the language with which they
are the most comfortable. By writing letters, students’ thoughts become more public and more open to scrutiny. Therefore, writing in this case involves more of a risk, but the benefits are also great. By writing to an authentic audience, students must be deliberate in their thoughts. They must take the time to discover what it is that they want to say, because their words will be seen not only by the teacher, but by peers as well.

In a study conducted by Dysthe (1996), teachers used quotations from students’ response journals to stimulate class discussion about literature. These student texts were used as “discourse initiations,” and validated students’ knowledge by incorporating their knowledge into the search for meaning (Dysthe, 1996, p. 414). According to Dysthe (1996):

> The systematic reading of student texts and the dialogic interactions around them in class was a very important part of augmenting students’ beliefs in themselves. These 16-year-old students had rarely been expected to think for themselves in an academic context. School to them had primarily meant reproducing correct answers, or what Bakhtin calls ‘the authoritative word.’ Here, they were valued as thinkers: What they wrote was taken seriously by the teacher. (p. 416)

Writing to learn can increase students’ academic self-confidence and trust in themselves as thinkers and learners whose ideas are valued. By demonstrating that their thoughts and ideas can be taken seriously, what students write can lead to greater knowledge (Dysthe, 1996).

**Changing Roles of Teachers and Students**

In student-centered classrooms, the roles of teachers and students are changing (Brooks & Brooks, 1993). As was noted in the section on discussion in the classroom, it is usually the teacher who has center stage. However, by allowing students to move into
the spotlight, we are inviting a multiplicity of perspectives that can not be achieved in a
teacher-run classroom. "The primary fact is that [students] know a lot more than we have
believed them to know and allowed them to reveal in the traditionally run literature
classroom where we emphasize 'the theme,' 'the plot,' 'the meaning' and so on" (Purves
et al., 1990, p. 30). When students are asked to share their experiences and opinions,
their knowledge is validated, leaving them with a sense of importance and self-worth that
they may not get in a traditional, teacher-centered class.

When teachers step out of the spotlight, they allow their classrooms to become
more democratic. The most important thing that a student will receive in a classroom
where ideas are exchanged freely is the opportunity to listen to his or her peers and to
respond in relevant terms (Rosenblatt, 1965). In this way, the student can consider a
wider variety of perspectives before deciding upon where she positions herself. Further,
such freedom can help the student determine why she has positioned herself in that
location. In this way, power and authority are returned to the students, because they are
now responsible for the discussion that takes place (Hines, 1997).

Reader response theory allows for a myriad of factors to be taken into
consideration when analyzing a work of literature. Most importantly, it allows room for
the thoughts and opinions of the reader herself. Her reactions to the text are considered
important to her ultimate understanding of the text. Because of this, many different
angles can be considered, and the writing that results can be far richer than writing done
in isolation. Throughout the reading of any text, it is important to keep in mind that our
reading will be affected "...not only by what the text is (textual knowledge) and what we
have experienced (social knowledge) but also by who we are and how we have come to
be who we are (cultural knowledge)” (Beach & Marshall, 1991, p. 441). By involvement in a project such as the one I studied, it is my contention that student writing can improve due to such a broad definition of what it means to “read” a text.

Computers in the Composition Classroom

According to Selfe (1999), “Electronic writing reflects the postmodern condition of contemporary culture” (p. 141). For her purposes, and for the purposes of this discussion, the term “postmodern” is defined as “…a response to our increased awareness of the great diversity in human cultures” (Selfe, 1999, p. 142). Postmodernism recognizes and accommodates for the differences in the various discourse communities earlier described by scholars such as Bruffee (1984). These “competing discourses” (Selfe, 1999, p. 152) combine to create temporary truths, truths in opposition to the Truths purported by the modernist movement with its reliance on the scientific community and the British literary cannon as the arbiters of one physical and social reality. One of the distinctive features of networked computers is their ability to connect student users with other distant student users with which to gain multiple perspectives on, among other things, literature. According to Langston & Batson (1990), “…respect for multiple perspectives may become increasingly important as electronic media make more ideas and opinions available” (p. 154). Thus, networked computers in the composition class provide students with the opportunity to collaborate with one another, in a sociocultural sense, to create their own learning experiences.
With this postmodern, sociocultural notion of networked computers in mind, I would like to discuss the use of networked computers in composition classrooms within the context of five postmodern assumptions:

- Language is socially constructed
- Knowledge is socially constructed
- The most effective learning is done collaboratively
- Collaborative composition classrooms are necessarily student-centered
- Networked composition classrooms assume a shift in authority

I will now discuss how each assumption manifests itself in networked composition classrooms.

**Language is Socially Constructed**

Pedagogies in the field of composition studies tend to be products of their times. As Selfe (1992) purports, “Word processing appeared as a classroom technology at the same time that the process paradigm was establishing itself in composition studies. Electronic conferencing has taken hold of the field at the same time that social constructivist views of language have similarly become prevalent in the profession” (p. 81). The idea of language itself as a socially constructed symbol system is not new, and can be traced back to previous discussions of Vygotsky’s (1962) ideas of the inner speech of the child. The inner speech of the child was built upon the foundation of language that socially surrounded the child during his or her formative years. “For Vygotsky, the language of inner speech condenses in extremely compressed form the language of our conversations and relations with others” (Trimbur, 1987, p. 215). Thus, language is not something born within the individual, but something that is developed as a result of social interaction.
The Internet appears to have developed its own form of language. Symbols and abbreviations created in an effort to increase the speed of communication are common, especially in synchronous chat rooms (Tapscott, 1998). The concept of language play leading to new constructions is something that is seen more frequently in computer-mediated communication as opposed to face-to-face or traditional written communication (Kemp, 1998). When engaged in on-line discussions with peers, students talk about much more than the assigned topic at hand, finding ways to insert short sentences divulging personal information and questions encouraging their partners to do the same. Dialect and colloquialisms also enter the textual mix, creating a language immediately recognizable to the student participants. Emoticons (the smiley faces created by punctuation marks) are an example of this new “language” creation. It was expected that the same trend would manifest itself in my study. Commenting on his students’ use of CMC in his classes, Kemp (1998) states that, “With the appearance of unexpected languages, the students were self-consciously watching themselves write rather than writing to communicate. But because this was the usual pattern for groups new to [Computer Mediated Communication], I was not concerned” (p. 195). In CMC, students are able to recognize and locate themselves at the point of language production, thus validating their own cognitive contributions. The students, then, become the authors of the texts that they are exchanging with others.

The concept of dialogism that Bakhtin (2000) introduced in his essay “Discourses in the Novel” is foundational for the social view of language in two ways: dialogism is essentially social and operates via the inclusion of various languages (Galin & Latchaw, 1998). According to Bakhtin, language is multi-vocal (which he terms “heteroglossia,”
or multi-voiced). For Bakhtin, language is stratified into its “social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of authorities, ... and languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day” (2000, p. 426).

Bakhtin argues that, in the novel, various languages spoken by the characters and the narrator combine to enrich each other, just as multi-vocal and varied viewpoints enrich our society today. Through the use of clear, deliberate language choices, I anticipated that the students involved in this project would enrich one another with personal views of how the literature studied defined each culture, and what each of them could learn from such experiences.

**Knowledge is Socially Constructed**

For a long time, the Catholic church held the monopoly on written knowledge, and only those who were members of the nobility or training to be priests could decipher the Latin text (Spender, 1995). Then, around 1450, Gutenberg created the printing press. Suddenly, there was an alternative way of looking at the world, a way not tainted by the politics of the Church. According to Spender (1995), “In this new perspective the Church was far from central; science, rather than religion, became the framework for explanations” (p. 3). Today, the pedagogical tides are shifting once again, and the postmodern idea of knowledge as being socially constructed has been greatly facilitated by the use of CMC in composition classrooms (Barker & Kemp, 1990; Cooper, 1999; Langston & Batson, 1990; Selfe, 1989). According to Herrmann (1989), “The computer dramatically brings into question our traditional notions of what knowledge is and how education can best help children function in our evolving world” (p. 110).
With the vast quantities of information now available over electronic networks, students must learn to make sense of it all and assimilate it in ways that are personally and professionally meaningful. Barker & Kemp (1990) argue that, "A postmodern writing pedagogy represents a structured attempt to combine the realities of current social and economic conditions with instruction that emphasizes the communal aspect of knowledge making" (p. 2). With knowledge as socially negotiated, students involved in the my study will gain a sense of what is involved in making meaning collaboratively through literature.

Barker & Kemp (1990) point out that "Our classrooms have become ethnically and economically diverse to a degree unimaginable in 1960" (p. 3). By validating these multiple viewpoints in composition classrooms, student’s world-views can be expanded. According to Harris & Wambeam (1996):

- Linking students 'from different historical and cultural situations,' as Bizzell put it, can lead to dialogue between disparate groups of people. Such a dialogue allows students to consider and perhaps accept others’ viewpoints. Often this ability to see beyond one’s initial reaction is central to successful communication; it is also central to complexity of thought. The more fully writers are able to understand various perspectives on an issue, the better they can incorporate others’ perspectives into their own, and the more fully they can develop as thinkers. (p. 355)

Incorporating other’s perspectives into their writing is part of what the students in my study were encouraged to do.

In validating multiple viewpoints in the composition classroom, the concept of intertextuality necessarily comes into play. Similar to Bakhtin’s (2000) concept of dialogism, intertextuality is “the principle that all writing and speech—indeed, all signs—
arise from a single network..." (Porter, cited in Hawisher, 1992, p. 94). According to this principle, no text exists independently from another. The writer can be seen not so much as a solitary individual, but a "member of a team, ... a participant in a community of discourse that creates its own collective meaning" (Porter, quoted in Hawisher, 1992, p. 94). This idea mirrors the dynamics of on-line correspondence, with its text-based environment making intertextuality almost inevitable as students borrow from one another portions of text to add to the creation of their own arguments (Hawisher, 1992, p. 94). As Riel (1989) states, being exposed to differing points of view causes "cognitive conflicts" (p. 183) which interrupt current ways of thinking and require students to question their own assumptions. The cross-cultural nature of my study, plus the immediacy of interaction via electronic networking, make this situation a valuable site for learning.

The Most Effective Learning is Done Collaboratively

The idea that the most effective learning is done collaboratively follows logically from the previous assumptions of the social nature of language and knowledge. If language and knowledge are created socially, taking into account multiple perspectives and the intertextual nature of networked communication, then such creation necessarily occurs in a collaborative fashion. Not surprisingly, of all of the assumptions of networked composition classrooms, more studies have made reference to collaboration than any other (Faigley, 1999; Hawisher & Moran, 1993; Herrmann, 1989; Selfe, 1989).

Collaborative learning is not something that is unique to the networked composition class. What Bruffee (1984) had to say about collaboration did not focus on the use of networked computers, but his ideas certainly apply. For Bruffee (1984),
collaborative learning is "a form of indirect teaching in which the teacher sets the problem and organizes students to work it out collaboratively" (p. 637). Not only did Bruffee understand the need for a shift in the authority of the classroom (which will be discussed in detail in a following section), but he also understood the importance of linking students to primary sources of information, something that networked computers are set up to do. Through the utilization of the Internet, archival information can be accessed easily. The Internet effectively turns a classroom into a library with an enormous amount of resources, from the Library of Congress to other information databases, such as NASA. According to Bruffee (1984), "Most of us feel that those whose knowledge is confirmed by hands-on laboratory experimentation have greater authority than those whose knowledge is based on a synthesis of secondary sources" (p. 649). In one composition classroom (Day, 1998), students tapped into what their professor called the "living database" of real people and resources available on the Internet in order to collaborate with professionals on various projects. Students accessed business and industry professionals to consult for case studies, request information from various experts in the field, and even connect to job networks and submit resumes via the Internet. According to Day (1998), "Because more and more professionals will be using [the Internet] for primary and secondary research, we are doing our students a service by helping them become accustomed to and involved in these media" (p. 163).

Faigley (1999) contends that, "I believe that most learning is not 'self-taught,' most learning is not a solitary experience, and that people learn best when learning with other people" (p. 137). Based on many years of teaching in networked classrooms, Faigley feels confident in stating that, "students trained in collaborative learning have
higher achievement and self esteem” (1999, p. 138). Computers, he believes, can add yet another level to the learning of students, yet another level of access to people not only within but beyond the walls of the classroom.

Collaboration can happen within the actual classroom as well. When using computers in the classroom, text is displayed publicly on the screen as opposed to privately on a piece of paper lying flat on a desk. Therefore, more collaboration is inevitable (Eldred, 1989). Daiute (1985) documents a study in which a student was typing so furiously that her fellow students gathered around her to see what she was writing. As it turned out, she was typing the personal statement for a college application. The students that gathered around the computer screen began giving her suggestions based upon experiences they had encountered when writing their own applications.

“Working in such a collaborative environment helps students learn some of the purposes, forms, strategies, and powers of writing” (Daiute, 1985, p. 19). In my study, collaboration takes place on many levels. After the literature was read and responded to in both large and small groups, and after small group peer-editing occurred, whole group peer-editing took place. One by one, the classroom teacher projected each of the initial letters to the Russian students on the wall. The entire class very carefully read each letter not only to catch mechanical errors, but also to check for overall clarity and coherence. During the editing process, each student had a personal printout of their letter (which was composed at the keyboard) and could make corrections simultaneously, either at the computer or with a pen. By editing everyone’s letters in such a careful way, the students became familiar with the common mistakes that were repeated, and had a better understanding of how not to repeat those errors in future letters.
When there are numerous computers placed in a lab, collaboration is encouraged and also results in the development of new discourse communities and rules of conduct for writing in such public settings (Selfe & Wahlstrom, 1986). Since each student in my study was working around the common goal of providing the Russian students the best examples of the use of English, the feeling in the classroom was one of collaboration rather than competitiveness. No one was ever chided for his or her mistakes. This was important, for having their writing displayed in such a public fashion may be uncomfortable for those who feel more comfortable in writing in a more private setting. However, their common goal of clear communication superceded any feelings of embarrassment the students may have felt.

Introducing computers into composition classrooms also involves collaboration on another level—that of administrators and teachers. “Administrators and teachers need to work together collaboratively. Without effective collaboration with teachers, principals may find them unwilling to acquire the necessary computer skills or fearful of trying new approaches in their classrooms” (Herrmann, 1989, p. 118). Teachers know best what their student’s needs are, especially in the area of their specialization. By collaborating with administrators, teachers will be involved in the decisions made on the types of software and hardware to use, and involved teachers are more likely to remain dedicated to implementing the technology in their classrooms (Herrmann, 1989).

Collaborative Classrooms are Necessarily Student-Centered

By now, it should be clear that among these five assumptions of postmodern pedagogies, much overlapping occurs. If we accept that language and knowledge are created, and that the most effective learning takes place collaboratively, then we also
must assume the importance of the student and his or her experiences in the overall curriculum. "This is not to say that teachers should not offer their own perspective or other perspectives that are not know to the students, but rather that these perspectives must be clearly connected with the student's experiences and must be offered as perspectives, not as the official or correct view" (Cooper, 1999, p. 159). The basis for reader response theory assumes that the text is enhanced by the knowledge the reader brings to it (Rosenblatt, 1965).

One of the positive aspects of CMC is its ability to allow for an egalitarian discussion forum (Barker & Kemp, 1990; Eldred, 1989, 1991; Eldred & Hawisher, 1995; Langston & Batson, 1990). By generating knowledge from the perspective of students, they can see immediately how their experiences and opinions affect (and are affected by) the opinions of others. Instead of traditional face-to-face class discussions, CMC encourages the contribution of many viewpoints. "Instead of validating authority...computer conferences can be set up to encourage egalitarianism and competition that takes place on the level of ideas rather than on the level of personality" (Cooper & Selse, 1990, p. 853, emphasis added). This feature of CMC can be especially valuable for students who would normally shy away from contributing orally in a face-to-face discussion. When students are exposed to the viewpoints of peers, within an egalitarian context where those viewpoints are valued as meaningful, students become much more likely to question their own assumptions as well as the information provided in their textbooks (Cooper & Selse, 1990). In this way, through the validation of their own knowledge and interests, students learn to become better critical thinkers (Harris & Wambeam, 1996).
Networked Composition Classrooms Assume a Shift in Authority

Finally we arrive at the assumption upon which earlier ones in this study are based, the assumption of a shift in authority between teachers and students.

In traditional classrooms, teachers are expected by students to know, or at least pretend to know, everything. In collaborative classrooms, teachers are expected to explore along with students and to be a learner among learners. They are freed from the debilitating role of being the font of knowledge. (Herrmann, 1989, p. 119, emphasis added)

Within such a context, teachers are free to undertake a multitude of classroom activities, even if they are in areas where they may not have all of the answers. By relying equally on students for access to information (often via the Internet), everyone benefits (Herrmann, 1989). Teachers are still needed to guide the learning process, but are no longer the arbiters of expertise, allowing more room for the knowledge of the students to emerge (Cooper, 1999).

However, creating such a nonhierarchical classroom may be difficult. “The current traditional rhetoric maintains its hold on writing instruction because it is fully consonant with academic assumptions about the appropriate hierarchy of authority” (Crowley, quoted in Kemp, 1998, p. 135). Networked computers have the potential to decenter that authority and redistribute it in dramatic ways (Kemp, 1998). It is, in fact, this concept of authority that makes the idea of change so difficult. According to Cooper (1999):

If knowledge is not guaranteed by some authority—God, priests, intellectuals—the hierarchical underpinning of education (and many other institutions) breaks down. If knowledge is not a stable construct of ideas to be passed from teachers who know to students who learn, the basis for teachers’ authority in the classroom is threatened; and if knowledge is socially constructed, students need to be able to engage in the process of knowledge construction in the
classroom. Thus, in the 1980s, teachers and scholars focused on the question of how to restructure power relationships in the writing classroom. (p. 144)

However, according to Cooper (1999), in order to ensure a more egalitarian classroom, teachers have to have a better understanding of what power is. Cooper (1999) claims that the modernist perception is of power as a *possession*, and that some people have it and can give it to others or share it with them. In contrast, Foucault argues that “power functions not as a possession, but a *relation*, and that it attempts to stabilize power relationships that are favorable to one party that result in power appearing to be a possession” (Cooper, 1999, p. 145, emphasis added). Thus, power can be conceptualized as a series of actions taken by a person, for which that person must accept individual responsibility. The actions that students take, then, when involved in on-line correspondences constitute relations of power (Cooper, 1999). “In classrooms where teachers can be counted on to tell students what they should or should not say, what reason do students have for reflecting on or being careful about how the actions or positions they take affect others” (Cooper, 1999, p. 150)? By bringing students into collaborative situations with peers through writing on-line, power is being transformed at the point of individual student responsibility. In this respect, teachers and students are on more equal terrain. The students in my study felt a genuine responsibility to represent to the Russian students how to correctly use the English language. Their roles as teachers were important to them, as they were the experts in this situation.

A further assumption within a classroom where authority is equally distributed is that the teacher is no longer the sole reader and responder to student work. As stated
earlier, Britton et al. (1975) found that 95% of student work was written assuming the teacher as the sole audience. However, when students write to peers, in addition to teachers, their attitude and performance improves (Barker & Kemp, 1990). A networked composition classroom assumes "a reader who reads for information and effect, not simply to evaluate a performance, as a teacher does" (Kemp, 1998, p. 136). Kemp (1998) continues by stating that the presumption on the part of the writer that the teacher is reading his or her piece merely to assign a grade drains the student of "authorial independence and dilutes commitment to the writing act, causing in effect a breakdown in effort and the sorts of lazy, sterile writing that instructors are all too familiar with" (p. 136). If, however, students know that their work will be seen by a wider audience of their peers, a "sense of engagement" (Kemp, 1998, p. 136) is restored. "Student writers often value the reactions of their peers over those of a professional reader—their teacher—and show more concern for their own text when writing for an audience they understand well" (Kemp, 1998, p. 136).

Another manifestation of shifting power in the classroom can be seen in the process of peer-editing. Because the students in my study were reading and responding to each other's work, the workload for their teacher was reduced. This, as stated earlier in the chapter, can be beneficial for everyone involved. The teacher can feel more comfortable in assigning more writing assignments, and the students can feel more comfortable by getting the immediate feedback that they crave (Weeks & White, 1982).

Taking all of the above sociocultural factors into consideration—that language and knowledge are constructed within a collaborative, student-centered environment—the use of networked computers in the composition classroom seems a logical transition
into the postmodern era. In the following section, I will illustrate how teachers in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) have been using networked computer technology for the past ten years, and how it can be an effective teaching tool.

Studies of the Use of Technology in the EFL Classroom

A review of the literature in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and technology studies suggests a harmonious relationship between the two. The authenticity of utilizing technology to connect students is the key. "Simply put, writing becomes a valid means of expression to our students when they have an eager audience and a reason to write" (Tillyer & Wood, 2000, p. 181). According to several studies, (Fox, 1998; Gousseva, 1998; Robb, 1996; Singhal, 1997;) the appropriation of networked computers into the EFL classroom supports both postmodern (Cooper, 1999; Selfe, 1989) and sociocultural (Vygotsky, 1978) learning frameworks. By incorporating e-mail into the EFL classroom, students gain access to an authentic audience, display a heightened sense of motivation by writing for an authentic purpose, participate in writing activities in a social atmosphere, become more culturally aware, and become immersed in literacy through writing, reading and questioning with their partners continents away.

Authenticity

"For many American students, it is already more common to encounter a different language on the Internet than anywhere else. So it makes sense to study a language in the context in which it is used, including the context of cyberspace" (Blyth, 1999, p. 1). The history of technology and EFL can be traced back to the language labs of the sixties and seventies (Singhal, 1997). The traditional language lab was comprised of a central control panel from which the teacher could control the cassette tape of the day's lesson.
Students were isolated in booths with a set of headphones with which to hear the tapes while working on workbook-type activities. It was assumed that if verbal behavior was modeled and reinforced, students would quickly learn the language in question. “The language lab activities were therefore grounded in a stimulus-response behavior pattern” (Singhal, 1997, p. 1). Based on this drill-and-practice technique, it was determined that students would quickly and efficiently learn the foreign language (Singhal, 1997). However, it was soon realized that such activities were boring and tedious for both students and teachers. “Furthermore, the amount of student-teacher interaction was minimal, and individualized instruction was irrelevant” (Singhal, 1997, p. 1). Thus microcomputers were utilized along with popular Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) software which allowed for yet another medium of language learning. With CALL, teachers could tailor their language lessons to fit their students’ individual needs. Vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, spell-checkers, and electronic workbooks all combined to aid the student in the acquisition of the foreign language. CALL programs were noted for the immediate feedback they offered students, and for increasing student motivation as well (Singhal, 1997). However, CALL came under criticism for several reasons, chief among them the fact that learning a foreign language through the use of fill-in-the-blank exercises does little to simulate real-world use of the language (Singhal, 1997).

Due to its ability not only to simulate but also to offer genuine, authentic practice in the language in question, the Internet is seen as an important innovation in EFL classrooms. Instead of relying on a one-way channel for learning, as with CALL, the Internet is interactive, and can provide the means for students to both retrieve and receive
information on a variety of topics (Singhal, 1997). “Overall, e-mail can encourage students to use computers in realistic, authentic situations in order to develop communicative, and thinking skills” (Singhal, 1997, p. 2).

Several studies point to the importance of utilizing an authentic audience when learning to read and write in a foreign language (Gousseva, 1998; Kasper, 2000; Warschauer, 1997). Using e-mail in the EFL classroom provides an opportunity for students to connect with other students around the world. “Most students, especially those living in EFL situations, lack sufficient opportunities for communication in English. E-mail can put students in contact with native speakers or other English learners around the world instantaneously and provide authentic contexts and motivations for communication” (Lee, 1998, p. 2). For many students, writing for an audience of their peers rather than for the teacher increases their motivation to write cohesively and correctly (Kasper, 2000). By writing to peers, assignments become more meaningful. In a study conducted by Gousseva (1998), a college student noted that, “the reason for writing...is not only to show the teacher that we can write but also to share our opinions and learn about other students [sic.] ideas. This makes you reflect over your own ideas and also to maybe reconsider your opinion and make it even more persuading” (Gousseva, 1998, p. 10).

Involving an authentic audience in the study of EFL then necessitates that the purposes for writing become more authentic, also. Drill-and-skill exercises and writing paragraphs for the teacher to grade and return lack a real communicative element in the EFL classroom (Tillyer & Wood, 2000). “E-mail correspondence, with its easy, conversational tone, provides a reason to write and a way to overcome...reluctance by
allowing students to write in a non-threatening situation that seems natural, not artificial and strained" (Tillyer & Wood, 2000, p. 167). According to Gousseva (1998), when writing for an authentic audience of peers, students also perceive a shift in the purpose of their writing from simply fulfilling an assignment to sharing their views with other students. Students also perceived that by having the opportunity to read responses from distant peers, they were able to broaden their outlook on various issues by looking at them from multiple perspectives (Gousseva, 1998). When writing and reading are done in the context of authentic purposes, motivation becomes intrinsic rather than extrinsic. “In other words, we want to see our students develop interests in the subjects we are teaching that they will pursue on their own, rather than because of outside pressures such as homework, tests and the like” (Fox, 1998, p. 1). Internet use, including the use of e-mail in the EFL classroom, provides students with functional, authentic communicative experiences that not only serve their needs as students, but also motivate them to use English in their daily lives.

Writing Within a Social Atmosphere

The importance of utilizing peers as an authentic source for information is a cornerstone of sociocultural learning theory (Vygotsky, 1978). As stated earlier, what makes the Internet unique in the EFL classroom is its ability to both retrieve and receive information, to talk and reply (Liao, 1999; Nagel, 1999; Singhal, 1997). Even though EFL e-mail correspondences may take place over thousands of miles, between people who have never met face-to-face, they are social activities, and social activities tend to engage students (Lee, 2000). Despite the fact that Internet conversations tend to take on a decidedly casual air, these conversations “...are occasions for which the EFL student
must try to make himself or herself understood to another actual person (other than the teacher or classmates). This makes the act of communicating in English not just a theoretical problem, but a practical one" (Lee, 2000, p. 2). Tillyer & Wood (2000) use e-mail in their college EFL classrooms for many reasons, including the social benefits that it provides their students. Tillyer & Wood (2000) explain that when writing an e-mail to a native-speaking peer, little care is given to the idioms, grammar and usage included therein. However, when their non-native speaking students receive e-mails from their English-speaking partners, they study each letter closely. "Their motivation for understanding exactly what the message means is the social, emotional, pure joy of human contact" (Tillyer & Wood, 2000, p. 169). They go on to explain that we acquire the use of a language by understanding language that contains structure a bit beyond our current level of competence (Tillyer & Wood, 2000). This idea illustrates the concept of Vygotsky’s (1978) zone of proximal development (or ZPD), an important element of sociocultural learning theory in which students learn at an optimal level when assisted by a more capable peer.

The role of peers and peer-editing is crucial when deciding to implement e-mail into the EFL classroom. Peer-editing is a vital component of composing letters to distant partners, as it increases student confidence about the language being learned (Tillyer & Wood, 2000). According to Gousseva, (1998) “[Peer-editing] groups help the writers view their writing from the perspective of the audience...and force the writer to think more consciously about his/her purpose and context” (p. 3). Gousseva (1998) continues, stating that there are three main benefits to peer reviews:

(1) They promote a ‘thoughtful’ reading, one in which the reader reads like ‘a writer composing a text’; (2) they help
the students generate ‘language about language, creating a vernacular to be internalized for the members’ future use’; and (3) they help the students to develop confidence in their capacity to learn from one another and for themselves.

Gousseva (1998) emphasizes the reading-writing connection, stating that the best way to reinforce strong writing is to not only ask students to read and respond to their classmates’ work, but also to evaluate their own performance as critical readers. In other words, Gousseva (1998) is asking his students to practice what Flower (1979) calls “reader-based” prose, wherein the students must take their readers into account as they write. In my study, the importance of peer-editing is emphasized, as the local students attempted to write “perfect” letters to their Russian partners, showing off their expertise in their native language.

The reading-writing connection emphasizes the importance of the students’ own comments, thus adding more validity to their roles as “experts” with their EFL partners. This is especially true for basic writers who are not used to being the expert when it comes to writing in English. Tillyer & Wood (2000) explain that their basic writing students in New York City are elevated “to the unfamiliar role of ‘expert,’ and they delight in explaining idioms and other terms and phrases unfamiliar to their [EFL] partners” (p. 167). Student-centered pedagogy suggests that students engaged in dialogue are better able to build “a personal knowledge base that they understand” (Brooks & Brooks, 1993, p. 68). In such an environment, students become less dependent upon their teachers for information and more dependent upon their in-class and e-mail peers.
Cultural Awareness

According to Liao, (1999) "Without cultural awareness, a language cannot be properly understood" (p. 3). The Internet in general, and e-mail specifically, emphasizes the study of language in a cultural context. Singhal (1997) states that, “language and culture are inextricable and interdependent; Understanding the culture of the target language enhances understanding of the language” (p. 4). To this end, the Internet and e-mail are valuable resources for the EFL classroom.

Liao (1999) uses the term “reflexive impact” to describe why the Internet can be such a vital tool for EFL teachers. Reflexive impact “proposes that language teaching should also focus on learner’s own culture and not just look outwards to other cultures” (Liao, 1999, p. 3). This concept is present in my study. Both the local and the Russian students are encouraged to carefully examine cultural aspects whenever they write to their partners. By explaining institutions, traditions, and customs in writing, the students must examine their purpose for inclusion in the letters, and explain their meaning to someone who is not familiar with them. This causes the students to look reflexively upon their own culture, perhaps allowing room for different points of view to be integrated into their thinking. Such reflexive impact is a significant aspect of language learning, emphasizing that “we understand our own culture partly through understanding other cultures” (Liao, 1999, p. 4).

Tillyer & Wood (2000) agree that by sharing cultural information, students gain a broader understanding of one another and themselves. “Exchanging ideas and establishing relationships with students from other cultures can enrich the class and engender understanding as no textbook can” (Tillyer & Wood, 2000, p. 167). The value
of such exchanges is illustrated in a comment made by one of Tillyer’s basic writing students: “[Using e-mail] helped me by bringing to light how we all label people we don’t know or understand. I gained a new friend from a culture I didn’t understand, but I do…now” (Tillyer & Wood, 2000, p. 167). When exchanging information in the form of e-mail, students are better able to attach names and personalities to distant lands, making them seem not so distant after all.

**Immersion in Literacy**

According to Singhal, (1997) the Internet’s educational potential is vast. “Although entirely electronic, the Internet is an entity related to literacy—people…interact with it entirely through reading and writing. For this reason alone, the Internet is a technology that will, without a doubt, have significant implications for both teaching and learning” (Singhal, 1997, p. 5). Kasper (2000) cites Moll, stating that literacy is “a particular way of using language for a variety of purposes, as a sociocultural practice with intellectual significance” (p. 184). By trying to better understand the culture of their partners, students engaged in e-mail correspondence will be highly motivated to understand the language that they are trying to learn in order to better communicate with their partners.

Some research indicates that by using e-mail in the EFL classroom, students tend to write in more complex ways than if they were writing to satisfy an in-class workbook assignment. Fox (1998) states that, “…as the Internet is primarily text driven, the electronic discourse that students will participate in tends to be lexically and syntactically more complex than oral discourse. Students that are participating in e-mail, discussion groups and the like are going to be using a broader range of English than those who tend
to focus mainly on spoken or conversational English” (p. 2). Writing for authentic, communicative purposes thus ensures a more complex and meaningful language experience for many EFL students.

Finally, the importance of questioning cannot be overlooked when utilizing e-mail in the EFL classroom. By allowing students to construct their own questions, the classroom becomes more student-centered, and the motivation level remains high (Brooks & Brooks, 1993). As writers on opposite sides of the world share questions, personal connections begin to surface, and students are able to tailor what information they would like to receive as its relevance becomes apparent. Thus, the use of e-mail in the EFL classroom can encourage students to use computers in realistic, authentic ways in order to develop communicative and thinking skills (Singhal, 1997).

In the previous two sections, I have discussed the variety of ways that computers can be used in language classroom settings. Overall, networked computers are used for their ability to connect students from distant locations. Why, then, are computers not found more often than they are in schools? In the final section of this chapter, I examine some of the reasons that computers are not as popular as some researchers would like them to be, and why when they are, they should not be attributed as the singular cause for student improvement.

Roadblocks to Computer Immersion in Schools

Without Internet technology, this project, with its four rounds of correspondence in a ten-week period, would have been impossible. The uses of Internet technology situate student writing and literature analysis within an authentic series of communications. While a review of the literature on technology and situated learning is
beyond the scope of the current project, some key questions emerge from that literature including: in what ways does technology contribute to the creation of authentic educational activities, in what ways does technology support learning (or interfere with it), and how can teacher choices influence the effectiveness of technology use? In the following paragraphs, I examine some of the roadblocks that have been placed in the way of widespread technology use in the language classroom, and some of the ideas and concerns that contribute to them.

Schools have seen their share of new "technologies" come and go. Some, like the chalkboard and overhead projector, have stayed. Others, like radio, have come and gone (Cuban, 1986). According to Cuban, (1986) all new technologies make big promises as to how they can improve teacher and student performance in the classroom. Thomas Edison had high hopes for the use of motion pictures in education:

I believe that the motion picture is destined to revolutionize our educational system and that in a few years it will supplant largely, if not entirely, the use of textbooks. I should say that on the average we get about two percent efficiency out of schoolbooks as they are written today. The education of the future, as I see it, will be conducted through the medium of the motion picture...where it should be possible to obtain one hundred percent efficiency.

(Cited in Cuban, 1986, p. 9)

The same claims are being made today concerning the place of computers in classrooms, and while even some critics foresee the positive benefits that computers can offer, (Cuban, 1993; Kerr, 1996; Papert, 1987) we still have not seen a proliferation in technology use in the majority of schools across the nation (Cuban, 1993).

Researchers believe that a lack of technology proliferation in schools is due in large part to our deeply held cultural beliefs about what schools are "supposed" to look
like (Cuban, 1993). Cuban (1993) cites several familiar reasons as to why technology has been slow to infiltrate our schools, among them insufficient funds, teacher resistance, and inadequate preparation for those becoming teachers. However, these reasons, according to Cuban (1993), while plausible, are only superficial. If computers have done nothing else, they have caused educators to re-examine their assumptions about what education is for. "One could even argue," states Papert, "that the principal contribution to education made thus far by the computer presence has been to force us to think through issues that themselves have nothing to do with computers" (1987, p. 23), issues such as what should be taught in schools at what time, how, and by whom.

Examining Cultural Beliefs in Education

According to Cuban (1993), "certain cultural beliefs about what teaching is, how learning occurs, what knowledge is proper in schools, and the teacher-student (not teacher-machine) relationship dominate popular views of proper schooling" (p. 186). Age-graded elementary schools and subject-centered, departmentally focused high schools, with multi-period daily schedules of lectures became popular in the mid-nineteenth century (Cuban, 1993). Preparing students to be future employees and the metaphor of productivity became popular as the nation became industrialized. Both ideas are still used as rationales today for including computers in schools. The mantras of "Computers are the future and schools must prepare students for it" and "Faster, better, cheaper" can be heard today in much of the school reform literature (Cuban, 1993).

Some critics of technology fear the demise of the familiar teacher-student dichotomy, with the teacher standing at the front of the room leading the entire class in a lecture or perhaps a group discussion (Kerr, 1996; Segal, 1996). Kerr (1991) suggests
that this fear could be an underlying factor as to why technology is not the panacea some educators hoped and assumed it would be. “Because these images [of teacher-led classrooms] are so widely and deeply held, they are not easily changed, making it difficult to bring about change in schools” (Kerr, 1991, p. 9). Taxpayers and policymakers expect schools to “look” and “act” in certain ways, and in some cases, technology threatens those beliefs, especially those concerning a shift in power in the classroom. Cultural beliefs such as teaching is telling, learning is listening, and knowledge is subject matter taught by teachers and books still dominate popular and practitioner thinking (Cuban, 1993).

Examining Other Assumptions About Education

Cuban (1993) has isolated three core assumptions that surface regularly in researchers’ discussions of technology’s role in the schools: “Computers are more cost-effective for instruction than other means of teaching; the use of computers in classrooms or in computer labs will not mechanize teaching; and, finally, the impact of computers on children’s learning is positive” (p. 205). Kerr (1991) adds to that list of assumptions, stating that most researchers believe that technology is good and value-free. “Researchers also assume that technology should find applications in many fields, disciplines, and aspects of our lives…and if technology makes it possible to do something, then that thing should be done” (Kerr, 1991, p. 1, emphasis in original). Kerr (1991) accuses researchers and policymakers of assuming that technology should be in schools. “Technology itself,” Kerr argues, “rather than the particular goals and ends we
wish to have students achieve by using it, often seems to have the priority...We readily ask of technology ‘Can it do X?’, but rarely seem to bring ourselves to ask “Do we really want it to do X? Why do we want it to do X’” (1991, p. 4)?

Segal (1996) suggests to us the traditional American rhetoric that “Technology and democracy go hand in hand in a reciprocal relationship, and every citizen will benefit equally from that relationship” (p. 45). Little concern is given to the digital divide that is apparent between school districts who can afford the technology and who can not, challenging yet another deeply held cultural belief concerning school funding (Warschauer, 1999).

There are a number of reasons why schools have not seen widespread integration of technology, and, when technology is used, it should not be accepted as the single cause of increased student performance or success. Other factors within the culture of the classroom must also be examined. As Papert (1987) suggested, “If you want to understand (or influence) the change, you have to center your attention on the culture—not the computer...What people often see as a property of ‘the computer’ is often a cultural construct” (p. 23). That is what I have tried to accomplish in my study—to examine each component of this e-mail project in relation to the others in order to gain a holistic view of how the goal of improving student writing can be achieved.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Overview

This case study was designed to investigate how writing about literature to a distant, non-native English speaking audience via e-mail influenced the quality of student writing. The following question was used to guide my research:

When given the opportunity to write for a distant, non-native English speaking audience, to what extent do each of the following affect the outcome of student writing:

- The opportunity for personal, collaborative response to selected literature in the form of large and small group discussions with writing to distant peers as the ultimate goal
- The opportunity for peer-editing to occur before any letter is sent to distant partners
- The opportunity to correspond about the literature via e-mail

At the beginning and the end of my case study, an attitudinal survey (see Appendix D) was administered to the local class to determine if there had been a shift in attitude and motivation after having used the literature, peer-editing and technology to connect with an authentic audience. I was interested in discovering how, on a numerical scale, the students involved would rate the factors involved in this project (such as peer-editing, group discussion, and connecting with an authentic audience through technology) from the beginning to the end. Other data collection methods used in this study included
the following: written comments by the students at the end of the pre- and post-project surveys, (see Appendix D); observations of the local classroom; oral interviews conducted with the focus students at three intervals during the course of the project, (see Appendix E); a detailed document analysis of the letters sent to the Russian students (see Appendix G); transcripts of peer-editing sessions held by the focus students (see Appendix J); and open-ended response questions sent via e-mail to the Russian students (see Appendix F). Analysis of each data source will be followed by discussion in Chapter 4.

