HIGH TEACH

LEARNING FROM THE EXPERIENCES OF WIRED WRITERS

by

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HIGH TEACH: LEARNING FROM THE EXPERIENCES OF WIRED

WRITERS

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Abstract

This study develops an historical description and analysis of the "Writers In Electronic Residence" (WIER) program—a national educational project that uses computer-based telecommunications technology to link students and teachers in writing and language arts classrooms with writers in Canada. Description in this thesis focuses on recounting events in the context of the experiences reported by participants in WIER. The analysis focuses on various roles of the participants in WIER and, in particular, the impact of participation in WIER on teachers' reflections on their teaching practice.

WIER is a national program in Canada, operating in some seventy schools with thirteen writers. There are programs for students at all levels of public school, elementary through secondary. In addition, there are links to post-secondary institutions through the community college system and teacher education programs.

Drawing on the theories of Harasim, Mason, Kaye, Riel and others (computer-mediated communications, or CMC), MacKinnon, Grunau, Grimmett and others (teacher development), and Willinsky, Britton, Atwell, Graves and others (language learning), and my own experiences in WIER, the thesis considers the:

- history and development of the WIER program;

- use of computer-mediated communication (CMC) as part of classroom-based writing and language arts programs;

- WIER program as an example of the use of CMC as an environment for writing, reflection and response;

- "asynchronous" nature of the medium of CMC and its impact on writing and conference design; and,

- impact of participation in WIER on teachers' conceptions of their own teaching practice.

Taken together, these elements form the WIER experience in which students see themselves and their work as making legitimate contributions to school learning, and teachers come to see students' work as part of the learning materials in the regular curriculum.

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Chapter 1

The Writers In Electronic Residence Program

This study develops an historical description and analysis of the "Writers In Electronic Residence" (WIER) program—a national educational project that uses computer-based telecommunications technology to link students and teachers in writing and language arts classrooms with writers in Canada. Description in this thesis focuses on recounting events in the context of the experiences reported by participants in WIER. The analysis focuses on various roles of the participants in WIER and, in particular, the impact of participation in WIER on teachers' reflections on their teaching practice. This introductory chapter sets out several key notions, and begins to frame the problem for the study in terms of two previous studies of WIER.

Background

When I applied for admission to the Master's Program in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University (SFU), I had already been active for several years in developing projects that incorporated word-processing and telecommunications into writing and language arts classrooms.

The Writers In Electronic Residence program has just completed its sixth year as of this writing. Although the project has emerged and been shaped in interesting ways as it has proceeded, its primary purpose from the outset has been to engage students, teachers, and well-known published authors in an exchange of original writing and commentary. The writers join students and teachers electronically via computers to read and consider the student works, offer reactions and ideas, and guide textual "discussions" between the students on the network.

The concept for WIER emerged in 1984 in response to a program known as *SwiftCurrent*, a so-called "electronic literary magazine," which was used as a national link by a number of writers in Canada. I first proposed the idea of creating an on-line writing program for students to Frank Davey, the Canadian author and English professor who created *SwiftCurrent* with writer Fred Wah. The project, which I called *"Works In Progress,"* was seen to be beyond the scope of *SwiftCurrent* and it was declined by the organizers. However, I was permitted to initiate a trial that involved electronic mail-based exchanges between writers and students on *SwiftCurrent* during the 1984/5 school year.

I then proposed *"Works In Progress"* to the Language Study Centre of the Toronto Board of Education, and later to the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) as the basis for a Masters of Education proposal. The Toronto Board initiative failed, but my application to OISE was accepted. I realized during advising sessions that my interests were really in mounting the "on-line" writing project, and, further, that I had really been seeking an on-line resource within an educational *milieu*—more so than an M.Ed. *per se*. I turned my attention to the former effort and did not begin the program at OISE.

Although I was not successful in finding funding or a host computer system for the program for several years, it was eventually developed under the auspices of the Faculty of Education at SFU. The project began in the 1987/8 school year in my classroom at Riverdale Collegiate Institute (RCI)—an inner city secondary school in Toronto, Ontario. Later in that same year, Cariboo Hill Secondary School in Burnaby, B.C. joined the project—an event that would give shape the notion of the "electronic residency" and cause me to re-think my understanding of the use of

communications technology in the classroom and its impact on my teaching practice.

The WIER project was supported through its first five years by the Faculty of Education, thanks to the efforts of Dr. Gerri Sinclair and poet Lionel Kearns, who was the first writer in electronic residence. Dr. Jaap Tuinman, then dean of SFU's education faculty, David Porter, David Bell, Peter Norman and others supported the effort as part of their existing initiatives to establish telecommunications in education through the faculty's computer network, known as *Xchange* .

In 1990, the Writers' Development Trust (WDT)—an organization dedicated to promoting Canadian writers and writing in Canada—emerged as a stakeholder, providing a needed link to the writing community in our country. The involvement of the WDT came as a result of the efforts of novelist Katherine Govier, who served as Chair of the WDT at the time, and who became a writer in electronic residence that year.

In 1993, the Faculty of Education at York University began hosting WIER, seeking to provide a secure home for the program and to develop links to teacher education. This initiative came thanks to the Faculty's dean, Dr. Stan Shapson.

WIER is now a national program in Canada, operating in some seventy schools with thirteen writers. There are programs for students at all levels of public school, elementary through secondary. In addition, there are links to post-secondary institutions through the community college system and teacher education programs. Another SFU-sponsored project, known as *The Virtual Practicum*, involved student teacher candidates at the Faculty of Education, University of

Toronto (FEUT) in 1988 and 1989. They incorporated WIER as part of their work in the secondary English program at FEUT (Owen, 1989).

How It Works: Writing to Learn—On-line

Students use word processors to compose their works and their responses to the works of others, before incorporating telecommunications into the process. They connect directly to the host computer from their classrooms, libraries, or, in some cases, their homes, and post their writing in an electronic computer conference that has been established for them. Most of the original writing is poetry and short fiction, but issues emerge from time to time that encourage writing in other forms. Often, these come in response to particular issues or concerns expressed in one or more of the submissions or responses, and discussions develop in which students explore their ideas with one another.

Taken together, these early projects provided some useful notions about how teachers might benefit from using computer-conferencing in the context of their teaching practice. Along with other forms of what I saw as "reflection" sustained by written interaction, such as conventional "dialogue" journal writing activities—see Diakiw and Beatty, 1991 for an interesting example of sustained written interaction between an elementary school principal and a school superintendent—I have come to regard computer-conferencing as an environment capable of promoting written interaction as a platform for reflection and on which to develop reflective practice.

Over the last few years, I have sought to inform and extend my understanding of these notions through my involvement in the Master's program at SFU, and a few areas of key interest have emerged to shape the directions I take in this thesis:

- the history and development of the WIER program;

- the use of computer-mediated communication (CMC) as part of classroom-based writing and language arts programs, which I have described as *Computer-Mediated Writing*;

- the WIER program as an example of the use of CMC as an environment for writing, reflection and response; and,

- the "asynchronous" nature of the medium of CMC and its impact on writing and conference design.

While I do not examine CMC in general terms, part of the undertaking of this study was necessarily concerned with the medium. Accordingly, I consider:

- the asynchronous nature of CMC and its impact on research methodology in this and other studies, such as those noted, below.

Over the last year, graduate students enrolled in Master's programs in faculties of education at two Canadian universities have pursued studies on WIER. I have participated in and contributed to these studies, which are described, below to help provide the context and uniqueness of the present study.

Accordingly, this study also

- serves to co-ordinate and report on what was intended to be a co-operative program of research on the WIER program.

Rationale

I found that my observations—both as a teacher using WIER in my own classroom, as well as an observer of how the program operated in other schools—began to lead me to consider how face-to-face classroom experiences were shaped by on-line experiences. I became especially aware of changes in written expression among the students in my class. What I might now describe as the interdependent culture of

the computer conference seemed to bolster students' confidence and independence. A certain authenticity of voice in their writing seemed to summon their own sense of authority and control over the things they wanted to write about. Over the course of the project, these attributes began to appear more frequently and (in my view) naturally in their on-line textual exchanges.

I began to see WIER as a kind of environment that was at once *written*—which I saw as a reflective process—and *experiential*—in the sense of combining opportunities for reflection and reflective writing with a sense of the immediacy of experience that the technology sustained. Taken together, then, my experiences lead me to believe that WIER was capable of providing opportunities for language development and proficiency through written and verbal interaction and collaboration—electronically during the on-line conferences, and verbally and in print during face-to-face interactions in classroom situations.

I also found that my understanding of WIER began to be *guided and shaped by my own involvement* in it; in response, both to my own and others' experiences, I began to consider how these opportunities could operate under the participating students' control, often within a collaborative on-line and classroom context. I further considered how the project helped to create conditions under which students' control might come to be acceptable—and be seen as acceptable, even desired—components of the writing and literature or reading curriculum in schools.

I began to seek ways in which I might inform and extend my understanding of WIER and submitted a proposal to enrol in a Master of Arts (Education) program at SFU during my term in the Professional Development Program (PDP) of the

Faculty of Education, where I served as a faculty associate from 1990-1992. My experiences at SFU, taken together with my continued involvement in WIER, allowed me to work closely with others who share my interest in educational telecommunications in general, and WIER in particular.

During this time, I worked with two other graduate students in education who were interested in developing their theses on WIER. This thesis is offered as the third in the series; as I noted above, it provides an historical analysis that focuses on teachers' reflections concerning the impact of the program on their own practice as teachers, while also seeking to build on the preceding theses in an effort to co-ordinate and develop a body of work on the WIER program. While our plans to develop a "consortium of inquiry" into WIER did not succeed in the end, I was able to work with both of these graduate students to varying degrees during the preparation of their theses. An overview of their work follows.

Student Case Study

The first Master's thesis on WIER was completed in July 1992 by David Beckstead at the Faculty of Education, Queen's University at Kingston in Ontario. His study was concerned with how students "make sense of a writer-in-electronic-residence program" and investigated students' views of WIER as "a program employing on-line communication conferencing and computer composition" as part of their experience of school-based learning. He invited four students to be involved in the study. Each of these students participated in WIER from January to June, 1991 as part of a senior level *"Writer's Craft"* course offered at a high school in Ontario where he had been employed as a teacher prior to his studies at Queen's. Although he did not teach *Writer's Craft*, he served as the school's project coordinator for the

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WIER portion of the course, which is known at the secondary level as *"Wired Writers."* Beckstead expressed his rationale for undertaking his study in this way:

> As an educator, I'm extremely interested in how students make sense of their classroom experiences, especially where technology is involved. This interest in students' voice and technology was partially cultivated as a result of my involvement with Wired Writers. As a school coordinator of a writer-in-electronic-residence program, I was privileged to see first-hand the development of the student as a writer by this means. This development was fostered in part, by a technology that permitted communication among a large group of people focused on a single idea—writing. I do not profess to be an expert on the subject of student writing, indeed, I am not even a qualified English teacher, but it seems to me that writing is inextricably linked to communication and the development of good writing skills should have a large component of communication. In other words, when one begins to discuss the writing classroom and its use of technology, it would appear that the idea of communication should be an integral part of the discourse, given the new opportunities in on-line communication for the classroom. (Beckstead, 1992, p. 8)

Through his association with the English course, as well as his own classes and participation in extra-curricular activities, Beckstead came to know the four students who would become participants in his study. He also looked for participants he perceived as prominent contributors to the 1991 WIER program. Through close contact and considerable knowledge of these students and their involvement in WIER, Beckstead's research contributed considerably to the notion of "communication," which, up to that point, had not been well represented in the literature dealing with CMC applications in the writing classroom.

Expert Practice In WIER

The second Master's thesis on WIER was undertaken at the Faculty of Education at SFU by Susan Crichton, a secondary school teacher from New Denver, British

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Columbia. She became quite interested in WIER when she and I met in a course we took together on research designs in the fall of 1991, and she eventually served as one of the on-line moderators for the program during its fifth year, beginning in January, 1992.

When I told Susan that David Beckstead and I had formed something of a consortium of inquiry into a number of the issues and notions we had encountered through our involvement in the program, she proposed the idea of building her own thesis around WIER as well. Like Beckstead, Crichton was intrigued by her on-line experiences in the program which, in her case, were expressed in terms of the social interactions that appeared in the textual exchanges between WIER participants. Upon further inquiry, Crichton found what I consider to be a parallel conclusion to Beckstead's idea that "communication" was not well represented in the literature dealing with CMC (or well defined—see Zorkoczy, 1989). While Crichton's notions were developing around the nature of communication—or what I might now describe, as she does, as *interactions* that promote student writing—she began to see WIER participants in particular roles: "expert" and "novice" writers. In her view, distinctions could be drawn between "expert" and "novice" writers in WIER, and she began to consider how linking these roles in the program might suggest particular relationships that promote a process of social interaction. More specifically, Crichton came to think of these relationships as a social interaction that exists on-line in the form of

> ...textual dialogue between conference participants. In the case of WIER, it consists of [written] exchanges between novice and expert writers, novice and novice writers, and expert and expert writers. Within these exchanges, the writers share their opinions, suggestions, reflections, and experiences. The result of these exchanges is the on-line social interaction. (Crichton, 1992, p. 4)

It is useful to note the purpose of Crichton's research to help establish the body of work that has been developed on WIER. As noted in her thesis proposal, Crichton's study set out to

> ...investigate how moderators in WIER have been able to encourage participant interaction within the computer-mediated communications (CMC) environment. As part of this study, I will interview the expert writers (moderators) and analyze their on-line commentary in order to determine their strategies to encourage on-line interaction between conference participants. The goal of this study will not be to create a prescriptive how-to list of moderating strategies, but rather to create a descriptive case study of how these particular moderators encourage participant interaction. (Crichton, 1992, p. 1)

While I have some difficulties with Crichton's notions of "experts" and "novices," which are elaborated briefly below, the creation of both theses was welcomed and informing to an emerging understanding of the program.

A Note Concerning Moderators & On-line Moderation

Crichton's view of "writers _as_ moderators" is what I might describe as *contextually* accurate—or better, contextually *possible*—within WIER. While this conception probably requires some further consideration, it will not be considered prominently in this thesis. However, it is worth noting for the purposes of this study that another role—the role of conference moderator(s)—is neither specifically nor adequately addressed by notions of WIER participants as either "novice," which Crichton implicitly explains in a "Glossary of Technical Terms" as "school students" (p. 10), or "expert," which Crichton sees as "professional writers" (p.10) or moderators (p. 2). In her thesis, Crichton makes her understanding of these roles explicit, saying that WIER "connects students (novice writers) with professional writers (expert writers)" (Crichton, 1993, p. 1)

In the literature, the role of moderator is usefully framed in the writings of a number of educators. Feenberg's descriptions of "contextualizing" and "monitoring" functions, along with his notions of "meta-communication," (which I see as consistent with a view of CMC as a reflective activity) and "weaving" (in Mason and Kaye, 1989, p.33); Davie's notions of "mediation" and "facilitation techniques" for "on-line tutors"(p. 82); Mason's discussion of "variations in moderating styles," (p. 141) which poses intriguing (and necessary) questions about moderators' own purposes for engaging in CMC; and Hiltz's early—and helpful—examination of assumptions made that "many expect a computerized conference to organize and facilitate itself" (1984, p. 81) focus and build upon Umpleby's initial thoughts that "an active moderator is necessary to keep the conference going" (1980, p.56).