In this chapter, I will provide the methodological framework for my study. Then, I will describe the context for my study, including descriptions of the setting, the e-mail project itself, and the participants. I will discuss how and why I chose the six focus students who participated in this study. I will then provide a description of the research design, including data collecting procedures and methods of coding and analysis. Finally, trustworthiness will be discussed, followed by the limitations inherent to a case study design.

Methodological Framework

For my study, I chose to employ a case study methodology. According to Merriam, (1988) “The logic of this type of research derives from the worldview of qualitative research” (p. 16). Qualitative research strives to understand how all the parts of a project, system, or community work together to form a whole:

[Qualitative research] is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as a part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting...and in the analysis to be able to communicate
Case studies are a form of descriptive, non-experimental research. “The aim of descriptive research,” according to Merriam, (1988) “is to examine events or phenomena” (p. 7). Merriam (1988) goes on to explain that case study, or descriptive research as it is sometimes called, is particularly well suited for understanding and interpreting observations of educational phenomena. In my study, the case being examined was the joint e-mail project being conducted by two secondary English classrooms, one locally and one in Moscow, Russia. This particular case was chosen, in part, because of my interest in the various elements surrounding the e-mail project as a whole, elements such as the role that whole and small group discussion of the literature played in the reading/writing process, the extensive use of peer collaboration, and the role that technology played as a means of communication. Stake (1994) refers to such a study as an *intrinsic* case study, where study is undertaken because, “one wants better understanding of this *particular* case. It is not undertaken because the case represents other cases…but because…this case itself is of interest” (p. 236, emphasis added).

Like any other methodology, case studies have strengths and weaknesses. According to Merriam, (1988) the strengths of the case study design are numerous:

The case study offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon. Anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon. It offers insights and illuminates meanings that expand its readers’ experiences. These insights can be construed as tentative hypotheses
that help structure future research; hence, case study plays an important role in advancing a field’s knowledge base. (Merriam, 1988, p. 32)

Guba and Lincoln (1981) suggest that a limitation to case study methodology is that it may “oversimplify or exaggerate a situation, leading the reader to erroneous conclusions about the actual state of affairs” (p. 377). They also warn that readers may be inclined to believe that case studies are accounts of the whole, “that is, they tend to masquerade as a whole when in fact they are but a part—a slice of life” (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 377). With these limitations in mind, I draw broad generalizations about the nature of the particular e-mail project at hand that may advance the dialogue concerning how best to integrate group discussions about literature, peer collaboration and technology in the secondary English classroom.

Context

In order to explore my research question, I employed a case study research design to study a local secondary English classroom and a secondary Russian classroom involved in a semester-long cross-cultural reading/writing e-mail project. Therefore, the two classes and the e-mail project formed my case. From the local class, I also selected six students to serve as focus students for closer study. I chose students from the local class based on what Patton (1990) calls “convenience sampling.” Because I wanted to observe and tape record interviews of groups of students, and traveling to Russia was not feasible, I chose to focus on six students who were in the local class. Following is a detailed description of the context in which this study took place.
Setting: The Schools

For the past ten years, the local high school teacher involved in this study has participated in cross-cultural e-mail exchanges with teachers and students at the Technology School in Moscow, Russia. The Technology School is funded in three ways: half is from public educational funds, and the other half is through both private tuition costs and a public technological organization. This technological organization is one of the world’s largest and oldest international technical training organizations. Originally founded in St. Petersburg in 1880 to provide basic trades and agricultural skills training, the organization is today a private, non-profit entity that meets the educational and training needs of people in 66 countries world-wide. The organization’s headquarters in Moscow supervises twelve High Technology Resource Centers throughout Russia. Through these centers, the organization offers a variety of services, including the supervision of several high technology schools. It is with one of these schools that the current e-mail exchange occurs. The two teachers involved in this study have been involved in several international projects (mainly with other teachers) in the past, and, because of the success of those interactions, decided to involve their students in similar exchanges.

The co-educational Technology School has a population of about 400 students, grades five through eleven—the equivalent of the American middle- through high school. Approximately 95% of the students are Jewish, and Hebrew is a required course (although it is not mandatory that one be Jewish to attend). The students must pay annual tuition to attend the school, much like a private school in the United States. The majority of the students come from upper middle-class families, often with both parents having
earned college degrees. Nearly all of the students who attend the Technology School continue to study at University, because one of the few remaining options for employment is the military, and from personal conversations with teachers from the Technology School, the military is not a desirable choice.

The Russian teacher working with my study teaches a Russian literature class. She also team-teaches with an English teacher, as English is also a requirement for the students. The Russian students read the short stories by Chekhov and O'Henry in Russian, but then apply what they learn in interaction with their American partners to their English classes.

The local high school, Riverside, is located in a southeastern suburb of a large Midwestern city. The school is large—approximately 1,500 students. Riverside High School, part of Riverside City Schools, is the only high school in the city. Publicly funded, the students pay no tuition to attend.

The local teacher involved in this study is highly interested in technology, especially in how technology can link people to one another across great distances and cultures. He has worked in cooperation with a large, Midwestern university on several distance education projects, and has published book chapters and articles on the topic. His students are often aware of how his curriculum employs a heavy use of technology; many of them sign up to take his classes for this reason. On the first day of his double-block world literature class, he told them, “You are in an unusual position,” explaining that they would be involved in several e-mail exchanges with a school in Moscow, Russia. He concluded by stating that, “So, we can be a regular English class, or we could do some innovative things with technology, a preview to how we’ll be teaching in the 21st
In his Shakespeare classes, no textbooks are used. Instead, on the first day of class, each student is handed a text disk, on which can be found all of the plays and sonnets to be used for the semester. Included on this text disk are also several of the tests to be administered throughout the semester. Oftentimes, students are required to e-mail their tests to him. If the students do not have access to e-mail at home, (which is rare) they can use one of the seven computers in his classroom, or in the school library. Incorporating technology into the English classroom is something that this teacher has been involved in for the past ten years, hence my interest in working with him for this project.

The E-Mail Project

According to the teachers involved, the goal of the project featured in this study is twofold. First, both teachers are concerned with improving the writing skills of their students. Second, the teachers want the students to become more culturally aware by working with their e-mail partners to compare and contrast the writing styles/social commentary present in the short stories of O’Henry and Anton Chekhov. The authors, who were contemporaries, were chosen as representatives of their respective countries, not only for their writing styles, but also because of the social commentary present in their work. The stories read in this project shared similar themes, so comparing and contrasting the content was easy. The short stories written by O’Henry included: “The Cop and the Anthem,” “The Gift of the Magi,” and “The Last Leaf.” Chekhov’s stories included “Chameleion” and “The House with the Mansard.”

The project began with the local students writing a letter of introduction to the Russian students. They also included a short biography of O’Henry, as each class needed
background on the authors involved for a separate assignment. All of these introductory letters were typed at the computer during class time. Once they were saved to a disk, they were merged into one file and sent as one long e-mail. From there, the Russian students randomly selected an American partner and wrote a response, introducing themselves and providing a short biography on Chekhov. Then the reading of the literature began.

Once each story was read, the teachers provided a framework for the students to guide their responses. For example, the first two stories read were "The Cop and the Anthem" and "Chameleon," both dealing with police and the law. The students were asked not only to compare the writing styles of the authors, but also to investigate the social and political commentary present. Then the students shared personal experiences that they may have had with the police to use as examples of how their respective cultures were similar or different today. Throughout the process, the students were encouraged to ask one another questions, as some of the subtleties of the symbolism in the literature may not have translated well to the other culture. The American students were allowed to work in small groups while they composed their letters in order to generate more ideas than they might if they were each working independently. In this way, they also monitored each other's writing, making sure it was "perfect" enough to send to their distant peers. Each student was responsible for writing his or her own letter on the computer, and then they were printed out for either large or small group editing. After corrections were made, again at the computer, the letters were sent to Russia. In the case of both the Russian and American classes, the final letters were not sent until corrections had been made. This extensive use of peer collaboration during reading,
writing and editing was investigated to determine how much of an effect such collaboration has on student writing. While the teachers played a minor role in editing, their main task was initially guiding the students in the reading/writing process and screening the letters for the appropriateness of the content.

Participants

The participants in this study were members of two high school literature classes, one located locally in Riverside, and the other in Moscow, Russia. The students in Moscow attended a private Technology School, with a curriculum designed around technology. The local students attended Riverside High School, a public high school located in a Midwestern suburb. Each class contained a mix of juniors and seniors. The Russian students shared the same age range as the students in Riverside, between sixteen and eighteen.

The local classroom was comprised of sixteen students—eight boys and eight girls. Three of the boys were African-American, four were Caucasian, and one was from a Middle Eastern background. Two of the girls were African-American, and six were Caucasian. These local students came from middle-class backgrounds, and according to survey results, eleven had computers in their homes.

As described earlier, six local students were chosen as focus students. During a pre-project survey, students were asked to rank themselves, using a Lickert-type scale, on the basis of their abilities as writers. Three were chosen as “strong” writers (Carlton, Paige and Laura) and three as “weak” writers (David, Travis and Sandy) based upon this information, plus information provided by their teacher. All names involved in this study have been changed to protect anonymity. These six focus students were
interviewed and observed carefully during the course of the study to help determine what aspects of the project had an effect on their skills and perceptions of themselves as writers and their thoughts on technology use. In addition, these students were asked not only to write to their Russian partners, but also to one another, to determine what sorts of accommodations (if any) were made for writing to non-native speakers of English as opposed to native-speaking peers.

Research Design

Preliminary Study

In the year prior to my dissertation study, I conducted a preliminary study. The goal of this preliminary study was to determine the nature of the data that I would be able to collect as well as practice data collection and analysis techniques. The preliminary study was conducted with the same two schools and teachers, but with different students and different literature being studied. Instead of several short stories written by two authors, students in the preliminary study read Shakespeare’s “Taming of the Shrew.” Throughout the reading of the play, the teachers introduced various topics and the students, amongst themselves and with their foreign partners, worked collaboratively to discuss the topics at hand. The majority of the topics dealt with gender issues present in the play and whether or not the gender roles presented in the text still held true for the students today.

During the course of the preliminary study, I devised my initial pre- and post-project survey, (with both Lickert-type and open-ended questions) honed my pre-, mid-, and post-project interview questions, and collected student e-mail documents to analyze. Based upon the themes detected in my initial analysis of the e-mail documents, I further
narrowed my focus for my dissertation research. The same elements (the roles of peer collaboration, discussion about the literature, and technology) that I identified for the current study were evident in the preliminary study, therefore affirming my focus.

In the preliminary study, students were selected for interviews on a volunteer basis. For the current study, I decided to select students based upon their perceived writing ability to determine whether or not any single element of the project was more or less important depending upon the student’s skill level. This decision was made along with the local classroom teacher during our many conversations on how best to address the various elements of the project based upon student instructional needs. This information, we decided, would best serve classroom teachers who wished to integrate similar e-mail projects into their own classrooms.

Overall, my preliminary study was useful to me in several ways. First, it helped me to negotiate entry into the field, and allowed me to gain the trust of the two teachers involved. Second, the preliminary study helped me to become familiar with the different methods of data collection. I was able to learn first-hand how difficult it is to find a quite place to conduct interviews in a public high school, and how long it takes to transcribe a seemingly brief interview. I was also able to gain a sense of what types of activities and events to focus on during my many hours of classroom observation, especially during peer-editing sessions and small group discussions about the text. Finally, I gained important practice in analyzing the large amount of data collected from the actual e-mail documents that the students sent to one another. From this large amount of data, I
learned to sift for patterns and categories, which slowly emerged. I also began to understand that if I was not careful and organized during this analysis phase, I ran the risk of “drowning in data” (Lather, 1991).

Based on my preliminary study, I made several adjustments for my dissertation. Most importantly, as discussed earlier, I decided to select focus students not at random, but purposefully, (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) based on their perceived skill level as writers. Morse (1994) cites Patton when suggesting that “the logic and power behind purposeful selection of informants is that the sample should be information rich” (Morse, 1994, p. 229, emphasis in original). I also refined my survey and interview questions based upon the responses I received from my preliminary study. I discovered that the role of peer-editing was more important to the students than I had originally anticipated, and decided to focus more closely on that aspect in my dissertation. Another change I made for my dissertation involved conducting an end-of-project interview with the Russian students via e-mail. I decided that in order to avoid a one-sided view of the project, their voices needed to be included as well. Finally, I decided to interview the focus students in groups rather than one-on-one. According to Kvale, (1996) “Group interviews today are often referred to as focus groups...The interaction among the interview subjects often leads to spontaneous and emotional statements about the topic being discussed” (p. 101). I found that when interviewed in groups, students played off of the comments of one another, giving me richer data than I received when interviews were conducted individually.

In summary, I feel as if my preliminary study helped to solidify my research interests and confirmed that the students involved benefited from involvement in the e-
mail project. The preliminary study gave me the confidence that I needed to proceed, as well as cautioned me on what expect in terms of the amount of work that lay ahead.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection for my study was conducted over the course of the second semester of the 1999-2000 school year. For this study, I triangulated (Denzin, 1989) my data collection methods. In order to gain a more holistic view of the case being studied, "The researcher often relies on triangulation, or the use of several different kinds of methods or data" (Janesick, 1994, p. 214). The methods I relied upon included a pre- and post-project attitudinal survey, e-mail document analysis, student observation, student interviews, and a post-project group peer-response session involving the focus students.

Surveys

Prior to the actual collection of e-mail documents, I administered a pre-project survey (see Appendix D) to the entire local class to examine their prior experiences and attitudes towards both writing and technology. This survey included both Lickert-type questions and an area for open-ended responses. By administering this survey, I gained a sense of what kinds of writing and technology use these students were engaged in, not only at home, but also at school. I was then able to determine whether or not they felt that involvement in such a cross-cultural writing project could improve their perceptions of themselves as writers, as well as their writing skills. A similar survey (see Appendix D) was administered at the conclusion of the project to examine if any of the students had attitudinal shifts regarding the use of technology and/or their perception of their skill as writers.
Document Analysis

Since I was primarily studying computer-mediated communication, (CMC) I was faced with a distinct methodological challenge. The crux of the interactions I was interested in examining occurred in cyberspace, making direct observation of the entire communicative event impossible. In order to observe the event holistically, I chose to use the actual communication documents as the primary data source (VanDevender, 1998).

In addition to examining the whole class, I asked six focus students (three strong writers and three weak writers) to write two letters for each exchange. The first letter in each exchange was to their Russian partner to fulfill their obligation to their class assignment. The second, additional letter was to be written to an in-class peer. A primary feature of the e-mail documents to be examined was what kinds of accommodations the local students made when writing for their non-native English speaking Russian partners versus writing to their English speaking American peers. The two types of letters (letters to Russian partners vs. letters to in-class peers) were compared using a chart that I designed to indicate the circumstances under which certain descriptive categories (avoidance of slang, spelling errors, etc.) were used (see Appendix I). This chart was designed using the Riverside City Schools Ninth Grade Rubric for Holistic Scoring (see Appendix C). This rubric illustrated factors that constitute quality writing based upon elements including precision word choice, complete sentences, and correct grammar/punctuation. Using this rubric as a guide, I developed two categories in which to compare writing of students when writing to two specific audiences. The first category included rhetorical/stylistic features in terms of audience awareness. Such
features included the use or avoidance of slang, vague vs. explicit writing, assumed or lack of assumed shared cultural context, and informality vs. formality in register. The second category included usage/mechanical features including indifference or observation of conventions, use or avoidance of contractions, indifference or observation of correct punctuation, and occurrence of spelling errors. The writing styles among the six focus students (three strong writers and three weak writers) were investigated individually, then summarized for comparative purposes.

Observation

According to Marshall & Rossman, (1999) “Observation entails the systematic noting and recording of events, behaviors, and artifacts (objects) in the social setting chosen for study” (p. 107). Through observation, I was able to note directly the social interaction that took place within the local classroom as the e-mail letters were composed and received. Since the students were socially engaged in constructing clear, deliberate language in their correspondences (Kemp, 1998), direct observation was not only possible, but also necessary. Direct observation—through note-taking and audio taping—allowed me to be aware of what was said and done among large and small group brainstorming and peer-editing sessions, adding to the total picture of the communal aspect of knowledge making. Through observation, it was possible to examine how the students worked collaboratively to generate ideas and to assist one another in the editing of their letters.

Interviews

Understanding that less experienced writers often focus on issues of mechanics, and more experienced writers are often able to visualize a specific audience
(Berkenkotter, 1981), I employed a semi-structured interview schedule with the six local focus students, three identified as weak writers and three identified as strong writers, at three points throughout the project: beginning, middle, and end (see Appendix E). I was interested in understanding how the phenomenon of audience awareness/analysis manifested itself when the students had a chance to write to an authentic audience of distant, non-native speakers of English. Students were asked about their roles as "experts" in the English language, and what kinds of accommodations they made for their Russian-speaking partners that they may not have made for their English-speaking peers. I asked students how their writing had or had not changed as a result of peer-editing in a highly socialized, public writing environment, and how they felt about the inclusion and validation of their own ideas as important platforms from which to initiate discussion. I also asked them how they felt about the shifting power relations in the class now that they were at the center of collaborative classroom activity, as opposed to their teacher. Their attitudes toward the literature and the technology employed were also discussed.

At the conclusion of the e-mail project, I interviewed, via e-mail, the Russian students involved and asked them questions pertaining to their level of improvement/enjoyment in learning English (see Appendix F). As stated earlier, traveling to Russia to interview these students in person was not possible. Further, conducting a synchronous interview was not possible due to the fact that they were eight time zones ahead of me. Since I wanted to find out more than what they revealed in their letters, conducting interviews with them individually at the end of the project was the most convenient way, for both their teachers and me, to be sure that their voices would be heard in this study.
Group Peer-Response Sessions

At the conclusion of the e-mail project, I engaged my six focus students (within their respective weak and strong writer groups) in a group peer-Response session. For the last three exchanges with the Russian students, I asked the American students to compose at the keyboard an additional letter for each exchange, this letter being addressed to someone in their own focus group. The purpose of these additional letters was to examine how the students may or may not write differently for students with whom they share a common language and culture (Saville-Troike, 1989). By asking the students at the end of the project to take a letter that was written for their same-language peer group, I asked them, as a group, to decide how (or if) they would make any changes to the letter if it were to be sent to one of their Russian partners. This final peer-response session was audio-taped, and the results of their editing (i.e. corrections of grammatical errors and word choice) can be seen in Appendix J. I suspected that the students would work as a group to explain slang terms, clarify cultural assumptions, and be aware of any spelling/mechanical errors that existed. Such clarification may not be necessary when writing to one’s own cultural peers, but would need to be taken into consideration when writing for a non-native English speaking peer.

Methods of Data Analysis

Beginning data analysis occurred in the field during data collection as I observed the students working collaboratively to make sense of their reading and writing. In qualitative research, data collection and analysis occur simultaneously, since the design is itself emergent (Merriam, 1988). “One does not know whom to interview, what to ask, or where to look next without analyzing data as they are collected” (Merriam, 1988, p.
Since data analysis is an attempt to make sense of the data collected, (Merriam, 1988) I began to categorize major themes as they emerged from survey, observation, interview, and textual data.

Initially, I entered all of the field notes, interview transcripts, and e-mail documents into a qualitative data analysis software program. The software I chose, NUD*IST Vivo, was designed assist in the organization and coding of qualitative data. I chose to use a computer for data analysis based, in part, on the nature of my research project. Since a large part of my data corpus consisted of e-mail documents, it was efficient to simply transfer the e-mail documents directly from the Internet into the N-Vivo program. Then, once I transcribed my fieldnotes and audio-taped interview sessions, I transferred those from Microsoft Word into N-Vivo as well. The only data source not stored in N-Vivo was the survey data. Survey data was analyzed separately from the qualitative component.

**Coding**

By using N-Vivo, I was able to enter data directly from the field into the program. In that way, I was able to begin my preliminary coding and categorizing right away. Initially, I began to search for patterns and regularities within the data collected. Those patterns and regularities were then transformed into categories into which subsequent items were sorted (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). I took what Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to as “units” of information that later would become the basis for defining categories. These units came from all data sources and included sentences, phrases, or paragraphs (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
From those defining categories, I was able to move beyond the raw data and move into concepts that were indicated by the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The concepts that emerged formed the basis for my research question, namely how peer collaboration, (in the form of peer-editing and small and large group discussion) and the use of technology affected student writing intended for a distant, authentic audience. Once those concepts emerged from the individual units of data, I was able to focus my study in an attempt to hypothesize how other classroom teachers may utilize such a project in their own classrooms.

To code the survey data, the total number of respondents was divided by the number responding to a particular level of the Lickert-type scale. From there, a percentage was assigned. Those percentages were then compared to a follow-up survey administered at the end of the project. The open-ended portions of the pre- and post-project surveys were entered into the N-Vivo program and analyzed along with the other qualitative data.

The coding of the qualitative data was determined by the nature of the category under consideration. To analyze the extent to which the focus students took their audience into account when composing, I analyzed their letters to their Russian partners in addition to the their letters written to their in-class peers. To display this comparison, I devised a chart (see Appendix I) based on the Riverside City Schools Ninth Grade Rubric for Holistic Scoring (see Appendix C). As discussed earlier, this rubric illustrates factors that constitute quality writing, including precision word choice, complete sentences, and correct grammar/punctuation. Using this rubric as a guide, I developed two categories in which to compare writing of students when writing to specific audiences. The first
category included rhetorical/stylistic features in terms of audience awareness. Such
features included the use or avoidance of slang, vague vs. explicit writing, assumed or
lack of assumed shared cultural context, and informality vs. formality in register. The
second category included usage/mechanical features including indifference or
observation of conventions, use or avoidance of contractions, indifference or observation
of correct punctuation, and occurrence of spelling errors. The writing styles among the
six focus students (three strong writers and three weak writers) were investigated
individually, then summarized for comparative purposes.

To analyze data collected during the group peer-response session, the same chart
was used to illustrate differences between the “strong” and “weak” focus students.
During the peer-response sessions, I randomly chose one letter (written by one of the
focus students) that was to be read by his American partner. My goal was to see what
changes these students would make, as a group, in order to send the letter to his Russian
partner. Changes made based upon intended audience were then illustrated in the chart,
as well as depicted in narrative form to show the patterns of their conversation.

Data collected to discover how students perceived discussing the literature and
their writing in large and small groups, as well as their attitudes about the technology,
were analyzed by categorizing the units of data that emerged from observations,
interviews, and their actual e-mail documents (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Trustworthiness

For this study, trustworthiness was established primarily through the use of
triangulation of methods (Denzin, 1989). By including classroom observations, surveys,
document analysis, interviews, and group peer-response sessions, I was able to consider
the data from several different angles. In this way, I was not limited to focusing on one aspect of the study, but considered it as a whole. Member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) also gave participants an opportunity to scan the data and my analysis to ensure that they were represented fairly. Member checks attempt to bring the voice of the “researched” into the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, qualitative research locates responsibility with the researcher for interpreting data and writing the study. Therefore, I have complete responsibility for the analysis and interpretation of the data. However, member checks informed the editing and reporting of the research document. All participants and specific schools were given pseudonyms to guarantee anonymity.

Peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) gave me, as the researcher, an opportunity to discuss the research with peers who, as fellow graduate students in the field of education, were familiar with the qualitative methodologies used herein. Unlike member checks, peer debriefing brings in the perspectives of a peer who is not involved in the proposed research project. For this study, I identified and invited a fellow doctoral student at my university to serve as a peer debriefer. Over the course of the study, the peer debriefer and I met for lunch twice a month to discuss the research design, data collection, data analysis and data representation.

Methodological Limitations

The greatest limitation to this study was my ability to work face-to-face only with the local students. Since I was not able to observe the Russian classroom directly, I cannot be sure of the arrangement of their classroom. I am not sure if the Russian classroom was as student-centered as the local classroom. I am not sure how much
classroom discussion and peer editing were done, making any conclusions I may draw applicable only to the local students. Several times when I tried to reach the Russian teacher by e-mail, a reply was not received, or the reply was very brief, not thoroughly answering my questions. Also, I was only able to conduct interviews with the Russian students via e-mail, losing out on the ability to elaborate upon answers in a spontaneous fashion.

Another methodological limitation I faced was time. The project spanned only one semester, making generalizations difficult. Due to time constraints, I was able to only conduct three interview sessions, and only one peer-response session. Because the project came to an end as the school year did, pulling students out of class for interviews became more challenging. Also, by the time my final interviews and peer-response session were conducted, Sandy, one of the “weak” focus students, had dropped out of school. This further limited my ability to generalize my conclusions to a broader spectrum of students. In Chapter 5, I will address some of the limitations to the e-mail project itself, and offer suggestions in how to improve such an endeavor for future research.

Summary

In order to discover how specific aspects of collaborative learning and technology affected the written products of students writing to distant, foreign-speaking peers, I observed the project as a whole for the duration of the semester in which it was conducted. As described, my methods of data collection were triangulated and included surveys, prolonged observation, focus group interviews, document analysis, and focus group peer-response sessions. These methods were drawn from a preliminary study that I
conducted at the same site one year prior to my dissertation research. Once data were collected and transcribed, coding, categorizing and interpreting began. Finally, issues of trustworthiness were addressed, as well as the limitations that are often faced when conducting case study research.

In Chapter 4, I will present my data analysis. I will use a combination of both calculated percentages (for the attitudinal survey) and thick description to illustrate how the factors concerning the role of peer-editing, large and small group discussion about the literature, and the use of technology affected the quality of writing for the six focus students, as well as the class as a whole. Chapter 5 will describe the implications of utilizing collaborative learning and technology in a secondary English classroom, and illustrate which students gained the most from each of the various elements of this project. I will then offer suggestions to teachers and teacher educators for implementing such projects into their own curricula.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter presents the results and interpretation of my analysis concerning the five data sources utilized in this study: surveys, observations, interviews, e-mail documents written to students’ Russian and in-class peers, and a final peer-response session. The purpose of this study was to examine the various aspects at play when students write for a distant, authentic, foreign-language audience via e-mail. Those aspects include the role that peer-editing plays in students’ writing and revision of their letters, the role that large and small group discussion plays in writing about the literature, and how technology facilitated the students’ communication with one another. In part one of this chapter, I will establish the importance to the students of audience awareness when composing. This will be determined by examining the pre- and post-project survey results of the entire local class. First, an examination of the students’ perceptions about writing and how they viewed themselves as writers will be discussed, then an examination of how they perceived their audience’s role and how they made accommodations for various audiences will be presented.

Part two of this chapter will discuss the effects of peer collaboration on student editing. First, collaboration during the editing process of the entire local class will be examined. Then, I will describe the focus students and the comparison letters that they wrote for their Russian partners and their in-class peers. After examining each of the six
focus students individually, I will compare the students (as a group) identified as "strong" writers with the students who identified themselves as "weak" writers. During this comparison, I focused on the rhetorical/stylistic features of their writing as well as the usage/mechanical features (see Appendix I). Within this section, I will also present data gathered during two peer-response sessions conducted at the end of the e-mail project to summarize exactly how the focus students accommodated their writing to suit their Russian-speaking partners.

Part three of this chapter will examine the role of large and small group discussion about the literature, and how this discussion aided the students in their writing. First, an overview of the short stories read during this project will be given. Then, the role of large and small group discussion about those stories will be considered as a segue to illustrate how talking collaboratively about personal connections made with the literature aided the students in making meaning out of the text. This meaning-making was reflected in and through their writing, with communicative writing for an authentic audience as a goal of this project. After the class as a whole is discussed, the three focus students identified as "strong" writers will be examined, followed by the three focus students identified as "weak" writers.

The final section of this chapter will consider the role played by the technology used in this project. I will explain how the technology became largely invisible, as the means to end—the end being successful written communication between the students involved.
Establishing the Importance of Audience Awareness

Overview

In the following section, I will first establish the attitudes that the entire class had about writing in general, and specifically writing with various audiences in mind. This will be accomplished primarily through the examination of pre-and post-project survey and observation data. Then, I will take a closer look at the six focus students to determine what changes they made in their writing based upon their audience. I will determine the nature of their writing based on their use of the formal characteristics of the language as related to their target audience. The term “formal characteristics” will be discussed in more detail when I examine each of the six focus students. I use the term “formal characteristics” as defined in the Riverside City Schools Ninth-Grade Rubric for Holistic Scoring (see appendix C). According to the rubric, formal characteristics of student writing include an adherence to sentence completeness, subject/verb agreement and correct punctuation and spelling. Because this is a cross-cultural study, I have also chosen to include an awareness of the audience involved in this study as evidenced in avoiding the following: use of slang, generalizing, assuming a shared cultural context and informality in register. Because the audience for the local students was their Russian partners, it was appropriate to analyze how the local students used language to communicate ideas through writing. My goal was to have the focus students write for two linguistically diverse audiences so that I could determine the accommodations they made for both, thus isolating characteristics that could be transferred to other school writing assignments.
Survey Data (Pre-Correspondence)

Prior to the beginning of the e-mail project, I surveyed the entire local (Riverside) class (n=16) to determine what the students thought of their writing ability and whether they enjoyed writing. From this information I was able to gain an understanding of how the class perceived writing in general. I was also able to select students with whom to work in a focus group based upon their own perceived skill levels, along with recommendations from their classroom teacher.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How Much do You Like to Write?</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Hate it)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Love it)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Entire class population pre-project survey response to question number 1: How much do you like to write? (n=16).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How Would You Rate Your Ability as a Writer?</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Weak)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Strong)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Entire class population pre-project survey response to survey question 2: How would you rate your ability as a writer? (n=16).
As indicated in Table 1, the majority of the class (56%) responded as either a 1 or a 2 on the Lickert-type scale, indicating a generally low enjoyment level of writing. Thirty-one percent of the class responded as either a 4 or a 5 on the scale, indicating that they had a high enjoyment level of writing. Only one respondent claimed to “love” writing by selecting a 5 on the scale. In contrast to their lack of enjoyment of writing, the majority of the class (81%) ranked themselves at a level 3 or higher on their perceived writing skill (Table 2), with 50% responding as a level 4 on the scale. Thus, although the majority of the class reported to not enjoy writing, they also reported to having a fairly high level of skill when it came to writing tasks. This was not the case when their actual writing was examined. During group peer-editing sessions (which will be discussed later) many mistakes were uncovered based upon the formal characteristics of language discussed earlier. The classroom teacher was also surprised at the results of the students’ high evaluation of their own skill as writers. He indicated that in general, the majority of the students ranking themselves high on survey question number two were not judging themselves accurately.

Based upon the results of Table 2, along with recommendations from the classroom teacher, I made my selections for the six focus students. I wanted to work closely with a total of six students—three who perceived themselves as strong writers and three who perceived themselves as weak writers—in an attempt to understand the composition process in both groups. By working closely with these six students, I wanted to detect patterns in their writing based upon comparing the letters that they wrote to their in-class peers and to their Russian partners.
The third survey question asked each of the local class members whether or not they were aware of their audience (either a teacher or a peer) when they write (see Table 3). The majority (69%) indicated that they were “sometimes” aware of their audience, followed by 25% who indicated that it depended on the specific assignment or task. Only one student claimed to “always” be aware of audience, and no students answered “never.” This indicates that all students have at least partial awareness of their audience—typically their teacher—as indicated by Britton et al. (1975) as they complete their writing assignments for class. Their teacher confirmed this, stating that in many cases, he is the only one who sees their written work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When You Write, Are You Aware Of Your Audience?</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It depends upon the assignment or task</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Entire class population pre-project survey response to survey question 3: When you write, are you aware of your audience? (n=16).

The fourth survey question asked each of the local class members whether or not knowledge of their audience would make them change the way they wrote. Table 4 indicates that the majority of the students (69%) indicated that knowing who their audience was would have an effect on the way they wrote. This concept connects with survey question three, where the majority of the students indicated being aware of their audience “sometimes.” In comments overheard during class discussions, students
indicated that if they knew specifically who their audience was, they would compose their writing accordingly. These results are similar to what Frank (1992) discovered in her study when fifth-grade students were asked to write to two specific audiences: one consisting of third-graders and one consisting of adults. In her study, Frank (1992) suggested that “the fifth-grade students were able to invoke [both audiences], and the two audiences had distinct qualities and characteristics in the students’ minds” (p. 289). The remaining 31% of students in my study indicated that they would write in the same manner regardless of their target audience. According to Frank (1992), this suggests a lower level of maturity in terms of targeting writing to a specific audience. Frank (1992) stated that while the fifth-graders in her study were capable of imagining two distinct audiences, some were more adept at addressing those audiences than others.

If You Knew Who Your Audience Was, Would it Change the Way You Write? Number of Students %

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Entire class population pre-project survey response to survey question 4: If you knew who your audience was, would it change the way you write? (n=16).

Survey question number five (see Table 5) asked students whether they preferred writing with or without a prompt. The majority of the class (56%) indicated that they preferred to write with a teacher-directed prompt, while the remaining 44% enjoyed the freedom of not having to write from a prompt. These results were not surprising, as the majority of the students (56%) indicated a low level of enjoyment with writing (see Table
1). For students who do not enjoy writing, utilizing the aid of a prompt can provide some structure and a point at which to begin (Britton et al., 1975). Although the majority preferred the safety of a prompt, it was not a large majority. The classroom teacher tried to explain to me why this might be so. He told me that one of the pitfalls of building an English curriculum around standardized testing is that it takes away from students the impulse for ownership of their writing. He explained that standardized test-graders are looking for specific formal characteristics, generally within a rigid five-paragraph design. The teacher indicated that this trend has negative consequences since students are asked to respond personally to an artificial topic. He hopes that by implementing projects such as this one, where the structure is less rigid, his students will eventually be comfortable enough to assume ownership of their writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do You Prefer Writing With or Without a Prompt?</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>With</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Entire class population pre-project survey response to survey question 5: Do you prefer writing with or without a prompt? (n=16).

Survey question number six asked students what kinds of writing they did at home other than homework (see Table 6). Students were encouraged to check as many categories as applied to their situation. As a result, the choice “Notes and letters” received the most responses, followed by “Journal or diary.” Four students claimed to write stories outside of school, and four also claimed “Other” as an answer, which
included (as indicated by what they wrote in the space provided) poems, raps and graphic novels. Only five students claimed to do no writing outside of class. This number was surprising, since the majority of the class (56%) responded as either a 1 or a 2 on the Lickert-type scale, for survey question number one (see Table 1), indicating a very low enjoyment level of writing. In later interview sessions, students indicated that they disliked school-related writing, but enjoyed writing done voluntarily at home, such as in journals or in letters.

What Kinds of Writing do You do at Home Besides Homework? Number of Times Item was Selected

| Notes and letters | 10 |
| Stories           | 4  |
| Journal or diary  | 7  |
| None              | 5  |
| Other             | 4  |

Table 6: Entire class population pre-project survey response to survey question 6: What kinds of writing do you do at home besides homework?

Finally, in terms of audience awareness, the majority of the local students (82%) responded at a 3 or higher when asked if they preferred writing to peers for school assignments better than writing to the teacher (see Table 7). Their responses to survey question number 12 confirm their responses in Table 4, that if they knew who their audience was, they would change the way they write. Examining their e-mail letters to their Russian partners, this proved to be the case. According to their teacher, writing done for their peers (both in-class and Russian) was more informal in register and more conversational in tone, yet more carefully written than essays done solely for him. This
finding agrees with previous research which states that when students write for an audience other than their teacher, they tend to write more carefully, avoiding common mistakes that may otherwise go uncorrected (Wollman-Bonilla, 1999). However, unlike the Wollman-Bonilla study (1999), I allowed room below their survey responses for an explanation of their response. One student said that, “I feel more comfortable writing to my own age.” Another student explained, “Sometimes your effort depends on who will be seeing your work. Students will sometimes do better work if they know that somebody other than the teacher will be reading it!”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing to Peers or Others (for School Assignments) is Better Than Just Writing for the Teacher</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Not at all) 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Much better) 5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7. Entire class population pre-project survey response to survey question 12: Writing to peers or others (for school assignments) is better than just writing for the teacher. (n=16).

A brief summary of the pre-correspondence survey data indicates that a majority of the students in this study indicated a low enjoyment level of writing, even though many of them perceived themselves as average or above-average writers. Before the e-mail project began, all students indicated at least a partial awareness of their audience when they wrote. Some students indicated that whether or not they were aware of their audience depended upon the specific writing task. If the students knew their specific
target audience, many indicated that they would adjust their writing accordingly. Finally, while a small majority of the students in this study indicated that they preferred to write with the aid of a prompt, many of them engaged in creative writing activities outside of school. The following section examines the results of the post-correspondence survey administered to the students. The post-correspondence survey data will give an overview of the class as a whole before I begin to examine the six focus students individually for a more in-depth description of their writing process throughout this project.

**Survey Data (Post-Correspondence)**

After the e-mail project was completed, a post-project survey was administered to the whole local class to detect any change in their attitude toward writing and their level of audience awareness. According to the post-project survey results, the students left the project with a more positive attitude about writing (Table 8) as well as an increased perception in their ability as writers (Table 9). Their teacher indicated that this number was still high, (see Table 9) but that he did notice that students paid closer attention to their writing now than they did before the project started.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How Much do You Like To Write?</th>
<th>Pre-Project</th>
<th>Post-Project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 3 or higher</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: Percentage of students responding with a level 3 or above on the Lickert-type scale for survey question number one. (n=16 for pre-project, n=14 for post-project)
How Would You Rate Your Ability as a Writer?  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Project</th>
<th>Post-Project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 3 or higher</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9: Percentage of students responding with a level 3 or above on the Lickert-type scale for survey question number two. (n=16 for pre-project, n=14 for post-project)

Table 10 indicates a slight increase in the percentage of students who claimed that they are "always" aware of their audience with they write. There was a slight decrease in the percentage who claimed to "sometimes" be aware of their audience. As with the pre-project survey, no students reported "never" being aware of their audience, while there was a slight increase in the number who reported that it "depends" upon the assignment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Project</th>
<th>Post-Project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depends on the Assignment</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10: Percentage of students responding to survey question number three. (n=16 for pre-project, n=14 for post-project)
If You Knew Who Your Audience Was
Would You Change the Way You Write? Pre-Project Post-Project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-Project</th>
<th>Post-Project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11: Percentage of students responding to survey question number four. (n=16 for pre-project, n=14 for post-project)

As illustrated in Table 11, students indicated that prior to the project, 69% would change the way they wrote depending upon the target audience. After the completion of the project, that number increased to slightly to 79%, indicating that some students had a heightened awareness of their audience, and how to accommodate their writing to suit a specified audience.

Table 12 indicates that there was a marked increase in the number of students who stated a preference for writing to peers for school assignments versus writing solely to their teacher. Before the project, 44% of the students indicated that they preferred writing to peers. After the completion of the project, that number rose to 94%. For many students, this was the first time they had written specifically for an audience of their peers. When asked to elaborate on their answers in space given below the question, students commented that, “It makes you feel like you have more leverage in your writing,” and “You’re speaking your ideas to not just one person, but to numerous people.” One student commented that, “I think [writing to peers] is better because you can learn from each other, and your work is not criticized as much because the teacher knows exactly what to look for.” Another student explained that he preferred writing to peers because, “You are writing to someone you can relate to.” For some students, their
answers depended upon the specific writing assignment or task. One student commented:

> I personally prefer to write to my peers because they seem to understand what I mean a little better than a teacher would. But the topic also depends. If it’s my feelings, a peer is better. But world issues, teachers would be better for that.

Another student explained, “It actually depends on the teacher, but you have a better understanding of your audience if it’s your peers.” These comments reflect student comments found in similar studies (Bateman & Benson, 1999; Citrino & Gentry, 1999), where students indicated that they were more comfortable, more “engaged” when writing to other students their own age.

One student in my study indicated that he felt uncomfortable with the idea that someone other than the teacher would see his writing. He stated that, “I would rather not share some of the writing I do at school.” However, the majority of the students indicated that writing for peers was more enjoyable than writing for the teacher. This confirms data collected by Barker & Kemp (1998) that when students write to peers, their attitude and performance improves. According to Kemp, (1998) “Student writers often value the reactions of their peers over those of a professional reader—their teacher—and show more concern for their own text when writing for an audience they understand well” (P. 136).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing to Peers (for School Assignments) is Better Than Writing to the Teacher</th>
<th>Pre-Project</th>
<th>Post-Project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 3 or higher</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12: Percentage of students responding with a level 3 or above on the Lickert-type scale for survey question number 13. (n=16 for pre-project, n=14 for post-project)
As indicated in Table 13, the majority of the students agreed that writing with a specific audience in mind, in this case their Russian partners, caused them to pay closer attention to writing conventions such as grammar, punctuation, spelling and clarity. This is a demonstration of what Flower (1979) calls reader-based prose, in which nothing is assumed and contexts are clear and shared. No students strongly disagreed with the statement, and only 7% responded with a level 2 on the scale, suggesting that they demonstrated Flower's (1979) concept of reader-based prose.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing for a “Real” Audience (the Russian Students)</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Made Me Pay Closer Attention to Things Like Grammar, Punctuation, Spelling and Clarity</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Strongly disagree)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Strongly agree)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13: Entire class population response to post-project survey question number 15. (n=14)

Post-project survey question number 16 (Table 14) asked students whether or not they agreed that their responses to their Russian partners improved over time (for example were longer, clearer, and more focused). The majority agreed, with 86% responding with a level 4 or 5 on the scale, indicating that they perceived that their responses had improved over time. Research has indicated that with college students, an increase in confidence over time can be typical (especially students with weaker writing skills) who are writing to EFL students on a regular basis (Kasper, 2000; Tillyer &
Wood, 2000). No students responded with a level 1 or 2, and only 14% of students responded with a level 3. After time, and due in large part to the group peer-editing sessions (which will be discussed later), the students felt that they knew how to better accommodate the Russians in their writing style, making sure to eliminate (or fully explain) slang, achieve clarity, and properly use grammar and spelling conventions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I Feel That My Responses To My Russian Partner Improved Over Time</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Strongly disagree)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Strongly agree)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14: Entire class population response to post-project survey question number 16. (n=14)

Post-project survey question number 17 asked students whether or not writing to a “real” audience of peers made them become more confident about their writing (Table 15). While the majority of the class (93%) responded at a level 3 or higher on the Lickert-type scale, the distribution was fairly even throughout. This high percentage could be due in part to the fact that the students perceived that they had a reason to write (to discuss the literature and demonstrate proper use of the English language) and were not just writing to satisfy the teacher (Tillyer & Wood, 2000).
Writing for a “Real” Audience Made Me Feel More Confident About My Writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Strongly disagree)</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Strongly agree)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15: Entire class population response to post-project survey question number 17. (n=14)

Post-project survey question number 18 asked students whether or not writing for a “real” audience made them more excited to write than if they were writing solely for the teacher (Table 16). As seen in Table 15, the majority of the class (93%) responded with a 3 or higher on the scale when asked if writing for an authentic audience make them more confident as writers, but with a fairly even distribution. In Table 16, 43% responded with a level 5, indicating a high level of excitement when writing to peers. Level 4 was chosen by 21% of the students, while 29% chose a level three, indicating neutrality. One student elaborated to the side of his answer, stating that he enjoyed writing to an authentic audience because his writing “meant something to them.” Again, other studies indicate that students tend to become more excited about writing when that writing is aimed at peers rather than the classroom teacher (Fox, 1998; Singhal, 1997; Warschauer, 1997).
Writing for a “Real” Audience Made Me Feel More Excited to Write Than if I Were Just Writing for the Teacher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Strongly disagree) 1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Strongly agree) 5</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 16: Entire class population response to post-project survey question number 18. (n=14)

For many students, writing for an audience of their peers rather than for the teacher increases their motivation to write cohesively and correctly (Kasper, 2000). By writing to peers, assignments become more meaningful. In a study conducted by Gousseva, (1998) a college student noted that, when writing to peers, “the reason for writing…is not only to show the teacher that we can write but also to share our opinions and learn about other students [sic.] ideas. This makes you reflect over your own ideas and also to maybe reconsider your opinion and make it even more persuading” (Gousseva, 1998, p. 10). Gousseva (1998) also found that when writing for an authentic audience of peers, her college students perceived a shift in the purpose of their writing from merely fulfilling an assignment to sharing their views with other students. Students also perceived that by having the opportunity to read responses from distant peers, they were able to broaden their outlook on various issues by looking at them from multiple perspectives (Gousseva, 1998). In my study, the survey data shows that high school students also enjoyed writing for an audience other than their teacher. Therefore, for
these students, writing to a distant audience of peers for a specific purpose indicates a positive effect on student’s motivation to write, and write well (Fox, 1998; Nagel, 1999; Warschauer, 1997). As one student in my study succinctly indicated, “I enjoyed writing to actual people!”

Summary

The purpose of the pre- and post-project surveys was to understand how the local students felt about writing in general, as well as writing to an audience other than their teacher. Overall, the students indicated that while they did not enjoy writing for school assignments, they did enjoy writing outside of school. They also indicated that they enjoyed writing for peers more than writing exclusively for their teacher. In addition, they indicated that, overall, if they knew who their audience was, they would compose their writing accordingly. In the following section, I will examine the effects that peer-editing had upon student writing. I will first examine the class as a whole, and then focus upon six focus students representing both strong and weak writers.

The Effects of Peer-Editing on Student Writing

Re-emphasizing the Importance of an Authentic Audience

From the beginning of this e-mail project, the local students were aware that they were involved in something different from what they were used to in school. On the first day of the e-mail project, their teacher told them about the short stories that they would be reading and discussing via e-mail with their Russian partners. He said that that their overseas partners would be reading Russian translations of the O’Henry stories (and original Russian versions of the Chekhov stories). However, they would be writing their letters to the Riverside students in English, as the Russian students were interested in
learning and using English in an authentic context. He also told his students that, "In this project, you become the teachers. You have a responsibility to write well so they can see how you use the language." The importance of using proper English was emphasized, as the roles in the class were about to change. "It's not like when you hand in something just for me, so you need to be very careful about your spelling, grammar, and what you say."

The teacher went on to explain to his students that the current Russian students had been speaking English in school since they were young, and in some cases knew as much or more than their teachers. However, he explained that the Russian students want to know how to understand and use "real" English, the English that "real" American students speak, the kind of English that they will use to examine real issues in their classroom.

Later in that first class period, the local teacher stated that, "We'll be creating an authentic audience." He explained to his students that while he is a real person, he is not an authentic audience because he has done all of the assignments and has read all of the literature that will be covered in the class. As the teacher, he knows "the answers," and therefore is an authentic teacher audience as opposed to an authentic peer audience.

According to Wollman-Bonilla (1999), "students need to write for an audience outside the classroom" (p. 2), an audience in need of knowing the information to be shared since they can not be there physically to communicate in person. The local teacher further explained that, "You're giving [the Russian students] genuine information that they can actually use. Usually, your only response is to the teacher, but I'm not judging it now—they are!" By straightforwardly alerting his students to not only who their audience was, but also to the importance of having that audience understand the letters that were to be written, the teacher generated a high level of audience awareness.
A slight increase in the awareness of audience was seen in the survey results, when before the project began, only 6% of the class responded as "always" being aware of audience, as compared to after the project, where that number increased to 14% (see Table 10). There was also an increase in the number of students who would change the way they wrote if they knew specifically who their audience would be (see Table 11). However, the largest increase from pre-project to post-project survey data was in the number of students who indicated that writing for peers (for school assignments) was better than writing exclusively for the teacher. Before the e-mail project began, only 44% of the students agreed with that statement. After the project was completed, that number increased to 94%, indicating that the students were more highly motivated to write to peers than for their teacher (see Table 12). Prior research indicates higher student motivation to be the case when working with peers (Fox, 1998; Goussera, 1998; Lee, 2000). Here, collaborative learning principles were being applied by allowing students the opportunity to work together with their classmates as well as their Russian partners to answer questions that were immediately important to them. This confirms what Faigley (1999) states, contending that, "I believe that most learning is not 'self-taught,' most learning is not a solitary experience, and that people learn best when learning with other people" (p. 137). In my study, collaboration was a key component in the composition process.

**Sequence of the E-mail Project**

The following figure (see Figure 2) explains the sequence of the e-mail project that I examined during the course of my study. There were four exchanges of letters total, and three of those exchanges were based on themes present in the short stories that
the students read. Unfortunately, the American students never received the final half of the fourth exchange, as time for the project ran out due to other end-of-the-year commitments in which the students from both classes were engaged.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Reading and Writing Tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Students wrote introductory letters to their Russian partners. These letters included autobiographical information plus information about O'Henry. These letters were projected on the wall and peer-edited by the whole class as a group before they were revised and sent via e-mail to the Russian students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Russian students' letters arrived. These letters were also introductory in nature and contained biographical information about Chekhov. Students began reading the short stories that dealt with the law. These stories included O'Henry's &quot;The Cop and the Anthem&quot; and Chekhov's &quot;Chameleon.&quot; During the reading process, students asked questions and discussed the text as a class. Students wrote first drafts of their second letters to their Russian partners. These letters were peer-edited in small groups. Revised letters were then sent to their Russian partners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The second set of Russian students' letters arrived. Students began reading O'Henry's &quot;The Gift of the Magi&quot; for the next exchange on Christmas. After reading the story as a class, small groups were formed for brainstorming and writing their responses. After small-group peer-editing, the third exchange of letters was sent to their Russian partners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The third set of Russian students' letters arrived. Students began reading O'Henry's &quot;The Last Leaf&quot; and Chekhov's &quot;The House With the Mansard&quot; for their final exchange, this time about art. After reading the stories as a class, small groups were formed as before to write and peer-edit their final responses to their Russian partners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The semester came to an end before the Russian students had a chance to complete the fourth exchange of letters.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: Sequence of reading and writing activities for the American students during the e-mail project.
Whole-Group Peer-Editing

The local class was instructed that their first letters to their Russian partners would contain two sections: first, an introduction of themselves, and second, background information on O’Henry. During a previous class, the students used the Internet and in-class books to look up information on the author. They then decided, as a class, what information was important to include in their letters, and what would be suitable to omit. The students took this task very seriously, because they were told that their Russian partners would take this information and use it for a class project of their own. My study is in line with earlier research stating that when students know that their work will be read and used by other students, they take the task more seriously than if they were using the information solely for themselves (Lee, 2000; Robb, 1996; Singhal, 1997). For homework, students were to compose their first letter, and have it available for the first peer-editing session the following day.

On the peer-editing day, students were asked to work in pairs. The teacher explained that they were to read each other’s letters as if they were the Russian students. He wanted them to be alert to any colloquial expressions that may not make sense to their partners (Tillyer & Wood, 2000). He said, for example, to be aware of the difference between the slang term “phatt” and the common term “fat.” He informed them that once all corrections had been made, they were to go to one of the seven computers in the classroom and type their letter, saving it on a disk when they finished. The students worked very quietly, concentrating mainly on surface-level errors such as spelling and punctuation use. As I observed students working in pairs, many glossed over the
colloquial phrases that their letters contained, as such phrases are a natural part of their daily speech. For example, the phrase "hang out" was often overlooked, as were the phrases, "what's going on?" and, "what's up?"

The following day, the teacher printed out the students' letters and proceeded to project each one on the wall for a group peer-editing session. By projecting each letter in front of the class, he was able to model the editing technique he wanted his students to use when they eventually broke into smaller groups. Before he began, he told the students, "I cannot overemphasize the importance of using proper English grammar!" He pretended to be a Russian student as he read each letter that was projected on the wall. He informed the class that it was not only punctuation and spelling that were important, but also the words they choose to use. He told them that they must learn to "simplify" the language, at least initially. "There are many, many differences between you and your partners, and between the literature of the two authors, so it's important that you serve the needs of the Russian students."

During the group editing of the first letter, issues arose. For example, a student wrote, "I want to let you know a little bit about me as a person first." Another student asked if "as a person first" was necessary. The teacher said no, but that the phrase could stay because he did not want the letters to be too impersonal. He said that the Russian students want to know how we actually write, so while the letters should be correct, they should not be too sterile (Tillyer & Wood, 2000).

When the class analyzed Travis' letter, (one of the three focus students identified as a weak writer) more questions arose. One student asked about the phrase "hang out." The teacher asked Travis to define it. Travis stated that, "It's something that boys do in
the bathroom." After the snickers receded, the teacher asked Travis where the phrase came from. Travis didn’t know, and neither did anyone else. Despite the vagueness of the phrase, the teacher allowed Travis to keep it in his letter, stating that because the Russian students watch just as much MTV as American students do, they probably know what it means. This seemed to be the case, as many Russian students made reference to MTV in their letters. Travis also used a negative tone as he introduced his biography of O’Henry, stating that, “Now I have to tell you about O’Henry.” The class decided that when stated like that, it sounded as if including the author information was a chore. Someone suggested that Travis rephrase his letter to read, “Now I’d like to tell you about O’Henry.” The entire class agreed that the letter now sounded much friendlier.

Another student’s letter claimed, “I like all music except country.” The teacher suggested that the student say “country and western,” because the Russian students may be more familiar with that term. Many students nodded and made corrections on their papers (copies of which were in front of them).

Next, the class examined Sandy’s letter. Like Travis, Sandy was one of the three focus students identified as a weak writer. In her introduction she stated that, “Ohio is boring and cold.” The teacher smiled and reminded her that she was writing to a student living in Moscow, so “cold” was a relative term. Students suggested that Sandy tell her partner the exact temperature, which would most likely seem balmy compared to the high in Moscow on a February day. The class also wanted her to explain what she meant by “boring,” stating that it was too vague a term. They suggested that she list some reasons that make Ohio a boring place to live.
Vagueness was a common problem found in many of the letters written. One student told his Russian partner, “I like to play golf and work.” The students were quick to point out that he should explain what he meant by “work.” He told the class that he has a telemarketing job, and they wondered if the Russian students would know what that meant. The teacher said probably not, considering that the concept does not exist in Russia, and should therefore be explained.

Carlton’s letter was then projected and scrutinized. Carlton was one of the three focus students identified as a strong writer. The teacher liked the way Carlton defined his slang terms parenthetically throughout his letter. For example, the letter began by stating, “Dear Ho-Mi (Friend).” The teacher went ahead and asked Carlton to define Ho-Mi anyway, and Carlton explained that, “It’s like homeboy, a member of the community, a brother.” Further in the letter, Carlton mentioned that his nickname was “Sabotage.” The teacher questioned Carlton on the word’s negative connotations, of which Carlton was unaware. Carlton explained that it meant “to stop the production of bad rap and grind it to a halt.” All of the students were confused. One student told Carlton to just tell his partner that “Sabotage” is a stage name and leave it at that. Another student told Carlton that it is just a “strange” name and should be omitted altogether.

After class, the teacher told me that for his students, “This e-mail project is a matter of clarity and correctness versus complexity and ambiguousness.” He said that he wants his students to write simply, and that in his heart he feels that this makes them better writers, more “deliberate” writers. For the teacher, getting his students to become readers of their work (Flower, 1979) as well as writers was the key to becoming successful communicators.
Small-Group Peer-Editing

For subsequent letters to the Russian students, editing was done not as a whole group but in pairs or groups of three. Keeping in mind the technique their teacher had modeled for them previously, the students were told to choose a partner or two that they trusted, and proofread his or her second letter. After they were done proofreading, they were to sign their name at the bottom of the letter. The teacher explained that if errors were still found after a letter had been proofed, points would be deducted from the person who did the proofing. Because of that announcement, many questions were asked during the course of the class. The teacher reminded everyone to think back to their first proofreading session, to remember what sorts of issues were important to consider, such as clarity, vagueness, and use of slang terms, not just spelling.

For this second peer-editing session I chose to watch David. David was one of the three focus students identified as a weak writer. He was working with a boy who was not one of the six case study students, but who indicated on the survey that he enjoyed writing and saw himself as a strong writer. David explained to his partner that something “just doesn’t sound right” in his letter. After taking several minutes to talk it out, David understood how he could make that section in his letter clearer. When David’s partner asked the simple question, “What are you trying to say?” David was able to re-word the section that he was trying to explain about how his soccer team won a recent game. The majority of David’s mistakes involved spelling in general, and capitalization in particular. David explained to his partner that he was used to “Internet” typing in chat rooms, claiming that in that venue, speed counts more than accuracy. “As long as the people know what you’re trying to say, it doesn’t matter how it’s spelled.”
A glance around the room showed that Paige, one of the focus students identified as a strong writer, had several people asking for her advice on their letters. From prolonged classroom observation, it was evident that Paige was a student who felt comfortable working with a wide range of her classmates. She was confident in her manner and tone, thus gaining the respect of her peers. Never one to criticize in a negative way, Paige was a popular editing partner. In terms of negative criticism, I never observed any incidence of one student humiliating another. The mood of the class was one of cooperation, all working for the common goal of understanding on the part of the Russian students.

For each of the four letters sent to their Russian partners during the course of this project, peer-editing played a major role. During the small group peer-editing sessions, I observed students working within Vygotsky’s (1978) zone of proximal development. According to Vygotsky (1978), there are two distinct levels that define the zone of proximal development. The first is the *actual* developmental level of the student. This is the level at which a student can work in isolation, unaided by peers or a more knowledgeable other. The second is the *potential* level of the student. This is the level at which students perform when assisted by peers or more knowledgeable others. As indicated above, many students went to Paige for assistance with peer-editing tasks. Because Paige was more knowledgeable than her peers about editing, she helped to extend their cognitive boundaries by showing them the correct way to edit their letters. Vygotsky (1978) argued that in some ways, this potential level of development was a better predictor of a student’s future success in the classroom than his or her actual
development level. "What children can do with the assistance of others might be in some sense even more indicative of their mental development than what they can do alone" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 85).

Comparative Letters

Now I will shift the focus of this discussion from the whole class to individual students. For comparative purposes, throughout the study I had each of the six focus group students compose additional letters to an in-class peer. Whenever they wrote to their Russian partners, which occurred four times throughout the study, they also wrote a letter on the same topic to their in-class peer. The purpose of these “extra” letters was to determine whether writing to a peer who shared the same cultural context would have an effect on how the letter was written. The data indicate that there were differences between the letters written to in-class peers versus letters written to their Russian partners. To gain a sense of how the two sets of letters differed, I chose to compare the formal characteristics of the language the students produced in their writing to their in-class partners and to their Russian partners. I defined the term “formal characteristics” as suggested by the Riverside City Schools ninth-grade rubric for holistic scoring (see appendix C). For the purposes of this study, I divided what I termed “descriptive categories” into two categories: rhetorical/stylistic features (as related to audience awareness) and usage/mechanical features, including grammatical features and punctuation/spelling. Under rhetorical/stylistic features, I further sub-divided the features into the use or avoidance of slang, vagueness/explicitness, assumed or lack of assumed shared context, and informality/formality of register. These categories were created after observing two group peer-editing sessions involving the whole class. Under
usage/mechanical features, I included indifference to or observance of grammatical
congventions, use or avoidance of contractions, indifference to or observance of correct
punctuation, and indifference to or observance of correct spelling. For each case study
student, I compared letters written to his or her in-class partner to letters written to his or
her Russian partner using the descriptive categories as a guide.

Using the comparison of letters, I will first examine the focus group students
identified as strong writers, triangulating with interview and survey data. Later, I will
examine their group peer-response session. This session was conducted to determine how
they worked as a group to address audience awareness issues present in their letters. For
each group of three focus group students, a letter written to their in-class partner was
randomly chosen for close examination of the descriptive categories mentioned earlier.
The students were asked to examine the letter and decide what, if anything, should be
changed in order to make the letter suitable for sending to their Russian partners. Since
the whole class had previously concentrated on editing, the students had some guidelines
of what to look for, such as correct grammar and specific, well-explained examples.

**Comparative Letters: Strong Writers**

The following tables (see Tables 17-22) compare letters written by each of the
three focus group students identified as strong writers (Paige, Laura and Carlton). For
each figure, letters written to in-class peers were compared to letters written to their
Russian partners. The purpose of the comparison was to determine how the individual
students accommodated their writing depending upon their target audience. It was
assumed that the target audience of in-class peers shared the same language and cultural
context, as opposed to their Russian peers who did not share those two factors. To obtain
the examples found in Tables 17-22, each student's letters to his or her in-class peer was compared to the letters that he or she wrote to their Russian partner. Then each letter was coded according to the descriptive categories described earlier. Examples were then pulled from the letters that best served to illustrate each of the descriptive categories.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptive Categories</th>
<th>Letters to In-Class Peer</th>
<th>Letters to Russian Peer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| I. Rhetorical/Stylistic Features (In Terms of Audience Awareness) | 1. Use of slang  
* e.g. Talk to ya later!  
2. Vague (generalizing)  
* e.g. I like stories that have a deeper meaning in them.  
3. Assumed shared context  
* e.g. I went to King’s Island last weekend.  
4. Informality in register  
* e.g. Hello, how ya doin'? | 1. Avoidance of slang  
* e.g. Sincerely,  
2. Explicitness  
* e.g. There seems to be too much focus on presents, and the real reason for celebrating is lost. Christmas is supposed to be in honor of Jesus’ birthday.  
3. Lack of assumed shared context  
* No mention of the amusement park.  
4. Formality in register  
* e.g. Hello! I always enjoy your letters. |
| II. Usage/Mechanical Features                  |                                                                                          |                                                                                          |
| A. Grammatical Features                        | 1. Indifference to conventions  
* e.g. I love to play pool, do you play? (Run-on sentence.)  
2. Use of contractions  
* None | 1. Observance of conventions  
* No run-on sentences.  
2. Avoidance of contractions  
* One contraction used: can’t. |
| B. Punctuation/Spelling                        | 1. Indifference to punctuation  
* Correct punctuation throughout  
2. Spelling errors  
* e.g. "i" used for "l." | 1. Observance of punctuation  
* Correct punctuation throughout  
2. Lack of spelling errors  
* Error corrected: "l" |

Table 17: Examples of descriptive categories for Paige.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptive Categories</th>
<th>Letters to In-Class Peer</th>
<th>Letters to Russian Peer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| I. Rhetorical/Stylistic Features (In Terms of Audience Awareness) | 1. Use of slang  
e.g. "love birds" | 1. Avoidance of slang  
Avoids the term "love birds" |
|                        | 2. Vague (generalizing)  
*No vagueness present* | 2. Explicitness  
e.g. *We celebrate Christmas on December 25. We decorate a tree with ornaments and lights, then we put presents under it until it is time to open them Christmas morning.* |
|                        | 3. Assumed shared context  
e.g. *I know you already know the ways we celebrate Christmas.* | 3. Lack of assumed shared context  
e.g. *The tradition for us is to exchange gifts between friends and family.* |
|                        | 4. Informality in register  
e.g. *I don't know about you, but...* | 4. Formality in register  
Avoids such idioms |
| II. Usage/Mechanical Features | 1. Indifference to conventions  
e.g. *Then, finally, he is arrested in the end for a stupid reason, he was in a church when it was closed and no one was supposed to be there.*  
*(Run-on sentence)* | 1. Observance of conventions  
e.g. *In the end of the story, the cop finally arrests Soapy for being in the church when he was not supposed to be because it was closed.*  
*(No run-on sentence)* |
| A. Grammatical Features | 2. Use of contractions  
*Used in both* | 2. Avoidance of contractions  
*Used in both* |
| B. Punctuation/Spelling | 1. Indifference to punctuation  
*Correct punctuation observed* | 1. Observance of punctuation  
*Correct punctuation observed* |
|                        | 2. Spelling errors  
e.g. "Anyways" | 2. Lack of spelling errors  
*Changed to "first"* |

Table 18: Examples of descriptive categories for Laura.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptive Categories</th>
<th>Letters to In-Class Peer</th>
<th>Letters to Russian Peer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Rhetorical/Stylistic Features (In Terms of Audience Awareness)</td>
<td>1. Use of slang e.g. ...beat the dog mess out of him.</td>
<td>1. Avoidance of slang e.g. ...got beaten up for being a black man.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Vague (generalizing) e.g. I spent a day and a half downtown.</td>
<td>2. Explicitness e.g. [the cop] took me downtown, fingerprinted me, and kept me in jail for two days.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Assumed shared context e.g. Remember back in 1992 when the L.A. riots took place?</td>
<td>3. Lack of assumed shared context e.g. In 1992, a man named Rodney King was pulled over for a routine traffic stop and got beaten up for being a black man. This set off a whole set of riots in the Los Angeles part of the United States.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Informality in register e.g. Yo!</td>
<td>4. Formality in register e.g. Dear Rim,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Usage/Mechanical Features</td>
<td>1. Indifference to conventions e.g. This causes him to what I like to say &quot;keep it real.&quot; Meaning the stories have truth in them. (Sentence fragment)</td>
<td>1. Observance of conventions No sentence fragments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Grammatical Features</td>
<td>2. Use of contractions e.g. hasn't</td>
<td>2. Avoidance of contractions e.g. has not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Indifference to punctuation Correct punctuation observed</td>
<td>1. Observance of punctuation Correct punctuation observed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Punctuation/Spelling</td>
<td>2. Spelling errors Mix-up of &quot;their&quot; and &quot;there&quot;</td>
<td>2. Lack of spelling errors Spelling errors corrected</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 19: Examples of descriptive categories for Carlton.
Each of these three students were considered by themselves and their teacher to be strong writers, therefore the letters they wrote to their in-class peers and the letters that they wrote to Russian partners varied little in terms of usage/mechanical features. Each letter contained only one run-on sentence or sentence fragment, and each letter observed correct punctuation. The use of contractions, giving the letters an informal air, was evident in all letters, both for the in-class peers and their Russian partners (although with less frequency). Spelling errors for each letter were also minor and infrequent. In all cases, corrections were made in the letters to be sent to their Russian partners. Because the focus students were aware that their letters would serve as an example of “correct” English grammar to their Russian partners, they wanted them to be as error-free as possible. While research has shown this to be true for many students writing to EFL peers (Kasper, 2000; Tillyer & Wood, 2000), none have specifically examined high school students using such comparative letters to gauge an increase in writing skills.

According to the survey data, Paige, Laura and Carlton all responded with a level 3 or higher on the Lickert-type scale when asked how much they liked to write (see Table 1). These strong writers said it was because of their general interest in writing that their letters contained only minor usage/mechanical errors. For each of them, writing has always come easily, and the rules of grammar and punctuation have always made sense. According to Paige, “I just have always gotten good grades on essays, and I do write in my free time.” Carlton added:

I believe I’m a great writer! I mean, I’ve been told since elementary school that I’m a good writer. To perfect my skill, I just put it in the form of raps. I come up with things in my imagination and have the ability to put it into words. To be able to do that fluently and what not without a mistake takes great writing skills. I mean, not to be cocky or anything!
Laura claimed that she was a good writer, but not for “school writing, like when we’re given a specific topic and we have to go do research about it. I like creative writing.” Carlton agreed, stating that, “Most of the time a good writer is a good writer when they have full control over what they’re writing, not a set limit, like boundaries.” Carlton indicated on the pre- and post-project surveys that he enjoyed writing without the aid of a prompt, and Paige agreed, saying, “Yeah, because you want your writing to have feeling in it, and the more you feel about that subject, the more feeling is gonna get through.” When asked about the types of writing that they were asked to do for school, everyone agreed that the majority of assignments asked them to write about a pre-set topic and adhere to strict guidelines. They said that their English class is the only place where a freer type of writing is accepted, and they liked that freedom. Carlton mentioned a test he recently took that covered “The Scarlet Letter.” The test, rather than asking objective questions about the plot, setting, and characters, allowed the students to demonstrate their knowledge in a broader, more subjective format through writing. “I loved that test,” said Carlton. “It wasn’t like something set that you had to do. You had to come straight from your head with the ideas and stuff, like what you’re going to say to these people, not like, ‘Tell me the name of the little girl in chapter four’ or something like that.” Paige agreed. “It like, brought out the bigger meaning of the book instead of all the little facts.” Clearly Paige, Laura and Carlton appreciated being able to express themselves in broader terms than typical standardized tests allow.

Both Laura and Carlton agreed that one has to be born a good writer, as Carlton put it, “to have it in your heart.” Paige disagreed, comparing writers to athletes. “It’s just like practicing. Some people are naturally good athletes, but whether you are or not, you
practice and you can improve. Like, some people who aren’t great writers can practice and re-write stuff, revise it, until it turns into a good paper.” When asked what made someone a good writer, Paige, Laura and Carlton all agreed that it took imagination—and the will to write. When I asked Carlton what he meant by the “will” to write, he explained that, “If you don’t like doing work, if you don’t like writing stuff down, writing whatever’s in your head down at the time, then you’re not going to be a good writer. You’ll feel like it’s a chore.” Paige said that, “You need to be able to interpret what you are thinking into words, so people understand it and it flows. You need to know how to word things, how to get variety into your vocabulary.” For these students, writing was not a “chore,” and each student demonstrated a high level of skill with usage/mechanical features.

Paige, Laura and Carlton also indicated on their survey responses a high level of audience awareness. As Carlton emphatically stated, “[These letters] are gonna have to be perfect! They’re gonna have to be better than perfect! I mean, you have to go above and beyond all standards that the teacher sets!” For this e-mail project, Carlton saw himself shift from the role of student to role of teacher, and for him this shift was important. He appreciated being given the freedom to use his prior knowledge to connect with the literature on a personal level, and share that connection with his Russian partner. When the knowledge students have is allowed to emerge and be used for specific, meaningful purposes, the classroom becomes a more egalitarian place (Cooper, 1999) where the teacher is not the only person in the room with something valuable to contribute.
When discussing audience awareness issues, these three students understood that they had a big responsibility ahead of them. I asked them if they thought that writing for their Russian partners would make them write better, or more carefully. Paige responded by saying, “Grammar-wise, probably, just because I know they’re learning from our examples. But I think it’s gonna be hard to not use so much slang and symbolism and stuff, because they’re gonna take it literally.” Carlton saw the project as a huge responsibility, one that he was going to take seriously. “You’re shaping their minds,” he told me, “to how we speak, and how our culture is. Rap is the same way. You can say certain things, but can be criticized for it because kids will follow [your example].” Laura commented, “I think we have to be really careful, because the people we’re writing to, that’s how they’re gonna learn our way of writing. You don’t want to give them the wrong message or teach them the wrong way.” I asked the group how writing for their Russian partners would be different than writing for their in-class peers, and Paige said, “I think we’re gonna have to go backwards into time when we were learning, because now we can be so open and write about, like, use similes and metaphors and stuff, stuff that they might trip on and get confused. We’ll have to be more simple.” Everyone agreed, and Paige continued by saying, “I know that if I was reading something in a different language...I would want them to use very short and simple sentences. I don’t want them to say too much stuff.” Laura added, “I agree with how we shouldn’t use big words and stuff, but I think whatever we write to them needs to be detailed, and explain what we mean.” Carlton came up with an example, “Like ‘fat’ and ‘phat.’ F-A-T is the wrong word, but if you say like, ‘That car is phat’ using the P-H-A-T form, that means, ‘It’s nice, I like that car.’” In his letters to his partner, Carlton became known for
parenthetically explaining his slang terminology. Paige suggested that her American peers try saying the same things in different ways. "For example, you could say, 'He did many crimes in his lifetime,' then you could also say, 'He was a rebel.'" This illustrates the use of what Flower (1979) identifies as reader-based prose, where the writer is highly aware of the needs of his or her reader, and composes accordingly.

As suggested by Carlton’s attention to the treatment of slang, greater variation occurred in the rhetorical/stylistic features of each of the letters. Focusing on the use of slang, Carlton’s letters contained the most. In his letters to his in-class peer, he often used such phrases as “my peoples,” and “my realities” with no explanation to describe his family members. In many cases, Carlton included slang in his letters to his Russian partner, followed by a parenthetical explanation of what the word or phrase meant. For example, in one letter, he stated that, “Your letter was the bomb (your letter was very good).” In the same letter, he said, “One weekend I was running through my hood (neighborhood) and a robbery had taken place.” In his first letter to his Russian partner, Carlton began by writing, “Dear Ho-Mi (Friend).” He ended the same letter by writing, “Stay up God! (Keep doing good, friend!)” All three agreed that they wanted to share their slang words with their partners. According to Carlton:

I think most of them want to know what our slang is. I would love to find out what their slang is! Like what do they say for ‘dope’ or ‘nice’ or ‘good’? Or what do you call your friends? Like, I call my friends ‘God,’ like a form of respect, like, ‘Hi, what’s up, God.’ I wanna know what they say in situations like when they come up to their friends and whether they just say ‘hello’ or something.”

Overall, the strong writers were very explicit in their letters, both to their in-class peers and their Russian partners. However, there were some exceptions. Instances where
they were vague generally coincided with assuming a shared cultural context. As Table 19 indicates, Carlton wrote to his in-class peer that he spent “a day and a half downtown,” assuming that his in-class peer understood that in this case, “downtown” meant “at the police station.” In his letter to his Russian partner, however, Carlton elaborated, stating that going downtown entailed getting fingerprinted and spending a couple of days in jail. In her letter to her in-class peer, Paige simply stated, “I like stories that have a deeper meaning in them.” However, for her Russian partner, she elaborated, explaining that the O’Henry story “The Gift of the Magi” made her think more deeply about the meaning of Christmas. “There seems to be too much focus on presents, and the real reason for celebrating is lost. Christmas is supposed to be in honor of Jesus’ birthday.” In Laura’s case, both letters were quite explicit, as was the majority of her writing in general.

In the letters written for their in-class peers, each strong focus group student assumed a shared cultural context. Paige mentioned a local amusement park, Laura stated that, “I know you already understand the ways we celebrate [Christmas],” and Carlton assumed knowledge of the 1992 L.A. riots. In his letter to his in-class peer, Carlton also wrote that comparing the two authors, O’Henry and Chekhov, was like trying to compare the two comedians Bill Cosby and Richard Pryor. Here, no explanation was given as to who these men were—it was simply understood, and thus would be an inappropriate comparison for someone not familiar with the comedians. However, in his letter to his Russian partner, Carlton made no mention of the two comedians, and explained in more detail the background of the L.A. riots for clearer understanding. In an interview conducted midway through the project, Laura indicated
that writing to her Russian partner was more difficult for her than writing to her in-class partner, mainly because of the assumed shared cultural context that she and her in-class partner have in common:

I think it’s challenging for me because you really have to sit and think about what you’re about to write before you write it. It’s not normally how I would write. I have to write easier stuff so they will understand it. For my English [speaking] partner, I use more slang words and stuff they know about because my friends understand that more and I don’t have to use as many easy words or be as descriptive.

A general informality in register could be seen in the letters written to their in-class peers that was lacking in their letters for their Russian partners. Paige and Carlton both used “ya” and “yo” on several occasions in their local letters, while omitting the words in their letters to their Russian partners. In one instance, Carlton began a letter to his Russian partner by stating “Yo (Hello),” followed by his usual parenthetical statement. As stated previously, Carlton made it a habit to include slang in his letters to his Russian partner, but a parenthetical statement of explanation always followed the slang. When asked why he included such parenthetical statements, he explained that the Russian students wanted to learn the slang, just as he would want to learn their slang so he didn’t sound “too proper” if he ever found himself on the streets in Moscow.

After the project was completed, I asked the focus students again about their views concerning the role that audience played in their writing. At the beginning of the project, everyone but Carlton stated on survey question number four that if they knew who their audience was, they would change the way they wrote. During an earlier interview, Carlton told me that it didn’t matter who his audience was, that his message
would stay the same. However, after the project, Carlton changed his mind, citing his responsibility for showing his Russian partner the correct way to use English. "You’re shaping their minds," he told me. For the post-project interview, I asked the same questions as I had asked during the pre- and mid-project interviews (see Appendix E) to check for such changes in attitude about audience awareness. When asked whether writing to an audience other than their teacher made them better writers, Carlton said, "Always! You have a bigger variety of people reading your stuff!" Paige agreed, with one exception. "You don’t get any feedback or comments on your writing, whereas if you were writing for a teacher, he would grade it, and you would see..." Here Carlton interrupted, stating that, "Yeah, but that’s the beauty about it! They do respond to what we write!" The fact that his distant partner would be reading his words, his message, was of primary importance. As was standard for Carlton, the wider his audience, the better. He concluded by stating that, "We had to do all the work ourselves!" referring to the peer-editing sessions. In fact, each student selected a 4 or higher on the Lickert-type scale for post-project survey question number eighteen which asked "Writing for a ‘real’ audience make me feel more excited to write than if I were just writing for the teacher.” This confirms studies that have concluded that when writing to an authentic audience for authentic purposes, student motivation to write increases. Because Fox (1998), Lee (2000) and Singhal (1997) had college students, I can conclude that student motivation to write well for distant peers is true across a variety of grade levels.