I see my own experiences as consistent with the literature on this matter. I also see them as developmental in the sense that continued examination of the *role* of a moderator or moderators as expressed in WIER suggests a shift away from a discussion of CMC as a technological phenomenon. I understand the role of *moderator*, then, as distinct from the roles of *participants* who, in this case, are the writers that Crichton sees as "novice" or "expert." While these participants may—and often do—begin to assume moderating roles in on-line conferences, I would first define a moderator as:

- an on-line presence offering comments of encouragement related to the *experience* or *task* (Owen, 1990) of CMC-based programs; on-line instruction for participants; or, who may be responsible for the design within which interactions might be encouraged; and/or,

- a physical presence in the classroom, normally in the form of a teacher, librarian or parent, who creates the conditions within which students process their understanding of on-line experiences in the context of familiar classroom

settings. I have described this as giving *"local shape"* to on-line programs in general, and WIER in particular

This role is present in the WIER program and design, and is something I consider to be an important component of the "communication" that Beckstead describes, or the "interaction" that Crichton considers. Drawing again on Hiltz's notions, above, I certainly agree with the interpretation that Crichton clearly draws from Levinson, Mason and Kaye, and Harasim (1990), that there is

> ...an implicit assumption in the literature that social interaction will automatically, necessarily take place in the on-line environment... (Crichton, 1992, p. 4)

I also agree that "CMC is cited as a vehicle for linking people across time and distance." (p. 4) However, it should be said that this is as true of any number of on-line educational telecommunications projects as it is of the literature. Crichton's initial concern that the literature, "...stops before describing exactly how participants are to be encouraged to interact once they are linked electronically..." (p. 4) also warranted closer attention. If the literature fails to describe *exactly* how participants are to be encouraged to interact once they are linked electronically, it is because it is somewhat more concerned with describing *generally* how interaction evolves in the experiences with which they are familiar, or, based upon their experiences, how interaction might be encouraged in on-line groupings. Rather than seeking to describe "exactly" how participants are to be encouraged to interact, then, these authors offer instead a variety of possibilities that describe how learning on-line might frame an understanding of CMC as a new kind of educational *environment* (Harasim *et al.*, 1990; Mason, *et al.* 1989; Hiltz, 1984; Umpleby, 1980). In this environment, it is possible that the primary responsibility for control or guiding of the interactions that can occur may evolve, perhaps naturally, as the province of

the participants more than we might be accustomed to in more conventional situations of social interaction, or in the conventions that govern them, such as the conventions of writing, for example. Crichton responded to this concern in her final proposal, noting that the "goal of this study will not be to create a prescriptive how-to list of moderating strategies, but rather to create a descriptive case study of how these particular moderators encourage participant interaction" (p. 2), and in her final thesis (Crichton, 1993, p. 14).

I feel this thinking is consistent with the view of social interaction in education that Crichton draws from Vygotsky (Wertsch, 1979). The ability to develop higher mental functions through a process in which social interaction permits learners to engage in the "transformation from the social, interpsychological plane to the individual, intrapsychological plane" (Crichton, 1993, p. 5) is surely enhanced through increased control over one's own participation in social interactions. In the case of WIER, Crichton believes

> ...this transformation takes place when the novice writers interact on-line with the expert writers. The novice writers submit their writing and engage in a dialogue with the on-line audience. Student peers and expert writers enter comments about the writing, and the novice writer can agree, disagree, discuss, or ask for elaboration about the comments. From there the novice writers can make the decision of stopping further dialogue about that piece of writing, extending the dialogue via questions and further comments, or moving into the intrapsychological plane of working on revision or further individual thoughts or writings. In many cases in WIER, the student submits a revised piece of writing and extends the comments about the revised piece. (p. 5)

Crichton believes that her experiences in WIER are distinguished from her on-line experiences elsewhere. I agree with the notion that

...on-line participant interaction does not happen just because people are gathered together in a conference and attempt to complete a common task. (p. 4)

This study examines the development of WIER and considers how, taken together, the various constituencies involved (i.e., students, writers and teachers, as well as moderators and guests) contribute their own "expertise" to interaction in WIER. It also considers how these contributions lead teachers to reframe notions of their own teaching and learning in their classrooms—on-line and off.

Methodological Considerations

Glesne and Peshkin (1992) suggest that "the entire process [of a study], with all its elements, is a reflection of [a] conceptual framework" and that "theory," as it may emerge through participation in the study, might sometimes be [more accurately] referred to as "the latest version of what we call truth" (p. 21). Their thinking is useful to me here. While this study does not seek to test hypotheses in an effort to develop theory, it has helped me to formulate hypotheses that can be located in the experiences of WIER. Accordingly, I see that it is grounded "within a broad structure of both explicit and assumed propositions" (Denzin, in Glesne and Peshkin, p. 21) about writing, about telecommunications technology, and about the things that happen when they are blended into classroom activities and contexts, including face-to-face interactions and talk. While I know WIER well, from a personal perspective, I accept that I may have been drawn to areas I had not considered (or noticed, perhaps) before, and that my research "may or may not eventuate in statements of theory that are grounded in the data" (p.21).

Personal Stories & Reflexivity

> In some contexts, writing a thesis, report, research paper, or monograph might be seen (for better or worse) as a more or less straight-forward affair: after the research is "completed" the "results" are presented through the "neutral" medium of conventionally organized reports. (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, p. 207)

I have also accepted that it is neither possible nor desirable for me to engage in a research activity like this and suggest or claim that it is *interest-free* or *value-neutral* (Hesse, Reinharz and others in Lather, 1991, p. 50). I am *involved* in WIER. The creation of this thesis is, in part, my own narrative about that involvement, in which I regard my experiences as the "data" insofar as they substantiate this thesis

as a case study. I have also accepted, then, that I must remain "self-conscious" in my role as researcher and author (Hammersley and Atkinson, p. 207; Van Maanen, 1988, p. 4) who is also "part of the world" under study (Hammersley and Atkinson, p. 14). WIER exists in the experiences of people and in our perceptions and sense-makings of them. The stories that participants have to offer are personal ones, and some of them are mine.

In this thesis, then, I consider how WIER embraces telecommunications-based experiences as, essentially, *experiences of language and task* through interaction and reflection rather than as *experiences of technology* through access to information and the immediacy of its delivery. In my view, the manner in which participants experience their *use* of the medium (see also *Computer Use*, below), or activities associated with the medium, will govern how they undertake their interactions on-line. In the latter case, which I have labelled *experiences of technology*, interactions seem to mirror patterns of talk, even though they are tapped in at a computer keyboard. In the former case, which I have described as *experiences of language and task*, the nature of interaction becomes more a process of writing, including response, as well as revision and editing, and for a purpose—reflective and contextually authentic communication.

Procedure

Barrow (1990) notes that

> There are two main stands in educational research: the positivist tradition, derived from mainstream social sciences, and the naturalist tradition, derived from nineteenth-century conceptions of subjective understanding. Most educational researchers, especially those trained in the United States, are positivists: they treat social facts as being identical to natural facts, form generalizations based on those facts, and from those generalizations, derive bodies of theory, on the

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pattern of physicists looking for universal laws. Those in the naturalist tradition, as the name implies, seek to understand the educational world in its own terms, without the use of such pre-formed categories and understandings. (p. 119)

He goes on to point out that

Educational researchers have adopted the term *ethnography* (first used by anthropologists to indicate a method of describing cultural groups by extended observation) to denote naturalistic approaches to examine schools and schooling. (p. 119)

As a neophyte researcher, I have undertaken to inform my understanding of educational research through the course work of my M.A. program. My introductory course in research designs was rooted solidly in the positivist tradition. While I found little within that tradition to help me understand the experience of WIER, or to make sense of the ways in which others might develop ways to understand it, it did help me to understand that I was seeking to make sense of experiences *in which I was involved* both as a participant and an observer.

I found questions emerging that caused me to look elsewhere. What happens, for instance, when *"the researcher"* becomes involved in the process of inquiry with *"the participants?"* What happens when they interact? What if the outcomes, or effects of the interactions between researchers and participants change them both, or foster new directions in seeking to understand the relationships in which both are involved with one another?

Context

In an effort to locate these notions in the experiences of others, I turned away from research methodologies to more familiar ground in an effort to establish a context

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for this study. Northrop Frye's notion that we each have a *motive for metaphor*, or, a desire to associate what goes on inside the mind with what goes on outside it, (Frye, 1963) was helpful to me. I thought of it as contextually similar to what Donald Schön writes about "accounting for our perspectives in the world, how we think about things, make sense of reality, and set the problems we later try to solve ... a certain kind of product—a perspective or frame, a way of looking at things—and a certain kind of process, a process by which new perspectives on the world come into existence" (in Ortony, 1988, p. 254).

These notions frame the purposes to be achieved more than, say, the means by which we might achieve them. Schön distinguishes his "purposes" from problem solving as *"problem setting."* This thinking is useful to me because it suggests that we encounter new ideas in ways that lead us to reflect upon them in the context of the things we know.

The Wrong Frame

I found my notions were in the wrong frame; I was seeking to *develop* hypotheses from experience rather more than to form generalizations from which to derive bodies of theory, or *knowledge claims*. And I found that the idea of an ethnography as "a written representation of a culture (or selected aspects of a culture)" (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 1) portrayed "in terms of another" (p. ix) was consistent, even resonant, with Frye's associative learning, or Schön's frames of understanding.

I return to this below when I discuss the problem of *framing* the uses of computer technology in educational research.

Method

I have said that the study sets out to consider the impact of participation in WIER on teachers' reflections on, and re-framing notions of, their own teaching practice. Initially, I proposed to do this by:

- reviewing and analyzing the content of WIER projects (on-line transcripts) and articles that have been written about it;

- framing the idea of computer-based telecommunications technology as an *environment* or *field* more (or rather) than as an instrument of data analysis;

- interviewing participants *(see below)*; and,

- presenting and analyzing relevant documents and correspondence.

As I became involved in the collection of data from the conferences, the notes I have kept on WIER throughout its existence, correspondence with participants and so on, I became aware that I kept returning to a conception of WIER that seemed to be different from the conceptions of others and that these were distinguished by the historical context within which I knew the program. Throughout my investigations, it became clear to me that I was the only person who knew the history of WIER from its beginning to the present.

This thesis, then, accepts that my own involvement in and understanding of WIER provides the framework within which other methods of inquiry may be linked.

Overview of the Document

Stages of Development

The ideas presented in this study are explored in the context of the development of WIER from its first conceptions as a "student writers' database" through to its

current operation within a computer conferencing environment. While WIER's development may be seen, in some sense, as "stages," the reader will find no claim here of a prescription for successful telecommunications activity in education. However, it is my hope that the reader will come to see some of the key features— and spirit—of this rather lovely program of original student writing and expression in Canada through the ideas that its participants have encountered, considered, and worked through. Taken together with two earlier studies, which considered student case studies of WIER, and expert practice in WIER, respectively, this thesis takes particular interest in issues of teaching practice that emerge in, and are associated with teachers' involvement in WIER.

Borders

Distinctions between issues of writing, technology, and research may be seen to blur somewhat as one considers myriad ways in which to understand WIER. While this study endeavours to guide the reader through these distinctions, it may be helpful to see the blurring of them as useful. It may be better, for instance, not to try to see WIER as technology on a "cutting edge" so much as imaginations meeting at a border. Chapter 2, then, considers key elements in the development of a conceptual framework for the study, and explores the possibility of a common field within which the ideas and aspirations of participants contribute to an understanding of WIER as a kind of border work.

The Learner's Perspective

Chapter 3 describes the history of events that lead to WIER, undertaken largely through the stories of those who saw something in it and who tried to make it work, while Chapter 4 considers the establishment of WIER and its development as a process of creation.

Chapter 5 concludes the study with a re-conceptualization of WIER as, in John Donne's words, "a little world made cunningly" of elements that may be seen to inform teaching practice.

Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework and Method

Many educational uses of communications technology—and particularly telecommunications technology—emphasize access to, and delivery of, information. Distance education programs have been quick to develop along these lines, embracing computer-based telecommunications links as delivery systems for the distribution of course materials and the exchange of student assignments (Kaye, 1989; Mason, 1989). Electronic mail and computer conferencing capabilities have also been embraced as ways of promoting interaction that are independent of both time and place (Harasim, 1990; Levinson, 1990), and many host services in both the commercial and educational communities have responded by offering access to conferencing systems for educators at all levels (Kurshan, 1990). To a lesser degree, this access has also been extended to students at various levels.

A Note Concerning Asynchronous Interaction & Reflection

It is interesting to note, though, that the design of some of these conferencing systems—and especially "newer" systems like PARTIcipate or CAUCUS, for example—appear to emphasize telecommunications-based interaction as a kind of textual "talking" (Hiltz, 1990; Owen, 1992), even though they may offer many sophisticated methods for "linking" text, "branching" ideas, or creating identifiable "conferences" or discussion groups. Compared to earlier systems, like (the ancient) FORUM, or even the more recent CoSy, the so-called standard "command line" interface designs, which require participants to type out the functions they want to invoke on the conferencing system, seem to have imagined that participants will want to read and, as often as not, respond while on-line. In effect, the guides and prompts of these systems encourage users to make an immediate decision about ⸜

what to do with whatever current message or posting they are dealing with—*before undertaking any further action*—like whether to post or compose a response, proceed to the next message or, perhaps, to go off-line in order to read and reflect on the material. This apparent bias in favour of dealing with current material over what we might call current response to the on-line past of what is, in effect, a textual group, combines with what has been called the "small-window problem" (Davie, 1989), in which there is a perceived need to deal with the text within a computer context—the common eighty character by twenty-five line display screen format used by most of the computers that are likely to be available to schools.

Clearly, this kind of thinking will present some constraints to those seeking to promote reflective discourse. One constraint that Davie cites—that texts longer "one or two screens" become "hard to follow"—reveals an assumption that many participants share, namely, that communication that is supported electronically in this way, that is, read while on-line, should somehow be dealt with electronically too, like on-line, "chatting" (Daiute, 1985; Feenberg, 1989).

An embrace of on-line interaction as a kind of "textual talking" is a perception I find interesting, if not curious, for several reasons. The asynchronous nature of computer conferencing is distinct from so-called "chatting," or synchronous communications systems, such as the popular Minitel system in France, the Alex system in Canada, or even so-called "chat" or "converse" modes on electronic mail systems. Asynchronous communication is, in my view, essentially reflective and responsive communication. And this asynchronous nature suggests the possibility of dealing with on-line materials in a variety of ways that are capable of promoting and sustaining what I think of as "considered response" within a textual community. Capturing, or "downloading" the electronic text for reading off-line,

or in printed form, for instance, is something we encourage our students to do in WIER so that they may feel free to contribute in ways they find appropriate—and at the times when they feel it is appropriate to do so as well. I believe this happens best when people have had a chance to reflect on their experience, consider the language they would choose to express their ideas, and compose their ideas to their own satisfaction.

I feel that the medium of computer conferencing is well suited to the task of using language to understand and interpret new experience. In my view this medium, which might now be defined for the purposes of this study as textual exchanges that remain "public" and accessible to a defined constituency in electronic form, offered a potential to embrace on-line interaction as a "retrievable form of discourse" (Feenberg, in Mason and Kaye 1989, p. 25) that was particularly attractive precisely because participants could read what others had to say, consider the implications of these views within the context of their experience, and prepare their thoughts in a manner that allowed, and even encouraged them to summon language—often new language to deal with new ideas—or transform practice in ways that were consistent with their interpretations.

This view of computer conferencing as communication that is essentially reflective and responsive has been particularly helpful in my efforts to promote reflection through writing in WIER and elsewhere. Taken together, the experiences that project participants have with one another (which we could call "social structure," or perhaps the structure for "social interactions" here) and the ability to return to the full text of the interactions that have developed on-line before offering a response (which we could call "reflection" here) blend to create a sense of community that would not otherwise exist. As Feenberg notes, "a group which

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exists through an exchange of written texts has the peculiar ability to recall and inspect its entire past. Nothing quite like this is available to a community based on the spoken word" (p. 25).

I believe that the "peculiar ability" that Feenberg identifies is transformational in promoting reflection among WIER participants in general and, within this group, among the community of teachers in particular.

A Reflective Teaching Community: The Teacher's Perspective As Learner

MacKinnon and Grunau (in press) suggest that a teacher education program

> ... has a great deal to do with the social structure among the various participants as the foundation for a number of 'forums of action and discourse,' in which the knowledge base of teaching gradually and continually develops through supported reflection. (p. 4)

These authors contend that reflection is a function of "community and discourse" for student teachers within these multiple forums. They go on to discuss how student teachers might learn from each other by engaging one another in the "practice of teaching and the critical discourse surrounding their experiences," and present a project undertaken with the co-operation of the Toronto Board of Education (thirty-four student teachers from the Faculty of Education, University of Toronto were placed in an elementary school so that a school-based practicum capable of sustaining the experience of practice with community and discourse could be developed).

MacKinnon and Grunau also declare that their assumptions that "knowledge about teaching is actively constructed by practitioners themselves, inextricably linked to

their experiences and inquiries in actual situations of practice," (p. 7) lead them to construct their own view of teacher education programs as a "number of forums in which we might nurture and develop students' own expertise in taking on the role of the teacher..." (p. 8).

Computer conferencing offers a platform for "forums" of this kind. They are reflective, written forums in which participants may, in effect, "take on the role of the teacher" with one another. When this "taking on" of the "role of the teacher" is *also assumed by participants who already are teachers*, I believe that they come to see their teaching in new ways—particularly in the context of activities, like WIER, that are important to them.

Writing, Reflection & the On-line Environment

It is useful to consider some details about the on-line systems in use at SFU during the WIER projects in the study, particularly insofar as they influence teachers' notions of "learning from past experience," (Schön, in Grimmett and Erickson, 1988, p. 24), "coaching"—and who is to serve as a coach (Gilliss, in Grimmett and Erickson, 1988, p. 52)—"reflective transformation" and "thoughtfulness about action...that leads to conscious, deliberate moves," the "consideration of educational events in context," (Grimmett, p. 12), and "reconstruction of experience" (p. 13) in light of "reconsidering the assumptions on which previous understandings...were based" (p. 12), both for others and for themselves.

For my purposes here, then, the idea of "reflection" emerges as written interaction that promotes considered response within a community—both on-line and in the classroom—and which leads to "reframing" (Schön, 1983), or coming to see experiences and events in new ways. I have come to see this community as a

reflective one in which participants are in control of the communications media that link them, and utilize the media to broaden the shape and scope of the classroom experience.

In the case of WIER, participants use these media to

- consider the value of revision and response in the process of writing, and the impact this might have on interpreting and understanding experience—both for themselves and for others;

- revisit their thoughts in light of the ideas they receive, in the context of their experiences; and,

- transform future activity based upon this reflection, having seen the world as another might in the language-based (and rich) environment that on-line computer conferencing systems offer them. (Owen, 1990)

Key Ideas

This view that learning in textual, on-line communities is transformational and based upon reflection that is, over time, largely participant-controlled and guided suggests some key ideas. The projects emphasize task, not technology, and they are language-based, involving participants in actively summoning language appropriate to the tasks at hand, and particular language in particular situations. Accordingly, they seek to engage and empower learners by offering direct and personal access to activities that are relevant to current experience. And they promote equity, increasing participants' access to new experience by extending their reach out into the world and bringing what they find there back into their current experience (Owen, 1990).

Theoretical Framework and Procedural Considerations

The Asynchronous Interview

I had proposed a form of interviewing—what I think of as the *asynchronous interview*—as a research methodology to be used in this study. In my view, the on-line conference offers a real opportunity to combine the asynchronous nature of the medium with reflective tasks, especially by invoking writing as a means of incorporating considered response into exchanges between interview participants. This was to be offered as distinct from what I saw as the more *talk-like style* that characterizes many other uses of computer-based communication, such as electronic mail or chatting systems.

Face-to-Face

I wanted to explore this as an alternative to an apparent assumption in the literature that "interviews" are encounters that happen in face-to-face situations, in which participants are engaged in an interview process concurrently. This assumption appears again and again in the literature I have read on the nature of interviews (Borg and Gall, 1989; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983; Lather, 1991; Glesne and Peshkin, 1992; and others). My experience with interactions undertaken in computer conferences reveals that the introduction of writing and reflection time to an interview process changes the nature of responses and, perhaps more importantly, the nature of participants' *feelings* about their responses. How often, for example, have you said to yourself that things would be better *if only you could have said* or done something differently, upon reflection?

While I do not mean to suggest that interviews conducted textually in computer conferencing environments are the only locations within which asynchronous interviews can occur (I am thinking here of dialogue journals as another alternative, for instance), I had wanted to develop the notion for another reason— to demonstrate a conception of the computer as a catalyst for understanding more than as the simple tool for recording and analyzing data so prevalent in the literature. While I explore this conception here, things did not proceed according to the plan I had proposed.

I established an interview group of four teachers. All were participants in WIER, but represented different provinces, grade levels and genders. Mid-way through the on-line interviews in the fall of 1992, SFU discontinued access to its computer systems for those outside B.C. who were unable to connect via the Internet computer network. Accordingly, I abandoned the effort for the purpose of this thesis.

It is true I am disappointed that my proposed method of investigation was interrupted. But I am not disappointed with the impact it had on my work. If the remaining pages of this chapter are of value to another new researcher, I would be pleased to think that the asynchronous interview might be as useful an approach as I had imagined it might be. In any case, the conception of computer use that gave rise to the research methodology I had proposed was developed in response to my experiences in WIER. It is my hope that the following pages will give some insight into this conception.

Computer Use (Research)

In educational research the computer is clearly identified as a *tool*, the use of which is handy for common operations in the analysis of content in such "dull and time-consuming" operations as the identification and tallying of word frequencies; statistical counts and analyses; information access and searching techniques (data bases generally, ERIC in particular); alleviation of "technical problems" associated with research observation and the recording and timing of events; data gathering strategies, like *computer-assisted telephone interviewing* (or *CATI*, which, interestingly enough, is said to *"virtually eliminate two major sources of errors in interviews, namely, recording data in the wrong place on the form, and asking the wrong questions"*—good heavens!); manipulation of data, printing and distribution of findings and on and on.

However, the role and possibility of computer use as an *environment* or *culture* within which research is experienced remains to be explored in the literature on research (*cf.* Borg and Gall, 1989; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1990, Tesch 1990, Glesne and Peshkin, 1992 and others).

Noting The Field

If computer use as it is experienced in WIER can be considered an environment or culture, then it is less the "tool" noted prominently in the literature than it is a kind of field trip into a culture that is actively engaged in process of being one. The trick here is that the environment or culture I have in mind is *also operating as a discussion about* that engagement and the process of being engaged and interested—a kind of meta-discussion that comprises both the field within which a

researcher might work and the work a researcher might do in the describing of that field.

Off-line Cultures

In our (more or less) familiar off-line cultures, researchers may invoke a methodology that involves the taking of *fieldnotes* as a way to produce a written understanding of their experiences through a process of associating cultures they don't know with ones they do. It seems sensible enough to me that this would be an attractive approach to anyone seeking to make sense of things they don't yet know. After all, "a world cannot be apprehended directly; it is always inferred on the basis of its parts, and the parts must be conceptually and perceptually cut out of the flux of experience" (Clifford, 1988, p. 38). It is interesting to me, though, that the idea of *fieldnote* seems rather more detached from the idea of observation than it is connected to it. I suppose this is the trouble of dealing with them well. However, I think that the idea of *observation* is imposed on the idea of *fieldnote* in a quite particular way, and perhaps a bit quickly at that. The central idea here is that these two notions are separate ones. *Observation*, or what I might call *event* here, is distinguished from *fieldnote*, which I might call *response* here. It is as if one necessarily sits *outside* of the other.

What if they were the same thing?

An assumption governing the nature of research in this thesis, then, is that on-line interactions blur more familiar distinctions between events and their attendant responses, or, between the *field-as-worked* and the *field-as-noted.*

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Computer Use (Writing)

The literature on computer use and writing also emphasizes the use of the computer as a tool, often noting software aids for identification and correction of errors of spelling or grammar, or the use of word processors as helpful instruments for the revision of texts. This is especially evident in journals for practicing teachers (e.g., *The Computing Teacher, ECOO Output, CUE-BC Journal, The English Journal, The Writing Notebook, T.I.E. News* and so on). Beckstead's notions, which are based upon his review of some of the literature on this matter, are consistent with my own thoughts in this area, and usefully stated in his own proposal to study WIER:

> Technology itself is not a new idea to the writing classroom. Hawisher and Selfe (1989) comment on the proliferation of computers in education and state, "English teachers in increasing numbers have come to regard computers as allies in their teaching, research, and professional efforts" (p. 9). Studies have attempted to illustrate its importance and efficacy in a variety of ways including fostering collaborative writing (eg. Daiute, 1985; Dickenson 1986), enhancing the work of average and low achieving pupils (Peacock, 1988), and increased revision (Dalton and Hannafin, 1987). However, Chandler (1988), in a review of the research, notes the rising debate pertaining to the computer as a writing tool. Skeptics speak of superficial revising (Gerrard, 1989) and no clear improvement in the quality of writing (Bridwell, Sirc & Brooke, 1985). (1992, p. 3)

Notions like these are located in what I think of as a *technological frame*, which I hinted at earlier by suggesting that the manner in which participants experience their *use* of the medium, or activities associated with the medium, will govern how they undertake their interactions on-line, and which Beckstead saw initially as well:

There is no doubt that there is an on-going debate concerning the efficacy of the computer in the writing classroom, but how are these researchers perceiving its use? It seems to me that they see the computer as a tool for the simple manipulation and management of text. In doing so, they ignore some of the emerging technology such as the one utilized by Wired Writers [i.e., WIER]—computer-mediated communication (CMC). (Beckstead, 1992, p. 4)

Computer <u>Use</u> & *Computer-Mediated Writing*

The necessary shift from the idea of "*computer* use" to the idea of "computer *use*" in writing programs can also be framed in the literature, and in my own experience. In 1988, for example, just following the completion of the first Writers In Electronic Residence project with poet Lionel Kearns, I had the opportunity to introduce the program at the *14th. International Conference on Distance Education* in Oslo, Norway. I had never attended a conference like this before, and I worked hard to locate my thoughts in reasonable and descriptive language that would be consistent with the best intended meanings of CMC of the day. These were taken to be "more than electronic mail, but...also less than all computer applications in educational settings" (Zorkoczy, 1989). Zorkoczy also noted—accurately, in my view—that the term CMC was "lacking in some precision in the use of the word 'communication'" and that while CMC may initially have been taken to mean "the use of a telecommunications network," the notion had been extended to include

> ... cooperative working, decision-making, etc., where...the *emphasis is on direct human communication augmented by computer*. (emphasis added, p. 260)

I agree with this analysis and feel—as I did then—that WIER serves as an example of this kind of thinking. I settled on the term *Computer-Mediated Writing* as an appropriate description of the place WIER might hold within the realm of CMC.

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After several ERIC searches turned up no previously defined instances of it, I presented my work as *Computer-Mediated Writing* at Oslo and in papers presented at conferences elsewhere.

However, during the course of his own thesis investigations, Beckstead discovered an article in a 1987 edition of *Machine-Mediated Learning* by Carolyn Kirkpatrick of the City University of New York entitled *Implementing Computer-Mediated Writing: Some Early Lessons.*

Unlike the meanings associated with CMC, Kirkpatrick does not define what her notions of "computer-mediated writing" are except in general terms of her experiences as a teacher of writing working with "uses of word-processing for instruction in ... developmental writing classes" for "basic writers" (p. 35). While her notions about word-processing do lead her to consider that "the full power of the computer will be tapped only if it is seen as a catalyst, rather than a tool" (p. 44), which I would agree with, they clearly differ from the notions I supported under the banner of "computer-mediated writing," and which seem to have survived as more and more people became active in the possibilities that "communication augmented by computer," to return to Zorkoczy's words, could summon and sustain.

Peer interaction, contextual approaches to writing activities in school, the role of "distant audiences" on students' writing and the place of telecommunications as a means of facilitating writing as "a communicative act" (Cohen and Riel, 1989) have emerged as strong indicators of the value of CMC in school. Taken together with ideas like Britton's notion (1980) that every classroom contains *two experts*—the teacher and the student—and that the experiences of both have value and meaning

in the construction of curriculum, a view of the _use_ of computers takes over where using computers left off.

A Writing Frame

I think it is possible and desirable to locate ideas like these in a _writing frame_ for understanding technology and experience. In this frame, "distance" is not something to be _overcome_ by technology. Rather, it is a _resource_, an experiential distance, the expression of which allows participants to experience the things they know in new ways. These ideas will be explored in greater detail in Chapter Five.

The remainder of this thesis, then, will introduce the reader to this resource—and the experiences of many WIER participants as well.

A Note Concerning Style

Given the historical nature of this thesis, an effort to provide an accurate recounting has resulted in an attempt to select language in a manner that captures and conveys to the reader the spirit of the events that are described. Accordingly, in the chapters that follow, the reader will encounter a difference between the writing styles associated with the description and analysis of events.

Chapter 3

Works In Progress: Failures & First Attempts

This is a modem

I purchased my first computer in March, 1984. It was a thirty pound, sewing machine-sized model developed as the first so-called "portable" computer by Silicon Valley "guru," Adam Osborne. Details like this were important when word that I had actually bought my own computer got out at my school.

A student came rushing into my office for details. Matthew knew everything about computers and often brought his Apple II to school to teach others how it could be used. He was very excited that I had joined his technological world. As usual, he was full of questions—and, thankfully, answers—but what impressed me most was how he set out to introduce me to his world through one we both knew I would find familiar. He asked for pen and paper to illustrate the concept of telecommunications to me. First, he drew a small square, and beside it, a large circle.

"This is a modem," he said, pointing to the square.

His pen moved thoughtfully to the circle, and a smile pushed its way through his lips.

"*THIS* is the world!"

I hadn't given telecommunications serious consideration before then. To me, the computer was a tool that could serve as an antidote to my handwriting; a perfect typewriter that produced readable characters on fluidless sheets. Frankly, this possibility alone was so attractive that trying to imagine some greater purpose simply wasn't a big priority. After all, the idea that one could use telephone lines so that computers could talk to each other seemed a bit odd. Why not simply call? It all sounded a bit too much like "C.B."—Citizen Band Radio, and I didn't need any more "good buddy" metaphor on my back door.

At first I tried to dismiss it as educationally suspicious, but Matthew was a credible student whose views had been felt in our school before (some of the people who were learning on his Apple II were teachers). It wasn't long before he helped me to realize that writers had embraced the technology quite nicely, and were busy utilizing it to produce meaning in my classroom.

It was time to play catch up.