Paige, Laura and Carlton all indicated on their post-project surveys that writing to their Russian partners made them pay closer attention to grammar, spelling and clarity in their writing. They also indicated that their responses to their Russian partners improved
over time, meaning that they were not only longer, but clearer and more focused. When asked how they would rate their strength as writers now as opposed to the beginning of the project, both Paige and Laura said they were probably the same. This was indicated by both of them selecting a 4—on the Lickert-type scale to survey question number two, “How would you rate your ability as a writer?” on both the pre- and post-project surveys (see Appendix D). But Carlton disagreed. He stated that, “I’ve gotten stronger as a writer, partially because of this project. Now I pay more attention to grammar and clarity in my rhymes and in my papers for school. Like, I had to do a paper on hip-hop for [English class] and for history class, and I just kept thinking back and asking myself, ‘If I were sending this to somebody else, would it be correct or not?’” This comment shows a direct transfer of peer-editing skills to other written school assignments. Before the project, Carlton ranked his ability as a writer at a level 4 on the scale. After the project, he increased his score to a 5, the highest level of writing ability. For these students, good writing meant more than correct spelling and grammar; therefore, they were not as overwhelmingly supportive of this project in terms of becoming better technical writers. Their improvement became evident in the accommodations that they made for their Russian partners. Their writing became more reader-centered, attending to the needs of simplicity and clarity that their Russian partners required.

**Group Peer-Response Session: Strong Writers**

Near the end of the e-mail project, I randomly chose one of the letters that the focus group students wrote to their in-class peer. I wanted both focus groups to examine this letter, and determine whether or not any changes needed to be made in order to send
it out to their Russian partner (see Appendix J). By having the focus group students participate in this exercise, I could determine to what extent their level of audience awareness had increased.

It did not take Paige and Laura too long to figure out that the letter that had been randomly chosen for them to examine as a group was Carlton’s. His use of acronyms and slang was easily identifiable. While Carlton was proud to have been chosen initially, he was surprised at how many spelling errors and cultural assumptions his letter contained. The letter chosen explored the theme of law. The first item the students commented on was the use of the names “Bill Cosby” and “Richard Pryor.” Paige explained that, “The Russian students might not know who these people are. Carlton would have to explain it better if this letter were being sent to them.” In fact, the assumption of a shared cultural context could be seen in many of the letters the students wrote to their in-class peers, while their letters for their Russian partners displayed a lack of assumed shared cultural context (see Table 23).

During this group peer-editing session, Paige noticed that, while spelled correctly, Carlton used the wrong form of the word “there.” In writing about the two comedians mentioned previously, Carlton wrote, “…there styles are different.” Paige corrected his error to read “their.” Laura backtracked and wondered about the use of the word “acclaimed” in the first sentence. Paige decided that, “It’s not simple enough.” Carlton agreed, adding, “Not to say that they’re simple, but, you know, they’re trying to learn English.”

Another spelling error was discovered by Laura, and discussion ensued as to the correct spelling of “bases.” In the letter, Carlton’s sentence read, “Chekhov basses his
stories from an oppressive communist surrounding…” Paige asked if it should be spelled “basis,” but then, after writing it out, decided upon the correct spelling, “bases.” Another instance of the wrong form of “there” was found, to which Carlton replied, “What’s up with my ‘theres,’ doggone it!”

Further along, Paige commented, “I don’t understand this sentence: ‘O’Henry, on the other hand has an oppressive surrounding, but he put himself their.’ Like, he chose?…” Carlton responded by explaining that, “Yeah, [O’Henry] didn’t really choose to be in jail, but he committed the crime. I’d take that whole sentence out, because they’re not really going to know what I’m talking about necessarily.” I asked whether or not there was a way that they could re-word the sentence so that their Russian partners would know what they were talking about. Paige said, “Yeah, you’re assuming here that they know what you’re talking about. I think you should write it out…” Carlton interrupted, stating that, “They read the story, so they should know that…” Paige replied, “It’s just like saying ‘he’ went to the store, thinking that they know who ‘he’ is. You might as well just put the person’s name there to make it clearer.”

At the beginning of the second paragraph, Carlton wrote, “That leads me to this.” Paige said, “‘That leads me to this.’ I don’t know. I know I would understand that, but maybe they’re thinking, they don’t know…” Carlton said that the phrase wouldn’t be necessary in a letter to the Russian students. Paige commented, “I think it’s a good thing to put in when you’re writing to us, but I think for the Russians you need to write less, like make it less complex.”

The following paragraph in Carlton’s letter to his in-class peer contained a lot of shared cultural context that the students agreed would be confusing to their Russian
partners. Carlton read, “‘Remember back in 1992 when the L.A. riots took place?’ I need to explain the L.A. riots.” In his letter to his in-class peer, Carlton wrote that the riots occurred because, “the officers who beat the dog mess out of Rodney King got off.” Paige said, “They will not understand that!” Carlton said, “They wouldn’t know! I was gonna put ‘dog poo,’ but...” Paige suggested, “Why don’t you just say ‘beat’ Rodney King? Also, there should be a comma.”

Further along in the paragraph, Carlton wrote, “If the cops were black and the man was white, then they would have hung them all on the spot.” Paige asked, “I wonder if [the Russian students] would take the part about the hanging literally? They might!” Carlton imitated a Russian accent and exclaimed, “Oh my God, their society! Bring down the nooses!” Paige explained, “We were talking about that in class, like about how it’s hard to stress sarcasm in e-mail. It’s probably like regular writing, it’s really hard to stress sarcasm.” She explained to me about how she would include smiley faces or other “emoticons,” symbols that express emotions, in her e-mail writing to stress sarcasm or that something is not to be taken literally. She continued, “Maybe we should say ‘punished them more’ instead of ‘hung them all on the spot.’” Then Paige read the following sentence, “‘All these beautiful things in life and people can’t get over color.’” Carlton injected, “Speak the truth!” Paige asked, “When you say ‘color,’ are they gonna know that you’re talking about skin?” Carlton said, “Yeah, they should.” Laura said, “Think about their culture. Do they have as many different skin colors there?” Paige said, “Not really, not like what we think of as color.” Carlton became frustrated and said, “They should know, they watch enough MTV! They know who Kurt Cobain is, they
know who Puff Daddy is. They should know Puff Daddy's a black man and Kurt Cobain's a white man.” Paige suggested, “Like people can’t get over ‘differences’ or ‘racial differences’ or something like that.”

Carlton was then asked to explain what he meant by his sentence, “If we all live off of P.E.A.C.E. (Positive Energy Activates Creative Education)…” He explained that, “It’s a philosophy I go by. As long as you keep positive energy around you, then people around you will be better educated.” Paige read the sentence again, “ ‘If we live off of P.E.A.C.E. then we would go farther then what we are right now.’ That sounds confusing to me. ‘Farther that what we are right now?’ I don’t think the ‘what’ should be there.” The “what” was then changed to “where.” Everyone agreed that it made more sense that way.

In the next paragraph, Carlton told of a personal experience he had with the police. Paige asked, “Should you put ‘I had fit the description,’ or just, ‘I fit the description’?” “Had” was removed. Laura then asked, “Shouldn’t there be commas here? There are so many ‘ands.’ ‘The police saw me—comma—pulled me over—comma—and told me I fit the description....’” Carlton argued, “No, you don’t use a comma with ‘and!’” Paige suggested taking some of the “ands” out, replacing them with commas. Then they came to the sentence that read, “I couldn’t produce any I.D. and my peoples weren’t home.” Paige asked, “Do you mean ‘parents’?” Carlton said, “Yeah, that’s my family!” So Paige replied, “We’d need to put ‘my family wasn’t home’ so the subject and verb match.” It was then decided that the Russian students may not know what “downtown” would mean in the sentence, “I spent a day and a half downtown.” Paige suggested that he say “police station” to make the meaning more clear. Also, the
phrase “...they let him go on his word” was debated, eventually changed by replacing it with, “they believed him.” Carlton wanted to keep the phrase as it was written, but Paige explained that, “that makes sense to me, but it might confuse somebody who doesn’t speak English. They’ll take it literally and wonder what ‘word’ means in that case.”

**Debriefing: Strong Writers**

At the end of their peer-response session, I asked the three strong focus group writers what they had just accomplished. Laura said, “We made things simpler.” Paige agreed, stating that, “We kind of made it not so, I don’t want to say deep, because it’s good to put emotions and stuff in it, but...” Carlton interrupted, “To understand our philosophy, especially mine!” Paige said, “I think they would understand it, but just not...on paper. Like maybe they’d need to hear your tone or something.” Laura had the last word, stating that, “We put more description in it, and made it more specific. Like instead of ‘downtown’ we had to put ‘police station.’” For this group, while surface errors were attended to, the changes went deeper than that when they had their Russian partners in mind. They were cognizant of their partner’s need to be able to understand what was being said. These students were aware that they were writing primarily to communicate, to get their thoughts to cross the barriers of language. As Carlton summed it up, “If I know that somebody’s going to see this someday, then yeah, I’m going to give it my all. You know, if I’m just writing for myself and what not, It’s still gonna contain a good piece of me, but it’s not gonna be like if I were writing for a crowd of a million, or a thousand, or one, or any crowd!” In their desire to be understood, (Tillyer & Wood, 2000) these students began to see that this project was about more than just knowing where to place a comma.
Comparative Letters: Weak Writers

As with the strong writers, I asked the weak writers to compose additional letters throughout the course of this project, letters that were to be exchanged with an in-class peer. As with the strong writers, I wanted to determine what the weak writers did differently, if anything, when writing to two distinct audiences, one with whom they shared the same culture, and one with whom they did not.

The following figures (see Figures 20-22) compare letters written by each of the three focus group students identified as weak writers (Sandy, David and Travis). For each figure, letters written to in-class peers were compared to letters written to their Russian partners. As with the students identified as strong writers, the purpose of the comparison was to determine how the individual students accommodated their writing depending upon their target audiences. It was assumed that the target audience of in-class peers shared the same language and cultural context, as opposed to their Russian peers who did not share those two factors. To obtain the examples found in the figures, each student’s letters to his or her in-class peer was compared to the letters that he or she wrote to their Russian partner. As with the focus students identified as strong writers, each letter was coded according to the descriptive categories described as rhetorical/stylistic features (as related to audience awareness) and usage/mechanical features, including grammatical features and punctuation/spelling. Examples were then pulled from the letters that best served to illustrate each of the descriptive categories.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptive Categories</th>
<th>Letters to In-Class Peer</th>
<th>Letters to Russian Peer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>I. Rhetorical/Stylistic Features</strong>&lt;br&gt;(In Terms of Audience Awareness)</td>
<td>1. Use of slang&lt;br&gt;e.g. <strong>Weed</strong>&lt;br&gt;2. Vague (generalizing)&lt;br&gt;e.g. <em>He even did illegal things with them.</em>&lt;br&gt;3. Assumed shared context&lt;br&gt;e.g. <em>I'm sure you've heard of a former football player named O.J. Simpson.</em>&lt;br&gt;4. Informality in register&lt;br&gt;<em>Formality used</em></td>
<td>1. Avoidance of slang&lt;br&gt;e.g. <strong>Marijuana</strong>&lt;br&gt;2. Explicitness&lt;br&gt;e.g. <em>He even smoked and drank with people on a daily basis.</em>&lt;br&gt;3. Lack of assumed shared context&lt;br&gt;e.g. <em>Here in the U.S. there is a former football player named O.J. Simpson.</em>&lt;br&gt;4. Formality in register&lt;br&gt;<em>Formality used</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>II. Usage/Mechanical Features</strong></td>
<td><strong>A. Grammatical Features</strong></td>
<td><strong>B. Punctuation/Spelling</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1. Indifference to conventions<br>e.g. *This cop was very sneaky, he hung out with the students on a day-to-day basis.* *(Run-on sentence)* | 2. Use of contractions<br>*None used* | 1. Indifference to punctuation<br>e.g. *Anyway's*<br>2. Spelling errors<br>e.g. **there** | 2. Avoidance of contractions<br>*Contractions Avoided*<br>1. Observance of punctuation<br>*Avoids using "Anyways."
2. Lack of spelling errors<br*e.g. their* |

Table 20. Examples of descriptive categories for Sandy.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptive Categories</th>
<th>Letters to In-Class Peer</th>
<th>Letters to Russian Peer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Rhetorical/ Stylistic Features (In Terms of Audience Awareness)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Use of slang e.g. The police in both stories were not with it very much.</td>
<td>1. Avoidance of slang e.g. I think both are writing from the same viewpoint, but they are doing it differently.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Vague (generalizing) e.g. And in the other one.</td>
<td>2. Explicitness e.g. O’Henry is trying to make a point in a humorous way.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Assumed shared context e.g. The bombing at the 1996 Olympics.</td>
<td>3. Lack of assumed shared context e.g. ...in the 1996 Olympics, when a security guard supposedly set up a bomb and tried to disarm it at the last moment, but did not.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Informality in register e.g. Kinda</td>
<td>4. Formality in register Avoids the word “kinda.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Usage/ Mechanical Features</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Grammatical Features</td>
<td>1. Indifference to conventions e.g. Wouldn’t gave</td>
<td>1. Observance of conventions e.g. Wouldn’t give</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Use of contractions Used in both</td>
<td>2. Avoidance of contractions Used in both</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Punctuation/ Spelling</td>
<td>1. Indifference to punctuation e.g. About the way society is corrupt and is wrong. (Sentence fragment)</td>
<td>1. Observance of punctuation No sentence fragments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Spelling errors e.g. shear</td>
<td>2. Lack of spelling errors e.g. shear</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 21. Examples of descriptive categories for David.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptive Categories</th>
<th>Letters to In-Class Peer</th>
<th>Letters to Russian Peer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Rhetorical/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stylistic Features</td>
<td>1. Use of slang</td>
<td>1. Avoidance of slang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(In Terms of Audience</td>
<td>e.g. All right, I’m out,</td>
<td>e.g. Your friend,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Explicitness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Vague (generalizing)</td>
<td>e.g. In the O’Henry story, the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e.g. In the our story The Cop and</td>
<td>policeman end up catching the person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Lack of assumed shared context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Assumed shared context</td>
<td>e.g. Have you ever heard about the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e.g. Have you heard about the</td>
<td>rapper Puff Daddy getting caught with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>police finding a gun in Puff Daddy</td>
<td>a gun?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Informality in register</td>
<td>4. Formality in register</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No greeting</td>
<td>e.g. Dear [partner's name]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Usage/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanical Features</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Grammatical</td>
<td>1. Indifference to conventions</td>
<td>1. Observance of conventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Features</td>
<td>e.g. I was com home from the</td>
<td>e.g. I was coming home from the store.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>store.</td>
<td>2. Avoidance of contractions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Use of contractions</td>
<td>Used in both</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Used in both</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Punctuation/</td>
<td>1. Indifference to punctuation</td>
<td>1. Observance of punctuation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>e.g. So they, end up buying a gift</td>
<td>e.g. The man doesn’t have any money,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>for each other.</td>
<td>so he sold his little watch.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Spelling errors</td>
<td>2. Lack of spelling errors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e.g. wont, christmas</td>
<td>e.g. won’t, Christmas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 22. Examples of descriptive categories for Travis.
While more liberties were taken in the letters to their in-class peers than with the previous group, the end result—error-free letters to their Russian partners—was the same. Due to extensive group peer-editing sessions conducted in-class (which will be discussed later) and a growing awareness for audience considerations, the letters written for their Russian partners were as polished as the letters written by the strong writers. I suspect that because they knew that their writing was going to be used as a model of correct English, they showed greater concern for their writing than if they were writing solely for the teacher.

As with the strong writers, the weak writers wrote letters to their in-class peers that contained mistakes in usage/mechanical features, yet they occurred at a slightly higher rate than for the strong writers. Problems with subject/verb agreement occurred in the letters written by David and Travis, while Sandy’s letter contained several run-on sentences. Contractions were used in both letters by David and Travis, but avoided in both letters by Sandy. Punctuation slippages were evident in Sandy’s letter in the form of misused apostrophes. David’s letter to his in-class peer included a run-on sentence, and Travis’s letter contained a comma that was not necessary. All three of the weak writers’ letters contained spelling errors that were corrected in their final letters to their Russian partners.

For the weak writers, spelling was a primary concern. When I asked each of them what makes a good writer, David and Travis said, “The ability to spell.” Sandy agreed, although she also felt that “the ability to express yourself” was another key ingredient. When asked to elaborate, she could not. I then asked them if they considered themselves good writers, and they all said, “no.” This confirmed their answers to the first survey
question asking whether or not they enjoyed writing, as no one responded above a level 2 on the scale. Travis told me that he was not a good writer, “because I’m not too swell at spelling or anything.” Sandy said, “I’m not a good paper writer, I just like to write how I feel.” In the survey, Sandy did indicate that she kept a journal/diary in her spare time. For these students, writing well meant writing that contained few surface errors such as spelling and punctuation. This concern about surface errors is typical for students who lack basic writing skills (Frank, 1992). For the previous group, writing well had more to do with imagination and content than spelling and punctuation.

In terms of the rhetorical/stylistic features of the letters of the weak writers, similar errors were noted in their letters to their in-class peers as were seen in the letters composed by the strong writers. In her letter to her in-class peer, Sandy used the slang term “weed,” but then eliminated the slang and substituted the word “marijuana” in her letter to her Russian partner. In David’s letter to his in-class peer, he used the slang term “with it.” In his letter to his Russian partner, the term was eliminated, as was the entire awkward sentence in which it was contained. Travis’s slang occurred in the letter to his in-class peer at the closing of his letter, where he stated, “All right, I’m out.” In his letter to his Russian partner, the closing appeared in the more traditional form, “Your friend.” I asked them whether or not writing to their Russian partner would cause them to write more carefully, especially when dealing with slang terminology. Travis replied, “Yeah, so they don’t think we’re stupid or something.” David said, “Yeah, it’ll make us write more correctly, but we can’t use slang or something where we know what it means but they don’t. So it’ll actually make us use correct English, or correct grammar, or whatever you want to call it.” Sandy added, “Yeah, we’ll have to be more careful, but I don’t think
we should be, because they should know that that’s not really how we talk.” I asked her if she were trying to learn Russian, wouldn’t she want it seen written correctly? She said, “Yeah, but, I mean, if I went over there, I wouldn’t want to talk like a dork all the time. I’d want to fit right in!” The stronger writers also indicated that they would want to know Russian slang, therefore they felt that it was important to include such terminology in their letters. Travis picked up on Sandy’s comment, stating that, “I try not to use slang and to bring it down for them to understand what I’m saying.” David said that, “I just try to talk regular, using proper, standard English.” After pausing to think for a moment, Travis expanded, stating that, “When I write to the Russians, I have to bring it down a little ‘cause otherwise I’d be talking slang and making stuff up. I mean, I wrote it down, but then explained what it meant in parentheses for the Russian people. I wouldn’t do that for the English-speaking people. If they read my sentences, they’ll probably understand what I’m trying to say.” By mentioning his use of parenthetical statements to clarify meaning, he demonstrated that he and Carlton had paired up for the most recent peer-editing session, demonstrating another instance of the students working together within the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). Without editing his work with peers, Travis may not have understood that his slang terms might be confusing to his Russian partner.

Each letter to their in-class peer contained at least one instance of vagueness or generalizing, mistakes that were corrected in their final letters to their Russian partners. Sandy, in one of her letters to her in-class peer, stated that, “He even did illegal things with them.” In her letter to her Russian partner, she further described the word “things” to include, “smoked and drank.” David wrote an awkward transition in one of his letters
to his in-class peer, stating that, “In the other one, …” That phrase was eliminated in his letter to his Russian partner. Travis also decided to eliminate a vague phrase in a letter to his Russian partner, going from, “In the our story The Cop and Anthem was doing his job by telling the true,” to, “In the O’Henry story, the policeman end up catching the person.”

As with the strong writers, assumed shared cultural context clues were eliminated in the letters written by the weak writers to the Russian students. In one of her letters, Sandy assumed that her in-class partner understands who O.J. Simpson was. Similarly, David assumed that his in-class partner was familiar with the bombing incident at the 1996 summer Olympic games in Atlanta. However, in their letters to their Russian partners, they explained in more depth the people and events they mentioned. The same was true for Travis, who explained that Puff Daddy was a rapper (assuming that his Russian partner was familiar with the term “rapper”).

Both of Sandy’s letters to her in-class peer demonstrated a formality in register. In his letters to his in-class partner, David had a habit of using the word “kinda.” In his letters to his Russian partner, the word was either eliminated or separated into its two parts, “kind of.” Travis never felt the need to formally greet his in-class partner, but his letters to his Russian partner always began with “Dear [name].”

After the project was completed, I asked these students to explain to me their views concerning the role that audience played in their writing (only David and Travis were present for the post-project survey and interview, as Sandy had dropped out of school). All three students had indicated on the pre-project survey that they would change the way they wrote based upon who their audience was, and David and Travis still felt the same way after the completion of the project. They also felt that writing for a
real audience made them pay closer attention to grammar, punctuation, and clarity. Travis stated that, "I re-read over what I write now, instead of trying to rush through it." David agreed, adding, "I re-read through it and write a little more in detail, like explaining stuff more. I don’t just assume people know what I mean anymore."

For both students, writing to their Russian peers made them feel more excited to write. Both David and Travis agreed that writing to an audience other than their teacher made them better writers. Travis explained, "Most of the time, when I write to a teacher, I just write down whatever and say, ‘Here, fix it.’ But when I write to somebody else, if somebody else is gonna look at it, I try to make it sound like I’m intelligent and I know what I’m talking about!" Like Carlton, Travis took his role of teacher very seriously. It was also important for Travis to write his best so that he would not appear to be "dumb" or "stupid" to his Russian partner. Both students also indicated that their letters to their Russian partners improved over the course of the project, and their teacher and I agreed. The same was true for the strong writers, indicating an increase in writing confidence and performance across the two groups.

However, in spite of their responses to my interview questions and their actual e-mail documents, both David and Travis did not indicate that they had become stronger writers on their survey responses. Before the project, David rated his ability as a writer at a level 4 on the Lickert-type scale. After the project, his rating was the same. Travis gave himself an ability rating of 3 both before and after the project. Perhaps this was because even though they demonstrated an increase in writing ability throughout the course of the project, they still did not view themselves as improved. Since they had considered themselves poor writers for so long, it may take time for them to believe
otherwise. Where they did indicate an increase, however, was in their enjoyment of writing. Before the project, David indicated his enjoyment for writing at a level 2, whereas Travis was at a level 1. After the project, both David’s and Travis’s ratings had increased to a level 3.

Where the real growth for David and Travis occurred was in their ability to take their Russian partner’s needs into account when writing. As was discussed in Chapter 2, Both Berkenkotter (1981) and Flower & Hayes (1980) discovered that skilled writers were able to conjure a mental sketch of their audience, while poorer writers remained in a literal, topic-bound frame of mind, “…that is, could not think beyond the content of their essays” (Berkenkotter, 1981, p. 388). According to Flower & Hayes, (1980) “One of the most powerful strategies we saw for producing new ideas throughout the composing process was planning what one wanted to do to or for one’s reader” (p. 27, emphasis added). In spite of David and Travis perceiving themselves as unskilled writers, they did just that: planned what they wanted to do to or for their readers. This contradicts what Berkenkotter (1981) and Flower & Hayes (1980) suggest that poor writers do. Making accommodations for one’s reader is exactly what these students had to do during the course of this project. Because the students involved in this project had a clear sense of purpose in their writing, and composed with the assistance of others, their writing took the needs of their readers into consideration (Ede, 1978).

Group Peer-Response Session: Weak Writers

As with the strong writers, I asked the weak writers to review a randomly selected letter written to an in-class peer. I used the same letter for both the strong and weak writing groups for comparative purposes. I asked the weak writers to, as a group, read
the selected letter and determine what, if any, changes needed to be made in order to send the letter on to their Russian partners.

Several weeks prior to the completion of the e-mail project, Sandy dropped out of school. Therefore, David and Travis were the only students available to participate in this peer-response session. Where the strong writers were more attentive to issues of clarity and structure, the weak writers were more attentive to surface level issues. This was expected, since according to Frank (1992), “With less experienced writers, revising and editing tends to take place at the surface level as opposed to the content level” (p. 280). This is not to say, however, that issues of clarity and structure did not come up. The weak writers spotted major assumptions of an assumed shared cultural context as well, but minor cultural assumptions were left alone. For example, they were quick to point out that without explanation, their Russian partners would not know who either Bill Cosby or Richard Pryor were. They also identified Carlton’s first misuse of the word “there,” and the corrected form was inserted. David then decided that an entire sentence sounded awkward, and stated, “I’m going to circle this whole section. ‘O’Henry leaves you with an unlikely twist that is likely.’ It’s something that wouldn’t happen, but probably could, but like it takes a while to think about it. I just think it’s too vague—it needs to be more descriptive.” Ironically, the strong case study students made no mention of this awkward sentence.

In the third paragraph, Travis was quick to point out that the Russian students would not understand what “beat the dog mess out of Rodney King” meant. He said, “I’d tell ‘em who Rodney King was and what he did—give ‘em a little background so they could understand. And I wouldn’t use ‘dog mess.’ I’d think of something else, like
‘beat.’” David agreed. David then noticed the phrase, “...hung him on the spot.” He stated, “The Russians probably aren’t going to know what you mean by ‘hung them on the spot.’ They might, if they knew the history of America.” Travis exclaimed, “Hung on the spot means right there and then, and that’s easy to understand! I think it should stay in!” After a moment of consideration, David agreed. Apparently that shared cultural context clue was not major enough to warrant further explanation. The students then argued about whether or not Carlton was actually 6’2”, 220 pounds as he claimed in the letter. Travis said, “I don’t know, he does have a belly on him...”

In the fourth paragraph, Travis and David circled the word “peoples” and replaced it with “parents. They also replaced “realities” with “relatives.” They also decided that “downtown” should be replaced with “in jail.” David then decided that the order of the fourth paragraph should be switched, that Carlton should follow the story about the student at their own high school. Travis agreed, stating that:

Let’s tell them about the incident with the white person [at school] first, that would sound better, because they know that the cop, I mean, he should start with the guy who he knew was guilty that got away. Then Carlton’s story should follow...so he can tell more what he’s gotta say instead of jumping from the top part to the bottom part, then going back to the top part.

I was impressed that Travis saw that going from a general to a specific story would increase the chances of the Russian students understanding the idea Carlton was trying to express. This idea of switching the order of Carlton’s examples of personal run-ins with the law was not attended during the previous group’s session. However, David and Travis did not question any of the acronyms included in Carlton’s letter. They also assumed that the Russian students would have been familiar with the L.A. riots of 1992.
and saw no reason for further explanation. Since most of Carlton’s spelling was correct, (with the exception of “there” and “their”) David and Travis did not spend as much time making changes as the previous group.

Debriefing: Weak Writers

After the completion of the session, I asked David and Travis what they had accomplished. Both agreed that they read over the letter carefully to make sure that the Russian students would understand it. David said, “We made it less slang-like, you know?” I then asked them how they felt about peer-editing in general, since much of it had taken place during this e-mail project. Travis said, “It helps me out a little because it makes me try to write better, because I’m not a great writer. I try to make myself write better so people who read it won’t think that I’m stupid or something.” Research indicates that for basic writers at the college level (as well as EFL writers at the college level), engaging in peer-editing sessions prior to sending e-mail increases students’ confidence level because they know that the letters they send will be as error-free as possible (Fox, 1998). According to Fox, (1998) “I have found that many students simply feel more comfortable participating [in e-mail projects] when they are assured of error-free correspondence” (p. 3). Both David and Travis, as high school students, agreed that the combination of peer assistance and writing to an authentic audience helped them to become better writers, illustrating that working together to produce error-free writing crosses different age groups.

Discussion

After a review of the five data sources used in this study, it is clear that the six focus students involved in this project used peer-editing to make accommodations in their
writing based upon their target audience. Survey data indicated an increase in the level of audience awareness over the course of the project as indicated by pre- and post-survey responses (see Table 11). Students also indicated through interview data an increase level of accommodation when writing for an audience that had specific needs, as did their Russian partners who were involved in this project to improve their English skills. Extended classroom observations also indicated that, through the process of peer-editing, students became aware of what it meant to write clearly and concisely for communicative purposes. Some of the group peer-editing skills were able to transfer to individual students, as Travis indicated in his interview statement that explained, "I re-read over what I write now, most of the time, instead of trying to rush through it." Paige also indicated that the group peer-editing sessions had a positive effect on her writing. "It's hard for you to edit your own writing, because you have it partially memorized, so when you read it, you're kind of reading ahead because you know what it says next and you're not really looking at correcting it."

Throughout the interview sessions, the six focus students indicated a heightened level of audience awareness. Paige indicated that the accommodations she made for her audience were in the form of making her letters easy to understand. "I try to make it really simple. I like to make it real descriptive, and sometimes I think they might not know what this word means, so I try to write real simple and to the point." David agreed, stating that making such accommodations was a challenge, because that is not normally the way he writes. He expressed to me that now he takes more time when he writes, taking into consideration not only what he's saying, but also how he's saying it. The same was true for Carlton, who stated that, "Now, I pay more attention to my grammar
and stuff... Like, I had to do a paper for [English class] and for my history teacher, and I just kept thinking back, ‘If I were writing this to somebody else, would it be correct or not?’” This statement indicated a direct transfer of skills. All of the six case study students agreed with the statement that Carlton made in his first interview session, that, “[The letters] are gonna have to be perfect...better than perfect!”

The proof of the student’s commitment to a heightened awareness of audience could be seen in their actual letters to their Russian partners. When comparing letters that they wrote to their in-class peers versus the letters they wrote to their Russian partners, it was evident that accommodations for audience were made. Accommodations were made on two levels: first, on a surface level, incorporating correct use of grammar and punctuation, and second, on a deeper level of ideas and clarity. Where accommodations for audience were most dramatic were on the level of understanding the difference between cultural contexts. In the letters written for their in-class peers, the six focus students all assumed a shared cultural context. For example, Laura made reference to a local amusement park, and Carlton assumed knowledge of the 1992 L.A. riots involving the Rodney King beating. In their letters to their Russian partners, such assumptions were not made. Laura omitted any mention of the local amusement park, and Carlton explained in further detail the riots that had taken place. In the peer-editing sessions that I conducted with the six focus students, a great amount of my time was spent listening to the students as they figured out what cultural knowledge could be assumed and what could not. For example, they all indicated that the mention of the two comedians Bill
Cosby and Richard Pryor would probably mean little to the Russian students, thus their names were eliminated. Such an awareness that different cultural contexts do exist is an important finding in this study.

Another important finding in this study was the effort that the six focus students made to eliminate vagueness or generalizations from their writing. In the letters written to their in-class peers, all students but Laura contained at least one item that could be categorized as vague. For example, when David was making a transition to the O’Henry story from the Chekhov story, he stated in his letter to his in-class peer, “And in the other one,….” In this case, we are left to wonder what “the other one” refers to. However, in his letter to his Russian partner, he eliminates the phrase “in the other one” and uses the author’s name, clearing up any confusion: “O’Henry is trying to make a point in a humorous way.” Sandy’s letter to her in-class peer also included the vague statement, “He even did illegal things with them.” In her letter to her Russian partner, she elaborates: “He even smoked and drank with them on a daily basis.” Elaboration was also achieved in Carlton’s letter. In his letter to his in-class peer, he stated that the police took him “downtown,” indicating, but not stating, that he was taken to the police station. This is also a case of assumed shared cultural context. When Paige, Laura and I read Carlton’s letter, we understood what he meant by being taken “downtown.” However, as was mentioned in the peer-editing session, the Russian students may not be familiar with what that word means in that specific context. Therefore, in his letter to his Russian partner, Carlton cleared up any ambiguity by stating, “So [the cop] took me downtown, fingerprinted me and kept me in jail for two days.”
The six focus students also exhibited a heightened awareness of audience in terms of the vocabulary they chose to use, though in varying degrees, especially with slang terms. Throughout the peer response sessions, the discussion of what constituted a slang term was often brought up. For example, while having his letter edited by Paige and Laura, Carlton fought for the term “let him go on his word” to be retained. Paige explained to him that, “Well, that makes sense to me, but it might confuse somebody who doesn’t speak English...They’ll take it literally and say ‘word?’” However, the students did like the way Carlton included slang terms in his letters to his Russian partner followed by parenthetical explanations of what they meant. According to Carlton, “I think most of them want to know what our slang is. I would love to find out what their slang is!” Sandy agreed when she stated, “If I went over there, I wouldn’t want to talk like a dork all the time, I’d want to fit right in!”

Summary of the Focus Group Peer-Edited Letters

The following table (see Table 23) provides a summary of all of the letters to in-class peers and to Russian partners (see Appendices G and H) as indicated by rhetoric/stylistic features and usage/mechanical features. Table 23 illustrates that usage/mechanical errors and generalizations (mainly due to an assumed shared cultural context) present in the letters to in-class peers were either eliminated or otherwise changed in the letters for the Russian students. Slang was apparent in each in-class peer letter, while in the letters for the Russian students, slang was eliminated. In Carlton’s case, the use of slang was not eliminated entirely, but explained parenthetically so the Russian students would have an understanding of what the words meant. Vague or generalized use of English was apparent in all but one of the letters to in-class peers,
while no such stylistic preferences were found in the letters to the Russian students. As
stated earlier, all letters to in-class peers shared an assumed cultural context, whereas
such an assumption was not made in the letters to the Russian students. Events
mentioned by the focus students were more fully explained in their letters to their Russian
partners, such as the L.A. riots and the O.J. Simpson trial. An informality in register
could be detected in all but Sandy’s letter to the in-class peers, while the letters to the
Russian students possessed an air of formality, mainly in the greeting and closing.

As for the usage/mechanical features of the writing, indifference to conventions
were present in all letters to in-class peers. For example, there were problems with
subject/verb agreement in letters to in-class peers that were not apparent in letters to the
Russian students. The use of contractions was present in all letters, leading me to
conclude that the students either assumed that their Russian partners would understand
them or that the case study students were unaware that the use of contractions could be
considered non-standard or informal. An indifference to punctuation was present in all
letters to in-class peers except for Paige and Laura. Punctuation rules were uniformly
attended to in the letters written to the Russian students. And finally, spelling errors were
present in all in-class letters to peers except for Paige and Laura, but were corrected in
the final copies of their letters to their Russian peers. The students in this project clearly
saw themselves as the teachers and their Russian partners their students. Sandy indicated
her enjoyment of this new role, stating that, “Normally, I don’t care how I write. I mean,
I’m just writing for myself or a teacher and it doesn’t matter if I can’t spell perfectly. But
if I’m writing to [my Russian partner], it has to be perfect.” The reversal of roles
between teacher and student played a key part in the success of this project. The students
knew that their writing would be evaluated and taken seriously by their peers, and that was important to them. They knew that they were writing for someone other than their teacher, and that they had to pay closer attention than usual to the way they wrote. Travis agreed by stating, “Most of the time, when I write to a teacher, I just write down whatever and say, “here, fix it.” But when I write to somebody else, if somebody else is gonna look at it, I try to make it sound like I’m intelligent and I know what I’m talking about!”
Table 23: Summary of all letters to in-class peers and to Russian partners in terms of rhetoric/stylistic features and usage/mechanical features in terms of audience awareness.

Peer-editing also played a large part in the final written products. By students constantly reminding one another of the needs of their audience, they were able to collaboratively generate what Flower (1979) referred to as “reader-based prose,” or prose
that takes into account the needs of the reader. According to Weeks and White, (1982) peer-editing is valuable for students for several reasons. First, it allows students to write more often. With students making the preliminary editorial comments, the clerical load of the teacher is reduced, allowing for more opportunities for writing to occur. Second, peer-editing allows for immediate feedback. No longer will the student have to wait a day (or longer) in order to receive teacher comments. With peer-editing, the problems in the student’s writing can be attended to right away, while they are still fresh in the student’s mind. Third, peer-editing allows students the opportunity to interact with their peers, and according to Vygotsky, (1978) much learning can take place within the zone of proximal development when peers assist one another in the learning process. Fourth, through peer-editing, students develop a critical awareness of the materials they read. Reading and correcting the work of their peers can lead students to recognize errors in their own writing (Beachy, 1992). Finally, peer-editing helps students to develop a positive attitude about writing. “In acting as editors,” O’Donnell suggests, “students gradually become more confident of their own writing” (1980, p. 7). Such confidence helps to counteract negative attitudes students may bring with them when attempting to write. This was especially true for the focus students identified as weak writers. According to Sandy, “I like [peer-editing] because my friends catch all of my errors!” In the next section, I will examine how the role of collaborative discussion about the literature helped to generate and shape the initial stages of student writing.
The Role of Discussion About the Literature

Overview of the Literature Read by the Students

This section focuses on the role that collaborative discussions about the short stories that all of the students read played in writing the letters to be sent to their Russian peers (see Figure 3). However, I would first like to discuss the role that these short stories played within the context of this project. For each of the students involved, the literature acted as a springboard from where discussion could begin, and this, in turn, served as the context for the letters written. In the local class, students voluntarily took turns reading each of the short stories aloud, according to theme. During this whole-group reading, questions could be asked and answered at any time. The students, not the teacher, generated the questions asked. Nystrand (1997) calls these “authentic” questions, questions that deal with student reactions to the text, not teacher-generated questions used to see what students do and do not know (p. 7). After each story was read and discussed as a large group, the teacher suggested a few things to think about (in terms of the stories) when composing their letters to their partners. Then, the students broke into smaller groups of three or four to further discuss how the theme in the stories connected with their own personal experiences with that theme, and how they could share those experiences through writing in their letters. Throughout the project, the students indicated that they liked having the literature to write about as a starting point for their letters. In a final letter to her Russian partner, a student commented that having read the same stories made it easier for her to share her opinions than if their letters were just “freelance”:

If [the letter writing] was just freelance, the letters might have been more awkward and boring, back and forth, the
many trivial facts about ourselves. I’m not saying that we
didn’t do that anyway, I know I did, but needless to say, it
made the format of the letters more colorful and appealing.
I think it’s easier to understand a person we’ve just met if
we both have experienced the same thing, read the same
material, been exposed to the same ideas, etc.

(Letter from local student to Russian partner)

In my study, there were five short stories that were read by the students—three by
O’Henry, and two by Anton Chekhov. There were three themes that were incorporated
into the selection of the stories: dealings with the law, Christmas traditions, and cultural
opinions on art.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Law</th>
<th>Christmas</th>
<th>Art</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Exchange #2)</td>
<td>(Exchange #3)</td>
<td>(Exchange #4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Cop and the Anthem” (O’Henry)</td>
<td>“The Gift of the Magi” (O’Henry)</td>
<td>“The Last Leaf” (O’Henry)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Chameleon” (Chekhov)</td>
<td>“The House With the Mansard” (Chekhov)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3: Literature read according to sequence and major themes

Prior to the beginning of the project, the two teachers (American and Russian)
discussed via e-mail the stories and themes that they wanted their students to examine. In
a letter to the Russian teacher, the local teacher had some suggestions:

My suggestion for the order of the readings is that we do “The Cop and the Anthem” first, followed by “Chameleon” because they both deal with interpretations of the law based on social standing. Then I suggest we read “The Last Leaf” and “House With the Mansard” because they deal with art, though in very different ways. Finally, I suggest we end with “Gift of the Magi” because it has a more universal theme of self-sacrifice for the benefit of loved ones. I see that theme as being more universal
while the others are affected more by our different cultures. In that way...we can enjoy the differences and the similarities in our worlds.

(Letter from local teacher to Russian teacher)

The Russian teacher was eager for her students to discuss the motivation of characters’ behavior in each of the stories. She wrote to the local teacher that, “It would be nice if American and Russian students ask each other for advice about how they would act in the place of the characters.” The local teacher liked that idea, and added, “Let’s think about how to put [the students] into the stories so their conversations can bring the literature to life—their own personal experiences.”

In this section, I will first examine the role that large and small group discussion about the literature played when forming written responses to literature (Beach & Marshall, 1991; Nystrand, 1997; Purves, 1990). I will then discuss how being encouraged to make personal connections with the literature through writing enriched the students’ experiences with the text (Rosenblatt, 1965), and hence enriched their letters. Finally, I will discuss how communication with students from another culture helped the local students to gain multiple perspectives on the political satire present in much of the literature, thus broadening their own view of the world (Rosenblatt, 1965) while also causing them to be aware of the special needs of their audience as they wrote. First, I will examine the whole-class discussion of the texts. Then I turn my attention to the six focus students for a more detailed analysis of how using literature as a catalyst for writing functioned for them in this project.
Large and Small Group Discussion About the Literature

In many literature classrooms, there are definite patterns of discussion that develop, and in most cases, these patterns do not focus on the students' own interpretations of the text (Beach & Marshall, 1991). In the question/answer/evaluation model (Beach & Marshall, 1991) all student comments are filtered through the teacher, with little discussion occurring among students. In the transmission model of classroom discussion, information about a novel is transmitted from the teacher to the student in the form of a lecture, or recitation, allowing for even less frequent student input (Beach & Marshall, 1991). Nystrand (1997) agrees, stating that recitation is the predominant model of classroom discourse. In his two-year study of eighth and ninth-grade literature classrooms, Nystrand (1997) found that teachers tightly controlled the classroom discourse, constraining student participation, thus constraining what the students wrote about. In my study, the teacher employed an alternative approach to the transmission model, one which Barnes (in Beach & Marshall, 1991) refers to as the interpretation model. In this model, the goal was not for the teacher to transmit knowledge directly to the students, but rather for the teacher and students to explore a topic collaboratively, which allowed the students to draw upon their past experiences as an aid in interpretation (see Figure 4). Because the students were allowed to draw upon their life experiences and work collaboratively, their writing was richer and contained more detail than it would have had the students written in isolation about a tightly regulated topic.
By engaging in classroom discussion that is not tightly constrained by the teacher, students can become active in their own meaning-making, while also producing more interesting writing. Nystrand (1997) suggests that interactive classroom discussion "validates students as important sources of knowledge and stimulates models of cognition (thinking and not just remembering) that differ from those of recitation" (p. 28).

Furthermore, when teachers ask questions about what students are thinking, as opposed to whether or not they did their homework, teachers promote fundamental expectations for learning by treating their students as serious thinkers, indicating that students' contributions are important and worth examining (Nystrand, 1997).

The first exchange of letters in my study included personal introductions plus biographical information on the authors, so no literature was compared until the second exchange, which dealt with the law (see Figure 3). When it was time to begin reading the literature that would form the foundation of their writing, the local students took turns reading O’Henry’s “The Cop and the Anthem” aloud from special packets that the
teacher had run off to include all of the short stories needed for the project. Throughout
the reading, the teacher stopped to clarify questions and allow the students to share their
comments on the development of the story. In the story, a homeless man, Soapy, is
trying to get arrested and thrown in jail so that he won’t have to spend another winter on
the streets. Soapy argues that he would rather be arrested and thrown in jail than go to a
homeless shelter where they might try to force religion upon him in an effort to “save”
him. Because the students were free to comment during the reading, the process was
slow. However, the teacher stated that the pace was okay because the better his students
understood the story, the better letters they would be able to write, thus they would be
better able to assist their Russian partners in learning English. At one point in the
discussion, a student asked, “Can [the Russian students] see the movie ‘A Bug’s Life’?”
sensing a parallel between the stories. This launched a discussion of how in the 1950s,
Cruschev wanted to visit Disneyland during a trip to the United States. The teacher
explained that Walt Disney called President Eisenhower and wanted Eisenhower to back
him in not allowing Cruschev into the park. Eisenhower refused, yet Disney, being anti-
Communist, held firm. Cruschev was so angry that he banned all Disney products from
his country. Therefore, the teacher said that even now, it is difficult to find Disney
products in Russia. The students found this very interesting, and were eager to keep
reading. This example illustrates what Nystrand (1997) means when he says that
“learning is promoted when students can relate what they must learn to what they already
know” (p. 28).

For the second story in their second exchange about the law, the local class read
Chekhov’s “Chameleon” aloud, as a group, as they did with the previous story.
“Chameleon” was to be compared with “The Cop and the Anthem,” so they were read in sequence. In this story, a dog bites a man. At first, it is believed that the dog is a stray, and therefore will be destroyed. However, someone believes that the dog may belong to a high government official, in which case the man who was bit will be charged for enticing the dog. Opinion goes back and forth depending upon who the dog’s owner appears to be. Throughout the story, the police refuse to take a stand, for fear of losing their jobs. As with the O’Henry story, the students took turns reading aloud, freely asking questions and making comments throughout the class period. They were all puzzled by the way several of the main characters coughed throughout the story, especially when it came time to make a decision regarding the dog. One student suggested that the coughing may be symbolic, but was not sure how. The students decided that they should ask their Russian partners about that and other details found in the story. Throughout the reading, the students were keenly aware that whatever they read could be symbolic of the political satire for which Chekhov is known. Because they were reading for the specific purpose of comparing and contrasting the two authors, the students paid close attention to the text (Brooks & Brooks, 1991).

After the two stories were read, the teacher told the students to work in self-appointed groups of two or three. The reason for asking the students to work in small groups was to facilitate discussion among fewer students to avoid all of their letters sounding the same. For the first set of letters, their introductions and author biographies, the students, as a whole group, chose events from O’Henry’s life that they decided were
important for their Russian partners to know. As a result of working in a large group, all of the letters sounded very similar. In a letter written to the Russian literature teacher, the local teacher commented:

We talked about the problem of large class discussions before writing. I gave my students a handout on O’Henry and we talked about the important points in his life. So many of their letters had the same information. Your letters on Chekhov were similar. As we shared the letters with each other, the writings on the two authors are more a rewording of a teachers’ lecture than fresh ideas from the kids. I decided to try to avoid that in the next letters, so I am not ‘lecturing’ on the similarities and differences between the stories. I had each student write ideas on the following four topics:

1. Give an incident in which you or a friend had an experience with the police
2. Give an incident in which a national, well-known case of injustice occurred
3. Compare and contrast the actions of the police in the two stories
4. Compare and contrast the writing styles and motivation for writing of Chekhov and O’Henry

Then I asked them to get into groups of two or three and share all their ideas with each other, but we did not report to the whole class. Hopefully this will cause our letters to be less carbon copies of each other and have more individual details that will be fun for your students to share with each other.

Working in small groups also has the advantage of allowing more students to be heard during a discussion. According to previous research (Beach & Marshall, 1991, Phelan, 1990), allowing small groups of students to generate questions after reading a story or play helps them to think through what was just read in a way that is active, yet not as threatening as when the entire class is involved. Also, by working in small groups, students had to work harder to articulate their ideas in clear and meaningful ways (Probst, cited in Beach & Marshall, 1991). Working in small groups was the perfect precursor to writing their Russian partners, because the students were able not only to connect the
literature to their own lives, but also to sharpen their articulation skills with their in-class peers. When the students worked in small groups, they solved the problem of having all of their letters sound alike. More personal examples were given in their writing when working in smaller groups, which made the letters more enjoyable for both the Russian and the local students.

The following week, the second set of letters from their Russian partners arrived (the first set did not deal with the short stories). The teacher waited until he collected as many as possible before distributing them to the class. That was one of the major differences in the two teachers throughout the project. The local teacher always waited until he had all of the letters collected before sending them to ensure that every Russian student would have a reply. The Russian teacher, on the other hand, would send her students' letters as they were turned in to her, resulting in a staggered pattern of return. The local students found this frustrating, but understood the reasons. On several occasions, the Russian students fell ill and were not in school for days at a time. Also, there were frequent technical problems in Moscow that resulted in delayed communication. However, once the local teacher collected as many letters as possible, he would distribute them and each student would read his or hers aloud to the entire class. This activity always resulted in much excitement.

There was a heightened sense of excitement on the day that the second set of letters came from Russia, because now the local students could get some answers to the questions that they had asked about the literature in Chekhov's "Chameleon." Also, by sharing their letters with the whole class, a sense of the project as a whole could be gained. During this exchange, many of the Russian students provided answers to the
American students as to why the characters in Chekhov's "Chameleon" coughed each
time the identity of the dog's owner was discussed. According to one Russian student:

Well, they didn't begin to cough because of some sudden illness! When the policeman asked them about that dog, they were afraid of answering the question [of ownership]. They expressed the lack of willingness to answer the question with coughing like 'Hm, hm, hm.' That's what Chekhov meant when he said, 'Everyone began coughing.'

Another student explained how Russian police are known for taking bribes, so you can
not always trust what they say. This student commented about the strength of the
characters by stating, "Were they weak? Oh, they weren't. They were passive, partly
indifferent and just didn't want to change something." Fear of the government, he
explained, was a motivating factor for many of the characters in the Chekhov story. Yet
another Russian student expressed gratitude towards her partner for helping her
understand O'Henry's "The Cop and the Anthem." "To say the truth, at first I didn't
understand why the bum was arrested. But you clear this fact, you've written that he was
arrested because he was at a church when it was not open. I like this idea." By
discussing the letters as a large group, the local students were able to piece together the
details of the Chekhov story and make sense of it for themselves. Throughout the class
discussions, the teacher played a supporting role while the students shared information
amongst themselves, calling on the teacher only for clarification of some of the odd
vocabulary used by the Russian students. The times when the students read their letters
aloud to the group were exciting examples of a response-centered classroom in action.

Christmas was the theme in the third exchange, and the students read O'Henry's
"Gift of the Magi." Originally slated to be read last, it was read mid-way through the
project due to scheduling concerns. Most of the students were already familiar with the story and had their own opinions. When they reached the end of the story, where the characters had each given away what they had in order to buy a gift for each other, the students were dismayed, seeing the situation as a tragedy. One student responded that it would be “horrible” not to get any presents for Christmas. Other students quickly agreed. A student then suggested a deeper meaning of the story, the triumph of devotion and love over material possessions. The rest of the students thought about that, but were not willing to comment any further. Thus, the teacher sensed that it was time for them to break into small groups again and consider the following questions to guide their discussions:

1. What is O’Henry’s message about Christmas?
2. What is the best gift you have ever given?
3. What is the best gift you have ever received?
4. Describe your own Christmas traditions.

As with the previous story, by having students break into small groups, more of their voices could be heard and incorporated into their writing. Within the groups, students shared their stories, and took notes when anyone mentioned something that sparked a memory of their own. By conducting guided conversations in a small group setting, the teacher was pleased that he had solved the problem of carbon-copy letter writing. To conclude this round of letters, the local students were instructed to ask their partners to share their Christmas traditions for comparative purposes. The students then anticipated the replies and the class time that would be devoted to a class discussion examining the differences.
The final exchange dealt with art. "The Last Leaf" by O‘Henry and "The House with the Mansard" by Chekhov were, according to the local students, the most difficult stories to understand; thus, their final letters were the most difficult to compose. The teacher suggested that they work individually and think of questions to ask their Russian partners pertaining to the literature. The students took a long time to begin their letters, and a murmur of classroom chatter could be heard. I overheard one student telling another that she felt frustrated because she knew that the Russian students were counting on them to write good letters, but this time, no one seemed to know where to start. Another student didn’t want to appear to be “dumb” by asking so many questions about the plot and characters. By the end of the period, no letters had been completed, and they were assigned as homework. After class, the teacher confessed that he believed that the students didn’t understand the stories well enough to formulate questions on their own. Again he brought up the frustration he feels when he asks students to write “without a net.” He explained that, “So often, they want to be told exactly what to do. If they don’t get specific instructions, they freeze up, like today.”

The following day, the teacher decided to break the class up into groups of three or four. He told them that as a group, they were to generate a list of questions about "The House With the Mansard" (the current Chekhov story) that they would like their partners to answer. Allowing the students to work in groups generated far more ideas than having them work independently. Research indicates that sometimes it can be productive for students to work with others when composing. According to Purves et al. (1990) “Writing is both private and public—at times we withdraw and at others we need company—i.e. we need to talk with other writers, we need feedback from other writers
and readers" (p. 134). Conversation was stimulated when one student’s idea would spark another, and so on. Most groups were quickly able to come up with a list of questions, asking for both historical background and questions specific to the text. For example, Laura, one of the strong focus group writers, wondered why Chekhov referred to the town in the story simply as “T.” Paige wanted to know why all of the characters had two names. Paige also asked, “Why does the older sister, Lidia, have so much power in her house? Are oldest siblings responsible for their younger brothers and sisters in Russia?”

For this e-mail project, discussion about the literature functioned as a way to both share and discover new things about a different culture through writing. By allowing the students control of the discussions of the literature, they were able to make connections on a level that was appropriate for them (Nystrand, 1997; Rosenblatt, 1965). As one student told me during an interview, “Normally we read something and have a class discussion, and that’s usually where I get what I want out of [the literature] as far as understanding it. If we didn’t talk about it in class, I think these letters [would not be as helpful] to our partners.” Another student agreed, adding, “I think I get the most out of the class discussions.” In the next section, I will take a closer look at the content of the letters written by the six focus students and how the students in both classes used personal experiences to enhance and further analyze the literature and add more detail to their writing.

Making Personal Connections to the Literature Through Writing

By encouraging their students to make personal connections to the literature, the students’ letters contained greater detail and were more interesting to their distant peers than if they were solely analyzing the text given. Also, by incorporating events from
their own lives into their writing, students came to know their partners on a more personal level, increasing their motivation to want to write well. According to Rosenblatt, (1978) “The reading of a text is an event occurring at a particular time in a particular environment at a particular moment in the life history of the reader. The transaction will involve not only the past experience but also the present state and present interests or preoccupations of the reader” (p. 20, emphasis added). In reader response theory the text is enhanced by what the reader brings to it. In fact, Rosenblatt (1965) argues that what the student brings to the text is as important as the text itself. Therefore, in the current study, for each letter written to their Russian partner, the students were asked to use their own personal experiences to elaborate upon the themes present in the literature, thus resulting in writing that was richer and more detailed. By far the most lively personal experiences shared occurred when the students commented on the law, the theme shared by O’Henry’s “The Cop and the Anthem” and Chekhov’s “Chamelecon.” In this section, I will examine the personal experiences shared by the six focus students in their letters as well as their interview responses to questions aimed at examining personal connections to the literature.

Personal Connections: Strong Writers

After the students finished reading “The Cop and the Anthem” and “Chamelecon,” they were to use the following questions as a guide for writing their letters:

1. Give an incident in which you or a friend had an experience with the police
2. Give an incident in which a national, well-known case of injustice occurred
3. Compare and contrast the actions of the police in the two stories
4. Compare and contrast the writing styles and motivation for writing of Chekhov and O’Henry
The first two questions clearly ask for the students to draw upon their own past experiences when answering the questions. For this exchange, there was no prior whole-class discussion of the questions to avoid all of the letters from sounding the same. The students were to, on their own, come up with examples from their own lives. It wasn’t until after they had come up with ideas on their own that they broke into small groups to compare their ideas with what others had written.

In her letter, Paige decided to describe her brother’s experience with the local police to illustrate question number one. She stated that:

One time my older brother got caught stealing cigarettes at a grocery store. The cop called my mom. He really didn’t get in much trouble with the law. My mom was pretty mad though. Have you ever had an experience with the police?

To illustrate question number two, Paige, like several students, chose to describe the O.J. Simpson trial:

Are you familiar with the O.J. Simpson case? He was a professional football player who was on trial for killing his wife and another man. I think that he probably did it, but he was never convicted. There are just so many holes in our system and sometimes justice is not served.

When the Russian replies came back the following week, Paige’s partner responded in great detail:

Hi, how are you? I enjoyed your last letter. Talking about cops is interesting, especially about Russian cops, we call them not police but militia. More often we call them with words, which could be translated like garbage, wastes, and there are a lot of jokes about our policemen. There are many reasons for that.

I have my own experience of dealing with police. One evening I was taking my dog for a walk, I was with my friend, we were doing nothing bad, but the 2 cops decided that we look suspicious and decided to check us. They were looking for drugs in my
chewing gum, and they were really surprised when they found nothing. I had got no documents with me, my friend also had nothing, so policemen first wanted to take us to the police dept. to find out who we are, but they let us go, I think they were just having fun.

My another friend told about his quite interesting experience. He was on his way home when cop stopped him, they thought he was a drug addict. They checked his hands, there was nothing wrong, so cops decided to grab his CD player and let him go. He went home, but then those 2 cops came back to him and returned his player, but they took all his money. This behaviour of cops shocks me. They can see a fighting in the street and do nothing, saying that this is not his area.

Last letter you told me about a crime which shocked you. That was really strange. As for me I think that terrorism shocks me most. Maybe you know about the explosions of the 2 houses in Moscow last year, a lot of people died for nothing. Everybody suspects terrorists from Chechnya, but nobody was found.

For Paige’s partner, the theme of the law and injustice struck him in a very personal way. Judging by the detail of his response, he has given a lot of thought to the idea of injustice and has some strong emotional ties to that theme (especially in listing the nicknames for police in Moscow). In both cases, the theme of the two stories was made clearer for the students by allowing them to compare it, in great detail, with what they were familiar. This e-mail project took their personal connections a step further by allowing the local students a chance to understand what the theme of law and injustice means to a peer from a different culture. During an interview, Paige expressed surprise that terrorism was a reality in the life of her partner:

I didn’t know that Russia had terrorism problems, with Chechnya, and my partner wrote in the last letter I received about explosions and what was going on there. I had no idea. It’s hard for me to imagine what it’s like
for him to live around that. Hopefully we’ll talk more about that. In my letter, I asked him to tell me more about that.

For Paige, a concept that once seemed distant (terrorism) had now been made real.

Laura also chose to write to her Russian partner about the O.J. Simpson trial as an example of an injustice done on a national scale:

Our court system is very unjust. It is basically most of the time your own opinion and if there is enough credible proof that the person did commit the crime. A few years ago we had a trial for O.J. Simpson to find out if he murdered his wife. He was proven not guilty by the courts. Many people believe that he did commit this crime and justice was not served. There was a lot of evidence to prove that he did indeed murder her. He had a great lawyer and I think this is what got him out of it.

For her personal experience with the law, she also chose to write about her brother.

Judging by the detail of her answer, the incident had a strong effect on her:

Cops here in Ohio are not fair. If they have a bad day, they like to make your day bad by giving you tickets for stupid reasons. On Christmas, my brother was on his way to the hospital to see my grandfather because he was ill, and a cop pulled him over. He was pulled over for such a stupid reason. He had a green light, but not the arrow. He turned and the car coming through was far enough back, he had time to go under the light and was able to stay safe. The cop told him that he did not have enough time to turn and be safe. My brother also has been pulled over many times for stupid little reasons such as having his window tinted too dark and having his car stereo too loud. You would think they would be worried about more important stuff like drug dealers and drunk drivers just to name a few.

Laura’s partner did not respond in quite so much detail, but like Paige’s partner, made mention of not having I.D. handy:

I want to tell you about Russian cops. In Russia we call them ments. I’ve never been to jail. I have no problems with them, but my friend had one. He went to the music concert with his girl. He didn’t take his passport. When cop stopped him and asked his passport? My friend said that he forgot it at home.
Cop got him to the jail for 5 hours. I can tell you a lot of these stories, but [I] have not enough time to do it.

This passage brought up discussions of proper documentation and racism in Moscow, which the students found interesting. According to the local teacher, racism exists in Russia, but it is based more on religion and location than skin color as it is here in the United States. Several letters mentioned the police brutality towards “Caucasians,” who are originally from the Caucus mountain region (which includes Chechnya). The local teacher said that Caucasians are often seen as different in the eyes of other Russians, although their skin color is the same. This cultural information was new and interesting for the local students.

For his example of an injustice done on a national level, Carlton chose to describe the Rodney King incident and the riots that ensued:

> I remember when the cops here did a couple of injustices, a man named Rodney King. He was pulled over for a routine traffic stop and got beaten up for being a black man. This set off a whole set of riots in the Los Angeles part of the United States.

While the majority of the class chose to focus on the O.J. Simpson trial as an example of injustice, Carlton chose the beating of Rodney King (other incidents included Jon Benet Ramsey, the 1996 Olympic bombing, and the accidental murder of a 22-year-old African immigrant in New York City).

For his personal incident with the law, Carlton was one of the few students who had something happen to him personally as opposed to a friend or a relative. In his letter, Carlton explained:

> I have also been done wrong by the law. I am a 16-year-old black male and I look about 19 or 20. One weekend I was running through my hood (neighborhood) and a robbery had taken place. I had nothing to do with it, but somehow I fit the
description of the suspect. I told the cop over and over again that I was only 15-years-old, but he would not listen. I had no I.D. on me to prove this, so he took me downtown, fingerprinted me and kept me in jail for two days until someone could I.D. me.

Unfortunately, Carlton did not receive a response from his partner for this round of letters. In fact, the only response Carlton received was to his first letter where he introduced himself and gave a brief biography of O’Henry. Carlton commented by stating that, “They don’t love me anymore [sniff]! No, it was cool, I mean, I can understand as long as they got my letter... At least my name will be known, it’ll be out there!” For Carlton, an audience was all that mattered.

**Personal Connections: Weak Writers**

The differences between the personal connections of the weak and strong writers were minor. Overall, the weak writers did not provide as much detail in their letters as the strong writers. However, I am uncertain that either their excitement or emotional involvement could be measured by details alone. Of the three weak writers, Sandy provided the most details for her Russian partner:

> Have you ever thought the law was unjust when you thought someone was innocent? Here in the United States, there is a former football player named O.J. Simpson, who was found innocent of killing his ex-wife Nicole Simpson. I thought he was guilty. All the evidence proved that he was. The jury thought opposite of me. So I feel the law didn’t do their job correctly.

For her personal incident with the law, Sandy chose to describe what happened to a friend of hers when an undercover cop visited the high school:

> If you attended my school 3 years ago, then you would of gone to school with an undercover cop, and you wouldn’t have even known it. My friend, Daren, had to spend 6 months in the work house because he sold a bag of weed (marijuana) to the undercover cop. The cop was very sneaky. He even
smoked and drank with people on a daily basis. I feel this was unfair to all the students here at my school.

While Sandy was careful to explain what the slang term “weed” meant, she neglected to tell her partner what a work house and an undercover cop were. While she made some cultural assumptions, she succeeded with coming up with a personal example of a time when an injustice was done to someone she knew. Her partner was also guilty of making even more cultural assumptions than Sandy was:

And at last my occurings with the law (OMON—squad of special assignment on a soccer matches). We all after matches usually have combats between the fans usually between RBW and HOOLIGANS, BWD, GLADIATORS. And once I have hilted in this combat, but OMON has beaten me and all my friends for it. OMON beats the fans at the stadium always, but it is law.

Though the gist of the story is clear, Sandy is never told exactly what “RWB, HOOLIGANS, BWD and GLADIATORS” are. Her assumption was that they were the names of soccer teams, since in his first letter, her partner told her that soccer was his favorite sport. Sandy was also confused about the use of the verb “hilted.” Her assumption was that it most likely meant “participated,” although she could not be sure. For Sandy, hearing about her partner’s personal connections to the literature was her favorite part of the exchange. “It’s interesting to [read] about what life is like over in Russia.” As was the case for Paige, Sandy now has a face to connect with events that once seemed distant and unrelated to her own life.

David decided to use the 1996 Summer Olympic bombing as his national example of an injustice. David wrote to his partner:

The one place that I think the cops did not do their jobs was in the 1996 Olympics, when a security guard supposedly set up a bomb and tried to disarm it at the last minute, but did
not, it exploded which injured many people. The security guard says that he did not do it, but told his friends he was going to be a ‘hero.’

It is unclear what David means by stating that the security guard wanted to be a “hero.” In this case, more detail would be useful. He also does a poor job of stating exactly how he thinks the police failed to do their job. Perhaps more background information would be helpful. In any case, the event he chose evidently stuck out in his mind as having importance and for him, served as a suitable example of a national injustice.

When describing a personal incident with the law, David is vague. Unlike the specific examples provided by his peers, David only glosses over the issue:

I do not really like the police very much. When the police see me driving, I always feel like they are following me and it bothers me. I don’t like getting traffic tickets. Don’t worry. I bet, when you get your license, you will be a good driver. When it comes to driving, boys are meant to be bad drivers.

Aside from the sexist remark, David only alluded to the feeling he gets when a police car is near. He suggested that he has received traffic tickets in the past, but did not go into detail about a specific event. Perhaps this was because David truly felt uncomfortable writing. David’s teacher believed that David may have a mild form of dyslexia, which makes writing a chore for him.

David (and the class as a whole) was very interested to read his partner’s response:

And what about police? I don’t think that all policemen are bad nor good. The most part of all Russian policemen take bribes. But there are some who doesn’t do. I know a lot about our police because my father works in FSS (Federal Security Service like ure FBI) and he tells me some really interesting stories about police. But don’t think that FSS is like police! My father watches all policemen haughtily. Nobody can stop our car. And police never disturb us. There is new really cool
serial film called "Streets of Broken Lights." It describes hard life of Russian policemen. If you want to hear some stories about police and me, write me an e-mail and I'll tell you, but only in private e-mail because in some stories I take part and not always it was legal.

Upon hearing this response, the class got very excited! First, they were impressed that David's partner had a father who held such a prestigious job. They liked the fact that the police never bothered this family (although they also admitted that this wasn't fair). For the American students, this was a real example of how corrupt the police system in Moscow can be. (Of course, the students acknowledged that the same sort of protection is afforded to the families of police here as well.) All of the students wanted to see the film that David's partner mentioned, but more than that, they wanted to know more about the stories that he could not share in this letter. The students wondered if it was fear of the government or fear of the teacher (and consequently his parents) that caused David's partner to not reveal his personal dealings with the police.

Then the discussion turned to Chekhov's reluctance to mention specific town names in some of his short stories. It was hard for the students to understand that a government could have so much control over a population. When asked if conditions of oppression were still the same today, the teacher said that while it is improving in Moscow, the farther east one travels in Russia, the more fear remains. Due to the personal examples shared by students of a different culture, the local students were beginning to understand the reality of another part of the world.

The only writer more reluctant than David in the class was Travis, and the brevity of his letters was an example of his reluctance. Travis chose to give a sketchy report about a famous rapper as an example of a national injustice to his partner:
Have you heard about the rapper Puff Daddy getting caught with a gun? He and his girlfriend, Jennifer Lopez, were at a party. After shooting began, Puff Daddy was arrested for having a concealed weapon in his car.

As with David, Travis’ letter would better serve his partner if more details were added. For instance, we are not sure what eventually came of the rapper’s arrest. We do not know if he was forced to serve jail time, or if the charges were dropped. Like David, Travis does not explain how the police did not do their jobs properly. This event, however, was the way Travis chose to connect to the literature, and therefore it was allowed to be included.

The example of Travis’ personal experience with the law was just as sketchy:

It was early last year about this time. I was coming home from the store and I had just gotten a new CD. I was listening to my CD in the car, then next thing I know the policeman pulled me over for speeding.

As with his national example, we are not told many of the important details, such as how the traffic stop ended. Did Travis get a ticket? Was he actually speeding? Did he have to face any punishment, either from the law or his family? As with David, I blame Travis’ lack of detail on his reluctance to write.

As reluctant as Travis was to write, he was the student who seemed most genuinely excited to read his partner’s responses aloud to the class. In an interview prior to the beginning of the project, Travis told me that he just wanted to get this project over with so he could get out of school for the summer. However, he of all the students beamed when his partner wrote him back. I believe that this is the first time that writing
has resulted in a personal connection for Travis, resulting in more than a grade for an assignment. The letter written by Travis’ partner caused the class to reconsider what racism means in this country:

You’ve asked me about my experience with the police. Well, I’ve never had one and hope I won’t have in future. But lately my friend told me about the terrible accident. As you know, Russia is in a state of war with Chechnya. So, the police can stop anyone who looks like Chechens or just people from Caucas to check their passport. If they don’t have it, they will be arrested. But, as you know, some Jewish people look like Caucasian (dark hair, dark complexion). So, my 15 year old Jewish friend was stopped by a policeman and had to spend an hour at the police office because even if we can get a passport at the age of 14, we use it very rarely. So, she just didn’t have it with her.

I guess that common problems with the police are violations of the traffic rules. But we’re not allowed to get a driving license under 18. I don’t mind, because it’s more dangerous to drive in Moscow than in [the United States].

As mentioned previously, the term “Caucasian” in the letter above has different connotations in Russia than it does locally, and the local teacher wanted to be sure that his students alerted their Russian partners to that fact in their next letters.

After the complete exchange of the letters dealing with the theme of the law and injustice, the local teacher sent an e-mail to the Russian teacher that included these comments:

I find your comments about police injustice very interesting. We assumed that, because your students don’t drive cars, they don’t often have contact with the police. Most of our teens get into trouble for driving too fast or not stopping at stop signs.... Also, you mentioned drugs. We have a problem with that here, but I have always assumed that it would be less of a problem there, just because I assume that there is little access to them. Is it a problem with current teenage students? We would be
interested to know about this, too. I think maybe I am still making assumptions about Moscow based upon my brief visits there.

Throughout this exchange, it was clear that not only were the students challenging their assumptions about a different culture, but the teachers were as well. By allowing their students the freedom to connect with the literature on a personal level, they allowed the literature to come alive for their students, to have a deeper meaning for them (Rosenblatt, 1978). When asked how he felt about being able to communicate on such a personal level with students half a world away, Carlton summed it up nicely: “I loved it! I’m touching the hearts of people through writing!”

Making Cultural Connections Through Writing

Everyone’s life is made up of a myriad of stories, each individually crafted using the materials of a person’s daily life experiences. In this e-mail project, students were encouraged to write about their own stories as a way of making meaning out of the literature that was presented to them. Writing their own lives into their letters while using literature as a catalyst is what makes my study unique. While the focus of this project was, for the local students, on writing to an authentic audience of foreign language learners to discuss literature, learning about their partner’s culture through hearing their partner’s stories was a natural byproduct. Using the literature as a catalyst, students in both classrooms were able to not only learn about their partner’s culture, but also reflect upon their own culture in a particular place at a particular point in time (Citrino & Gentry, 1999). In a similar study conducted by Citrino & Gentry (1999) they learned that, “exploring other cultures had made [their middle school students] feel pride in their own” (p. 121). Both differences and similarities were uncovered along with the
total picture of how life was lived far from home. The same was true in this study. After corresponding with their Russian partners, many of the local students came away with a deeper appreciation of what their culture has to offer in terms of comfort and safety. In this section, I will examine the letters of all students involved in the e-mail project, both local and Russian. I will study, exchange by exchange, ways in which the students learned about one another based upon cultural differences/similarities that they offered to one another. After focusing on the class as a whole, I will examine the six focus students by revealing their views on culture presented during our final interview session.

Exchange 1: Introductions

As noted in the previous section, the main purpose of the first exchange of letters was for the students to introduce themselves to one another. These introductory exchanges helped to establish the authenticity of the project, as well as establish relationships between distant students. By establishing this authenticity and trust, the students felt more ownership in what they wrote, thus writing more detailed letters than if they were writing solely to a teacher audience. Students were given flexible guidelines from their teachers as to what to discuss. For example, they were told that mentioning their hobbies would be interesting to their partners. After their personal introductions, the local students were to give their Russian partners a brief biography about O’Henry, while their partners were to give them a brief biography about Chekhov. When broken down into topics, the local students chose to include in their personal biographies the following: personal descriptions, their family arrangements, favorite sports, hobbies, and jobs. Because the Russian students often used their local partner’s letters as a guide for constructing their own, the Russian students provided much the same information to their
partners. In the following sections, I will examine the similarities and the differences in terms of culture mentioned by the students in their introductory letters. Then, for the exchanges about the content of the literature, I will examine their responses in terms of the topic discussed, either the law, Christmas, or art.

**Similarities.**

The majority of similarities in the responses of the two groups of students came in the areas of sports and hobbies. Letters from both groups indicated an interest in sports such as basketball, soccer, American football, skiing (both water and snow) and tennis. Of all the sports mentioned, soccer was the one that had the most participants in both classes. Many of the students used the first paragraphs of their exchanges for personal talk before the “real” work (discussion of the literature) got underway. In many of these first paragraphs, comments like the following could be seen:

Our indoor soccer team just got finished with our season. I hope that we play [my friend’s] team, maybe then we can actually win a game. Our team has not won a game this entire season, but since we are playing [my friend’s] team, we are a little bit more confident.

(American student)

In a weekend I went to a soccer match, have met the old friends, and in general well have conducted time.

(Russian student)

During the first exchange, it became apparent that the two classes of students also shared many of the same hobbies, including going to movies, hanging out with friends, traveling, reading, shopping, surfing the Internet, and listening to music. Even the music that both classes listened to was similar. Many of the Russian students mentioned their love of American hip-hop and rap, along with heavy metal groups like Metallica and
older groups like the Beatles. This spoke to the American students of the spread of American culture throughout the globe. During conversations with their peers, I overheard the local students telling one another, “Yeah, I like that group, too,” and “America is number one!” Knowing that their partners half a world away liked the same things they did (and the same American musical groups) gave the local students a sense of pride in their culture that they may not have previously considered (Citrino & Gentry, 1999).

**Differences.**

During the first exchange of letters, differences became apparent in two areas: family arrangements and jobs. Not every student on both sides went into detail about their family arrangements, but patterns emerged among those who did. Of the American students who mentioned their families, only two indicated living with both parents, while four indicated living with only one parent (their mother in each case). Only three of the Russian students went into any detail about their families, and of the three that did, each of them lived with both parents. Divorce was not mentioned at any time in the letters from the Russian students. According to the local teacher, the divorce rate in Russia is similar to the rate in the United States, but the Russians are so reverent towards their parents that they never discuss such matters. Also, sometimes there may be a divorce, but it is hidden because a mother and her children, whose husband has left, might lose their apartment, just as a widow loses her apartment when her husband dies.

Another noticeable difference in their letters was the topic of after-school jobs. Several American students mentioned working at after-school jobs, while the Russian students made no mention of working. Again, the local teacher explained that without
numerous fast-food restaurants or shopping malls, there is not much work available for students. Students who have dropped out of school take what work there is. The students at the Technology School are what he calls “serious students,” and as such work all day in school, then do homework, then work with private tutors to prepare for university exams. If they get a good score on the university exam, their university tuition is paid for. Therefore, it is not unusual that the Russian students in this project did not write about having after school jobs.

**Exchange 2: The Law**

During the second exchange of letters, the literature took over as the springboard from which to begin writing. However, because relationships had been begun to be established during the first exchange, and because the students were encouraged to weave stories from their lives throughout their letters, their writing was lively and engaging. In this exchange, O'Henry’s “The Cop and the Anthem” and Chekhov’s “Chameleon” were compared due to their plots involving the law as well as whether or not justice was served. For this exchange, students were invited to share their own stories as a way to make meaning from the literature (Bateman & Benson, 1999). Within those stories were glimpses into how the students’ respective cultures operate. For instance, many of the American students chose to discuss the O.J. Simpson trial as an example of justice not being served. They compared this to Chekhov’s “Chameleon,” in which the punishment was constantly changed based upon who owned the dog in question. One of the local students stated about Simpson: “The man got away with murdering his wife. I think this happened because he is...an American icon (everyone liked him). He got away with murder and that wasn’t right. Just because you’re famous doesn’t mean the law doesn’t
pertain to you.” This illustrated for the Russian students that democracy is not perfect, and that justice is not always blind. In class discussions, the students became aware of the universal allowances made for people with money, power, or both. This was a good lesson for the students to learn, especially at this stage of their cognitive development.

According to Smagorinsky (1990):

Towards the end of high school, students develop an ability to see abstraction and generality; they begin to grasp concepts central to ideology, such as liberty and rights; they develop a sociocentric perspective, able to see ‘the big picture.’ (p. 13)

The Russian students countered with personal stories of the corrupt nature of the police in their country. Earlier in this chapter, David’s partner was mentioned because his father is a member of the FSS in Moscow. While this student admitted that police accepting bribes is a common practice in Moscow, he also stated that there were some who did not. According to David’s partner, “I don’t think that all policemen are bad nor good.” The local students agreed that the same could be said for the police here in the United States.

Another Russian student mentioned the problem of censorship in Russia, especially when it came to the war with Chechnya. “TV reporters have problems with policemen very often. They just take pictures... but policemen begin to beat [and] arrest them.” This idea was very surprising to the American students. They were aware of what censorship was, but mostly on the level of record companies censoring song lyrics of their favorite rap artists. The idea that a police force or a government would have the power to dictate what you saw on television was astonishing to them. For some local students, this was the first time they had seriously considered how fortunate they were to
have the freedoms that they did. In a similar study (Citrino & Gentry, 1999), middle
school students in Utah and Alaska corresponded with students from Kuwait during the
Gulf War. In those exchanges, students from Kuwait described to their peers the horrors
taking place outside their own homes. One Kuwaiti student wrote, “Today is the scariest
day of my life! Iraqi troops invaded Kuwait. Tanks and busses were everywhere.
People were running like crazy, looking for a safe place to hide” (p. 119). A student from
Utah responded, stating “…I realized what a sheltered world I seem to be living in. The
war in Kuwait was frightening here, but after reading a firsthand view on the inside, fear
is replaced with horror” (p. 120).

The current war between Russia and Chechnya was mentioned several times by
the Russian students during this particular e-mail exchange. Paige’s partner wrote about
his personal experience with terrorism: “...maybe you know about explosions of the two
houses in Moscow last year, a lot of people died for nothing.” This was shocking to
Paige, who told me during an interview session, “I didn’t know that Russia has terrorism
problems with Chechnya, and my partner wrote in the last letter I received about
explosions and what was going on there. I had no idea. It’s hard for me to imagine what
it’s like for him to live around that.” For the American students, the effects of terrorism
now had a face and a name.

Exchange 3: Christmas

While the literature for this exchange was one-sided (only O’Henry’s “The Gift of
the Magi” was considered), both sides contributed their thoughts and customs concerning
the celebration of Christmas. Students were asked to discuss the best gifts they have ever
given and received, as well as to discuss their family traditions. One American student
explained Christmas this way:

In the United States we celebrate Christmas on December 25\textsuperscript{th}. To children, Christmas means getting presents from Santa. On Christmas Eve children set out cookies and milk for Santa and his reindeer. Then we all grow out of that stage and get into the stage where we feel that we have to start not only expecting presents but start buying presents for others. We begin to feel like we have to buy presents for everyone who buys things for us. So at this stage, it is not only about receiving, but giving as well. It is almost like a mutual thing, in order to get you must give. Then of course we all get older and have children of our own and realize that giving is more important than receiving.