I purchased a modem based on my experience with Matthew and quickly found what were known at the time as "remote bulletin board systems" (RBBS). Most of these served as places for computer aficionados to share resources for and information about their machines and, while I knew little about the latter—and certainly not the former—I learned of a few systems that were beginning to emerge with a particular focus in mind. One of these was *SwiftCurrent*, the first "electronic literary magazine," or an on-line database that featured works by Canadian authors.

SwiftCurrent

SwiftCurrent was established and developed by two Canadian writers and professors, Frank Davey and Fred Wah, under the auspices of a Canada Council grant in 1983. Their conception of *SwiftCurrent* was based on their well-established record as supporters, editors and creators of literary magazines like *Tish* and *Open Letter*. After Davey began using a modem to send material to his publisher, *Coach House Press*, he and other writers "realized it was possible to read another's work on the screen." It wasn't long before a group of writers began discussing another possibility which, in turn, fostered its own unique set of difficulties. "We discussed putting a magazine on a floppy disk and mailing it either to each other or to all Apple users," Davey noted. "But that was its biggest drawback—it could only be read on Apple II [computers]." (Rose, 1985, p. 17)   Computer-based telecommunications, a more flexible technology, was necessary. The idea for an "electronic literary magazine" was born.

SwiftCurrent opened in the summer of 1984 on a UNIX system at York University in Toronto (see Appendix One for an overview of *SwiftCurrent*). When I read about it that summer, I thought it was a wonderful idea, and it occurred to me that a *student writers' database in Toronto schools could be a highly interactive tool* as well. I applied to join *SwiftCurrent as a* "subscriber" or "reader," which provided a level of access to the program that approximated the print-based writer/reader relationship, and which allowed Davey and Wah to distinguish writers from other participants on the system. Rose (1985) described this level, noting the link to schools as an example:

> Readers are those who pay $25 per year to dabble in the waters of SwiftCurrent. One of the most frequent readers is Trevor Owen, a

school board computer consultant who arranged for Riverdale and Monarch Park Collegiates in Ontario to sign on with SwiftCurrent. (p. 18)

I remember the thrill I felt when I connected and saw the animated discussions developing on-line between the writers as they considered one another's works. It was a striking event on its own, to be sure, but to me the experience was an epiphany—I *knew in an instant* what this kind of exchange could mean to my students. While it was clear that *SwiftCurrent* could be used to offer distinct benefits to schools, combining as it did the distribution of Canadian works with the *opportunity for subscriber comment and author response*, it was also clear that the program was not intended to be as interactive a tool as it might be in helping schools to pursue language development and proficiency in classrooms. And I had no idea then whether anyone else would see what I had "seen" on-line in *SwiftCurrent*. I felt I had inadvertently stumbled across something I knew but couldn't explain, like trying to speak convincingly about one's encounter with a Sasquatch.

Do you see what I see?

So, on October 2, 1984, I met with Ken Turner, a mentor and school superintendent in my board, to see whether my "epiphany" might emerge for another without further comment beyond engagement in the action itself. I lugged my Osborne into his office, connected to *SwiftCurrent* from his phone line, and asked him to take over the keyboard from there. He tapped his way through the on-line genres: "fiction," "commentary," "poetry" and so on, for several minutes.

"Do you see what I see?" I asked.

He tapped a few keys to disconnect.

"Yes," he said.

"Yes."

By October 15, 1984, I had developed and submitted my first proposal to the Toronto Board to re-define part of my duties as a Resource Teacher for the Arts in order to include promoting the use of *SwiftCurrent* in school English programs, and to develop a student writers' database along similar lines to *SwiftCurrent* for use in Toronto schools. This proposal is included as Appendix Two for the interested reader.

The Arts Resource Function

As illustrated in detail in Appendix Two, my role as an Arts Resource Teacher carried with it a clear set of duties, none of which had to do with implementing what was—and would be—seen as an essentially technological initiative. However, the group of superintendents who supervised the administrative area of the board in which I served shared my view that

> ... the arts provide, as language does, *the means by which individuals process experience and give meaning to it, both for themselves and for others* ... (Language Across the Curriculum, Ontario Ministry of Education, 1978, p. 3)

These superintendents also supported the notion that the time that I would spend on the project would be consistent with their interpretation of my duties as an Arts Resource Teacher. This was based, in part, on a conception of computers as

"applications devices [that] hold great opportunities for highly interactive learning situations" (see Appendix Two). My role in this effort would be seen as serving to "enhance the relationship between the Arts, all areas of the curriculum, and the school experience."

> In this case, the relationship between computers and writing holds great promise in language development and proficiency in a manner which encourages the sharing of experiences within schools, among families of schools, and more. (Owen, 1984, *Letter to Ken Turner*, p. 3)

I began to contact school principals in my area of the Board (see Appendix Three). The responses I received focused mainly on obtaining some of the funding that was available so that schools could augment their computer resources. However, two secondary schools prepared to obtain the necessary equipment and to arrange for student access to a school telephone line for the purposes of the project. By mid-year, one school—Monarch Park Secondary—was ready to proceed thanks to the efforts of Mary Rintoul, Assistant Head of English, David, a senior student, and Glen Boisvert, Teacher of Computer Studies. Later, Mary Rintoul became Head of English at Malvern Collegiate and brought WIER into the writing program. Glen Boisvert left Monarch to serve as Assistant Head of Computer Studies at Owen Sound Collegiate and Vocational Institute (OSCVI), where he helped the English department to offer WIER. These kinds of links have been instrumental in the development of WIER, especially in the first few years of the project. Both Malvern and OSCVI remain active in WIER.

The Teacher

I began visiting the school at regular intervals over the winter of 1985 to test equipment, and to offer tutorials for David and his teachers. I arrived at the school one day to meet Mary for her first tutorial on connecting to *SwiftCurrent*—an encounter that would shape my understanding of the *task-oriented* view of computer use noted in Chapter Two of this thesis. We wheeled a trolley equipped with a computer, printer and modem into the English office so that we could be near a phone line and have a little privacy. I may have demonstrated how to connect to *SwiftCurrent* first myself, I cannot recall, but I *do* recall—vividly—what happened when Mary sat down at the keyboard.

She shook.

She tried several times to still her trembling hands, but she was afraid she might make a mistake and damage the computer. I am sure it was a terrible experience for her, but it was a beautiful one for me. In those painful moments I saw a dreadful power of technology and the real impact that the fear of losing control to a machine can have. The event also revealed that Mary's love of student writing was more powerful than her fear of technology—she was *more afraid of not proceeding than she was of going ahead.* She was determined that students would be able to participate.

The Student

David was in his final year at Monarch Park and supporting himself through school by working nights as a computer programmer. When the Head of the English department asked for volunteers for the *SwiftCurrent* project, David offered to participate. He saw the project as an opportunity to get some extra marks in English by engaging in an activity that interested him—*and in which he had some expertise.* While David's interest and expertise were primarily technological—a fact that disappointed me initially—I came to appreciate it later on when I saw the impact the experience had on him.

We met face-to-face at the school a few times so that David could learn to operate the equipment at Monarch and implement the *SwiftCurrent* software once he had connected, and to help with any arrangements that he might need to participate in the project. The teachers welcomed him easily into the English office during his spares or at lunch. When things seemed to be operating smoothly and he seemed comfortable, we agreed not to meet face-to-face for awhile. Instead, we would communicate on-line through *SwiftCurrent's* internal electronic mail system. I left David with an activity: to connect to *SwiftCurrent* from time to time and read any entries that might interest him. If he found that he wanted to respond to any of the works he read, we agreed he would let me know on-line. While David did communicate with me via e-mail, there were not really any pieces that interested him. I began to wish that more students had volunteered with a particular interest in writing or Canadian Literature. I wondered whether the trial at Monarch would be successful. Then David sent me a *very* excited message regarding an exchange that had been initiated by Margaret Atwood and Graeme Gibson on March 17, 1985 as an "electronic chain letter" protesting cultural cutbacks, which were being

proposed for an upcoming federal budget. I remember when this piece was posted (Atwood and Gibson were travelling in the U.S. at the time), although I no longer have a copy of it (see Rose, 1985, p.18). This exchange generated a second piece by author David McFadden. And David (my student), who had been taken by McFadden's comments, had sent off a response! In fact, he was a bit worried about it because he taken a position against a point of view advanced by the author regarding government spending on the arms race. He posed a number of questions to the author, including one that wondered whether McFadden thought that those who served in World War II had given their lives in vain.

I was too thrilled to be worried.

The Writer

On May 17, 1985, a remarkable event occurred at Monarch Park. The author wrote back! When I arrived at the school I found the English department in a rather happy state of shock. What would happen if students and writers could have direct and, it seemed, personal access to one another on *SwiftCurrent*? What would teachers do? Frank Davey recalled the event as well.

> They were astounded that they got a reply. That's not generally available with print publications. (Rose, 1985, p. 19)

McFadden's reply revealed a characteristic that would become a cornerstone for WIER when the program opened several years later—that students could be taken seriously for what they had to say. This set of events also established a reference point for what would develop into my own conception of CMC as a *medium of response* and the value that participants in CMC-based projects feel about the

interactions in which they are engaged on-line. In this case, David considered what had happened for some time. Eventually, he decided to write back to the author. His note of June 7, 1985 reads:

Dear David McFadden

I wish to thank you for taking the time to write. I was not trying to force my opinion on you. However, I was quite intrigued by your idea that "Russia and the States should start concentrating on their common aspirations rather than their philosophical differences, change their thinking and begin pooling their intellectual resources for the benefit of all humanity." This was a fresh and rather new concept for me . . .

I would like to see the States and Russia sit down and work together for the betterment of all mankind. The advanced technologies of the two nations combined would be fantastic. However, the hatred between (them) is too intense to allow this to happen—at present.

Your reply to me was a crucial factor in trying to promote SwiftCurrent for future school use.

I once again would just like to THANK YOU for your time.

TAKE CARE!

Earnestly and sincerely

Dave

P.S. If you wish to respond, the system will be down at Monarch until Sept. Have a Great Summer.

In an open letter dated June 3, 1985, David considered his experience this way:

I have been working...on *SwiftCurrent* for a few weeks now. I believe that this type of system has tremendous opportunities and applications, allowing students and teachers to achieve a higher form of excellence (and to) widen the range of a student's capacity (to) learn. I count it as a privilege to have been able to...work with and discuss *SwiftCurrent*.

One major accomplishment we have achieved is that we received correspondence from the Canadian author Mr. David McFadden. This was, indeed, an exciting moment and a welcomed surprise.

As our society turns more and more into the technological realm, this system, and others like it, will eventually have boundless scope and endless possibilities. I would see the permanent installation of this project to be a small step for the Board, however, a gigantic step towards providing a greater learning capacity for both the students and teachers.

The Learner's Perspective

The Monarch Park trial with *SwiftCurrent* taught me several things that I continue to value in on-line learning situations generally, and WIER in particular. First, the experience helped me to put my earlier encounters with technology in perspective. The "world" that became accessible via Matthew's modem was a participatory one, not technological. While the ability to participate in this world was *sustained* by technology, an appreciation and sense-making of it was not, and need not itself be, technological in nature. To see that this world was, indeed, *his* world, had little to do with his considerable ability to embrace the intricacies of technology. Rather, it had to do with *his expertise.* What Matthew had was *understanding* and he knew he could apply it in many ways. Some of these were technological in nature or impetus (as expressed, for instance, in the form of the computer seminars he'd offer at the school, or the impromptu crowds that would gather around his Apple II at lunch.) But others revealed that he had the knowledge and skills to interpret his understanding in the context of the understanding of others, as he did with me when he asked for paper and pen. Having been lead, then, to interpret this thing I didn't know—computer-based telecommunications—in the context of something I did know—writing and written interaction—I was able to construct a new understanding of computers as *catalysts for learning* rather than as the "tool" I'd

seen before. A field trip in which participants were engaged in tasks they could value, more than an "electronic pen" that might ease the burden of recording one's thoughts. I also understood that these experiences would not have been available to me had I not seen Matthew *as a credible student*.

Second, while *access to technology* could distinguish between members of various constituencies, technology did not. All participants, in this case writers and students, appeared in the same form to one another (i.e., as text on a screen or printed on a page from an on-line session.) On *SwiftCurrent*, though, distinctions <u>were</u> drawn between those who could submit works to the "electronic magazine," which was a computer conference, and those who could not. Davey and Wah did screen potential "contributing editors," as they would have been known in the literary world, but they did not edit the content of *SwiftCurrent* once works had been posted by the contributors. "Anyone who becomes a contributor is free to put in anything he wants. We wanted the system to be as eclectic as possible," noted Davey (Rose, 1985, p. 19).

The opportunity that students could be taken seriously *for what they had to say* existed on *SwiftCurrent* to the extent that they, as subscribers, could comment on their reading through the electronic mail system and receive any responses that authors may—or may not—choose to send along via the same route. The possibility of this, as we had experienced with David McFadden's responses to the Monarch Park student, was thrilling—and it would prove to be again in a second project two years later. But it was not as thrilling as the discussions that the "contributing editors" were having with one another as they considered and responded to one another's ideas. They had the power to submit whatever they liked—and did—to the animated discussions that students or other "subscribers"

could only witness. Operating under a magazine metaphor, as *SwiftCurrent* did, this was partly acceptable. After all, students could not simply decide to have their work published in print magazines. And if they had comments to offer, they could write a letter to the editor who, in turn, would decide whether to publish it.

For my purposes as a teacher, though, the metaphor of magazines was not particularly helpful. It emphasized *publishing*, and what I wanted to have was the *interaction* that the technology sustained. Without this, the student writers' database that I imagined *Works In Progress* might be would become like a student's eye view of another staff room or school office—a place where others can discuss and even decide things that affect you, but where you have no access.

Third, I began to understand that the role of the technology itself could become an obstacle if it became the focus of attention. I'd seen this in a number of forms already, ranging from the responses I'd received from principals who were willing to participate in *any* project if it would generate an additional complement of hardware, to the triumph of Mary Rintoul's love of writing—or task—over the fear of computers, to David's initial excitement—and wonder—at participating in a project where his expertise—technology—held some currency in the context of his English course.

Finally, there were clear signs that the effort had merit. I had seen it in the teachers at Monarch Park, who were *happy* to have a student in their department office if it would help to encourage interest in writing. And we had all experienced it in the shock wave that went through the school when a *"real" author wrote back* to a student.

I have said that McFadden's reply provided a reference point for what would develop into my own conception of CMC as a *medium of response*, above, and that the nature of his response revealed a characteristic that would become a cornerstone for WIER—that students could be taken seriously for what they had to say.

I know now that this sense of validation had been extended to me as well, setting in place a powerful chain of events some nine months earlier in Ken Turner's office.

"Yes," he said.

"Yes."

Time Passes

At the end of June, 1985, I left the Toronto Board for a year's leave of absence, seven months of which would be spent travelling in Europe. I arranged to maintain telecommunications links with Canada via the *International Packet SwitchStream* (IPSS) data network of British Telecom, and Telecom Canada's *Datapac* network. Together, these services provided me with the opportunity to connect via London to electronic mail and the postal system in Canada, as well as to *SwiftCurrent* while travelling throughout Europe.

I did not undertake any projects with students during this period, but I did continue to use *SwiftCurrent* and to consider ways in which to build on the experiences I have described, above. This was a helpful period to me. I found that I spent a good deal of time considering my teaching experiences during these travels. Over time, I began to see that the sense I had made of children and learning in school while engaged in the activity of teaching was changing. I found myself thinking through teaching events as I recalled them and considering what I might do—in the classroom—to encourage students to see their ideas as valid in the context of school, as I had seen on-line.

In the spring of 1986 I received a teaching placement to begin that fall at Riverdale Collegiate, an inner city school in Toronto's east China town.

What Does It "Mean?"

As a "regular" school, Riverdale was *quite* different from my previous alternative school experience. The students were every bit as generous and kind, interested and interesting, but they did seem to expect me to more of a "teacher" than I was used to. They called me "sir," and they answered when summoned to do so by me, although there was a clear reluctance to volunteer in class. I soon learned that "volunteering" meant "giving an answer" or, more accurately, giving *the correct* answer. What it didn't mean was offering an opinion, and certainly not engaging in a discussion for the sake of one's interest!

I was quite puzzled by this. As a group, the students were quite motivated, worked hard, and deserved to do as well as they did in school. Little by little, I began to see a number of classroom events as indicators that gave me some insight into this. One of these involved a student in grade ten, who approached me one day after class with a concern about a poetry writing assignment I had given. She was very polite and smiled broadly, which caused her cheeks to push her glasses higher on her face.

"Okay, sir," she began. I knew she was serious as a frown returned her glasses to her nose. "This thing about 'writing poetry for the love of it' is great, sure—*but will it get me into grad school*? I have an average to consider ... "

I was unprepared for a question like that, although I did manage to say "yes" and to formulate a rationale that was reasonable enough to cause her glasses to rise again. More important was that it would happen again. And that I would be prepared when it did.

Ritz

I met Ritz in one of my senior English classes. She was an excellent student—in all subjects—and held a number of positions of leadership in the school. At the end of a class early in the term, I gave an assignment in which I asked the students to consider how the poem we had been studying "made them feel," noting that we would pick up the lesson from there next class. As the students left the classroom, Ritz came by to ask about the assignment.

"You meant 'what does the poem mean,' right?"

I explained that I hoped she might read the poem and take note of any feelings she had, and that my plan for asking was to see whether any of the feelings that she and the others noted could be located in the text. Although a little concerned that this approach might not result in finding out the "right answers," she seemed intrigued by the idea.

"No one ever asked me how *I felt* about a poem before," she said. It was a statement that surprised us both, I think, a little more that either of us thought we might have been, or should have been, perhaps.

In my memory, the lesson went well when the day came to have it, and the students found that their feelings—their responses—were valid when it came to interpreting the poem. After all, *their ideas did have reasonable sources in the text.* I also recall that a few students expressed surprise that their "feelings" could be "right" when it came to "analyzing," a term I came to understand as a catch-all description used by students to identify what happens in school, or at least,

secondary school English classes. And I recall as well that some students expressed concern about whether this would "count" on an exam. I saw this as a legitimate concern—exams are an enormous component of students' lives in secondary schools. But I didn't see that drawing on the students' experiences and understanding of the world, or, *taking them seriously for what they had to say* was somehow antithetical to doing well on an exam, or any less legitimate a concern for them—or me—to have about what might result from their school experience. Over time, the students began to trust what they saw as "creativity" at least to the extent that they seemed not to perceive a risk to the more mark-driven notions of success that seemed to govern their views of school learning. I was pleased enough with the developing character of our class to believe that original writing and response could summon and sustain a sense of authenticity in learning.

Introducing Computers—the promise and the keep

Early in the year, I set out to obtain computers for my classes. Like many, perhaps most, teachers of English who embrace some form of computer technology in their classes, I suspected that the ease with which one *could* revise using a word-processor would encourage revision in student writing. However, I wanted to extend word-processing activity so that interaction between students, writers and teachers would be emphasized beyond revision as an act of writing in school, or which would establish the activity of interacting with an audience—or more accurately a safe audience (Owen, 1993)—as a legitimate catalyst for revision. I developed a proposal, which the English Department submitted to the Board on September 10, 1986, and which resulted in the introduction of two computers into the writing program. The proposal which, at the time, was seen as needing to address issues of technology as much as issues of curriculum, was guided by, and

developed in accordance with Ontario Ministry of Education Policy and indicated that the machines were to be used by students to support

> ... creative use of computers by individuals: writing, composing, designing, analyzing and *other extensions of original thought*. (Policy/Program Memorandum 1982:47 [1981-82:31]) [emphasis added]

I was also guided by some Toronto Board of Education policy objectives of the day, which emphasized computer use as having to do with:

- education and, in particular, curriculum;
- equal opportunity of use; and,
- applications in classrooms within an integrative context across the curriculum (Learning With Computers: The Next Few Years),

although, for the purpose of conveying in the report the emphasis I wanted to place on the use of telecommunications, I rephrased the last objective to read:

> ... applications in classrooms within an integrative *(and interactive)* context across the curriculum.

Based upon the assumption that computer use must be integrated within the context of the existing English program, I emphasized the following objectives:

- to help students learn to use microcomputer technology for enhancing and extending the dynamic processes of learning and self-expression (sensing, creating, synthesizing, designing, analyzing, and expressing);

- to make the content, process, and pace of learning more adaptable to individual students' needs, and to help students develop the basic knowledge and skills necessary for formulating and expressing ideas through words, numbers, and symbols;

- to encourage the development of alternative delivery systems for education; and,

- to help students understand how microcomputer technology is used in everyday life and to foster their ability to use devices based on this technology.

No One Ever Asked Me ...

When the machines (two Commodore PETs, which were surplus to another school) arrived, they were placed on rolling carts so that they could be moved from room to room. I re-organized the program in my classes so that several groups could work concurrently on different projects, based on activity-based centres I'd seen operating in elementary schools. The word-processing "station" became an activity centre, and the students were invited to use the machines for their writing during class. Some students expressed concern that higher marks would go to those who took up the invitation, so we agreed that "the conventional instruments of writing were welcome in our class" and that no one would be penalized for using them.

In an assignment that came out of a discussion of writing in Timothy Findley's *The Wars*, students were asked to write at least two paragraphs describing a photograph they knew well. The photograph could be one that only they might know, or one in the public eye, but in either case, they were to begin an early paragraph with the words "Here is," and a subsequent paragraph with the words "There is." Ritz made her way to the computer and began writing.

Kindergarten

If you look closely, holding it up under the yellow lamp and bringing your face to its glossy surface, you can make out the blurred outlines of faint smudges. Fingerprints. No one has bothered to wipe them off;

they have interlocked, one on top of the other. Between the blurred spaces are faces—the biggest one is Mrs. Smith. The sea of small eyes and pug noses stare back; well, most of them. Some of the heads are not even directed at you, but instead, they glance out to the edges.

Here is little Johnny with his hair pointing in all compass directions. One strand of his tousled locks is jutting into a pony-tailed figure. Oblivious to nothing but the enticing lens, he smiles; one side of his mouth pulls back happily into his cheeks, while the other half remains shyly fixed. He is flanked by two girls whose rosy cheeks occupy the majority of their bright faces. All the tiny heads are full of toothy grins. All except one.

There is a red sweater at the very edge of the eager group. The sweater is the type that could only be worn with innocence—it is shabby but warm. If not for the awkwardness of the sweater on her skinny frame, you would have passed her by. She frowns proudly, refusing to submit to the camera's charm. Her hands are clasped on her lap and her mouth twitches defiantly at you. With a tilt of her head, she strengthens her gaze; she is looking at you and beyond. Her eyes command you to see. A frown is more than a hint of sadness. (Computers and Word Processing in the English Classroom, 1987, p.5)

I watched Ritz write this piece at the keyboard. As she composed it, I became aware of her keen eye, her power as a writer. The detail of her recollection, although I will call it a *reading*, of her photograph—the "fingerprints" and the rebellious red sweater at the very edge of the eager group—was thrilling to me. Her writing *did* "command me to see," and more than I had expected to.

I also noticed that decisions about writing were made—and re-made—while engaged in the process of composition. As Ritz typed her thoughts onto the screen, she would pause briefly now and then to return to a passage for a specific revision, and then continue with her writing. I was intrigued by this and saw it as a rather natural blending of editing or revision *within* composition—something that we teachers were actively trying to delineate and separate into "stages" of "the writing process."

Over the remainder of that year and the next, I came to see this act of revision within composition as a kind of "chording" of writing processes that students seemed to do on their own when writing at a word-processor. I didn't have a sense then of whether such a "chording" was "good" or "bad" for writing in school, or for the introduction of computers into a writing program, but I certainly noticed that students seemed to do it without questioning whether it was an appropriate activity during a "composition stage" of writing.

While students articulated a clear conception of word-processors as tools for editing and publishing, and felt that they would be good for revision, or a revision stage in their writing, most of them "chorded" while writing, and "tinkered" with the appearance and mechanics of their writing when they returned to prepare their work for presentation and marks rather than in the development of their ideas or a conception of a staged approach to a "writing process." This can been seen in the students' comments, all of which appeared in *Computers and Word Processing in the English Classroom* (Volume 1, Issue 1, April 14, 1987), a report documenting the introduction of computers into the English program at Riverdale:

> Having written a story on of these word-processing programs, I have come to the conclusion that this is very useful toy. I am not a very fast typist and I make quite a few mistakes when I write or type—and with a word-processing program, I can narrow down the number of mistakes that I make. This is extremely useful when it comes time to hand in an assignment that was due yesterday! Another pro that I have discovered is that students who work on the computer are usually either so determined or so frustrated that they seem to complete their assignment at one or more sitting. Well, I do know one thing and that is we're glad that our English teacher gave us the opportunity to work on word processing program! — Aniqa (p. 14)

Word processing is an advantage to typing since you can correct mistakes easily, fool around with the set-up, and make as many copies as you want. —Grace (p. 15)

What a FANTASTIC, TERRIFIC, WONDERFUL, MAGNIFICENT idea to use the computers in the English class!!! It is the greatest for processing future masterpieces in a professional looking way. What can I say? Computers are the best!!! —Sandra (p. 15)

A few of the students also saw some value in the use of the word-processors for their own writing and composition in addition to revision, including this sense of "chording," noted above:

I think that it's a great idea to use computer word processing for any form of writing, since it provides an efficient and neat way to compose. I find that I can think better when I'm on the computer; the ideas just roll into my mind. After I'm finished (or even half finished, I can save the text and retrieve it whenever I want. Another good thing about it is that I can change any errors without using liquid paper or rewrite the entire text over again. In addition to all those great applications, using word processing on the computer will also allow me to improve my typing skills! —John (p. 15)

Using the computer for English is an excellent idea for compositions and other means of writing. With this type of writing we as students as well as teachers can improve and learn to write stories, essays, poems, and even a book. When we write stories or essays and we make a mistake we do not have to rewrite the whole piece of work or throw it out. Using the computer we need not need the use of liquid paper or to throw out any paper. This is a very economical way to save paper and liquid paper also with this method we do not have to bruise the sides of our fingers. With just a tap of the keys we can accomplish a lot in our writing. —an interested student who would like to see more of the computer used for creative writing. (p. 17)

The use of a word processor seems too much time and trouble to bother with, but it really isn't. The quick speed and persistency aids the pace in writing. Aside from the continuous accuracy, its results are more than adequate.

What I like about it is the ability to make corrections without using a bottle of liquid paper, or scribbling lines on the paper. An advantage which impresses me is the many copies that it can produce by just the push of a button.

Stories can be stored on disks for future reference and, when needed, can be played back.

This was my first experience using the word processor to print my story. I found it quite an advantage, and hopefully will be using word processing in English in the future. —Ann Marie (p. 17)

Basically, in my opinion, I feel that the use of (the word-processor) is beneficial in the aspects of deleting, inserting, or simply correcting "misspelled" words. Initially what I had felt about computers is, "They are impossible!!," but at this point I realize the potential (they have) in helping to develop creative writing. I could actually see, in front of me, what has already been written down! Plus the fact that I don't own a computer at home has made me sit down and actually complete an assignment with plenty of time to spare. In conclusion, the pros for the use of (the word-processor) overshadows any of the cons and its use will be quite accepted by students who hate computers. (Plus it feels so professional!) —Ling (p. 14)

William addressed some concerns about the technology, and suggested that the type of equipment used in the class would affect *how students used* the word-processors. In particular, he saw a danger in the technological limitations of the Commodore PETs and felt that these limitations would discourage composition.

In my experiences with using computers for essay writing, I have discovered several benefits as well as several problems. Some benefits are that the final draft can be printed very quickly relative to writing or typing it; typing or spelling errors can be easily corrected, resulting in neater final drafts; writing can be formatted; and several copies can

be made. The problems which exist are that the system may crash and/or data may be lost if the wrong keys are pressed; if one decides to delete a section, then changes his/her mind, the data cannot be recovered whereas with pen and paper, all information can be recovered; one is also restricted on the amount of time one has to write an essay.

These problems can be resolved if better software is used (re: deletion and recovery of data, and safeguards against wrong keys being pressed) and if a computer can be accessed for longer periods of time. As it now stands, the computers in the English department are not suitable for composing essays; they should be used only for final draft if used at all. On the other hand, there are suitable programs and computers in the computer science department; these should be put to use during periods when there are no classes in the rooms. Computers can be used for composing essays; however, the programs must be more helpful to the writer than it hinders his writing. —William (p. 16)

Ritz's thoughts on her experience appear, at first, perhaps, to emphasize the technology as well. However, I believe they will reveal for the reader, as they did for me, her emerging sense of *being a writer*. To me, this is imbedded in her sense of *being a student*, which is also clear here, and a dissonance that appears when one—the "call" of her emerging writer's voice—is associated with the other—the standards expected of school life.

No green thoughts on screen save for the winking "READY" cursor which, when you shut your eyes, blinks even more rapidly in the focus of your mind. Time is slipping quietly away; but wait, a sudden idea springs forward! Fingers fly but are lost searching for keys and the sentences halt on the keyboards. Gradually, a rhythm is established and everything flows forward. Oh no! Incorrect grammar! No problem. Just direct the flashing cursor to that vile mistake to blast it off the screen; no sooner said than ... More harmony resides in the clan of words and peace is restored—momentarily. By reviewing the happy green bunch, it can be seen that something is amiss. There's no coherence. What will the teacher think! But another life is salvaged in a sensitive student as lines are rearranged with the clicks of several keys as order is swiftly attained. At last, all is finished and edited. Store. Nothing happens. The computer does not stir.

Blank screen. Where's the programmed essay? Shallow breathing
supports a weak heart. Memory. Letters file out in procession before a
dripping brow. Store. Then print. It works! —Ritz (p. 14)

The students' experiences and commentary gave shape to the plans for Riverdale's

program, which have been described, above. I knew that any notions of "success"

or "failure" would have to be understood in the context of issues of access and

equal opportunity of use, which were expressed in our program in the form of

restrictions on the location and number of machines available. While re-

organizing the program so that students who wanted to use the machines could

simply be invited to use them was partly helpful, it was clear that much more

thought and work was necessary if students were going to be able to use word-

processors as part of their regular program.

There were other issues that surfaced as well, revealing difficulties that had not

been anticipated. At Riverdale, for example, where convention dictated that

students write a common English exam in December, it was impossible to take the

time to introduce the project on the one hand, and be fair to legitimate student

concerns about content acquisition for the exam on the other. This fact alone

meant that a program like this one could not be introduced until the second term.

But there was another, more compelling problem that Ritz introduced me to when

she said "No one ever told me I could write before."

She was right—a frown *is* more than a hint of sadness.

Ritz borrowed *The SwiftCurrent Anthology* from me and took up an offer to make on-line participation in the program "count" as an independent study project in the second term. She composed her thoughts in a paper, which was posted on-line in *SwiftCurrent*, and presented at the *First International Conference on Telecommunications in Education* held in Jerusalem, in 1989.