Another American student wrote:

Christmas here is chaotic. Everyone gets so stressed out, running around the malls trying to buy things. We decorate with electric lights and real or artificial trees....My family loves to drive around to different areas to look at the lights and admire the trees.

Not many of the American students mentioned the religious significance of the holiday, only the fact that we buy a lot of gifts. Perhaps this is to be expected from within our consumer-based economy. Paige was one of the few American students to comment on the religious significance of the holiday, writing that, “There seems to be too much focus on presents and the real reason for celebrating is lost. Christmas is supposed to be in honor of Jesus’ birthday.” There was one other American student who commented on the consumerism that engulfs much of the Christmas holiday:

[Christmas] is celebrated here in this country as being the biggest (and most expensive) holiday of the year. Many people during this holiday are mostly concerned about what they want and are going to receive, thus becoming very selfish and greedy. I, however, consider myself very generous around the holidays and I don’t expect much from anyone else. That wasn’t always the case, but past circumstances have left me grateful of having any possessions at all.
This student then continued to tell her partner of her time in and out of foster care, when often her only possessions were the clothes on her back. It was not unusual for students to share rather personal stories with their partners, perhaps because the distance between them acted as a cushion. Often, students will share things in writing with peers that they would not share solely with their teacher (Bateman & Benson, 1999). The student quoted above ended her letter by sharing a poem that her mother had given to her as a gift.

Carlton shared a personal story with his partner about the best gift he had ever given—a gift that did not involve a material possession:

The best gift that I have ever given was to my nephew. He stayed in another state and he had never seen me. It was around our Christmas, Dec. 25, and my father and I drove to see him. We arrived Christmas eve while he was asleep and I went to bed right next to him. When he woke up, he screamed because he knew it was me. That was the best gift I have ever given.

The replies from the Russian students contained more references to religion, and even politics. The Russian students explained that Christmas is officially celebrated twice in Russia: once on December 25th (for Catholics) and once on January 7th (for Russian Orthodox). They also explained why New Year’s Day is more popular:

In Russia [we] celebrate Christmas but on the 7th of January, that’s because of the difference in religion. New Year holiday is more popular. The communists did that, they were against the religion, but the holiday is becoming more and more popular every year.

(Letter from Russian student)

Some, such as the following student, celebrate both the Russian Orthodox and Catholic holidays:

In our country we have Russian Orthodox Church and celebrate Christmas on 7th of January, but my mother doesn’t consider it right. So we celebrate Christmas on 25th of December, too, like
in your country. It’s very good to have 2 Christmases because I receive 2 gifts. But I like more to make presents myself, though to receive presents is also very pleasant.

The majority of the Russian students were Jewish, and therefore did not celebrate Christmas at all. One Russian student made reference to the Jewish cartoon character Kenny on the American animated series “South Park.” In her letter, she stated, “My family is Jewish and we don’t celebrate Christmas at all. (Have you seen the South Park episode about Kenny on Christmas? He sings a funny song about all that stuff.)” The American students were surprised to learn that their partners watched “South Park”!

One point of interest to the American students was when several of their partners mentioned their “country houses,” or dachas. According to their teacher, dachas date back to the time when Muscovites grew crops for their families outside the city limits and needed a place to stay during the growing season so their crops would not be stolen or destroyed. Today, many families still own dachas, and use them much as Americans would use a country house, though they are not large or fancy.

Aside from the various dates of celebration, there were more similarities between the two groups of students than differences. One Russian student went into great detail to describe to his American partner his family’s holiday traditions:

[Christmas] is a big holiday in our country, but what is interesting, Christmas, the most important Christian holiday, is celebrated less colourfully, but more warmly than New Year. During the winter holidays we have a very cozy atmosphere at home, which I love very much. A big tree is set in our living room, so there is only one narrow path between it and a bookcase. The fir tree (lots of people call it the New Year Tree) stays on the floor, touching the ceiling by its top. My little spaniel spends time laying under it or walking around. What is only boring—to comb needles from my puppy’s hair every four hours and often sweep under the tree and the whole flat.... Beyond windows the wind is blowing, trees look as moving monsters, the light of the park sparks through their dancing branches, and you
begin to believe, that those trees under cold black snowy sky are simply warming up not to become completely frozen.

We gather together at the table in the kitchen, my mother moves a roast turkey (or a large chicken—it doesn’t matter much) out of the oven when the table is already laid, wait for the 12 o’clock and start tasting various delicious things, present toys to each other, then under the fir tree appears the main present.

Aside from the jumpy prose and interesting vocabulary, the above description could have been written by one of the American students. The American students admired this Russian student’s descriptive talents and were able to visualize a typical holiday scene in a Moscow home.

Exchange 4: Art

The final two stories to be compared in this e-mail project were O’Henry’s “The Last Leaf” and Chekhov’s “The House with the Mansard.” The local teacher decided to begin with the Chekhov story, mainly because it was considerably longer than the O’Henry piece and was a bit more difficult to interpret. The teacher told me prior to the beginning of the class that he was going to have to resist the urge to over-teach during this exchange, because he wanted his students to work with their partners to make meaning out of the stories through their writing and not rely so heavily upon him for information.

For the local students, the concept of “art” was difficult to deal with. Many of them had never given any thought to what art meant to them. Therefore, they looked to the literature for a place to begin their writing. “The House with the Mansard” dealt with the corruption of the upper class. The story focused on a narrator who was very wealthy. He was also an artist and able to make a small amount of money selling his artwork. The
teacher explained that many of Chekhov’s stories deal with the idleness of the upper class, people who merely exist without contributing to their society. The narrator of the story believes that taking time to nurture one’s soul is more important than producing materialistic possessions (although he is a consumer of such possessions). He thinks that if everyone just had time to sit about and contemplate art, in all of its various forms, society will take care of itself. This idea left the students somewhat confused.

In contrast, the artists in O’Henry’s “The Last Leaf” paint for the sake of painting. Art to them is not about making money or for contemplation, but using it as an expression of love for others. Many of the students were confused by the two stories, as illustrated by comments such as this:

I didn’t think that these stories really talked about art much at all. I mean, “The House with the Mansard” talked more about the opposing sides of culture versus work. “The Last Leaf,” although it was a very warm and sad story, art was only a part of the setting.

To clear up the confusion they had about the stories, especially about the Chekhov story, the students were encouraged to ask their partners questions. Since the local students figured that many of the “inside” meanings had to do with cultural differences, they were eager to hear from their partners to put the missing pieces together and create a meaning that they could understand. Some of the questions included: “Why do all of the characters have two names? Do you have two names?” “Why does the oldest sister, Lidia, have so much power in her house? Are oldest siblings responsible for their younger brothers and sisters?” “The story never tells us the narrator’s age, but I was wondering if age and dating is an issue there. Do older men date younger women commonly? Does this story relate to life in Russia?”
In the meantime, the local students shared with their partners what art meant to them. Of all of the comments throughout the project, these were the ones that revealed the most about the students. Since the project had been going on for several months, the students indicated that a bond had formed between themselves and their partners. During this exchange, more personal responses emerged than with previous exchanges. For example, Paige commented:

What are your views on art? What does it mean to you? I think our lifestyles are art. Does your life have colors and passions in it? I think my relationships with the people in my life are brilliant pieces of art. The world is full of art, that’s what it is made of.

Another student wrote:

I look at art as a memory, and that the memory itself is a type of art. A painting, song, photograph, sculpture, etc. has meaning behind it and that is what makes it beautiful and rich. In our house, my family has many photographs that are art to us because of the meaning.

Finally, another student commented:

The subject we’ve recently been discussing in this class is one I have had a special interest in almost all of my life: art. What is art to you? Is it a painting, or a sculpture, or more than that? Obviously [from previous letters] your art must be music and writing….The definition of art to me is the creation of emotion or thought the artist perceives and is thus interpreted by the viewer. Art, in general, means different things to different people. That’s why I asked you.

Conceptually, these final letters were more complex than the first exchange, or even the second when the students were sharing stories about the law. More of the student’s own opinions surfaced in these final letters, allowing more of the students’ personalities to shine through in the details of their writing.
Unfortunately, due to scheduling/technical problems, the final letters from the Russian students were never sent. According to research, these obstacles to completion are not uncommon (Bateman & Benson, 1999; Citrino & Gentry, 1999). This was disappointing to the local students. Although their questions for this exchange would not be answered, questions from previous exchanges were answered, and friendships were made. Many students exchanged personal e-mail addresses, suggesting that their correspondence would last after the school year was over. Some even talked of being able to travel to their partners’ country someday to see how life in a different culture really is lived.

**Summary**

In this particular e-mail project, the literature acted as a catalyst to inform the writing that the students exchanged. Guided by the topics suggested in the literature, the students were able to apply their own experiences and make their own meaning from what they read, resulting in writing that was highly detailed. Talking about the literature before writing about it appeared beneficial, as discussion allowed the students work collaboratively to decide what questions to ask their partners, and what types of details to share about themselves. According to Bruffee:

> Our task [as teachers] must involve engaging students in conversation among themselves at as many points in both the writing and the reading process as possible...The way they talk with each other determines the way they will think and the way they will write. (1984, p. 642)

During an interview session, Sandy stated, “I like talking about what I’m going to write before I write it. I like to know what other people are going to say. That always give me better ideas.” Here is yet more evidence of Vygotsky’s (1978) zone of proximal
development in action. Working alone, Sandy may not have been able to generate or articulate ideas very well. However, when allowed to work collaboratively with her peers, she was able to produce writing that she felt worthy of sending to her Russian partner. Travis felt the same way, stating that, “Talking about [what I’m going to write] helps me to sort it all out in my head.” He, too, benefited from working collaboratively to create his text.

Finally, allowing the students to personally interact with the text made their writing more meaningful, for according to Rosenblatt, (1965) “…what the student brings to the literature is as important as the literary text itself” (p. 78). By bringing their own experiences to bear in their letters, the students learned a great deal about the culture of their Russian partners. They also grew to appreciate their own. As Paige commented regarding her partner’s description of recent bombings in his neighborhood, “I had no idea. It’s hard for me to imagine what it’s like for him to live around that.” Now she can.

The Role of Technology

How the Technology was Used

Before I begin to examine what the students had to say about the technology that facilitated this cross-cultural reading/writing project, I would like to describe in detail how the technology was used. After reading and discussing the stories for each exchange, the local students would go to one of the seven computer terminals in the classroom and compose their letters (notes from their discussion periods could be used). The fact that the classroom was well equipped with computers helped to establish a seamless bond between the technology and the curriculum. In many school settings,
computers are kept in separate computer labs, leading the technology to be seen as something separate from what occurs on a day-to-day basis in the classroom (Citrino & Gentry, 1999). In this case, the students had access to Internet-ready computers at any time. In fact, while collecting facts to send to their partners concerning the life of O’Henry for their introductory letters, the Internet was used as a starting point for gathering information.

There were no length requirements for the letters, only that students were to cover each of the guidelines suggested by the class discussion for that particular exchange. These suggestions arose from the discussion the class conducted during and after the reading process, either in large or small group settings. Competition for the use of the computers was not a problem, as the students were generally working on other literature projects simultaneously. Students simply worked on other assignments while they awaited their turn at the computers.

Once the students completed their letters, they saved them on their own disks (which were kept in the classroom) and printed out a hard copy to use during peer-editing sessions. Once their letters had been edited, the students went back to the computers to type and save their final drafts. From there, the local teacher took each students’ disk, retrieved the saved final copies, and merged them all into one large e-mail (the use of attachments was avoided, as the Russian teacher sometimes had difficulty opening them). At this point, the e-mail was sent to the Russian teacher’s account at the Technology School. Sending the e-mails through the teachers’ accounts, what the local teacher referred to as “bottlenecking,” was done mainly for convenience, but also as a safety measure so that students did not receive any unwanted or inappropriate mail in their
home e-mail accounts. It should be noted that while many students exchanged personal e-mail addresses in their letters, all text generated in this project was filtered through the teachers.

The local students received their e-mails in a slightly different fashion. Once their Russian partners had completed their replies, their e-mail was sent to the local teacher. Instead of sending the letters in a large group, the Russian teacher sent the letters as she received them. The reason for this is not known, but perhaps this was how she chose to handle the organization of the project. Once an e-mail arrived, the local teacher would print it out and hold it until all e-mails had been received. At that time, the teacher distributed the letters in-class, and everyone took turns reading theirs aloud to the entire group. As might be expected, the days on which the Russian students' letters were distributed were exciting ones! Reading their letters as a group allowed each student to hear what their peers' partners had to say, thus expanding their sense of the project. By hearing the letters written by their classmates' Russian partners, the local students were exposed to more opinions than if they read only the letters of their partners.

The total turn-around time for a complete exchange averaged approximately two to three weeks. Here, one of the major benefits of using the Internet became apparent. Had the students relied on traditional mail delivery, the time it took for a complete exchange to occur would have been considerably longer. Because the students used e-mail, the project remained interesting and current for them. It was also due to the pace of the project that their motivation to continue writing was maintained (Caswell & Wood, 1999). Student motivation to write was increased due in large part to the utilization of the technology, but as described earlier, not only because of the technology.
When the Technology Becomes Invisible

At this point in my data analysis, I find it difficult to divorce the technology from the project as a whole. While the technology was the conduit for communication, I cannot be certain that it was not the act of communication itself—within and outside of the classroom—that motivated these students to want to write. When asked specifically how the technology affected this project, the majority of the focus students answered in terms of the speed and convenience with which the letters could be exchanged. Only David and Travis, two of the weak writers, mentioned the physical keyboard at which they wrote and revised. According to Travis, "It was easier to fix my mistakes on the computer...and my letters looked better, because my handwriting isn't so good." For Travis and David, the electronic text they saw on the screen seemed more changeable, ephemeral, less permanent than text written with pen on paper (Belise, 1996). The ease of editing on a computer can certainly be seen as a motivating factor that makes writing less painful for students, but their motivation ran deeper.

For most of the students, their motivation came from the connections they made, from writing to a real audience and for a real purpose (Fox, 1998; Singhal, 1997). Also, during this project, the knowledge that the students brought to their discussions, both in-class and with their Russian partners, was validated and seen as important. The technology that enabled this collaborative process was both attractive and practical to the teachers and students involved (Cooper, 1999). In the following section, I will examine the American and the Russian students' perceptions about this project as a whole, and also the teachers' perspectives.
Thoughts About the Project: The American Students

At the completion of the e-mail project, I met one final time with the focus students to assess what they thought about the experience. Overall, the strong writers were able to see beyond the surface-level goals of the project—to become better writers in terms of the quality indicators suggested by the Ninth Grade Rubric for Holistic Scoring (see Appendix C). They were able to understand the greater social and cultural implications as well. The weak writers, while also able to understand the social and cultural implications, were more concerned with how the project affected their writing skills, although they felt that their writing skills had considerably improved.

Focus Students: Strong Writers

When asked to share their overall impressions on the e-mail project, Carlton was the first to answer with a resounding, “Loved it!” Paige liked the fact that e-mail was used, which considerably cut down on the time it took for the letters to be transported back and forth. For Paige, the technology eventually became invisible, which is one of the signs that the technology was used effectively in supporting cross-cultural communication (Citrino & Gentry, 1999). Laura enjoyed making a connection to someone so far away. “I thought it was kinda neat to talk to people in another country, because I’ve never done that before. I also thought it was neat to be able to help them out, how they were trying to learn our way of writing.” Paige responded, stating that she liked how the stories were incorporated into the writing. Prior research has shown that when students write for real audiences and real purposes, the enjoyment of writing, as well as the quality of the writing, tends to increase (Bateman & Benson, 1999; Caswell & Wood, 1999; Citrino & Gentry, 1999).

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For Carlton, writing for an authentic audience was the most important aspect of the project. "Once again, I'm touching the hearts of people through writing!" He enjoyed having a wider variety of people with which to communicate, and that writing for the purpose of communication was better than always writing to get feedback, "like for a grade." This e-mail project successfully incorporated the concept of an authentic audience because of the necessity of its purpose. According to Bateman & Benson (1999), "What is a real audience? One that has need of the information or insights a writer possesses; one that responds to the content of the writing" (p. 164). In this case, the Russian students needed to know how native speakers of English use the language in day-to-day correspondence, and the American students needed to understand more about the Russian culture to fully appreciate the literature being studied.

When asked whether or not the project had an effect on their writing, the strong writers all agreed that overall, it did not. As Laura explained, "I don't think it's really changed, I just think that I've had to be more careful." I then asked them whether or not they agreed that they had to write more carefully than they normally did when writing to their Russian partners, and they all agreed that they did. Paige commented, "Yeah! You have to read it over and over again, like, 'Does that make sense? Does that make sense? '" They also agreed that discussing the literature with their Russian partners was more helpful than a typical class discussion alone would have been. "They were able to explain things differently than the teacher," said Paige. "I thought it was a lot more fun, because it was just between you and the other person. You were able to really go into detail where in class it's just everybody talking." Through writing, more students were able to be heard and a deeper understanding of the literature was achieved. This was due
in part to the personal connections that the students were encouraged to make with the literature by using their past experiences as tools to help them create meaning (Rosenblatt, 1965).

It was difficult for the group of strong writers to come up with one most important thing learned throughout the course of this e-mail project. They each left with several important lessons. Paige started our dialogue by stating that,

I thought it was neat because you were nice to the person that you were writing to. I mean, you don’t know who they are, what they’re thinking, what kind of person they are. You’re writing to this person and there’s nothing that’s going to be in your way, there’s no elements that are stopping you from writing to that person, and the only thing they know about you is through your writing and what you put down on paper.

This sort of freedom in writing to communicate was new to Paige, and she continued. “It’s weird! Can you really put that much about yourself on paper?” This caused them each to pause while they considered the possibilities of creating a persona purely out of words. This concept is dealt with often in Internet chat rooms where people are rarely as they describe themselves (Rheingold, 1993). After a moment, Laura considered what she had taken from the project and stated that, “I think I’ve learned to be more careful in what I write because people might take it a different way than what I mean.” Laura learned that making cultural assumptions can sometimes result in miscommunication, as when they helped Carlton to re-write his letter during the peer-response session. Laura concluded her thought by explaining, “I don’t really like the fact that we don’t get to meet them, because they just know us through the letters, and, like Paige was saying, that could be a totally different person than what I am, what I write.”
Both Paige and Laura commented that they enjoyed playing the role of the expert when it came to teaching their partners about the English language. Paige said, “I think that [projects like this] would be extremely helpful for the teachers over there who are teaching kids English, because, you know, [the teachers] are Russian themselves, so I’m sure they’re even still learning about English. So there’s stuff that we can teach them that even the teacher can’t!” Being the expert was another aspect of the project that made it genuine and purposeful for the American students involved (Bateman & Benson, 1999).

When asked if they would like to see more projects like this in school, Paige answered enthusiastically, “Yes! I think it’s important that we communicate with people from different countries. I know myself that I’m really naïve about, just other cultures and stuff. I find it hard to believe that things are different from the way that I live life every day. And from talking to people from different countries, I think it’s helpful to learn.” Laura agreed, stating that, “I like it because we’re able to see a different culture, and I think it’s more fun than just having boring old class lectures and taking notes and stuff like that.” But it was Carlton who gave what I believed to be one of the most insightful comments of all:

If they had [e-mail] back in the day, I guarantee you a lot of stuff wouldn’t have happened that did happen between countries. I’m referring to like the Cold War and stuff. If they had the Internet back then, they could’ve actually talked and get their mindsets. [The Russians] think the same things that we think, we just go about it in a different manner…. If they communicated back then like we do now, a lot of conflicts could’ve been solved. That’s why I feel that because of the Internet, we’re gonna be friends with a lot of countries. Folks going into politics now will do something like this project and it’ll change their viewpoint about other people from different countries and their philosophies.
This group of students understood the potential power of such frank and open communication via a medium like e-mail. Involvement in this project succeeded in having them understand the power of open communication and acceptance of the way that life is lived by a culture different from their own (Soter & Rogers, 1997).

When asked what they would change about future e-mail projects based upon their experiences with this one, the strong writers all agreed that they would do more writing! They also wanted to do more reading as well. Laura said, “I think it would’ve been better if things would’ve gone quicker and had more stories to talk about.” Carlton suggested, “Guarantee that everyone gets a letter back!” He was saddened by the fact that he only received one letter instead of three due to technical/scheduling difficulties. He was, however, grateful for the chance to hold up his end of the commitment and write all four of his letters, giving him that all-important outlet for spreading his word to the world. Paige asked, “Why didn’t we chat with them live on the computers?” Laura and Carlton looked at her, rolled their eyes, and Laura said, “Because they’re at home when we’re at school.” Paige replied with an embarrassed, “Oh, yeah.”

**Focus Students: Weak Writers**

At the time of our final interview, Sandy had dropped out of school, so I was only able to discuss the project with David and Travis. Both students were very enthusiastic about the project, although for different reasons from their strong-writer peers. Travis said, “[The e-mail project] was a lot better than writing stories or something like that! I enjoyed writing to them.” This suggests that Travis appreciated the sense of purpose, that his time spent writing was not being wasted on assignments that he considered trivial (Bateman & Benson, 1999). Both agreed that their writing had improved significantly,
due in large part to the amount of time spent composing and editing with the aid of peers. Travis reported, “I re-read over what I write now...instead of trying to rush through it.” “I agree with him on that,” replied David. “I re-read through it and write a little more detail, like explaining stuff more. I really try to explain what I mean. I don’t just assume people know what I mean anymore.” Like Laura, David became aware of the dangers of making cultural assumptions when writing to EFL learners.

While both David and Travis agreed that writing for an authentic audience helped to improve their writing, they were consistently more concerned about surface-level issues such as spelling and punctuation than the stronger writers. For each of them, the desire to appear intelligent to their Russian partners was strong, and because of that they both enjoyed the peer-editing sessions that took place in class. The peer-editing sessions gave them the support they needed, in a non-threatening, non-graded way, to be sure that what they were sending out was as error-free as possible (Tillyer & Wood, 2000). When placed in the role of expert, as David and Travis were, they wanted to do their best to impress their partners. According to Tillyer & Wood (2000), it is common for native English speakers with weak writing skills to want to do their best when demonstrating to EFL students how to use proper written English. “E-mail correspondence counters negative attitudes [about writing] and builds confidence because students succeed” (Tillyer & Wood, 2000, p. 167). Writing in the role of expert to EFL students caused David and Travis to not only improve their writing, (see Tables 21 and 22) but also to increase their confidence as well. According to Travis, “I think I can spell better when I write now.”
When asked whether or not they would like to see more e-mail projects done in school, Travis exclaimed, “I wish all English classes were like [this] class!” This was exciting for me to hear, because it was Travis in the beginning of the project who stated that, “I’m just gonna [do] the project. I just want to get the grade and get out of school.” Making a connection to his partner through e-mail was more rewarding than Travis anticipated. For possibly the first time, Travis was the expert and someone was listening with great interest to what he had to say. Whenever the letters arrived from Russia, it was always Travis who beamed the brightest when reading his letters aloud to the class. David commented that, “[This project] wasn’t like writing for no purpose except for a grade. It was more like writing because we wanted to, not really like for a grade.” For these two students, writing for understanding and communication was a new concept, and one they appreciated a great deal. This demonstrates how writing to authentic audiences for authentic purposes can benefit even the most reluctant student (Bateman & Benson, 1999; Brooks & Brooks, 1993; Tillyer & Wood, 2000).

Lengthening the amount of time for the project was the only suggestion that David and Travis could come up with. David suggested, “Like, start at the beginning of the year and do it all year, make it longer. I mean, we only wrote what, four or five letters back and forth?” Hearing these very reluctant writers request more time for writing was a key factor in demonstrating this e-mail project’s success.

**Thoughts About the Project: The Russian Students**

During the final week of school, I e-mailed the Russian students a list of questions (see Appendix F) that I asked them to answer and return to me, also via e-mail. Due to their involvement with final exams and projects, I was only able to gather responses of
twelve students, but each student agreed that this e-mail project was worthwhile and something they truly enjoyed. When asked if they felt that their written English had improved due to participation in this e-mail project, one student stated, "Yes, I really feel that my written English has improved due to this project. Now it's not difficult for me to write letters for my English-speaking friends. I know how to begin and finish my letter. I learnt [sic.] many new useful words." Another student wrote, "I really think that my English indeed has improved a lot, because when you write to the person you've never seen, you try to look as a clever kind man. And like in our native language it is better to use different nice...expressions for the best effect." One student also gained an added benefit from the project, stating that, "Yes, [my English] improved great! But also I have improved my typing speed. I'm writing using 10 fingers now!" Only two students did not feel that their writing had improved, one because of the brevity of the project, and another because of the style of writing he used. "When I write letters for this project, I don't think a lot about grammar. I write in speech style." Writing in "speech style" is something that normally occurs when people engage in conversations in chat rooms where speed is more important than the quality of grammar. Earlier in the chapter, David alluded to his typing skills being poor because he is used to such fast typing on the Internet. Typically, the problem of typing for speed is not encountered when using e-mail, since the letters are sent asynchronously and not in real-time (Sefie, 1992).

The Russian students, like the American students, enjoyed writing for an audience other than their teacher. According to one Russian student, "Talks with our teacher are about things which our teachers have planned. And with other people we can speak about that what we want to!" Another student commented, "I like writing to somebody
other than my teacher. You don’t have to worry about the grade you will get. It is more interesting to write to somebody who is the same age as you. You learn lots of slang words that teenagers use!” Earlier in the chapter it was Sandy who stated that if she were a student learning a foreign language, she would like to learn the slang words so she would not appear to be a total “dork.” Finally, when asked about writing for an audience other than the teacher, a student said, “It is more interesting. I want to do this project.” This is similar to what David mentioned earlier, stating that during this project, he wrote because he wanted to.

I also asked the Russian students if they felt that writing about the literature with their American partners helped them to better understand it. The students agreed that by having access to other’s opinions, both personal and cultural, they were better able to understand the literature. One student wrote, “My partner showed some things that I missed in the literature.” Another student claimed, “In my opinion, if you really want to understand the literature you have to discuss it with other people. I was really interested in my American partner’s opinion.” For this student, discussion took the form of writing via e-mail as opposed to the face-to-face variety. One student mentioned the value of the questions about the stories that her partner sent her in each exchange. “They asked me a lot of questions which made me ask my teacher more about the literature and [our partners] explained a lot of questions we didn’t understand.” According to prior research, having students generate their own questions after reading a piece of literature can greatly contribute to their own active meaning-making of the text (Beach & Marshall, 1991; Phelan, 1990).
The majority of the Russian students believed that participation in this e-mail project helped them to learn about American culture. One student claimed, "I know a lot about American culture from this project. My partner told me a lot about Christmas celebration and other American traditions." Another student wrote, "If I don't understand something from the letter, (you know, the way you do some things, your system of education and so on) I just ask my partner in the letter about it and after the answer it becomes a lot clearer. I've always been interested in American culture. I like American music, American books, American movies. As for me, I learnt [sic.] a lot about American culture." One student hoped that he was able to return the favor by stating, "We hope that American students learned a lot about our culture too!" Finally, one of the students noted the link between culture and the literature. "I think it is very good to receive such knowledge. In my opinion, discussing literature is a good way to learn other culture." This is one of the largest implications of the e-mail project. In using the literature as a catalyst for discussion about the literature, the students were able to consider culture at a much deeper level than if they were left to write with no guidelines. Paige noted this in an interview, stating, "I'm glad we have the stories to write about, otherwise it might get too out of control."

The favorite part about this e-mail project for the Russian students was the freedom they were given to express themselves. One student wrote, "We could tell each other about our own experience. It was really interesting to learn something about life of teenagers in other country, their life experience and their point of view on different topics." Being able to share and connect on a personal level was important to this student. Another student wrote that the most impressive part about the project for her
was, “learning more about other culture, other way of thoughts.” The American students found this to be an important aspect of the project as well, as when Paige said, “[The project] broadens your horizons.” One Russian student wrote that her favorite part of the project was simply, “Now I have a new friend in another country!” Like Carlton stated previously, perhaps the world would not be suffering so much conflict if communication such as this occurred between countries decades ago.

When asked how the e-mail project could be improved, the Russian students agreed with the American students that there should be more time. One student reported, “I wish we could enlarge the project’s time—it is too short!” Several Russian students suggested, as Paige did, that the discussion be moved to a live chat forum (although none thought about the problem of different time zones). One student suggested that the discussion take place not via e-mail, but via an electronic discussion group:

I think it would be better to do the project not in the form of e-mail communication, but in the form of web news conference with replies so that everybody could talk to everybody, not just like you have one penpal and you have to write him all the time. If you have any technical problems on this solution you can contact our school technical specialists (I am one of them).

Overall, the Russian students agreed that using e-mail to learn English was a useful and fun tool. According to one student, “I think e-mailing is a great thing. It gives us great possibilities in communication and learning.” Tillyer & Wood (2000) provide an explanation for the popularity of using e-mail to aid in teaching English to college EFL students:

E-mail correspondence, with its easy, conversational tone, provides a reason to write and a way to overcome...reluctance by allowing students to write in a non-threatening situation that seems natural, not artificial and constrained (p. 167).
Since all of the students involved in this e-mail project were writing primarily to communicate with another person, they became eager to write. The local classroom was enriched by the exposure to a different culture—a culture that was learned about first-hand rather than from a textbook. Many of the local students had not traveled outside of the United States, and for them this project was a portal to understanding that there is more than one way to make sense of the world. Learning about life in their partner’s country broadened their outlook and stimulated their thinking, making them look forward to the time when they would write again.

**Final Thoughts: American Teacher**

In a final letter to the Russian teacher, the local teacher commented on how successful he felt this project was:

> For the most part, I thought this was a very successful project. I have several students whose writing is very sloppy and it has been helpful for them to have an authentic audience to write to. It has been a good motivation for them to write more carefully. It also gave us an opportunity to have grammar lessons with their own work. I took several paragraphs by my students and projected them up on the wall so we could consider the good and bad grammar. That was so much more effective than using contrived sentences out of a book...

However, for the local teacher, the benefits went beyond effectively teaching grammar. In an interview conducted via e-mail, I asked him what he would say to critics who may claim that what he was doing with computers could be done just as easily with pen and paper. At the time, he was conducting another project with students in Siberia. This was his response:

> Let's say we are doing an exchange with students in Siberia. Sending one letter one way by regular mail takes four months. So we could read a play in September, write a letter to our partners. They would receive it in January and write back. We would
receive it in April and reply to their -- oh, never mind. They would have graduated before we ever replied to their first letter.

With electronic mail, three weeks ago the Siberian students wrote on Monday. We received it on Sunday, the previous day — only because they are 15 hours ahead of us. We took 24 hours to contemplate what they had written and wrote back on Tuesday. They received it on Thursday — only because they are 15 hours ahead of us. They then wrote back on Friday and we received it on Thursday (guess why?) So in 1/16th the time it takes one letter to travel one way, we had three exchanges.

Now consider the fact that teachers could not deal with one piece of literature or theme over the whole year for those 2 1/2 snail mail exchanges that would take place and you'll have, I think, a pretty good argument for e-mail in the classroom. Even if you are talking pen-pal letters with England, unless you pay $40 per letter, it will take two weeks one way.

I then asked him what, in his opinion, needed to happen in an e-mail exchange — using literature as a catalyst — to make it more than just a typical pen-pal relationship:

The answer to number one is important here because the immediate reply provides a continuity that makes it more like an intellectual exchange than a how-are-you-I-am-fine letter. Students have a natural desire to become pen-pals. While we ask them to compare Zeffirelli's ROMEO AND JULIET to Dicaprio's version, they still need to slip in a paragraph about their favorite music, pasttimes, hobbies, etc. So there is a natural desire to exchange cultural ideas. But the focus of an e-mail project needs to require a concentration on one piece of literature or theme so that they are not limited to naming popular music groups. If just writing pen-pal letters, each student would talk about their individual day-to-day experiences, which is a fine thing. But by focusing on a traditional and avant-garde version of ROMEO AND JULIET, they are forced to reflect on how Dicaprio's version implies Americans are obsessed with guns, drugs and rock-n-roll. They also discussed how the MTV style editing of Dicaprio's indicates a more hectic pace of life in America - as reflected in our current great directors like Spielberg and Lucas in their frenetic, fast-paced editing that makes the blood pump faster in our veins. (Oh how I would love to see Spielberg and Lucas edit a version of WAITING FOR GODOT.)
Anyway, focusing on literature [when writing] allows students to see beyond their own experiences in school and the workplace and understand general trends in their culture, of which their experiences are a part. Putting their own culture into some sort of focus for a foreigner helps them to better understand their own place in their own culture.

Citrino & Gentry (1999) also suggested that when students explored other cultures, they felt pride in their own, and also in their place within their particular culture.

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2000), 98% of public secondary schools reported having access to the Internet in 1998. However, the same report also stated that, in spite of the high percentage of networked computers in school, only 43% of secondary teachers reported using the technology available to them. When the technology was used, word processing programs and drill-and-skill exercises were used most extensively. This data prompted me to ask the local teacher why more teachers were not using the technology available at their schools. I wondered if it was because many of the activities technology facilitates, like cross-cultural projects, do not fit with our perceptions of what school is supposed to “look” like, a topic I investigate further in the next chapter. Here is the local teacher's reply:

First, you have to define who "our" is. Right now, politicians are forcing us to design tests that will force us to make schools look like what they had in 1950 because, hey, they turned out alright, didn't they? "Our" might refer to teachers who have been in the field for 20 years. Some of them are following lesson plans they wrote back in 1984 (when it was a brave new world). They are no more familiar with the technology than the student in my first project who asked the Russians why he should talk to them about literature "when we have all the bombs." He was being smart-assed because he didn't really believe I would send it. We have a vast number of teachers who don't even turn in daily attendance because they are required to do it electronically. Of course, there are new teachers out there who have new perceptions
of what schools should look like, but they are all trying to impress a 50 year-old principal who is overly concerned with standardized test scores. They won't start rocking the boat until they have tenure - which is now pretty much gone. Before they feel safe in their positions, they will have created the rut of a lesson plan they can just keep Xeroxing - and on it goes.

**Final Thoughts: The Russian Teacher**

After the completion of the project, I interviewed, via e-mail, the Russian teacher involved. Her comments were very limited, and she failed to mention how the project affected her students’ writing. She did tell me, however, that as a literature teacher, telecommunications projects such as this were very important to her work. “Telecommunications projects such as this one help students to frame the problems in the literature, and in society.” She said that because of working cross-culturally with peers, her students are better able to analyze the texts, and thus gain a broader perspective than if the students discussed the literature only amongst themselves. A final reason that she enjoys involvement in such projects had to do with the technology itself: “My students have an opportunity to use new information technologies in practice.” This, she says, will help to prepare them for the future.

**Summary**

As stated at the beginning of this section, it was difficult to divorce the technology as a specific tool from the context of the entire project. While the project could have been carried out using pen, paper and “regular” mail, the use of e-mail helped to speed up the process, allowing the students to read and write more frequently. Research has indicated that by giving students more frequent opportunities to write, their writing tends to improve (Citrino & Gentry, 1999). I suggest that the pace at which the
project was conducted helped to maintain the motivation level of the students involved (Tillyer & Wood, 2000; Fox, 1998). However, writing for an authentic audience could also have contributed to the high motivation level of the students (Britton et al., 1975; Roen, 1990). In this particular case, the students were actually writing for two authentic audiences: their distant peers in Russia, and also their in-class peers, as these were the people who responded first to their text. I also suggest that the role of peer collaboration, during the reading, writing, and editing phases of the project was yet another motivator, and perhaps the greatest reason of all that the students’ writing improved during the semester. Each of these contentions will be discussed in the following chapter.

In Chapter 5, I will discuss the conclusions and implications of the data collected. I will discuss which factors of the project seemed to have the greatest effect on which students, thus providing suggestions for teachers and teacher educators who may be interested in conducting a project similar to this in their own classrooms. Also, limitations to this type of e-mail project will be examined. I will then offer suggestions for future research concerning projects that integrate collaborative learning, literature, writing and technology.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Overview

In this study, five data sources were used to collect information about the e-mail project studied: attitudinal surveys, observations, interviews, e-mail documents and a group peer-response session involving the six focus students. Analysis of each of these sources was determined by which element of the e-mail project was being considered.

To review, the following research question was designed to invite a detailed examination of the three factors present within the larger context of the study:

When given the opportunity to write for a distant, non-native English speaking audience, to what extent do each of the following affect the outcome of student writing:

- The opportunity for personal, collaborative response to selected literature in the form of large and small group discussions with writing to distant peers as the ultimate goal
- The opportunity for peer-editing to occur before any letter is sent to distant partners
- The opportunity to correspond about the literature via e-mail

The following section contains a summary of the findings and conclusions yielded by the data sources as related to the previously stated research question.
Findings and Conclusions

The Role of Writing to an Authentic Audience

As stated previously, an authentic audience can be defined as one that has a need for the information or insights that a writer possesses and/or one that responds to the content of the writing (Bateman & Benson, 1999). In this e-mail project, an authentic audience was present in two ways. First, the students were communicating with distant peers, giving and receiving information that was both requested and needed. Thus, not only was an authentic audience present, but also an authentic purpose for writing. Second, the students were communicating with one another within their local classroom in the form of peer-editing and through discussions about the literature. Therefore, the writing produced by these students was seen by several audiences: their teacher, their local peers, and their distant peers. Due to this fact, it is my assertion that involvement in this particular project helped to raise students’ awareness of audience, and thus resulted in writing that was error-free as well as rhetorically appropriate for the intended audience (see Table 23). When writing to distant peers, (as opposed to their local partners) the focus students attended closely to any ambiguities and errors that may have confused their partners. Such care, while taken to some extent, was not seen in the letters that the focus students wrote to their local peers. The role that peer-editing played in this process had a great deal to do with this increase in audience awareness. The effects of peer-editing will be discussed in a later section of this chapter.