In the paper, Ritz includes her audience—as closely as she can in words—in her own progression and development as a writer within a technological *milieu*. This is an important point to consider, in my view. Ritz's *discovery of her own voice as a writer came largely as a result of her on-line interactions within the community of writers available to her on SwiftCurrent.* An opportunity like this is not readily available to students and teachers in school.

Her sense of technology never strays far from the centrality of dialogue or the interactions she experienced on *SwiftCurrent*. While they were *sustained* by her ability to communicate electronically, the role and impact of these interactions on her emerging sense of being a writer came in response to the access she had to other writers, or, as she says, to the "humanity" rather than data that is "transferred through a medium of wires and polyethylene coats."

Computer Writing: Mind Over Machine

Like a wave escaping from the tugging hands of the moon and slipping through luminescent fingers the computer craze has calmed in its path to resemble an ever-present trickle. Incompatibility of systems, unemployment, nuclear war, acid rain...all join threads in minuscule microchips. Point to a screen for directions. Look to a keyboard for survival. Lose your children to video fantasies.

Technology scrapes the naked backs of our reposed conscience stirring a brew of emotions as scratch scars tingle pleasurably on exposed skin. Gasping we turn to acknowledge the past seduction and feel shame in our sensations. Technology. The love-child of our fertile minds.

In strolls the future writer; a toss of the head a twinkle of an eye and fingers callused no more from typewriter syndrome. The writer is ready to tackle society and its morals. And what better than to transpose the unmentionable through the controversial form of a computer. Humanity transferred through a medium of wires and polyethylene coats.

A past writer is locked in a square room with circles of thoughts and violent white paper. No company save the loud whispers from the hissing typewriter; the writer sits and listens to silence. Time jumps with every punched key and sleeps with the mechanical words. Solitary confinement. For fear of overload the mind must be drained to form tangible words; this is how a writer survives. But that was the past because as weak souls know their siblings writers know the computer-the vulnerable link which lends itself to be explored and traversed again and again. A familiar modem. Symbols of processed thoughts. Solitary no longer; confinement debatable.

SwiftCurrent, a computerized literary magazine flows into the stream of writing subconsciousness unnoticed until the waves accumulate and prepare for a sudden impact; the jolt has yet to be felt but like foxes waiting for prey the waves are lurking quietly. A group of persons are no longer chained to separate typewriters; instead they are linked into a network of computer systems. Discs of voices hushed and loud jumbled and concise course through electric blood. Communication beyond the square-box room. Comments from across the cold hard mountains warm up on a coated screen in a tiny house. Dreams creep along fibre optics and intelligent wires with alarming urgency racing to reach another dreamer before expediency grips. The collaboration of pictures, colours, moods-a mirage determined to prove its existence. Ideas that once crammed the expanding souls of the solitary writer now find refuge in a communal release. Everything is altered except the swirling images within the writer, which now escape to haunt another.

The basis for the formation of the *SwiftCurrent* magazine lies in the hope that writers will help writers. Submissions could only be forwarded by an acknowledged Canadian writer although anyone could comment on any submitted work. Through this method of providing computer access to personal works the writer has gained an audience before possible publication; thus allowing him to further

change or mend any weaknesses in the written piece through feedback from the audience of writers or subscribers to the magazine. The writer-audience relationship is very tenuous. Most writers mainly write for themselves to justify the pictures in their minds; however writers are also somewhat curious and insecure. They want to know how a piece of themselves their written ideas will fare in the hands of a demanding society. With the construction of *SwiftCurrent* a writer does not have to pull out his or her folder of work, rather he or she may just file everything on the computer and rest assured that someone somewhere will eventually read it. Hopefully whoever reads it will comment on the piece by sending "mail" through the computer.

Variety is an important aspect of the *SwiftCurrent* magazine. Topics range from poetry to fiction to commentaries. There are many different authors and poets and it can be seen that all have yet to achieve widespread public acclaim for their works. Like the Paris Circle of the 1920's these writers share a quiet anonymity for the time being while pooling views and expanding ideas. One day we may have a Canadian "Hemingway". Of course he or she may become so prominent that he or she will someday be the icon of literature.

Of all the different manners in which a person communicates in written form I find the form of poetry to travel the most concise and direct route to the ears of the heart. Poetry cannot be grammatically incorrect. Poetry cannot have incorrect punctuation. Grammar and punctuation are creations to enhance writing but are not necessary in the silent language of emotions. Poetry speaks close to the heart and thus close to rationale and reason, for it is the heart and soul that decides what the brain commands.

Delving into the area of poetry I happened across the work of Lionel Kearns (after several hints dropped about the man I decided to pursue them). It rarely occurs that I sense a familiarity in the way an author expresses himself or herself with that of my own manner of self-expression. With Lionel Kearns I would say to myself "yes I know how he feels I know what he's saying or wants to say!" His style is very nonchalant and he paints a very exact picture. Although he makes no conclusion that is "worldly-wise" the weight of his poems can be felt in the aftermath of lingering insistent image which in itself represents everything he wanted to say. Kearns gives each his poems a strong identity as if they were characters in a giant procession of a narrative play. Each poem has a certain attribute or distinct purpose that makes it almost human.

"Access" written by Kearns clearly illustrates the purpose behind poetry-reading for some people: access to a world they'd rather not exert themselves to see. Kearns depicts the laziness of humanity through his suggestion that every one would rather live via a character in an author's pen than be living as themselves: "with this poem you don't have to walk anymore. It promises to put everything within your range: enclosed passion exotic food the joy of being some where else..."

Another poem by Kearns is "Negative." Many poems fit into the "character sketch" of this piece. "The essence of this poem is absence" clearly illustrates the lack of life in some poems. "It is space awaiting occupation gross generalization without particulars..." depicts some poems as having no definite comment to make; instead it just sits and takes up space.

Kearns' style is straightforward and hauntingly vivid in its eccentricities of human attributes splashed onto a character called a poem. The poem is a person and you are the poem because you've stopped eating long enough to read it.

Access to the *SwiftCurrent* network enabled me to read submitted works such as those of Lionel Kearns, but more importantly I was given the opportunity to comment on the many written pieces. Camaraderie filled an awe-struck soul. No one was a "better" writer. Fame had yet to claim our humble hearts. Such a supportive environment breeds a continuity in writing. Eventually the continuity leads to a more refined style of writing that will hopefully attract an audience.

Technology will not hinder the progress of future writers. What it will do is allow writers to catch the illusive threads of time by lightening their workload with more efficient proofreading systems. It can be projected that someday a push of a button or two will assemble hundreds of writers through satellite. Instant workshops in five minutes. Imagine the efficiency and convenience of talking and having your spoken words displayed onto a screen-no more weary fingers, no more lower-back pain. But with voice discs, will the written language be neglected? The future remains to be experienced.

Literature will always remain the offspring of a writer. The process in which the offspring is brought into the world may differ in the future but the offspring cannot be denied its human roots.

Ritz Chow, Riverdale Collegiate Institute, June 3, 1987

In my introduction to Ritz's paper, I mentioned that the opportunity for interaction like this is not readily available to students and teachers in school. Subsequent exchanges revealed that this opportunity for interaction was *also not readily available to writers*. On June 20, 1987, Lionel Kearns responded to Ritz's paper in an electronic mail message he sent to me:

Title: [from Lionel Kearns Jun 20 1987] Thanks

for the piece by Ritz Chow. I enjoyed reading it very much. She seems to be a bright student responding to SC the way we all would like more folk to do it. Anyway, I will write her a little response. I hope you can get it to her.

Dear Ritz Chow,

Trevor Owen passed your essay on *SwiftCurrent* on to me. I enjoyed it very much. What you say about the possibilities of computers and on line transmission as a medium for literature makes a lot of sense and corresponds to my own experience. I'm glad that you and some of the other students at Riverdale are able to connect with us in this way. In this regard we are a tiny privileged minority who by luck, and also by having open attitudes to such things, are able to tune in on something that few people realize is happening. That is, the effect on literature of electronics and this kind of personal on-line communication is going to be profound. It is perhaps, like being around when the airplane was just being invented, and then being one of the first people to fly.

I'm glad that you got at a few of my poems, too. I try to make them as available as possible, though I can't stop myself fro m piling in the irony and exaggeration, but that is part of the fun. Are you a writer yourself? Do you have a computer of your own, or are you using the school's? Will you be back at Riverdale next year?

Anyway, write me a few more lines if you can get connected.

Best wishes,

Lionel Kearns

P.S. I find the current version of *SwiftCurrent* pretty stiff and awkward for getting around in and responding and corresponding with readers and other writers. Hopefully its newer incarnation will be a lot easier to use.

The Learner's Perspective

Taken together with the Monarch Park trial, the Riverdale trial taught me a good deal about what I might expect during the establishment of telecommunications-based interactions within writing programs in secondary schools.

First, I understood that things proceeded differently in classes in which students felt they controlled their interactions with others, and that they would likely be suspicious of initiatives to develop or enhance opportunities for this control if they were perceived to be inconsistent with their existing notions of school convention, what learning in school meant to them, and especially whether their work had value either because it was "the same" as other students might expect, or because it "counted" as part of their evaluation.

The students would associate this work with the work they were doing now and had done in the past, and they would call upon the teacher—me—to account for any differences they perceived between the activities I was proposing and what they saw as "normal."

When Ritz declared her surprise at being asked "how she felt" about a poem as part of her school work, and later on at the thought that she could write, her words revealed her assumption that responsibility lay elsewhere—"no one ever asked me how *I felt*..." or, "no one ever told me I could write..." she had said.

An understanding of these events can be framed rather nicely by descriptions in Willinsky's book, *The New Literacy*. Of particular interest here, I think, are Willinsky's descriptions of:

- the writing process
- orthodoxy
- accountability
- single standard
- self-motivation

Writing Process

I confess I find the use of our definite article in the same breath as words like "writing" and "process" to be objectionable, if not arrogant. As Willinsky points out—thankfully, I think—there *are* others, which may be usefully seen as beginning with a process of

> ...learning the letter shapes (that) eventually moves to mastering the parts of speech; it relegates spelling, grammar, and creative writing to different periods in the weekly timetable to keep students and teachers from getting confused about the content of the language arts. At given points, a class is set aside so that students might apply the different aspects of this knowledge in a composition to be handed in... (Willinsky, 1990, p. 31)

combined more recently with a

> ...writing period (that) has witnessed a move from direct instruction in the parts of speech of a paragraph or theme to collaborative conferencing over the writer's work and the management of cooperative editorial settings. (p. 30)

But I am happy to accept for my purposes here a common sense of *a* writing process, emerging out of several, that would be generally familiar to most teachers of writing in Canada. I would characterize such a process as based on the idea that students can involve themselves actively in writing by identifying and participating in several distinct stages of writing activity, and that these stages are tied together by a further notion that "learning to write might be, in part, a process of learning from oneself" (p. 35).

This writing process, then,

> ...might be said to have evolved out of the relatively harmless introduction of a 'pre-writing' stage to the...composition class...(allowing) for a warm-up exercise, which built up a little momentum and a few leads for the writing to follow. (p. 35)

Drawing on Alan Bullock and James Britton's ideas in the *Bullock Report*, which underscores the importance of linking a strong sense of purpose to writing activity, Willinsky goes on to suggest that *intentionality* is part of what "learning from oneself" means, and that what is sustained by "pre-writing" activities is, in effect, the involvement of writer/learners in creating their own intentions. A developing sense of "writing process," then, nurtured by staging pre- and freewriting activities into lessons, provided the ground for "something of a three-stage method, with classes set aside for pre-writing activity, for drafting and drafting, and for sharing and editing the work" (p. 38).

The idea that "...writing had to come from something, had to be worked, and had to be going somewhere..." (p.38) provides the common "sense" of a writing process that I am looking for here. Whether it is expressed in the form of classroom writing "folders" that contain pockets for what I will describe generally here as

"rough work," "works in progress," and "finished pieces," or notions of "conception," "incubation," and "production" (Britton *et al.*, 1975, in Willinsky, p. 39), a sequencing of activities—embellished, perhaps, with various approaches to "conferences" with teachers and other students—will be familiar to most teachers of writing in Canada as the direction to the "somewhere" in which writing is going.

Orthodoxy & Accountability

What appears to me as the "objectionable use" of our definite article can also be seen as a progression from innovation to "the new orthodoxy" of "compulsory revision" and an "over-processing of writing that might have been well enough left alone" (p. 39). In what he describes as the "toll" of accountability "on the nature of teaching and the work in the classroom," Willinsky also sees a consequence to pressure on schools and boards of education to provide measurable results in the form of "packaged kits and programmed learning materials," shifting "teachers into the position of managers or technicians" (p. 18).

A Single Standard & Self-motivation

In his study of student writers in WIER, Beckstead also noted how compelling the idea of "revision" was in his review of the research on the use of computers in writing classrooms.

> Studies have attempted to illustrate its importance and efficacy (of computer use for writing) in a variety of ways including the fostering of collaborative writing (e.g., Levin & Boruta, 1983; Dickenson 1986), enhancing the work of average and low achieving pupils (Peacock, 1988), and increased revision (Dalton and Hannafin, 1987). Skeptics speak of superficial revising (Gerrard, 1989) and say there is no clear improvement in the quality of writing (Bridwell, Sirc & Brooke, 1985). With this initial search of the literature, I questioned how the researchers perceived the use of the computer in the writing context.

It seemed to me that they viewed the computer as a tool for the simple manipulation and management of text. In doing so, the researchers did not consider the possibilities of CMC in the writing classroom.

Hawisher (1988) provides a more methodical approach to an overview of the research concerning computers and composition. She analyzed 42 studies that, as a starting point, considered the computer as a tool for writing. These researchers perceived the computer in this context as a word processor. This perception is seen in the considerations or focuses of the studies, for example, use of the spell checker (Kurth, 1987), links between typing speed and quality of writing (Wetzel, 1985), attitudes toward word processing (Selfe, 1985) and, revisions among professional writers and students (Lutz, 1983, 1987). (Beckstead, 1992, pp. 9 - 10)

Appropriately, Beckstead focused instead on what the students perceived:

Students saw the conference as a place to comment on others' writing and offer suggestions for revision, but what they liked most was the fact that they did not have to revise their work if they felt it wasn't necessary. There is an inherent choice and space in the conference forum (in WIER) and they saw the choice of rejecting suggestions for revision as a most important feature of the program. (p. 65)

Ritz's emergence as a writer challenged her to consider what Willinsky describes as her own "natural competence, against traditional notions of correctness and a single standard" (p. 11). Throughout that spring and summer, Ritz would find in her continued participation on *SwiftCurrent* what would become normal in the school lives of the students that Beckstead worked with some years later in WIER—self-motivated learners, who prospered when furnished with "new links to the world" (Illich, 1970, in Willinsky, p. 23) and the opportunity to love the search.

Time Passes

As Ritz continued to develop her writing and her sense of being a writer in the context of *SwiftCurrent* that spring, several initiatives faded and emerged.

Works In Progress Fails

First, the *Works In Progress* project failed for the third time, and for what I saw as the same reason as well—want of a host. I had tried to mount the program in a variety of ways that would connect it to organizations that I saw as having a natural interest in the idea, and I was puzzled to see it fail on the same, essentially technological ground each time. *SwiftCurrent* had declined, seeing the project as beyond the scope of what it wanted to provide for writers and achieve for writing in Canada. As a Master's thesis or project at OISE, issues concerning on-line access and computer accounts for students emerged. There were also questions about the extent to which the program could be supported in the context of a Master's program at all, and if so, when. In my own Board of Education, all roads inevitably lead away from writing and language and toward the Computer Studies department which, correctly, in my view, declined to support it on the grounds that it was—and *should be seen* and supported as—a writing and language project rather than a technological one.

Access to Technology

On April 17, 1987, I made several recommendations that were adopted by Riverdale and submitted to the Board in *Computers and Word-Processing in the English Classroom*, a report that documented the writing activities in which Ritz and others were involved. In keeping with the aims and objectives of the September 10, 1986 report that "computer use must be integrated within the context of the

existing English program,"(see Chapter 3 pp. 19-20) this report included recommendations that:

- Riverdale Collegiate Institute continue to support the introduction of computers and word processing in the English classroom

- The program be considered a thrust for (Riverdale's) "Curriculum Implementation Plan"

- The school acquire more computers for student use within the English program

- At least one English class be housed in the Computer Room effective September 1987

- Additional English classes be scheduled in the Computer Room by arrangement, where possible (p. 3)

Accordingly, the school timetabled one of my English classes into the computer lab on a full-time basis for the following September, and two senior level writing classes into the classrooms equipped with the word-processing "stations." The initiative, which was seen as a pilot project at Riverdale, achieved two beneficial results:

- isolating the program would not threaten established school conventions

- a framework for development would be established

Thinking Big, Acting Small

The difficulties associated with establishing *Works In Progress,* taken together with the need to concentrate on classroom experience, caused me to re-think the project. I began to see that "thinking big" need not also mean "acting big," at least not at the outset. I shifted my efforts away from an attempt to establish a technological "home" for *Works In Progress* in favour of finding an interested writer who would

work with us, using whatever technology we had available in the school and that the writer had in his or her office. I thought that if my students could connect directly to the writer and that files of text could be sent and received between our respective computer systems, then a project that focused *on the students' writing* could be established, managed and maintained in a manner similar to the interactions I had seen evolving on *SwiftCurrent*.

Re-thinking the project in this way also resolved the problem of trying to find or develop a computer system to sustain it which, as events had revealed, was inhibiting the existence of the program.

Artist in the Schools

I contacted Kathryn Brown, the Toronto Board's *Arts Liaison Officer*, to see if she would support a project in which a writer would work with my class electronically via telecommunications. She tells me now that I "really had to work" on her to get her to consider it. While this is not my recollection, she did agree to support an application to the Ontario Arts Council (OAC) under the auspices of their *Creative Artists In Schools* (CAIS) program. CAIS projects operate under guidelines that establish both a standard *per diem* rate for artists' fees as well as an agreement to share costs between the OAC, the school, and the school board. In the Toronto Board, all applications of this kind are developed through the *Arts Liaison Officer*, and Brown agreed to fund the school board share through her office, if the application was successful.

It is important to note here that CAIS sees its mandate as *serving the needs of artists* more than schools. While proposals developed under this program do involve schools, *they are seen as proposals from artists*. Because of this emphasis it

was important that any interested writer be active in the development of the project, from the proposal stage on.

Swift Recurrent

Although *SwiftCurrent* had not wanted to host a program for students, it was the one place where I knew I could find a coterie of potential candidates for the project—writers who were using computers for their own writing, and who were able to use telecommunications technology. In late April or early May, 1987, I posted the following message on-line in *SwiftCurrent* under the Riverdale school ID:

> Hello.
>
> Beginning in September 1987, Riverdale will permanently house at least one English class in the ICON computer facility. We would be interested in talking to a SwiftCurrent author about creating an Ontario Arts Council/Toronto Board Artist In The School project about word processing, telecommunications, and the writing process.
>
> If you are interesting in discussing this, please leave us a note here.
>
> Thanks.

I received five responses fairly quickly. Three of them were particularly interesting because of issues that the writers raised. I entered into discussions with two writers: one from Toronto, and the other whose location introduced a new idea into the project—distance. Lionel Kearn's response follows:

> Title: [from Lionel Kearns May 14 1987] Interested
>
> I am interested in your proposition, depending upon the terms and conditions. Please give me some more details about the situation and your ideas about what might happen, and I will respond with some ideas of my own. Here are some questions: Is the class in the ICON lab

a creative writing class, a regular English class, or a regular writing class? Is there only one class using the lab in this way? How big is the lab? For example, do you have one machine for each student or do they have to share? Are the students already familiar with the machines, or does one have to start from scratch? Can they type? Does the lab already have some nifty interactive software, or at least reasonable word processors? How about on-line spelling checker, word counter, thesaurus, etc. Are you thinking about a full term or semester residency, or a week, or do you have in mind an on-line only presence. That is, I could conduct the course from here (Vancouver) given the right support (and I don't mean through the medium of SwiftCurrent, which is not a very compatible system, as you probably know. In any case, there are many possibilities, and I am interested in the whole area of computer-assisted creation. Besides my background in lit and creative writing (20 yrs in English Dept SFU) (Currently teaching with CW dept at UBC, but free in the fall), have extensive experience with word-processing, networking and telecommunication.... And have a squint at my sc poems.

Yours etc.

Lionel Kearns

A Collaborative Environment

The next months were exhilarating. Lionel and I began exchanging ideas via electronic mail on *SwiftCurrent*, setting out our ideas and aspirations for a writing project. Our on-line exchanges explored ideas ranging from the establishment and availability of collaborative writing environments on computer networks to our common interests in blending communications technologies with opportunities for original writing and interaction in school. Gerri Sinclair, who was already very active in the educational application of telecommunications at Simon Fraser, also joined in to offer her encouragement and counsel on-line.

Lionel and I arrived fairly quickly at some common understandings of what we were after, which I characterized initially as an "electronic presence," and what was likely to be available to us through organizations like the Canada Council, Ontario

Arts Council and so on. By the end of June, 1987, we had developed a plan for a project in which Lionel would:

- Meet the students and work with them in their regular setting as a writer in (physical) residence; and,

- Work with a number of classes before concentrating on the "electronic presence." (On-line correspondence to Lionel, June 1987)

It was intriguing to me to see how the introduction of an idea like "electronic presence" began to make it necessary to distinguish the face-to-face portion of the project as a "writer in *physical* residence" as well.

> I could spend a bit of time with your students at Riverdale...and then we could, as you suggest, continue the relationship over the wire through (SwiftCurrent) or some other medium. In any case, I welcome my connection with you and Riverdale and hope we can get something interesting going. When the new version of SwiftCurrent is running, which should be fairy soon, there will be many ways of easy writer/reader interaction, and I would think these would be acceptable for electroliterary enthusiasts like you, your students, and me. (On-line correspondence from Lionel, June 24, 1987)

By the end of July, we had decided to attempt a proposal to the OAC for funding under the CAIS program. After a holiday period, we resumed our activity in late August and prepared a final proposal, which was submitted to the CAIS program on September 29, 1987. (See Appendix 4)

A good deal has been written, presented and debated about CMC as a "collaborative medium," (e.g., Harasim, Levinson, Feenberg, Kaye, etc.) but for me there is no question that the most compelling evidence of this is *experience.*

For my part, the on-line convergence of Lionel Kearns, Gerri Sinclair, and myself demonstrated that the value of interaction as I had hoped to realize it in *Works In Progress* was not only possible and desirable, it was *better, fuller as a consequence of the collaboration.*

My own notions of *Works In Progress* as a "student writers' database" had developed from the nature of interaction I had seen taking place between writers on *SwiftCurrent,* and generated an understanding of how the relationships sustained between participants in the on-line medium could be located in my own experiences with students in the writing classroom. It established that "a new set of social relationships for the classroom, between teacher and pupil and between pupil and pupil" (Doughty, 1974 in Willinsky, p. 11) could mean "radically new lessons on...students' natural competence, against traditional notions of correctness and a single standard," (p. 11) which could—and likely would—be explored in a medium that had "the peculiar ability to recall and inspect (the) entire past" of a group through an "exchange of written texts." (Feenberg, 1989, p. 25)

Lionel and Gerri

But meeting my own dreams was just part of the value of my collaboration with Lionel and Gerri. In the effort to create the CAIS proposal, Lionel *reflected what they saw as well,* each drawing on their own experiences and understanding to

form something new. Lionel and Gerri, for instance, brought their work and experience in the educational application of on-line communication to the discussion. Where my notions had been shaped by *SwiftCurrent*, theirs could be found in programs like the *Ask-An-Expert* conferences under way on *Xchange*, the on-line network of the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University. What Lionel saw initially as an "electronic poet in residence," I saw as a "writer in electronic residence" based on the notion that it was the residency, rather than the writer, that was electronic.

The idea of the "electronic residency" was rooted in the nature of interaction as I had seen it on *SwiftCurrent* rather more than in an embrace of the technology that sustained it. In my mind, this distinguished the notion of an "electronic residency" from an "ask-an-expert" model, which I saw as an imaginative use of what was essentially a technological notion—that distance and time could be overcome by technology to link people who might not otherwise have the capability to address one another because of the things that separate them, which could as easily be a matter of constituency as geography. I will explore the distinction between the "electronic residency" and the "ask-an-expert" model in more detail in Chapter 5.

There was some wonderful work under way in the *Ask-An-Expert* conferences, which offered working examples of what could be done—and built upon—by students and others on-line, especially insofar as they underscored the importance of effective and involved on-line moderation (See Chapter 1, p. 11).

Lionel and Gerri guided my understanding of what might be possible to accomplish—something I had not been able to do on my own in the three or so years before then. Our collaboration, then, had taken me full circle. I had begun

with visions of students interacting on-line and been diverted, in a sense, by the technological difficulties involved in such an effort. I had re-framed my notions in response to these difficulties and concentrated again on the classroom by seeking a writer who was willing to work with me there, on-line and off. That the result was quickly reincarnating itself into a well-developed *Works In Progress* was astonishing to me.

As our ideas flourished on-line, Lionel and Gerri also saw possibilities for using the project as a pilot to develop a more broadly-based multi-media program. Their focus shifted from the idea of a text-based "electronic residency" to a concept in which a writer could become electronically involved in the entire school! They called their energetic idea "The Electronic Poet in the Schools" and saw it as having two distinct parts:

> The first would be a real-time presentation and exchange between the audience, assembled for the event at the host site (a room or hall in Riverdale), and the poet, at his remote site (i.e. my study in Vancouver). The two sites would be linked by two telephone connections which would carry (a) a regular voice link, and slow scan video transmission, and (b) a computer link. There would be two large monitors or screens at the host site, one for computer-generated text and the other for the slow scan (still) images. A more elaborate variation of this scheme would be to have more than one host site. In any case, I would be talking to the audience over the voice link, perhaps introducing my poems, reciting them and answering questions about them, while at the same time shots of me or my visual poems would be coming in on one monitor, and the text of my poems would be displayed on the other monitor. There would be the possibility of some kind of interactivity, as images, voice and computer text could be sent back the other way to me. In a sense it would be an ordinary reading conducted from a remote location. It would have a certain amount of novelty value, and would provide first hand experience with some of the technology that has just become available. Corporations are doing this kind of thing now, so

why not artists and educators? I am sure the press and the public media would pick up on the event and give it a bit of publicity.

In any case, the computer text of the real-time presentation could be saved either right at your site, where it could be printed off as discussed using the hard copy, or it could be put into an electronic conference and used in the second part of the project which is more down the lines we had discussed before. It would be carried out asynchronously, as they say, which means not in real-time, and would involve the use of an electronic conferencing system for ongoing discussions of various works, including my own and that of the students. I would moderate this conference and inject little morsels of literary and artistic wisdom and insight, and be provocative enough to get the students talking to each other. The students could come into the discussions under their own or assumed identities. (To make it more interesting, participants could be from various groups (i.e. classes or schools) so that their on-line encounters would be essentially different from their in-class activities. Ideally they should be able to sign on privately and in their own time, rather than just during class time. (On-line correspondence from Lionel Kearns and Gerri Sinclair, Sept. 17, 1987)

We did not develop this project, but it did serve as the first of many signs to come that the program would succeed so long as *people could see something for themselves within it.* "We have to be sure," Lionel predicted, "that it all remains fun rather than turning into a terrible grind."

Success

On December 2, 1987, the Ontario Arts Council approved the project under the CAIS program (correspondence from OAC, p.1). As of this writing, WIER has just completed it sixth year of operation. The first three, which trace the development of the program, are profiled in Chapter Four.

Chapter 4

Creating WIER

9752. It
Rc   02:28 Tue Apr 5/88 (revised) 54 lines

"To suggest is to create. To name is to destroy."
—Lionel Kearns quoting someone else

   did you know
it takes only 10 minutes on good days

that is
when the child is feeling
particularly trusting &
doesn't bite his or her lips
stubbornly
when there is no need for chocolate promises
   or movie passes

but then
it also depends on you...

if you've had one too many
   & time is your friend & you'd rather go the distance

or perhaps your big hands
  fumble on tiny clasps & zippers
   ...can't rip the damn thing off—how
  would you explain...
  so you
  smooth your affection over chubby arms
  smile
  say "let's play make-believe"
  (2 minutes if it's fun)

finally you have
a naked body on a bed or a sofa or the broadloom

it's your turn
to make it happen

if it doesn't come
   it may take a minute or two
   and you're in overtime
but it was worth it 'cause the air is heaving

your blood pierces pale skin
your ears club rising whimpers
your eyes are gods & sweep the ceiling

"beautiful" a voice thunders

best part is
that it continues even after
the child is home

on average on good days on
top it takes 10 minutes

(*what* magazine, May/June 1988, No. 16, p. 1)

The first project, ELECTRO-POETS, was undertaken as a CAIS project with Lionel Kearns between January and May, 1988. Initially, ELECTRO-POETS involved my own class from Riverdale, but we were soon joined by teacher Marion Poggemiller and her class from Cariboo Hill Secondary School in B.C.

Lionel came to the school for a week's "physical residency" before returning to Vancouver and continuing the program as a writer in electronic residence. Gerri arranged for the program to be hosted by the Faculty of Education at SFU, and created the on-line conference on SFU's FORUM system (see Chapters 2 and 5 for more detail about this conferencing system.) Lionel was able to undertake the necessary managerial responsibilities associated with conference moderation (adding/deleting user IDs, etc.) under his FORUM account, and on Tuesday February 9, 1988, he created the first "discussion" in ELECTRO-POETS.

In my classroom at Riverdale, the grade ten class that was housed in the computer lab set out to incorporate the on-line experience into its daily classroom program and, over the course of the project, the students wrote their way through some two hundred pages of original text and commentary.

There were many surprises in store for us all throughout this experience. One of the more powerful ones came in the form of the poem *It*, above. Clearly a powerful piece, *It* called attention to a number of questions. Were pieces like this acceptable for schools? Was it necessary to control what was posted on-line, and if so, who would decide?

The discussion that followed answered these questions as strongly as it had presented its picture of child abuse. The references to odd characters refer to transmission difficulties, which have not been reproduced here:

9752/1. Lionel Kearns   02:13 Mon Mar 21/88   5 lines

Well, ok, rc. You have given us something to consider here, with your suggestiveness and your irony. A quick question, though. What is that i at the end of the first line? Can't quite figure that one. LK

9752/2. Trevor Owen   08:20 Fri Apr 1/88   12 lines

There's a progression in this piece that comes from the "nesting" of lines, which takes you from "here" to "there". I think this form is what makes the 'horrible' here possible, because it lets you stick your toe in cold water & make the unfamiliar just familiar enough to go a little further, before you know you're in too deep or, at least, deeper than you might have wanted to go. While you bring us back with this form too, (thank you) we are a little changed, which is a good thing to have done to us.