Before the project began, only 6% of the local students claimed to be aware of their audience when they wrote. During the short duration of this project, that number increased slightly to 14% after the project was completed (see Table 10). In a similar
vein, before the project began, 69% of the students said that they would change their writing based upon specific knowledge of their audience, whereas that number increased to 79% by the time the project ended (see table 11). While this is a relatively small increase, it is an increase nonetheless. The majority of the class (58%) stated in a response to a post-project survey question that writing for an authentic audience (their Russian partners) made them pay closer attention to writing conventions such as grammar, punctuation, spelling and clarity (see Table 13). A review of Table 23 indicates this to be the case. Table 23 illustrates that usage/mechanical errors and generalizations (mainly due to assuming a shared cultural context) present in the focus students’ letters to in-class peers were either eliminated or otherwise changed in the letters for their Russian partners. This was due in large part to the many opportunities all students had for peer-editing. Furthermore, all students indicated an increased sense of confidence and satisfaction with their letters to their Russian partners as the project progressed. In an interview session with the focus students, Sandy stated that, “Normally, I don’t care how I write. I mean, I’m just writing for myself or for a teacher and it doesn’t matter if I can’t spell perfectly. But if I’m writing to [my Russian partner], it has to be perfect.” Similarly, Travis claimed, “Most of the time, when I write to a teacher, I just write down whatever and say, ‘Here, fix it.’ But when I write to somebody else, if somebody else is gonna look at it, I try to make it sound like I’m intelligent and I know what I’m talking about.” Because students in this project were writing for authentic audiences and for authentic purposes, greater care was taken in their writing than if they had been writing solely for the teacher (Britton et al., 1975; Cohen & Riel, 1989).
The Role of Discussion About the Literature

By allowing students to respond on a personal level to the literature read, the students perceived a greater sense of ownership of what they wrote. Also, sharing their personal responses with peers in both whole and small group discussions gave students more than one viewpoint to consider when composing their own writing (O'Donnell, 1980). This was true for both the strong and the weak focus students. By reading collaboratively, as opposed to individually, all students learned skills that encouraged them to develop “literate behaviors” (Hynds, 1990). Hynds (1990) explains, “Readers develop the will to read through participation in supportive communities of readers. This motivation to read encourages them to seek out and master the necessary competencies and skills” (p. 255). During this project, students were reading for more than simply a grade on a comprehension test, thus their motivation to read and understand was high. “When readers do not envision themselves as members of a literate community, they generally do not develop literate behaviors” (Hynds, 1990, p. 255). Thus, readers do not become literate simply by learning literacy skills, but by participating in an elaborate socially constructed system. “As they develop notions of themselves as readers through participation in reading communities, they develop both intellectual and social competence for bringing what they know about life into the text” (Hynds, 1990, p. 255). By learning literacy skills within a socially constructed system as observed in this study, the students demonstrated more ownership for their writing than if they had been instructed to write in isolation for only a teacher audience.

The opportunity to discuss the literature that was being read in both large and small group discussions benefited both the strong and the weak writers. As discussed in
Chapter 1, transactional reading allows the reader to take an active role in the construction of meaning, as opposed to the passive role the reader was assumed to take in the old transmission role of reading, where the text was prominent (Straw & Bogdan, 1990). During the reading done in this project, talk was often used as a way of sharing ideas, making personal connections with the literature, and constructing new meaning collaboratively (Bruffee, 1984). Working collaboratively to construct meaning can be beneficial to students, as understandings are shaped by struggles over meaning. “The content of literature is not autonomous, but has to be constructed by readers in engaged encounters with the text” (Nystrand, 1997, p. 9). If a student is simply told the meaning of a text, he or she may not remember what was said at a later time. However, by struggling over and piecing together their own meanings of the text through writing, students are more likely to internalize and understand the texts that they read. A two-way effect is thus created with reading and writing skills strengthening one another.

Each of the six focus students indicated that they appreciated having the opportunity to talk about the literature before they wrote their letters. In fact, the small group discussions seemed to be the most beneficial for the students. Several times I observed students who were not talking very much in their groups, but who were engaged and jotting down ideas as they heard them. Because of their involvement and listening skills, they were able to consider many more ideas for writing than if they had been assigned to write alone without the benefit of prior discussion. Even though quiet students may have made fewer comments, they were exposed to all comments and could draw upon the experiences of their peers to enhance their own writing. As Sandy stated, “I like talking about what I’m going to write before I write it. I like to know what other
people are going to say. That always gives me better ideas.” Her comments offer an excellent illustration of Vygotsky’s (1978) zone of proximal development. Working alone, Sandy may not have been able to generate or articulate ideas as well as she could have when allowed to work collaboratively to talk about her writing.

The Effects of Peer-Editing on Students’ Writing

The opportunities for peer-editing were beneficial to each of the students involved in this project. However, the benefits of peer-editing were more pronounced for the weaker writers than the stronger writers. Because they did not want to be perceived as “dumb” or “stupid” by other peers, the students identified as weak writers in this project became even more aware of surface-level grammatical and spelling errors than their in-class peers identified as strong writers. According to Tillyer & Wood (2000) this is not uncommon. Many students with weaker writing skills like the pace of e-mail communication—fast enough to keep interest levels high, but slow enough to allow for careful thought and editing before each correspondence is sent (Tillyer & Wood, 2000). With increased confidence and opportunities for genuine purposive writing comes increased motivation to write. “Until I began using e-mail in my [basic writing] classroom, I never found my students waiting to get into the classroom at 7:45 a.m. when I arrived” (Tillyer & Wood, 2000). And as Travis stated earlier, “I wish all my classes were like [this one]!”

The weaker writers in this project were grateful for having someone to work with while both generating ideas and editing their writing. According to Beachy, (1992) the goal of the peer-editing process is to help students to organize and guide their writing, to help clarify their thinking. After involvement in many peer-editing sessions, students
should be able to develop their own "internal checklist" (Beachy, 1992, p. 211) of features to look for when editing their own papers, features such as organization, clarity, and tone as well as usage/mechanical features. This process eventually helps the students to develop a sense of ownership and self-direction in future writing (Beachy, 1992; O'Donnell, 1980). Another advantage of peer-editing for the weaker writers was that they were able to see how the strong writers went about composing and editing their own pieces, thus having good examples of writing upon which to draw (O'Donnell, 1980). Also, since the students were busy assisting each other, the teacher had more time to be available to those who required further assistance (Weeks, 1982; O'Donnell, 1980).

The strong writers in this study also benefited from the peer-editing process. It allowed these students to demonstrate their talents by helping their peers, which increased everyone's confidence (O'Donnell, 1980). Also, by being looked upon as experts, both by their in-class and distant peers, these writers were more motivated to be certain that their writing was clear and error-free, as well as the writing of their peers that they were assisting. The strong writers in this project took their role of expert seriously, as they were in the position to answer not only to their peers, but to their Russian partners as well. According to Gousseva (1998), "I believe that electronic discussions [within a collaborative atmosphere] help the students to rely on each other more, and not depend solely on the teacher for answers and comments" (p. 7). With their in-class peers (through peer-editing) and their distant partners (through electronic networking), students involved in this project met one another at multiple sites of interaction, and I contend that their writing was better as a result.
For the strong writers, this project was about more than writing skills; it had cultural implications as well. While both groups understood their importance to their Russian partners in terms of helping them to learn and practice English, the strong writers looked past the individual level to the cultural level. Paige was surprised at her perceptions about her partner's experience with terrorist bombings that happened near his home. Carlton commented that by engaging in such open dialogue with people in distant lands, perhaps future global conflict can be avoided because now the people "over there" have names and faces and are not too unlike himself. "Online communication shrinks the world," state Citrino & Gentry (1999, p. 117), "and makes history come to life. When we realize that we are part of history, that we are watching it happen, we pay close attention." By the end of the study, students came to pay closer attention to their writing, both its form and its power as a communication tool.

The Role of Technology

As suggested earlier, the role that the technology played in this project was largely invisible. While using e-mail allowed a timely exchange of letters to occur, and that timelines was a great motivating factor, I still can not be certain that the technology was the most important element in this project. According to the students, the use of technology was at least as important (as a motivational tool) as both collaborative discussion and peer-editing, but not necessarily more. This type of project could have been carried out using pen and paper, sending letters out through standard mail. In fact, projects of this "old-fashioned" type have been carried out before (Christian, 1997), and I participated in such projects myself as a middle school teacher. However, the time that it would have taken standard mail to get through in my study (given the distance involved)
would have cut down the number of exchanges during the semester from four to possibly only one or two. For that reason alone, I believe that the technology was a benefit. Because of the increased number of exchanges, students were writing more often (Citrino & Gentry, 1999). The frequency of students’ writing, coupled with the fact that students were working collaboratively to make their own meaning of the literature—and sharing that meaning with an authentic audience—all combined to create a project that was beneficial to all students involved.

Implications

Information and knowledge are growing at a far more rapid rate than ever before in the history of humankind. “As Nobel laureate Herbert Simon wisely stated, the meaning of ‘knowing’ has shifted from being able to remember and repeat information to being able to find and use it” (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000, p. 5). Bransford et al. (2000) continue:

More than ever, the sheer magnitude of human knowledge renders its coverage by education an impossibility; rather, the goal of education is better conceived as helping students develop the intellectual tools and learning strategies needed to acquire knowledge that allows people to think productively about history, science and technology, social phenomena, mathematics, and the arts. (p. 5)

Learning how to frame and ask meaningful questions in the attempt to construct meaning about various subject areas is the key to developing lifelong learners (Bransford et al., 2000; Christian, 1997). Using networked computers to connect students near and far in collaborative relationships will help to facilitate the development of both lifelong learners and better writers, as the on-line environment is completely text-based.
Bransford et al. (2000) suggest that learning for understanding is rare in many school curricula today, as such curricula emphasize memory instead. While facts are indeed important for thinking and problem solving, facts alone, disjointed from their larger contexts, serve as a shaky foundation upon which to build an education. According to researchers (Bransford et al., 2000; Rogoff, 1998), schools and classrooms should be learner-centered, places where the knowledge, skills and attitudes that students bring with them are acknowledged. In my study, students were allowed to display and construct their knowledge collaboratively through writing. The teachers did not have all of the answers, and students were allowed to bring their own knowledge and experiences to light during the process of communicating with their distant partners.

In addition to being learner-centered, classrooms should also be a site of community building where students have the opportunity to help one another solve problems by building on one another’s knowledge. Both cooperation in problem solving and frequent discussion and questioning among students in an intellectual community can enhance cognitive development (Bransford et al., 2000). Developing effective questioning strategies within a community of learners should be a goal for all classrooms (Niday & Campbell, 2000). Christenbury’s “questioning circle” (cited in Niday & Campbell, 2000) includes questions about “the matter,” or, in the case of my study, the literature itself, “personal reality” which represents the readers experiences, values, and ideas, and “external reality,” which refers to the actual world, including the experience, history, and concepts of other peoples and cultures (p. 60). In my study, students engaged in questioning “the matter” and “personal reality” frequently and occasionally pondered “external reality.” By working collaboratively to read, write, edit and discuss,
projects like found in my study can help to construct classrooms that encourage learner-centered communities. In the following sections, I will discuss the implications of such a project for students, teachers, and teacher educators. I will then present the limitations of such projects, followed by my own guidelines for future cross-cultural e-mail projects, and suggest avenues for future research.

Implications for Students

One of the most positive implications for students involved in cross-cultural e-mail projects such as the one examined in this study is that it gives the students an avenue for self expression and their writing a genuine sense of purpose (Caswell & Wood, 1999). Throughout the e-mail exchanges, the students involved in this project were encouraged to connect on a personal level with the literature by making connections between the literature and their own lived experience. That alone, without the use of networked computers, could be valuable. However, knowing that their writing would be read and responded to by a group of distant peers gave the writing meaning and purpose; this writing wasn’t merely for a grade. Genuine communication was the goal, and acted as a strong motivator for the local students involved. As Caswell & Wood (1999) noted in their similar study involving college students, “It was the students’ personal relationships with each other that drove the correspondence, sometimes sending the discussions in new and worthwhile directions that we could not have anticipated” (p. 159). During my study, students were allowed, in a limited sense, to direct their own academic pursuits. The teachers’ decision to support the students’ inquiry gave them ownership, which, according to Brooks & Brooks (1993) is one of the cornerstones of a learner-centered, collaborative classroom.
Another implication for students involved in a project such as this is the fact that literature, and history and geography and language, came alive because it was shared with an authentic audience. No longer was Russia merely a place on a map. It was home to friends. Perhaps from now on, when Russia is mentioned on the evening news, students involved in this project will pay close attention, and perhaps be able to take action, rather than just ignoring the news as something else that happened “over there.” As Carlton mentioned, future conflicts may be avoided if open communication between countries continues to be encouraged. As Citrino & Gentry (1999) stated at the conclusion of a similar e-mail project, “This project has helped us to frame the past, to live in the present, and to imagine the future” (p. 132).

When students write to an authentic audience, they write with a sense of voice as they attempt to convey ideas, opinions and emotions. Christian (1997) calls this “connecting writing,” writing that connects to an audience (p. 53). This type of writing contrasts with what Christian (1997) calls “performing writing,” the kind of stale, literal, low-risk writing typically seen by teacher-only audiences (p. 53). Students in my study demonstrated a high degree of “connecting writing,” and hopefully this type of writing will transfer to other writing assignments that these students are asked to do in the future.

A final implication for students who use networked computers in the composition classroom is that computers can assist in improving student writing (Bateman & Benson, 1999; Tillyer & Wood, 2000). “Computer conferencing has a beneficial effect on students’ writing because it resonates clearly with the way humans learn naturally to speak” (Bateman & Benson, 1999, p. 177). According to Bateman & Benson (1999), linguists and psychologists such as Vygotsky (1978) state that the human brain must be
“wired” to learn language socially through practice and interaction. Like speaking, writing is learned best when accompanied by practice and feedback. Networked computers provide more options for practice and feedback than traditional textbook methods of learning to write (Bateman & Benson, 1999). Further, when exchanging written dialogue with peers, the emphasis is on meaning making, as in the case of the American and Russian students in the current study. Such communication is rare in most traditional school settings, where students are typically asked to demonstrate their knowledge as opposed to using it to communicate to an audience who has the need to know it (Bateman & Benson, 1999). Having an authentic audience of peers and the freedom to direct their learning based upon personal experience and knowledge combined to improve both the skill and confidence levels of the students involved in this e-mail project.

Implications for Teachers

My study has shown that utilizing networked computers in the English/composition classroom promotes many of the factors that teachers report are important in teaching writing, such as an increase in communication skills and time spent writing (Greb Nix, 1998). However, the use of networked computers in schools is not widespread. According to a 1997 survey conducted by Market Data Research for USA Today, of 6,000 US teachers, computer coordinators and school librarians, 87 percent believe that Internet usage by students in grades 3 to 12 does not help improve classroom performance (Tapscott, 1998). This high number is possibly due to the fact that most of those professionals have not yet attempted to use the Internet to change the way learning is achieved.
The most difficult transition for a teacher to make when making the choice to use networked computers in the classroom is that from "expert" to that of "fellow learner." Classrooms of tomorrow will necessarily be more student-centered, as the generation of students currently entering school is the first generation to have grown up completely surrounded by digital media (Tapscott, 1998). To them, digital communication comes more naturally than to many adults. "For the first time in history, children are more comfortable, knowledgeable, and literate than their parents about an innovation central to society...They are a force for social transformation" (Tapscott, 1998, p. 2). It is no wonder that traditional ways of schooling seem dull to this generation. "Today's youngsters are accustomed to being actively involved, and their sense of mastering the medium may well carry over into other text-based activities, when they are reading interactive fiction, traveling through a database, or using a word processor for writing. Increasingly, the sites of literacy have become dynamic centers of engagement" (Costanzo, 1994, p. 19).

Students who enjoy regular access to networked computers often use their access to communicate. Teachers can harness this natural tendency to communicate via electronic means and have students use computers as sites for sharing work, developing ideas or helping others. "The pedagogical effect...is that [teachers] remove ourselves from a position of authority in order to challenge the traditional classroom dynamic. We are showing students that they should take some responsibility for their education and needn't feel that one authority knows all the answers" (Handa, 1990, p. 170). My study demonstrated that students are capable of taking responsibility for their own learning when the teacher acts as a guide as opposed to an expert. Much of what the local teacher
did in his class was illustrative of what constitutes effective ways to use technology in the English classroom. Heath & Branscombe (1985), in a study involving ninth-grade composition students, suggest that becoming engaged with a distant audience and accepting that somebody other than the teacher cares about the writing helps students to become more motivated to write. Also, recognizing writing as tool for communication, not merely something that is done to complete an assignment, is important for the development of student writers (Heath & Branscombe, 1985). When students participate in writing activities willingly—and with a notion of responsibility to “make sense” of their writing—students move beyond initial response in writing to the level of thought development. Being willing to explain and question their own ideas and assisting their audience in understanding the meaning of their writing are also elements of effective practice in the secondary composition classroom (Heath & Branscombe, 1985).

Throughout my study, students were engaged with a distant audience who would respond to what they had written. Writing was seen as a way of learning, a way of making meaning out of the literature, and not merely for a grade. In my study, writing also functioned to serve several purposes such as communication, meaning making, and enjoyment; thus, students were able to questions assumptions about other cultures as well as their own.

It is important to remember, however, that moving the location of the teacher from the center to the margin during projects such as this does not negate the need for the teacher. According to Gathergood & Hall (2000):

If left alone, two students from opposite sides of the globe will carry on pen-pal type correspondences. But that has been done for years without high-tech equipment. If we are to take advantage of instantaneous transfer of information...
on a personal level, then the conversations must delve into
deep issues. It takes a teacher’s guidance to encourage
students to dig deeper. (p. 215)

It is important that teachers remain in the loop, especially with international e-mail
exchanges, not as a censor, but as a guide to ensure that the potential for this medium is
fully realized (Gathergood & Hall, 2000).

Implications for Teacher Educators

Research into technology in the classroom inevitably calls forth the question,
"Are we preparing teachers to make the best use of computers and the Internet”
(VanDevender, 1998)? A better question might be, “Should we?” As discussed in
Chapter 2, computers can not solve all of the problems found in education today.
However, when used in conjunction with the existing curriculum, computers can enhance
learning (Pope & Golub, 2000). Professional organizations such as the National Council
of Teachers of English have made recent efforts to facilitate technology infusion in
teacher education, indicating that the issue of bringing technology into the English
classroom is important and here to stay.

It could be argued that from the introduction of computers in education, the
emphasis has been on getting the hardware and software installed rather than taking the
time necessary to train teachers in how to properly use it. Criticism of teacher education
has focused on the one-size-fits-all nature of most training programs, especially the
rudimentary nature of most training, the lack of vision of what the computer’s role in the
classroom should be, and an absence of information about best practices for computer-
supported education (VanDevender, 1998). Only 13 percent of school districts nation-
wide mandate computer training for teachers, and more than half do not provide stipends
or other incentives to those who do get training (Bulkeley, cited in VanDevender, 1998).

Knowing how to use a computer and knowing how to teach using a computer are two different ideas (VanDevender, 1998). According to Cynthia Selfe (1992):

> If our profession is to succeed in preparing teachers to be effective educators in the virtual environments of the next decade, we will need to help them to use technology and to function actively as technology critics and reformers in the context of our educational systems. To these ends, we have to teach educators to function as lifetime learners within technological environments and to understand technology and technological change in terms of social, political and educational implications. (p. 25, emphasis in original)

According to researchers (Pope & Golub, 2000; VanDevender, 1998), colleges of teacher education have a responsibility to help pre-service teachers to become familiar with the variety of ways technology can be infused into the English classroom. The ISTE NETS project and PT3 are both aimed at introducing pre-service teachers to the variety of ways technology can be used in their classrooms, and will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

**The ISTE NETS and PT3 Projects**

Beginning in 1994, the International Society for Technology Education (ISTE) conducted research funded in part by the U.S. Department of Education to develop a list of standards for the educational uses of technology. In 1999, ISTE published the National Educational Technology Standards (NETS) (see Appendix K) whose primary goal was and is to “enable stakeholders in Pre-K-12 education to develop national standards for educational uses of technology that facilitate school improvement in the United States” (ISTE, 2000). In addition to defining technology foundation standards for students, standards were also developed for pre-service teachers. Through consortia of
educational technologists, technology corporations, professional educational associations (such as the National Council for Teachers of English), and government agencies, a national consensus has been outlined describing what teachers should know about and be able to do with technology. The National Educational Technology Standards (NETS) encode this consensus. To support teacher education programs to work towards these standards, the U.S. Department of Education established the PT3 Program. “These projects will also provide models for teacher preparation programs to use in incorporating technology in the teacher preparation process and disseminate these promising practices for preparing tomorrow’s teachers to use technology effectively for improving learning” (http://cnets.iste.org). Major functions of the PT3 Project are to:

- Develop a comprehensive set of performance-based technology foundation standards for all teachers reflecting fundamental concepts and skills for using technology to support teaching and learning
- Define essential conditions for teacher preparation and school learning environments necessary for effective use of technology to support teaching, learning, and instructional management
- Develop standards-based performance assessment tools for measuring the achievement of the technology foundation standards and as a basis for certification, licensing, and accreditation
- Identify and disseminate models of teacher preparation where candidates receive experiences preparing them to effectively apply technology to support student learning
- Establish a National Center for Preparing Tomorrow’s Teachers to Use Technology (NCPT3) which will provide coordination, leadership, and support for the PT3 initiative and dissemination of program results (http://cnets.iste.org)

According to Tom Carroll, the director of the PT3 Project, “Teacher preparation has emerged as a critical factor in the effective use of new technologies in education” (http://cnets.iste.org). Carroll (2000) goes on to state that, “Federal, state and local
agencies are investing billions of dollars to equip schools with modern computers and telecommunication networks. But these information technology investments will not pay off, unless future teachers become technology-proficient educators who know how to use these new learning tools to improve learning” (http://cnets.iste.org). My study adds to the growing body of knowledge of effective ways to integrate technology into the English classroom.

One of the main goals of the ISTE NETS and PT3 programs is to help educators integrate technology into the classroom. The use of technology in isolation is discouraged. Instead, technology is seen as a tool for learning, much like text and reference books are currently. It has been found (Caswell & Wood, 1999; Citrino & Gentry, 1999) that technology best serves students when it becomes invisible. In a study similar to the current e-mail project, teachers found that, “the technology eventually became secondary… It was the people [we] were communicating with that became important” (Caswell & Wood, 1999). With guidelines that are based upon the work of the ISTE NETS and PT3 projects, pre-service teachers now have some resources that encourage the integration of technology and English education.

Limitations to the E-Mail Project

Due to the technological nature of this e-mail project, and the distance between the two schools involved, there were a number of limitations inherent to the project’s design. As mentioned previously, one major limitation to this project was time. The students had only one semester in which to develop a relationship with their distant peers. While I do believe that several strong relationships were developed, I believe that they could have been stronger if more time had been allotted. The writing demonstrated by
the students may have become even more detailed, perhaps more congenial and less formal, had more time been an option. Several of the students, both Russian and American, stated that they wished the project could have started at the beginning of the year, giving them more opportunities to communicate with one another. However, given that the students in the American classroom were only scheduled with their teacher for one semester, a longer project would not have been possible.

Closely related to the issue of time was scheduling between the two schools. The two schools were operating on different calendars, thus causing several lags in communication. Not long after the project began, the Russian school closed for a midwinter break. This two week break, coupled with the one week spring break for the American students, added up to three weeks where the students were not communicating. Further, technological problems at the Russian school caused communication to be delayed for yet another week. Although I still believe that communication occurred at a higher rate with the technology than without, these pauses created a gap in the momentum of the project.

Another limitation to the e-mail project in my study was student absences. On some occasions, students were out of school for prolonged absences. Sometimes, students’ letters did not get included in the mailing. This made it difficult for their partners who were expecting to receive letters along with the rest of their peers. The Russian teacher in particular staggered the mailing of her letters, making their arrival in the local classroom erratic. Some of the local students viewed themselves as being “left
out" if their letters were not among the first to arrive. As stated previously, the local teacher tended to wait until all letters from the Russian students had been collected before disseminating them to the class.

An additional situation related to student absences was students who dropped out of school before the end of the project. This was only a problem in the local classroom, as two of the local students, including Sandy, left school early. In that case, the local teacher had volunteers take the place of the missing students so the Russian students could continue to participate. Also, for reasons that are unclear, Carlton only received one letter. In spite of this, he continued to write to his partner faithfully throughout the course of the project. In the following section, I will outline some suggestions for future e-mail correspondences to help avoid such disappointments.

Suggested Project Guidelines

Future projects can benefit from the experiences of the project described in my study and others that have focused on cross-cultural e-mail communication (Citrino & Gentry, 1999; VanDevender, 1998). The following are suggestions that I have developed for utilizing e-mail writing projects. If at all possible, projects should span the entire school year. One semester is often not enough time to allow relationships to fully develop, especially if communication is erratic. Also, teachers and students should collaborate on the project's design. By allowing students the opportunity to be co-designers, they feel a greater sense of ownership towards the project, and potentially a higher level of motivation. In a similar vein, the teachers and students involved should
communicate closely and often. Throughout the course of my study, the two teachers communicated their thoughts and concerns each time the students communicated. In this way, everyone involved can be clear on expectations.

To avoid situations like Carlton’s where one student is regularly not written to, students should work in small groups of two or three. This way, even if there is a prolonged absence or a student drops out of school, no one will feel left out. Also, the interactions should be consistent. Having a scheduled date by which to send letters would also help to prevent students from feeling as if they were forgotten.

When involved with an e-mail project such as the one in my study, students should be encouraged to talk and write about the project with the entire class. By engaging in whole-class dialogue about their correspondences, students may gain a wider worldview of the topics at hand, and thus may have richer and more detailed writing as a result. Also, students should be given plenty of freedom. Students should be encouraged to take control of the topic by being allowed to share personal connections that they develop between their own lives and the content of the literature. This necessitates that students have adequate time to reflect about what they will write. This could be in the form of peer brainstorming sessions or using a reflective journal as a catalyst for writing. Peers should also be encouraged to work together during the editing stages of writing, as I observed the benefits of this technique within my own study. Finally, although not absolutely necessary, students and teachers should have access to high quality hardware, software, and technical support. The local teacher involved in my study did not have expensive or elaborate equipment. However, he was highly skilled with technology at a variety of levels, and therefore was able to quickly solve problems as they arose. For
teachers who are not as comfortable with technology, embarking on a project such as this may be intimidating. Teachers must not be afraid to ask for help, especially from their own students. This could be yet another way of creating a classroom atmosphere that is more student-centered.

Avenues for Future Research

The results of this study invite further research in the areas of writing instruction and online communication. Whether or not an increase in audience awareness evidenced by fewer grammar/mechanical errors and an increased awareness of cultural assumptions was due to the use of e-mail alone is worthy of further research. That communication was achieved via e-mail provided a high level of motivation for the students involved, but it is not clear that their letters would not have been just as carefully written using paper, pen and the U.S. Postal Service. Another study might be conducted to compare students’ writing about literature using traditional paper and pen versus electronic communication. The frequency with which writing could be exchanged is an argument in favor of using e-mail as the medium of communication, as more frequent writing means more practice.

Another study could be conducted in which the writing spans the course of an entire year as opposed to one semester. Because of technological problems and occasional scheduling conflicts, only three complete exchanges were achieved between the American and Russian students. While this was more than could have been achieved using conventional mail, a longer-term study would have given the students more chances to discuss varied topics. It was during the final exchange about art that the students in my study began to break free from the text and venture into their own
interpretations of what art meant to them using their personal experiences as starting points (Christian, 1997). Longer participation may have encouraged even more complex writing.

Further study could also be conducted to compare audience awareness levels of students writing to partners halfway around the world (as in this study) to audience awareness levels of students writing to peers across town. Just how important a role geographical distance played on the part of audience awareness can not be determined by this study. Also, would students be as careful in crafting their letters if their geographically distant partners were native-English speakers? It has been suggested that students adapt their writing to their audience, providing more detail for those who are unfamiliar with their topic of discussion or elements contained therein (Cohen & Riel, 1989). Students writing to different age, gender, or geographical groups may all yield different results.

Final Thoughts

Students of today (and tomorrow) are members of a world that is being made smaller by electronic communication. The technology of the Internet has the potential for linking classrooms throughout the world, creating true cross-cultural connections and bringing the notion of collaborative learning to another level. By allowing students the freedom of communicating on their own terms with distant peers, they may be better able to understand not only their subject matter and their peers, but themselves as well. While many roadblocks stand in the way of true technological integration (lack of funding, teacher training and support to name a few), the potential good outweighs the bad. In preparing students to become global citizens of the 21st century, we as educators would
do a disservice to deny them the opportunity for authentic communication using the technology that we have available. The ideas of collaboration and sharing writing brought me to this dissertation, and they continue to intrigue me. As one of the Russian students in my study commented, “Now I have a new friend from other country.” Imagine the possibilities.
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Dear Parents/Guardians of Mr. [Student's Name]:

As a doctoral student in English Education at the Ohio State University, I am requesting permission for your student to participate in my dissertation research. After working with Mr. [Teacher's Name] for the past year, he has agreed that this project would benefit his students. Specifically, I am planning to take an in-depth look at how Mr. [Teacher's Name]'s students use e-mail in their classroom to discuss literature with their partner school in Moscow, Russia. Because I would like to audiotape some of the interviews, I will need your permission. If this is an inconvenience, please let Mr. [Teacher's Name] or me know.

I am also seeking case study students who would be willing to let me interview them several times during the course of the school year to get their opinions and ideas on this cross-cultural exchange. I would also ask permission to photostate some of the letters students share with their Russian partners during the duration of their projects. Students' identities will be kept confidential. Participation in the study is voluntary, and in no way will your students' participation or lack of participation as a case study student affect his or her grade in the class. At any point, case study students may drop out of the study with no negative consequences.

The project has been approved by the administration of High School and City Schools. In addition, my advisor, Dr. Maia Pan Mertz, who will monitor the research as the principal investigator, has approved the project. If you have any questions, feel free to call Mr. [Teacher's Name] or me.

If you choose, please sign and return the attached consent form with your student as soon as possible. Thank you for your assistance!

Sincerely,

Lauren G. McClanahan
Doctoral Student

Maia Pan Mertz
Principal Investigator
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH

I consent to participating in (or my child's participation in) research entitled:

E-pals: Examining a Cross-Cultural Writing/Literature Project

Dr. Maia Pank Mortz (Principal Investigator) or his/her authorized representative has explained the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and the expected duration of my (my child's) participation. Possible benefits of the study have been described, as have alternative procedures, if such procedures are applicable and available.

I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information regarding the study and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. Furthermore, I understand that I am (my child is) free to withdraw consent at any time and to discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me (my child).

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date: ____________________________ Signed: ____________________________

(Signed)

(Signed) (Participant)

(Signed) (Principal Investigator or his/her authorized representative)

(Signed) (Person authorized to consent for participant, if required)

Witness: ____________________________
Appendix B

Russian Informational Letter

Dear Parents/Guardians of O.R.T. Students:

As a doctoral student in English Education at the Ohio State University, I am conducting my dissertation research with students in Mr. ‘s class in Ohio. After working with Mr. for the past year, he has agreed that this project would benefit the students as well as yours. Specifically, I am planning to take an in-depth look at how Mr. ‘s students use e-mail in their classroom to discuss literature with their students in their school in Moscow, Russia. Hopefully I will be able to get the funding I need to actually come and visit the ORT school in the spring. Because I would like to audiotape the interviews I will conduct if I do come, I wanted you to be informed. If this is an inconvenience for you or your student, please let your student’s teacher know. The teacher will then inform me, and your student will not be a part of my study.

I am also seeking case study students who would be willing to let me interview them via e-mail several times during the course of the school year to get their opinions and ideas on this cross-cultural exchange. I would also like to photocopy some of the letters students share with their American partners during the duration of their projects. Students’ identities will be kept confidential. Participation in the study is voluntary, and in no way will your students’ participation or lack of participation as a case study student affect his or her grade in the class. At any point, case study students may drop out of the study with no negative consequences.

The project has been approved by the administration of High School and City Schools. In addition, my advisor, Dr. Maia Pank Mertz, who will monitor the research as the principal investigator, has approved the project. If you have any questions, feel free to contact Mr. or me.

Sincerely,

Lauren G. McClanahan
Doctoral Student

Maia Pank Mertz
Principal Investigator
Appendix C
Holistic Scoring Rubric

NINTH-GRADE RUBRIC FOR HOLISTIC SCORING

"4" The writing focuses on the topic with ample supporting ideas or examples and has a logical structure. The paper conveys a sense of completeness, or wholeness. The writing demonstrates a mature command of language, including precision in word choice. With rare exceptions, sentences are complete except when fragments are used purposefully. Subject-verb agreement and verb and noun forms are generally correct. With few exceptions, the paper follows the conventions of punctuation, capitalization, and spelling.

"3" The writing is generally related to the topic with adequate supporting ideas or examples, although development may be uneven. Logical order is apparent, although some lassos may occur. The paper exhibits some sense of completeness, or wholeness. Word choice is generally adequate and precise. Most sentences are complete. There may be occasional errors in subject/verb agreement and in standard forms of verbs and nouns but not enough to impede communication. The conventions of punctuation, capitalization, and spelling are generally followed.

"2" The writing demonstrates an awareness of the topic but may include extraneous or loosely related material. Some supporting ideas or examples are included but are not developed. An organizational pattern has been attempted. The paper may lack a sense of completeness, or wholeness. Vocabulary is adequate but limited, predictable, and occasionally vague. Readability is limited by errors in sentence structure, subject/verb agreement, and verb and noun forms. Knowledge of the conventions of punctuation and capitalization is demonstrated. With few exceptions, commonly used words are spelled correctly.

"1" The writing is only slightly related to the topic, offering few supporting ideas or examples. The writing exhibits little or no evidence of an organizational pattern. Development of ideas is erratic, inadequate, or illogical. Limited or inappropriate vocabulary obscures meaning. Gross errors in sentence structure and usage impede communication. Frequent and blatant errors occur in basic punctuation and capitalization, and commonly used words are frequently misspelled.

"0" Non-scorable. A paper may be considered non-scorable for any of the following reasons:
- illegible
- not enough text
- flagrant disregard of the topic
Appendix D

Local Student Pre-Post Project Survey

Remember, there are no right or wrong answers!

1. How much do you like to write? (Circle one of the numbers)
   (hate it) 1 2 3 4 5 (love it)

2. How would you rate your ability as a writer? (Circle one of the numbers)
   (weak) 1 2 3 4 5 (strong)

3. When you write, are you aware of your audience? (Check one)
   _____ always
   _____ sometimes
   _____ never
   _____ it depends on the assignment or task

4. If you knew who your audience was, would you change the way you write?
   _____ Yes
   _____ No

5. Do you prefer writing with or without a prompt? _____ With _____ Without

6. What kinds of writing do you do at home besides homework? (Check all that apply)
   _____ notes and letters
   _____ stories
   _____ journal or diary
   _____ none
   _____ other (please describe)

7. Do you have a computer at home? _____ Yes _____ No (If no, go on to question #9)
   If yes, how often do you use it?
   _____ never
   _____ hardly at all
   _____ a few times a week
   _____ every day

OVER
What kinds of things do you do on your computer? (Check all that apply)

- [ ] schoolwork
- [ ] games
- [ ] e-mail
- [ ] chat
- [ ] World Wide Web/Internet

8. Do you have e-mail at home? [ ] Yes [ ] No
   If yes, how often do you use it? (Check one)
   - [ ] never
   - [ ] hardly at all
   - [ ] a few times a week
   - [ ] every day

9. I think that using e-mail can make a person a better writer. (Circle one)
   (not at all) 1 2 3 4 5 (absolutely)

10. How often do you use a computer at school (not counting this class)? (Check one)
    - [ ] never
    - [ ] hardly at all
    - [ ] a few times a week
    - [ ] every day

11. If you use a computer at school, what is it used for? (Check all that apply)
    - [ ] a reward
    - [ ] to do research using the Internet
    - [ ] to do drill and practice tests
    - [ ] to create multimedia presentations
    - [ ] e-mail
    - [ ] other (please describe)

12. Writing to peers or others (for school assignments) is better than just writing for the teacher. (Circle one)
    (not at all) 1 2 3 4 5 (much better)

    Please explain:

Please circle your gender: Female Male

Thank you! ☺
Student Post-Project Survey

Remember, there are no right or wrong answers!

1. How much do you like to write? (Circle one of the numbers)
   (hate it) 1 2 3 4 5 (love it)

2. How would you rate your ability as a writer? (Circle one of the numbers)
   (weak) 1 2 3 4 5 (strong)

3. When you write, are you aware of your audience? (Check one)
   ______ always
   ______ sometimes
   ______ never
   ______ it depends on the assignment or task

4. If you knew who your audience was, would you change the way you write?
   ______ Yes
   ______ No

5. Do you prefer writing with or without a prompt? ______With ______Without

6. What kinds of writing do you do at home besides homework? (Check all that apply)
   ______ notes and letters
   ______ stories
   ______ journal or diary
   ______ none
   ______ other (please describe)

7. Do you have a computer at home? ______ Yes ______ No (If no, go on to question 10)
   If yes, how often do you use it?
   ______ never
   ______ hardly at all
   ______ a few times a week
   ______ every day

OVER →
8. What kinds of things do you do on your computer? (Check all that apply)
   ______ schoolwork
   ______ games
   ______ e-mail
   ______ chat
   ______ World Wide Web/Internet

9. Do you have e-mail at home? _____Yes _____No
   If yes, how often do you use it? (Check one)
   ______ never
   ______ hardly at all
   ______ a few times a week
   ______ every day

10. I think that using e-mail can make a person a better writer. (Circle one)
     (not at all) 1  2  3  4  5 (absolutely)

11. How often do you use a computer at school (not counting this class)? (Check one)
     ______ never
     ______ hardly at all
     ______ a few times a week
     ______ every day

12. If you use a computer at school, what is it used for? (Check all that apply)
     ______ a reward
     ______ to do research using the Internet
     ______ to do drill and practice tests
     ______ to create multimedia presentations
     ______ e-mail
     ______ other (please describe)

13. Writing to peers or others (for school assignments) is better than just writing for the
     teacher. (Circle one)
     (not at all) 1  2  3  4  5 (much better)

     Please explain:

        OVER ➔
14. The e-mail exchange with the Russians was a great project. (Circle one)

   (strongly disagree) 1 2 3 4 5 (strongly agree)

15. Writing for a "real" audience (the Russian students) made me pay closer attention to things like grammar, punctuation, spelling and clarity. (Circle one)

   (strongly disagree) 1 2 3 4 5 (strongly agree)

16. I feel that my responses to my Russian partner improved over time (for example, they were longer, clearer and more focused). (Circle one)

   (strongly disagree) 1 2 3 4 5 (strongly agree)

17. Writing for a "real" audience made me feel more confident about my writing. (Circle one)

   (strongly disagree) 1 2 3 4 5 (strongly agree)

18. Writing for a "real" audience made me feel more excited to write than if I were just writing for the teacher. (Circle one)

   (strongly disagree) 1 2 3 4 5 (strongly agree)

19. Using e-mail in this class has made me a better writer. (Circle one)

   (strongly disagree) 1 2 3 4 5 (strongly agree)

20. What did you like about this e-mail project?

21. What did you dislike about this e-mail project?

Please circle your gender: Female Male
Thank you! 😊
Appendix E

Local Student Interview Questions

Pre-Project Interview

1. What, in your opinion, makes a good writer?
2. Do you think you are good writers? Why or why not?
3. How can people become better writers?
4. Do you prefer writing longhand or using a computer? Why?
5. What kinds of writing do you do in school?
6. Who reads the writing that you do in school?
7. What kinds of writing do you do outside of school?
8. Who reads the writing you do outside of school?
9. When writing, do you prefer to ask peers or your teacher for help? Why?
10. Have you ever had penpals from another culture before?
11. Do you think that writing to the Russian students will make you write better or more carefully? Why or why not?
12. How will writing to the Russian students be different than writing for your teacher? What will you do differently?
13. What do you think this exchange with the Russian students will be like? Do you have any expectations?

Mid-Project Interview

1. What has been the most interesting thing about writing to your Russian partners?
2. Do you feel any responsibility to make your writing as clear and error-free as possible when you’re writing to them? How about to your in-class partner?
3. How do you feel about all of the peer editing?
4. What do you see as advantages to doing projects like this in school?
5. How do you think this exchange has helped you to better understand the literature?
6. Do you feel that your writing becomes better when you exchange letters with you partner? Why? In what ways?
7. How are you enjoying writing to an audience other than your teacher?
8. How much time would you say you spend socializing in your letters as opposed to the time you spend discussing the literature?
9. Are there any negative aspects or things about this project that you would like changed?

Post-Project Interview

1. What were your overall feelings about this cross-cultural e-mail project?
2. Do you feel that your writing has changed since the beginning of the semester? How?
3. Do you think that writing to an audience other than your teacher has made you a better writer? Why?
4. Did you have to think more about the correctness/clarity of your writing for your Russian partners?
5. Do you think that discussing the literature with your Russian partners was better than a regular in-class discussion? Why?
6. What was the most important thing that you learned from this project?
7. Did you feel as if your knowledge was important (valued) in this project?
8. How would you rate your strength as a writer now as opposed to the beginning of the semester?
9. Would you like to see more of these types of projects done in school? Why?
10. Is there anything you would change about this project to make it better?
Appendix F

Russian Student Interview Questions

1. Do you feel that your written English has improved because of this project?
2. Do you think that writing to an audience other than your teacher has improved your English? Why?
3. Do you think that discussing the literature with your American partner helped you to understand it better?
4. Do you think that this project helped you to learn more about American culture?
5. What did you like the most about this project?
6. What do you think could be done to improve the project?
7. How do you feel about using e-mail to learn English?
Appendix G

Examples of Final Letters to Russian Students (Exchange #2)

Dear __________.

Hey! How are you? I am doing alright. Before I start my letter I would like to commend you on your use of good English skills. And since you were here last fall, I really admire how you picked up on your English grammar. I understood you perfectly and really enjoyed reading your letter!

Our indoor soccer team just got finished with our season. I hope that we play __________'s team, maybe then we can actually win a game. Our team has not won a game this entire season, but since we are playing __________'s team, we are a little bit more confident. __________ is just being a sore loser because he knows that he'll lose to us. Otherwise, I have been quite busy with school work, soccer and other activities that are keeping me busy. I am also going to be doing some volunteer work in a local hospital.

Our Spring Break will be coming up soon and I am not sure what I'll be doing. But more than likely I will be studying for my college entrance examinations that are coming up in June. I hope I'll find time to have some fun. I'm looking at colleges that I will want to attend once I am finished with high school. I am thinking about going into Medicine and hopefully become a Doctor, sort of like Chekov. I wish you all the best in your pursuit in going into Law after Graduate School.

Well, that is all that is going on with me since I received your letter. Now I want to let you know about a national incident that has occurred in America where injustice was involved. One incident that occurred was the Rodney King beatings. Rodney King was a black man who was pulled over by the police for a traffic violation by four white police officers. The police officers then dragged and started beating him for no reason. This is what sparked the cause of the Los Angeles riots in 1992. In the riots, many black people started using violence to show their anger for what had happened with Rodney King. More than a hundred people were severely injured. That incident is what I believe was a symbol of injustice.

One personal incident that has occurred in my family was when my father's best friend, __________, was beaten just because he was Muslim. My father was seventeen and went to a school that was predominantly Muslim. During his time, there were many riots between Hindus and Muslims in India. One day my dad was walking with __________ to school when suddenly several Hindus started throwing rocks at my dad's friend. Then the people started beating my dad's friend and severely injured him. And there was no justice done for __________ and thus his family moved to Pakistan where they can live in peace and not suffer any more harassment.

I really enjoyed reading "Chameleon." It was quite amusing and enjoyable. I believe that the police officer in "Chameleon" was very corrupted and fickle-minded. One thing I found amusing is how he always tried to change his view of who did the dog belong to. It was a sign of how corrupted he was. And the title of Chekov's story was related to the police officer's personality. In "Cop and the Anthem" The police officer was not the main character but was the antagonist, the bad guy. Later on, when he arrests the guy who wanted to get in jail he solves the conflict.

O'Henry gave his story in more detail and with much more depth as did Chekov. Chekov's story is very amusing, yet shows the relationship between the title of the story and character. If you do not mind me asking, I would like to know why in the story "Chameleon" all the people started coughing when the police officer wanted to know who the dog belongs to? If you know why they started coughing, I would greatly appreciate it if you could tell me.

Well, I guess that pretty much does it for my letter. I hope you have enjoyed reading my letter as I did yours. Hope to hear from you soon, _____! :)
Dear ____,

Wow, your English is awesome! (Really good). Anyway, today we have to talk about O'Henry and Chekov first.

We are to compare their motivation to write stories. I know that O'Henry's stories are a lot funnier than Chekov's stories are because O'Henry writes his stories to entertain people, while Chekov writes his stories to mock society.

Next we need to compare the police in both stories. But first I have a question to ask about Chekov's story. Why was everyone coughing? Our whole class is stumped and we have no clue. Anyway, the policemen in Chekov's story were almost "crooked." He kept changing his view based on who the dog belonged to. In O'Henry's story the police did not really play a role.

Ok, enough about school and English, on with the personal stuff. I just wanted to compliment you on your English again. I would have never known you were not from America if you would have just contacted me on your own, good job.

Ok, we're supposed to talk to you about an incident that we had with the police. Well, late one night (about midnight) I was driving home. I was driving down the same street that my house is on, when all of a sudden, two cop cars surrounded me. When the policeman came to my window to get my license and registration, he just told me he wanted to make sure I knew what time it was. What a relief it was but then I started thinking about what an idiot the cop was for just pulling me over to make sure I knew what time it was. Thank goodness that was all that he wanted, and that's the only time I have ever gotten involved with the police.

Now we're supposed to talk about a national injustice. The only one that I could think about that you would know would be the O.J. Simpson trial. I'm not really sure if he was guilty or not, but obviously he was found innocent, although he was found guilty in another court system. He was found liable and had to pay both families money! I did not think that it was fair for him to have to do this but there was not anything that I could do.

Well I'm all done with the school questions now I have some questions for you. I'm not sure if we are allowed but you said that you liked the internet, so can I send me your address? Mine is ____. You told me that you liked to travel and that you were one of the ones who came to America, I find that interesting. I have never been to another country (besides Canada, but it was exactly the same as the US.) Which place that you have visited was your favorite and why? Do you like sports, and do you play any for school or just for fun? I play Varsity Soccer for the High School, and I'm in a basketball league. I also like to play American Football, and Baseball. I really love movies, and I work at the movie theatre here in town and if I'm not working, I usually there watching movies. Well I think this is enough typing for now, I can't wait to hear from you, so write back soon.

Your Friend,
Dear friend,

Hey, how are you doing? I really hope you are feeling better! I am waiting for your letter and I do hope it comes very soon.

Ok now back to school work. We are supposed to tell you the difference between Chekhov and O’Henry. Personally, I think both are writing from the same viewpoint, but they are doing it differently. O’Henry is trying to make a point in a humorous way. Chekhov just puts his point out clearly and makes it single sided.

Now we are suppose to describe to you about the police in the stories. I do not really like the police very much. When the police see me driving, I always feel like they are following me and it bothers me. I don’t like getting traffic tickets. Don’t worry. I bet when you get your license, you will be a good driver. When it comes to driving, boys are meant to be bad drivers. OK, back to school work. In the story that O’Henry wrote, I feel that the police were not doing their job well from what I have seen on television. The cops just don’t care what the bum did until the very end. Well, here in America they care very much. The police in Chekov were trying to uphold the law, but not get in trouble with the general. I think this is how it is in life.

The one place that I think the cops did not do their jobs was in the 1996 Olympics, when a security guard supposedly set up a bomb and tried to disarm it at the last moment, but did not, it exploded which injured many people. The security guard says that he did not do it, but told his friends he was going to be a “hero”.

So what do you like to do for fun in Russia? I like to program my computer, drive around and go to the movies.

Well I am running out of time to talk and I really hope that you get better so I can get your letter.

Your Friend.

---

Dear [Name],

How are you? I'm going to first write about a few required topics, then write more about myself, like you requested in the previous letter.

The similarities between O’Henry’s "The Cop and the Anthem" and Chekov’s "Chameleon" were that the law was easily changed under the circumstances. In "The Cop and the Anthem", Soapy pursues situations to get arrested, but fails because of all of Justice’s loopholes. When Soapy was innocent, however, he is caught.

In "Chameleon", whether the man who was bitten by the dog was innocent or not, his fate with the law was dependant on whether the officer thought that the dog was a stray, or belonging to someone of high authority. My conclusion with both stories is the cause of injustice (as depicted in "The Cop and the Anthem" and "Chameleon") is when people in power and control take advantage of their position by wrongful decisions.

One example where justice wasn't served here in the United States, was in the Jon Benet Ramsey case. There may have been selective evidence suggesting against the suspicion that the parents were involved in the murder, but since when does one call their lawyer before 911 (emergency phone number) when their child is killed? Regardless, they could've stayed in custody until answers to the case surfaced.

In July of 1998, I was arrested for petty shoplifting at a local department store. The store employees said that if I returned the merchandise, there wouldn't be any cops involved. However, when my mom couldn't come get me because she had to work, the police were called and took me to detention hall. I remained there overnight and the next day, until my mom picked me up.

I have a few questions for you about "Chameleon". Why were the characters continuously coughing? Were the characters sick of the society they lived in? Were they feable and weak?

I have mixed opinions about the writing styles and personal histories of Chekov and O’Henry.
I like the writing style of O. Henry the best because the humor and irony is thicker than that of Chekov. O. Henry's stories seem written solely for the purpose of entertainment and money, whereas Chekov was writing a satiric message for the people of his country: risking his own life for what he wrote. Although my opinion of O. Henry's writing style is greater than that of Chekov, I have a higher opinion of Chekov as a person and his purpose behind his writing.

And now, more about myself. I want to pursue many careers as an adult. I want to create and own an animation studio like Walt Disney did, only more serious stories. I also want to be a painter, a poet, a writer and a graphic novelist.

I love Japanese animation, like "Akira", and independant films from all over the world. My favorite poets are Sylvia Plath, William Blake, Dante and my mother. I'm just now becoming interested in different cultural philosophies, which is something I would like to study more in college. My favorite artists are Georgia O'Keeffe, Norman Rockwell, Salvador Dali and Leonardo DaVinci. This all may sound boring, but you did want to know more about me, didn't you?

I absolutely love the band "Pink Floyd", who was popular in Great Britain in the 1970s and '80s. I also like "The Cranberries", Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendricks.

What I do in my free time is watch T.V., draw, look at magazines, listen to music, design and make clothing, and work part-time at a pizza place.

Tell me what all you like and what you enjoy creating. Any questions, feel free to ask. By the way, you write English really well. Keep up the good work.

Your Friend,

---

Dear __________,

Your letter was excellent, and your English was tight (very good). I don't remember anyone from your group because I didn't go to Reynoldsburg at that time when you visited. My junior year I left Reynoldsburg and went to Eastland Career Center where I could study a specific trade. I went there to learn more about electronics. I for fun like to watch comedy movies. My favorite comedy actor was Chris Farley. If you didn't know, Chris Farley died of a drug overdose, but his movies are still alive (being watched).

Well, enough about me, let's talk about O'Henry and Chekhov. O'Henry seemed to write for the money and because of the fact that he was stuck in jail and didn't have anything better to do. Also, O'Henry's stories are a lot more funny than Chekhov's. In the meanwhile, Chekhov wrote to talk and criticize the society around him. Chekhov wrote the story "Chameleon", it talked about a dog they were going to put to sleep, even though they didn't know who the owner was. O'Henry's story talked about a bum who wanted to get arrested because he didn't have anything in life to care about. He also wanted a place to stay for the winter.

One of the worst injustices was the Rodney King beating. Rodney King was pulled over for a simple traffic stop and was dragged out of his car and beat up because of his color (African-American). Because of this, there were several riots in Los Angeles.

We also need to talk about an incident we had with the police. My friend and I got caught at the movies with alcohol in my car. We were not drinking in my car, we were waiting for our girlfriends to get off work so we could go to a party. That night I got thrown in jail. I had to stay there for a night. I hope you pick up more English skills with this letter.

Sincerely,

---

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Dear ___________

Hello, how are you? I really enjoyed your letter. great writing! Speaking of writing, I just read "Chameleon" by A.P. Chekhov. Now that I have read stories by both O'Henry and Chekhov I can compare them to each other. I think that O'Henry is more humorous too. I learned that this is because he wrote to entertain and Chekhov wrote about the truths of his society. So far I have read "The Cop and The Anthem" and "Chameleon". I like both of these stories.

The two stories were similar because they both dealt with cops. The cop in "The Cop and the Anthem" was just a cop doing his job. He wasn't dishonest. However, the cop in "Chameleon" was taking a more personal role. He was serving himself more than the people.

Are you familiar with the O.J. Simpson case? He was a professional football player who was on trial for killing his wife and another man. I think that he probably did it, but he was never convicted. There are just so many holes in our system and sometimes justice is not served.

One time my older brother, _____ got caught stealing cigarettes at a grocery store. The cop called my Mom. He really didn't get in much trouble with the law. My Mom was pretty mad though. Have you ever had an experience with the police? I will write to you again soon. Looking forward to receiving your next letter!

Sincerely.

Dear ___________

Yo! Your letter was the bomb(your letter was very good), and your English is excellent. All I need to do is try to learn Russian and I can be as versatile as you are! I am a couple of steps closer to becoming a star on MTV. I just recorded a new rap number in a studio. O.K. on to business. The stories "Cop and the Anthem" and "Chameleon" are very similar. The authors were in similar situations to. One oppressed by the United States Judicial system and the other by the laws of communism. It was in these times their best stories came out. The cop in "The Cop and the Anthem" was doing his job as an officer, so was the cop in the "Chameleon", but he took his job a little too seriously.

I remember when the cops here did a couple of people of injustices, a man named Rodney King. He was pulled over for a routine traffic stop and got beat up for being a black man. This set off a whole set of riots in the Los Angeles part of the United States.

I have also been done wrong by the law. I am a 16 year old black male and I look about 19 or 20. One weekend I was running through my hood (neighborhood) and a robbery had taken place. I had nothing to do with it, but somehow I fit the description of the suspect. I told the cop over and over again that I was only 15 years old, but he would not listen. I had no I.D. on me to prove this, so he took me downtown, fingerprinted me and kept me in jail for two days until someone could I.D. me.

Until next time "It's all about the I.C.E. Effect" -Sabotage The General-

Dear ___________

So how have you been? I heard a lot of people got sick in your school. I'm doing fine and I'm very excited for my Spring break to come. That's cool that you like soccer. My oldest brother played soccer his whole life, so I know a lot about it. I used to cheerled for the high school, but I quit this year because it started to interfere with my life. So anyway I'm going to compare for you the difference between Chekhov and O.Henry's stories. I find that O.Henry is more interesting.

__________________________________________

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then Chekhov. O. Henry has more surprise endings than Chekhov. That keeps a reader more interested in the story. O. Henry also writes more for money, where Chekhov writes about his society in satire. In class we read two stories about police officers, they were called "The Cop and the Anthem" by O. Henry and "Chameleon" by Chekhov. In O. Henry's story, the cop was just doing his duty as a policeman. In Chekhov's story, the cop was doing more of what he felt was right. He took the case more personal. Have you ever thought the law was unjust when you thought someone was innocent? Here in the United States, there is a former football player named OJ Simpson, who was found innocent of killing his ex-wife Nicole Simpson. I thought he was guilty. All the evidence proved he was. The jury thought opposite of me. So I feel the law didn't do their job correctly. If you attended my school 3 years ago, then you would have gone to school with an undercover cop, and you wouldn't have even known it. My friend, _____, had to spend 6 months in the work house because he sold a bag of weed (marijuana) to the undercover cop. The cop was very sneaky. He even smoked and drank with people on a daily basis. I feel this was unfair to all the students here at my school. By the way I thought your English was easy to read. I'm surprised you can write so well.

Your Friend,

Dear,

What's going on? I have something to ask you? Have you ever had an experience with the police before? I have had an experience with the police before. It was early last year about this time. I was coming home from the store and I had just gotten a new C.D. I was listening to my C.D. in the car, then next thing I know the policeman pulled me over for speeding. In the Chekhov story we read the policeman always changed his decisions. But in the O. Henry story the policeman ended up catching the person.

The way I compare O. Henry's writing to Chekhov's is that O. Henry writes for entertainment, and Chekhov writes about real life situations.

By the way I have something to ask you. Have you heard about the rapper Puff Daddy getting caught with a gun? He and his girlfriend, Jennifer Lopez, were at a party. After shooting began, Puff Daddy was arrested for having a concealed weapon in his car.

Your Friend,

P.S. Your letter was very nice, good English too.

Dear, ________

So how are you? I got your first letter and it was very good. You have great English skills. I was surprised that you wrote me such a long letter, but I enjoyed it. I have a question, why is your nickname Dragon? First, let me answer your questions. I don't have a computer, so I don't have an e-mail or internet address. I enjoy spending time with my boyfriend Joe and cheerleading. Like I told you before, I live with my mother and her name is Erin. I have two pets. They are dogs. One is a black Lab named _____ and the other is a Miniature Schnauzer named ____. I like to listen to Hip-Hop music and my favorite meal is steak and mashed potatoes. I don't have a favorite book because I don't like reading. I don't have a favorite movie because there are a lot of good ones. Well, enough about me, I need to tell you the difference between O. Henry and Anton Chekhov.

O. Henry writes to entertain and Anton Chekhov writes satire. O. Henry's stories stick to one subject and in the end there are surprise endings. Chekhov's stories are a lot more predictable and easier to follow.

I need to tell you about the two cops in the stories "Chameleon" and "The Cop and the Anthem." In the story "Chameleon" the cop seems like he is not fair, because he keeps changing his point of view on who the dog belongs to. The cop in "The Cop and the Anthem" is really quite funny because Soapy tries anything to get arrested so he doesn't have to be on the streets and the
cop basically tells him he needs to try harder. In the end of the story, the cop finally arrests Soapy for being at the church when he was not supposed to be because it was closed.

Cops here in Ohio are not fair. If they have a bad day, they like to make your day bad by giving you tickets for stupid reasons. On Christmas, my brother was on his way to the hospital to see my grandfather because he was ill, and a cop pulled him over. He was pulled over for such a stupid reason. He had a green light, but not the arrow, he turned and the car coming through was far enough back, he had time to go under the light and was able to stay safe. The cop told him that he did not have enough time to turn and be safe. My brother has also been pulled over many times for stupid little reasons such as having his window tinted too dark and having his car stereo too loud. You would think they would be worried about more important stuff like drug dealers and drunk drivers just to name a few.

Our court system is very unjust. It is basically most of the time your own opinion and if there is enough credible proof that the person did commit the crime. A few years ago we had a trial for O.J. Simpson to find out if he murdered his wife. He was proven not guilty by the courts. Many people believe that he did commit this crime and justice was not served. There was a lot of evidence to prove that he did indeed murder her. He had a great lawyer and I think this is what got him out of it.

Well, enough about school work let me know about you. I tried to open your homepage here at school and it wouldn't open (SORRY!). So do you have a girlfriend? I'm going to stop for now, but feel free to tell me anything you would like to tell me about yourself.

Sincerely

Dear Friend,

I didn't get any letter from my last partner. So I hope that you write me back. But I hope that we can talk about something besides English or O. Henry or Chekov if you want. My teacher said that I didn't have to say anything about myself because you already have information on me. Ask your teacher for my first letter.

While we're talking, let's talk about the differences and the similarities of Chekov and O. Henry. When Chekov tells a story, he talks and goes from one point to another with a story. O. Henry's tales or stories are a down-to-earth and straight to the point type thing and more understandable. Chekov's story is very predictable which makes the story uninteresting to read or hear about. To judge the humorous and who's the most I have to say O. Henry because of his imagination and how he uses it.

Chameleon, in the story, the policeman changed his mind more times than I can count which had me confused. When the policeman got word of who owned the dog, he feared of it's punishment so he did not tell who's it was. But when the dog was found a stray, the policeman wanted to punish the dog because of what he was. But he heard who the owner of the dog was and was courteous of not punishing the dog. In the story of "Cop and Attitude" the policeman also changed his personality as well. In the story, the bum wanted to go jail for a couple of months during the winter so he would not freeze to death. Towards the end of the story, when the bum finally decides to go clean, the cop arrests him because he was at a church when it was not open.

But through all of this, I think these are wonderful stories and should be read. But thanks for spending time and reading this letter. Hope you write me back. Bye.

Sincerely, your friend,
Appendix H

Examples of Letters to In-Class Peers

I, Dear Friend,

We have been reading stories by Chekhov and O. Henry. I find that O. Henry's stories are more interesting than Chekhov's. O. Henry writes his stories with more surprise endings, which keeps his readers more interested in the story. Chekhov's stories are more realistic. Chekhov also writes to express his opinion and to show us how the world is in reality. We found that O. Henry seems to write his stories more for money in his pocket. A few of the short stories we read were called: "The Cop and the Anthem", by O. Henry and "Chameleon", by Chekhov. In Chekhov's short story the cop took his job little more personal, then the cop in O. Henry's story. I feel that both cops were just doing there jobs. I'm sure you've heard of a former football player named O. J. Simpson. I feel that the O. J. trial was not properly handled. Eventhough it was very obvious to many people the court found O. J. innocent. If you attended Reynoldsburg High School about two years ago, then you would be aware of the undercover cop we had. This cop was very sneaky, he hung out with the students on a day to day basis. He even did illegal things with them. Well anyway's, my friend sold a bag of weed to him. Later when the investigation was over he had to serve six months at the work house. I feel this investigation was unfair to all of us here at ______.

Your friend,
Sandy

I think the differences between Chekhov and O. Henry are very small. They both seem to be writing about the same thing. But they choose to write them in different ways. About they way society is corrupt and is wrong.

The police in both stories were not with it very much. If some guy comes up to a girl in the street in the middle of the night and a police officer is nearby don't you think that he will go over to the pair and try to see what is happening just out of sheer politeness. And in the other one. It shouldn't matter whose dog it was. Every knows the rules and if the dog was anybody else's dog then the police wouldn't gave it a another thought about putting it to sleep that is what i think that the writers are trying to say about how corrupt society is.

The one thing I had that was injustice was kinda shot down by the class. It was the bombing at the 1996 Olympics where the guy was said to be the bomber and he worked at the Olympics. Well the class aid that the guy sued the F.B.I. because they said that it was him and it was not proven in a trial. So he got a lot of money and to this day we do not know who it was.

My own police story I was doing a really stupid thing and it was kinda funny. Me and my friends were doing a thing we call the Full Raider. We put on 3 or 4 layers of clothes and strip out of them in to just our summer band uniforms. Well I was taping one and my friends were striping on a car we got the cops called on us about 3 times in 15 minutes. Personal they got really mad that we were doing it on a car. but is was my friends dads car and it was about 9 o'clock on a Friday night. we were doing nothing wrong but my friends neighbors were really mean and the cops didn't think we were doing no thing wrong.

David

The different motivations for Chekhov and O. Henry stories writing is totally different in my eyes. O. Henry is a writer who like to have a twist in his story. As though Chekhov isn't like that. He writes about real life types of thing but uses animals as people in his story.
The similarities and differences between the two policemen interpret the law was when a man find a dog who bit a person (in the Chameleon). The policeman always would change what he was going to do depending on the person was. And in the our story The Cop and Anthem was doing his job by telling the true.

Have you heard about the police finding a gun in Puffy Daddy car? He was at a play were they was shooting. And they find a gun.

Now I have to tell you about when I had a incident with the police. It was about a year ago. I was come home from the store. I got pull over by the police for a speeding ticket.

Travis

To whom it may concern,

Comparing these two acclaimed great authors is like comparing the two great comedians Bill Cosby and Richard Prior. Even though the stories are similar, there styles are different. Most of this has to do with their motivation and surroundings. Chekhov bases his stories from an oppressive communist surrounding in which he hasn't ever had a choice of what he can do as far as living in a truly free invironment. This causes him to what I like to say "keep it real". Meaning the stories have truth in them. O. Henry, on the other hand, has an oppressive surrounding but he put him self their. It's also not to the extreme as Chekhov's. O. Henry leaves you with an unlikely twist that is likely, the cop didn't arrest the man until after he stopped trying to be arrested. Now how often in life does something like that happen?

That leads me to this. The cop in "Cop and the anthem" was doing his job as an officer of the law, the cop in "Chameleon" was playing social status officer letting people of the court and higher status off because of who they where.

Discrimination happens all the time. the perfect example, remember back in 1992 when the LA riots took place? Well they happened because the officers who beat the dog mess out Rodney King got off. Reverse the situation, if the cops were black and the man was white, then they would have hung them all on the spot. All these beautiful things in life and people can't get over color. If we live off of P.E.A.C.E. (Positive Energy Activates Creative Education) then we would go farther then what we are right now.

Once I was running through my old neighborhood and a robbery had taken place. The police saw me and pulled me over and told me I had fit the description of a 35 year old male 6ft 2 inches and 220 pounds. I told the officer that I was only 15 and I lived a couple blocks over. I couldn't produce any I.D. and my peoples weren't home. No one I knew was home and my realities were out of town. I spent a day and a half down town. The same incident happened to a white person at my school but they let him go on his word. The twist is he was guilty. The same exact cops let him go.

Like I said before we all need a little P.E.A.C.E. and maybe we can live life equal and right.

Keep these words in mind! From the Truest!
Carlton

Dear Friend,

How are you doing? I'm okay. I haven't been having a good day. Well, anyways I don't want to bore you with my problems. I know you probably could care less about this, but I have to tell you.

First I will tell you about Chekhov and O.Henry. They write in different styles and for different reasons. O.Henry writes for entertainment and his stories always have a surprise ending. On the other hand Chekhov writes satire. O.Henry writes to make you think that his stories are about real important things and then in the end it turns out not to be. Chekhov writes about
serious things and in fact are important. I think Chekhov's stories are boring and to down to the point. I like O.Henry's because they are funny and make you laugh. For example there are two cops in the stories that are very different.

In O.Henry's story, "The Cop and the Anthem", there is a character named Soapy. he is homeless, so he tries everything that he can to get arrested, but nothing works. Then, finally he is arrested in the end for a stupid reason, he was in a church when it was closed and no one was supposed to be there. He got what he wanted in the end. The cop in Chekhov's story "Chameleon" was very weird because he kept changing his mind on who the lost dog belonged to.

I enjoyed "The Cop and the Anthem", because it was actually funny. The cops were different because the cop in "Chameleon" was very serious about everything and he was also worried about little stupid things, and the cop in "The Cop and the Anthem" was not too worried about the little things. Speaking of being worried about the little things that is how the cops in Reynoldsburg are.

There was a cop that pulled my brother over for having his window tint to dark and for having his stereo to loud. I don't know about you, but I think those are very stupid reasons. The cops should be more worried about bigger things such as who the drug dealers are and who is driving drunk. Maybe there would be less crime if they would let the little things slide. The National system in my opinion does not do a good job either.

For instance the O.J. Simpson trial, he should have been proven guilty, but they let him go. There was too much evidence that showed that he should have been guilty. The whole world is all about money and the people you know. That's why I think O.J. got off because he had Johnny Cochren as his lawyer and that had to have cost him a fortune. Some people get away with even murder here and that needs to be stopped. They need to know the truth about everything so everybody gets what they deserve. Also when someone is convicted of murder they only have to go to jail. I think they should be killed too. Maybe if this was the punishment people would think twice about it. Well, I think that's enough about school because I am so sick of this place and doing homework all the time.

So how is life going for you? Well, things are okay here because we only have one more year of high school left and this will be our funnest year. We'll be SENIORS. Well, I gotta go for now. See-ya later.

Love-Ya
Laura

P.S. You better write me back and tell what's going on in your life.
# Appendix I

## Table of Descriptive Categories

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Appendix J

Example of Peer-Response Letter (Editing Session)

To whom it may concern,

Comparing these two acclaimed great authors is like comparing the two great comedians Bill Cosby and Richard Pryor. Even though the stories are similar, their styles are different. Most of this has to do with their motivation and surroundings. Chekhov basess his stories from an oppressive communist surrounding, in which he hasn't ever had a choice of what he can do as far as living in a truly free environment. This causes him to what I like to say "keep it real". Meaning the stories have truth in them. O. Henry, on the other hand, has an oppressive surrounding but he put himself in a setting not as extreme as Chekhov's. O. Henry leaves you with an unlikely twist that is likely. the cop didn't arrest the star until after he stopped trying to be arrested. Now how often in life does something like that happen?

That leads me to this. The cop in "Cop and the anthem" was doing his job as an officer of the law, the cop in "Chameleon" was playing social status officer letting people of the court and higher status off because of who they were.

Discrimination happens all the time. the perfect example, remember back in 1992 when the LA riots took place? Well that happened because the officers who beat the dog were not Rodney King. Reverse the situation, if the cops were black and the man was white, then they would have hung them all on the spot. All these beautiful things in life and people can't get over color. If we live off of P.E.A.C.E.(Positive Energy Activates Creative Education) then we would go farther than what we are right now.

Once I was running through my old neighborhood and a robbery had taken place. The police saw me and pulled me over and told me I had fit the description of a 35 year old male 6ft 2 inches and 220 pounds. I told the officer that I was only 15 and I lived a couple blocks over. I couldn't produce any L.D. and no peoples weren't home. No one knew me was home and my relatives were out of town. I spent a day and a half down town. The same incident happened to a white person at my school but they let him go on his word. The twist is he was guilty. The same exact cops let him go.

Like I said before we all need a little P.E.A.C.E and maybe we can live life equal and right.

Keep these words in mind! From the Ttruest!
Appendix K

ISTE National Educational Technology Standards (NETS)

INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR TECHNOLOGY IN EDUCATION (ISTE)
NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY STANDARDS (NETS) AND PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

ISTE NETS PERFORMANCE PROFILES FOR PREPARING TOMORROW'S TEACHERS TO USE TECHNOLOGY

The ISTE Educational Technology Foundations Standards for All Teachers reflect professional studies in education providing fundamental concepts, knowledge, skills and attitudes for applying information technology in educational settings. All candidates seeking initial certification or endorsements in teacher preparation programs will meet these educational technology foundation standards. It is the responsibility of teacher preparation programs to provide opportunities for their candidates to achieve these standards.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ISTE NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY STANDARDS (NETS) AND PERFORMANCE INDICATORS FOR ALL TEACHERS</th>
<th>General Preparation Performance Profile</th>
<th>Professional Preparation Performance Profile</th>
<th>Student Teaching/Internship Performance Profile</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All classroom teachers should be prepared to meet the following standards and performance indicators.</td>
<td>Upon completion of the general preparation component of their program, prospective teachers:</td>
<td>Prior to the culminating student teaching or internship experience, prospective teachers:</td>
<td>Upon completion of culminating student teaching or internship experience, and at the point of initial licensure, teachers:</td>
</tr>
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I. Technology Operations and Concepts: Teachers demonstrate a sound understanding of technology operations and concepts. Teachers:

A. demonstrate introductory knowledge, skills, and understanding of concepts related to technology (as described in ISTE's Technology Standards for Students).

B. demonstrate continual growth in technology knowledge and skills to stay abreast of current and emerging technologies.

II. Planning and Designing Learning Environments and Experiences: Teachers plan and design effective learning environments and experiences supported by technology. Teachers:

A. design developmentally appropriate learning opportunities that apply technology-enhanced application and

1. demonstrate a sound understanding of the nature and operation of technology systems. (I)*
2. demonstrate proficiency in the use of common input and output devices; solve routine hardware and software problems; and make informed choices about technology systems, resources, and services. (I)*
3. use technology tools and information resources to increase productivity, promote creativity, and facilitate academic learning. (I, III, IV, V)
4. use content-specific tools (e.g., software, simulation, environmental probes, graphing calculators, exploratory environments, Web tools) to support learning and research. (I, III, V)*
5. use technology resources to facilitate higher order thinking skills, including problem solving, critical thinking, informed decision making, knowledge construction, and creativity. (I, III, V)*
6. collaborate in

1. identify the benefits of technology to maximize student learning and facilitate higher order thinking skills. (I, III)
2. differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate uses of technology for teaching and learning while using electronic resources to design and implement learning activities. (II, III, V, VI)
3. identify technology resources available in schools and analyze how accessibility to those resources affects planning for instruction. (I, II)
4. identify, select, and use hardware and software technology resources specially designed for use by PK-12 students to meet specific teaching and learning objectives. (I, II)
5. plan for the management of electronic instructional resources within a lesson design by identifying potential problems and planning for solutions. (II)
6. identify specific technology applications and

1. apply troubleshooting strategies for solving routine hardware and software problems that occur in the classroom. (I)
2. identify, evaluate, and select specific technology resources available at the school site and district level to support a coherent lesson sequence. (II, III)
3. design, manage and facilitate learning experiences using technology that affirm diversity and provide equitable access to resources. (II, VI)
4. create and implement a well-organized plan to manage available technology resources, provide equitable access for all students, and enhance learning outcomes. (II, III)
5. design and facilitate learning experiences that use assistive technologies to
Teacher Standards and Performance Profiles

III. Teaching, Learning, and the Curriculum:

Teachers implement curriculum plans that include methods and strategies for applying technology to maximize resources that maximize student learning, address learner needs, and affirm diversity. (III, VI)

1. design and teach technology-enhanced learning activities that connect content standards with student technology standards and meet the diverse needs of students. (II, III, IV, V)

2. design and teach a lesson that meets content area standards and reflects the current best practices in teaching and learning with technology. (II, III)

3. plan and teach student-centered learning activities and lessons in which students apply technology tools and resources. (II, III)

4. research and evaluate the accuracy, relevance, appropriateness, comprehensiveness, and bias of electronic information resources to be used by students. (II, IV, V, VI)

5. discuss technology-based assessment and evaluation strategies. (IV)

6. design and teach a coherent sequence of learning activities that integrates appropriate use of technology resources to enhance student academic achievement and technology proficiency by connecting district, state, and national curriculum standards with student technology standards (as defined by ISTE's National Educational Technology Standards for Students). (II, III)

7. design, implement, and assess learner-centered lessons that are based on the current best practices in teaching and learning with technology and that engage, motivate, and encourage self-directed student learning. (II, III, IV, V)

8. guide collaborative
student learning. Teachers:

A. facilitate technology-enhanced experiences that address content standards and student technology standards.

B. use technology to support learner-centered strategies that address the diverse needs of students.

C. apply technology to develop students' higher order skills and creativity.

D. manage student learning activities in a technology-enhanced environment.

IV. Assessment and Evaluation: Teachers

apply technology to facilitate a variety of effective assessment and evaluation strategies. Teachers:

A. apply technology in assessing student learning of critical material.

publish, and interact with peers, experts, and other audiences.

14. demonstrate an understanding of the legal, ethical, cultural, and societal issues related to technology. (VI)*

15. exhibit positive attitudes toward technology use that support lifelong learning, collaboration, personal pursuits, and productivity. (VI)*

16. discuss diversity issues related to electronic media. (I, VI)

17. discuss the health and safety issues related to technology use. (VI)

* Adapted from the ISTE's National Educational Technology Standards for Students.

12. examine multiple strategies for evaluating technology-based student products and the processes used to create those products. (IV)

13. examine technology tools used to collect, analyze, interpret, represent, and communicate student performance data. (I, IV)

14. integrate technology-based assessment strategies and tools into plans for evaluating specific learning activities. (IV)

15. develop a portfolio of technology-based products from coursework, including the related assessment tools. (IV, V)

16. identify and engage students in technology-based opportunities for professional education and lifelong learning, including the use of distance education. (V)

17. apply online and other technology resources to support problem solving and related decision making for maximizing student learning. (III, V)

18. participate in online professional learning activities in which students use technology resources to solve authentic problems in the subject area(s). (III)

9. develop and use criteria for ongoing assessment of technology-based student productivity and the processes used to create those products. (IV)

10. design an evaluation plan that applies multiple measures and flexible assessment strategies to determine students' technology proficiency and content area learning. (IV)

11. use multiple measures to analyze instructional practices that employ technology to improve planning, instruction, and management. (III, IV)

12. apply technology productivity tools and resources to collect, analyze, and interpret
B. continually evaluate and reflect on professional practice to make informed decisions regarding the use of technology in support of student learning.

C. apply technology to increase productivity.

D. use technology to communicate and collaborate with peers, parents, and the larger community in order to nurture student learning.

Social, Ethical, Legal, and Human Issues:
Teachers understand the social, ethical, legal, and human issues surrounding the use of technology in PK-12 schools and apply that understanding in practice. Teachers:

A. model and teach legal and professional behavior as professionals.

B. make informed decisions regarding the use of technology in support of student learning.
B. Use technology resources to collect and analyze data, interpret results, and communicate findings to improve instructional practice and maximize student learning.

C. Apply multiple methods of evaluation to determine student growth, learning, and achievement.

Productivity and Professional Practice:

Teachers use technology to enhance their productivity and professional practice.

1. Use technology resources to engage in ongoing professional development.

2. Use technology to participate in professional collaborations with peers and experts.

3. Use technology to complete professional tasks.

4. Use technology to report results to parents and students.

5. Use technology to select and apply suitable productivity tools to complete educational and professional tasks.

6. Use technology to conduct online professional development opportunities.

7. Use technology to model safe and responsible use of technology and develop and implement technology acceptable use policies and data security plans.

8. Use technology to participate in online professional collaboration and communication with peers and experts as part of a personally designed plan, based on self-assessment for professional growth in technology.

9. Use technology to participate in professional collaborations for technology and develop and implement technology acceptable use policies and data security plans.

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40. Use technology to participate in online professional development opportunities.
ethical practice related to technology use.

B. apply technology resources to enable and empower learners with diverse backgrounds, characteristics, and abilities.

C. identify and use technology resources that affirm diversity.

D. promote safe and healthy use of technology resources.

E. facilitate equitable access to technology resources for all students.