Those "i"s in these Rc poems are on-line troubles, I think. Maybe noise on an acoustic coupler? Datapac troubles? (I used to get them on SwiftCurrent). TO

9752/3. Jack Koisumi   11:45 Tue Apr 5/88   6 lines

I have been thinking about this poem for weeks. It is obviously about child molesting, but I can't figure out what you are saying about it? There seems to be no criticism of the act even by implication? I would like to know what your intention was in writing this poem?

9752/4. Jack Koisumi   11:47 Tue Apr 5/88   1 line

Are you a child molester?

9752/5. Rc   19:33 Sun Apr 10/88   16 lines

Hello Jack Koisumi: I am not a child molester. If I were, I do not believe I would write about it unless I felt no shame in my actions. The intention behind "It" was to disturb the reader. I hope it did not amuse anyone. This poem makes no judgment on child molesting(at least explicitly). It is merely a painting. You decide how YOU feel about it. What I would like to add is that it is simple to condemn child molesting. It is difficult to condemn the child molester. If a child trusted you, would he or she not trust your actions as well? Thanks for your reply. I hope I have cleared some things up for you.

9752/6. Lionel Kearns   00:43 Fri May 6/88   9 lines

What is a poem for? To give you a bit of a jolt. To hang around in your head and make you think about things you would not normally think about. To force you to consider the world or life in a new way. To re evaluated what is perhaps hidden under the old clichés. I think this poem makes it on all these grounds. A poet has to have courage, has to put his or her words at risk. This kind of poem is worth it. LK

9752/7. Col   08:02 Tue May 24/88   62 lines

Mother, Stay Home

She sat on her bed

Hating herself as tears rushed out from her blue-green eyes
Looking around the room,

She observed how perfect it looked -How perfect her home
looked to the outside world

Remembering the times when she was younger and would go
outside in the backyard and sit near the swimming pool with
her parents sipping ice-cold lemonade and noticing an
occasional puff of white cloud while looking up at the pale blue
sky -the happy times

But then Mother - her sudden illness causing her to be in and
out of the hospital

Away from home - which isn't safe when she's not there

And father -coming into her room those nights Like tonight She
loathed the sight of him

She had to do something.

But what?

Her mother would believe her...

Right?

In Rc's poem in discussion '9752' I agree with her reply to your
response, Jack. If you are a child molester you would have to be
bold to want to reveal to everyone your hidden identity. In my
poem "Mother Stay Home", it deals basically with the same
thing. Now think about it Jack, if someone had incest going on
in their family, don't you think that they would be a bit scared to
even touch on that topic? That's why I feel that you either think
that you're some great critic or you are just not taking this
'Simon Fraser' project seriously. Jack, why do you insist on
putting down peoples poems or criticizing them in the most

cruel way? "Are you a child molester?" Yah, right. For example, the WHIZ KID wrote a poem in discussion '9640' describing HIS personal feeling of Riverdale C.I. I stress the word 'his' because maybe I see Riverdale in a different perspective and I've noticed that you've already drawn your conclusion on Riverdale and its students so I'll leave you with that one. You can't make people write what you want them to. You said to the WHIZ KID that he should only write poems that are important. Jack, something that is important to you may not be important to someone else and vise versa. How do you know if the WHIZ KID's poem was important to HIM? What kind of world would this be if everyone thought the same way? Think about it Jack.

Col.

9752/8. Rc   09:06 Wed May 25/88   34 lines

Col: Thank you for the reinforcement. I admit that when I first read Jack's question ("Are you a child molester?"), I was taken aback. At first I was indignant. But then I realized that, depending on one's tone and intents, the question could be a very valid one. I am happy to say I am not a child molester. I am even happier to say that I realize I have the potential to molest. No, I am not a monster with a clean grin. What I mean is that we all have the potential to act in endless ways. The attitudes we CHOOSE to keep or discard is what makes us distinctly human. I see the act of child molesting and CHOOSE not to perform it. It exists (child molesting), but I will be on the look-out for its deep ditch.

When it comes to child abuse, I am quite violent (no pun intended). Vulnerability is dangerous, not only to the one who possesses it, but also to the one who sees it.

The media is a great perpetuator of sex. Children are exposed to sex in all its stages and forms. Some adults claim that a child seduced him or her. Possibly. But aren't the children just mimicking what they see? Do the children realize to the full extent of what they are initiating? I believe not. And here, I believe the responsibility lies with the adult. With the benefits of adulthood (driving, voting, drinking, experience, etc.), comes the responsibility. The adult should prevent child abuse. It is sad that we must teach our children to say no. I feel there is something very wrong about a child TELLING an adult not to molest him or her.

I'm glad you wrote about it in your poem, Col. I think that if we wrote or talked more of "taboo acts" in a NEGATIVE way, we may avoid performing them. Keep writing and thinking!

Rc

Neither Lionel nor I expected such a response from the students—and certainly not the *creation of a new poem as part of the commentary* or response that we saw in Col's "Mother Stay Home." I had expected the students to focus in on the work, yes, but the level and tone of interest and debate fascinated me. First, there were the teacher/writer responses:

Well, ok, rc. You have given us something to consider here, with your suggestiveness and your irony. (Kearns)

and

There's a progression in this piece that comes from the "nesting" of lines, which takes you from "here" to "there". I think this form is what makes the 'horrible' here possible, because it lets you stick your toe in cold water & make the unfamiliar just familiar enough to go a little further, before you know you're in too deep or, at least, deeper than you might have wanted to go. While you bring us back with this form too, (thank you) we are a little changed, which is a good thing to have done to us. (Owen)

While there was an attempt to convey how seriously we wanted take the work, it was really Jack's response that established the level of investment students could—and would—make in their own involvement on-line:

I have been thinking about this poem for weeks. It is obviously about child molesting, but I can't figure out what you are saying

about it? There seems to be no criticism of the act even by implication? I would like to know what your intention was in writing this poem?

That Jack was clearly lying (the poem had been posted for just a few days, not the "weeks" that he claimed to have been thinking about it) didn't detract from the value of his queries. The students, who had assumed that *It*'s author must be male, and who saw the piece as a confession, began to think critically—something Jack revealed even more with his next, quite provocative query to the author, "Rc"

Are you a child molester?

"Rc's" response caught them by surprise:

Hello Jack Koisumi:

I am not a child molester. If I were, I do not believe I would write about it unless I felt no shame in my actions. The intention behind "It" was to disturb the reader. I hope it did not amuse anyone. This poem makes no judgment on child molesting (at least explicitly). It is merely a painting. You decide how YOU feel about it. What I would like to add is that it is simple to condemn child molesting. It is difficult to condemn the child molester. If a child trusted you, would he or she not trust your actions as well? Thanks for your reply. I hope I have cleared some things up for you.

My students had "met" Jack on-line before in a fairly nasty exchange with a student, "WHIZ KID," whom we knew to be from Riverdale because of the subject of his poem, "MUSIC:"

9640. MUSIC
WHIZ KID   06:53 Sat Mar 19/88 (revised) 43 lines

VOICES AND SOUNDS OF RIVERDALE

THERE WE SIT IN THE CLASS
NOT A SOUND TO BE HEARD.
SUDDENLY!!!
CLICK!!! BRRRRR-RING!!!
OUR SWEET SILENCE
IS BRO--KEN.

GRADUALLY THOSE VOICES AND SOUNDS RETURN,
THOSE SOUNDS OF FROLIC AND LAUGHTER,
THOSE VOICES PROJECTING NOT ONLY
WORDS OF WISDOM,
BUT MOUTH-FULLS OF GOSSIP.

HERE WE ARE INTRIGUED BY WHAT OUR EARS ARE SUBJECTED TO LISTEN
TO.

WE CAN LISTEN TO..... GIRLS WHISPERING ABOUT HANDSOME GUYS
AND DESPISING UGLY NERDS
OR BOYS PRAISING GORGEOUS GIRLS
AND, WELL.... WE'LL LEAVE IT AT THAT.

WE CAN LISTEN TO..... PEOPLE GOSSIPING ABOUT MARKS
OR WORDS OF WISDOM FROM ONE TO ANOTHER.

THOUGH SOME ARE GOOD AND SOME ARE BAD
THEY ARE THE VOICES AND SOUNDS
MUSIC
OF RIVERDALE.

9640/1. Jack Koisumi   10:58 Fri Mar 11/88   15 lines

Ho Hum. Sounds like you dudes in the East are really into
boredom. TEll US SOMMMTHIN INNARRESSONN, OK!

A VISION OF RIVERDALE

I see those rows of zombies each one like the others their mouths set in
identical smiles, their eyeballs are eight-balls. All the thoughts in their
heavy heads are mumbling the self same formula.

                        Jack Koizumi, Burnaby

Jack's response to MUSIC incensed my class and ignited quite a debate about writing and purpose. Jack was also invited to send in some work of his own work—and to look more critically at his own responses (please see Appendix 5 for Jack's poem *The Anonymous Canadian* and the discussion it evoked):

9640/2. Lionel Kearns   22:40 Sat Mar 12/88   22 lines

> This is a response to the poem by whiz-kid and to the poem
> response by Jack Koisumi. First I should defend Riverdale. I
> certainly didn't encounter any zombies there myself. In fact I found
> it to be a very wide awake place. I am wondering about what exactly
> in the poem gave you that impression. Let's see. Perhaps there is
> not enough concrete sensuous detail in the poem to give us a
> picture of the actuality of Riverdale. In a way that poem could be
> talking about anywhere and that means nowhere. We need
> distinctiveness, images that we will never forget. Probably the first
> thing to do on a revision is to knock out a few of those clichés:
> handsome guys, nerds, gorgeous girls, etc. And then start
> substituting hard images for the discursive passages. By discursive I
> mean where you are discussing rather than presenting. Anyway,
> give it a try. AS for your poem, Jack, the best part is "eyeballs like
> eight balls". Put some more of that kind of thing in and you will
> have an interesting piece. But do thoughts mumble? Better tighten
> that one up. LK

9640/3. Trevor Owen   17:43 Sun Mar 13/88   11 lines

> This is a response to 9640/1. by Jack Koisumi: First, I am pleased to
> see others participating in the conference & hope we shall soon
> see some of your work too. Second, I think LK's remarks are well
> taken. It may interest you to know that two classes wrote pieces
> like this for a vice-principal who was transferred elsewhere.
> Students were asked first to listen to the school for a few minutes
> & record what they heard, then to offer up the "recording" in
> some way. A kind of parting gift. Perhaps, as LK suggests, this
> could be "anywhere", but it wasn't. For those few minutes, it was
> a hallway heard from a classroom here. TO

Jack revealed that he had his reasons and, while he expressed concern for those who may be offended, stood his ground:

9640/4. Jack Koisumi   11:10 Wed Mar 16/88   9 lines

> Sorry, didn't mean to upset anyone. All I was suggesting was that
> poetry should be serious, or at least focus on serious matters. I think
> best thing that anyone said to me about writing poetry was this. (It was
> one of my teachers) Write about what is important. there are plenty of
> other people who will write about what is trivial." I think that was
> good advice.

It was in this context of knowing Jack that my students pursued their response to

"Rc's" *It* as well as to Jack himself. Col's poem in 9752/7, above, was posted on-line

as much to Jack as in response to the issues raised by *It* itself. I was thrilled by these

exchanges and the debates they fostered in my classroom. And I was also thrilled by

the dynamism of the student exchanges, as Kearns revealed when he returned to

the discussion of *It* a few weeks later:

> What is a poem for? To give you a bit of a jolt. To hang around
> in your head and make you think about things you would not
> normally think about. To force you to consider the world or life
> in a new way. To re evaluate what is perhaps hidden under the
> old clichés. I think this poem makes it on all these grounds. A
> poet has to have courage, has to put his or her words at risk.
> This kind of poem is worth it. LK

"Here" is not "There"

The introduction of the Cariboo Hill class into our on-line program yielded many

unexpected pleasures, such as this poem by MK.

> I stood on the high rocky cliff
> And I peered into the distance.
> I saw nothing below me but identical jutting rocks that appeared
> small while I stood majestic.
> A light cool rush of air caressed my face.

Then a stronger, more powerful wind encircled my body and slowly lifted me into the air.

I soared higher and then I looked down to see the small jutting rocks which now appeared to be no more than a mere relief map.

Above me the sky seemed so close, I thought I could touch it.

The light baby blue of it flowed easily into the brighter more vibrant violet and orange of the setting western sky.

I gazed at the blazing hot sun for a moment absorbing its golden radiance.

When I turned away I saw black spots when I blinked my eyes.

Soon I noticed the crisp wind was cooling my hot body.

A continuous rush of air flowed over and around me.

It stung my eyes making them water.

My hair flapped carelessly over my shoulders, tickling them gently.

I licked my lips and the wetness soothed their dry chapped state.

I felt so free and light, like nothing could ever stop me.

I heard the shrill cries of the seagulls flying below me.

They flapped their feathery wings while my fleshy arms remained comfortably stretched out as my body formed a T.

Ahead I saw a puffy white cloud that seemed to get nearer every second.

I closed my eyes as I entered the billowy fog.

Inside I opened my eyes slowly to find myself lost in an all-white world.

Since the sun did not shine in there it began to cool down.

I didn't get very cold because I was out of the opaque cloud the next second.

My eyes focused once more into the distance.

All I saw was a continuous pathway of blue, violet, and orange hues.

I had seen forever and I was heading straight for it with a broad smile upon my wind-burnt face.

Reading this piece, and others that came from Cariboo, revealed for the first time that—and how—*a sense of place was inherent in the work.* Not only was it clear that this piece drew on images of surroundings that were familiar to "MK," it was also *quite* clear that the work flowing from our side of the country was just as identifiable:

10582.inventory
helga   13:51 Tue May 17/88

She wanted to ride
the subway, to sit in the front,
by the window that holds all
the places before you even get
there. but she had too many
things.

She had her house, and it overflowed
all the time. the children were
always falling out the windows, with
their knowing smiles as she caught
them in the cushion of her debris.

She often would struggle, and struggle, trying
to put something down for she could no longer
stand up straight, nor see straight.

She once placed her husband on the counter, by
the toaster, but his reflection multiplied in the
heat of breakfast, until he was all she could see.
He was more anonymous while she held him.

And then there were the magazines that dated
back to 1946, before she was born. Stained by her
mother's chalky fingerprints, she hugged them to
tightly to breathe.

Sins. Countless, thirty ton sins. Stains and scars, they
dotted her skin in such a way that she could not ride the
subway, as it exploded through her backyard.

And:

10127.First Fight
Rc   21:02 Sun Apr 10/88   39 lines

callous winds chill like subway eyes
constant on her evolving body...
reaching for freshness tripping each
step

on a long, narrow road lined with block houses she
knows it's Tuesday because trucks have forgotten

pickle jars beside jagged chocolate wrappers --
the upturned cans call her

to mute leaves frozen on branches
there are no nests it is still winter

fresh chicken & celery hearts blend a
neighborhood meal which weighs her
thoughts in cooking oil

her thin steps are trapped by yellow circles
competing with silence --she stretches past
the black grass then shrinks back to snapping
concrete-- one window grows brighter and
bigger

she lifts a heavy door extends
white arms to one flawless
face but can't reach it in time

Distance Is A Resource

The sense of place contained within the students' writing had not been expected and everyone involved was very excited when it surfaced. That our opportunities to understand the views of others were made available by the technology was not what was important about this to me. Rather, it caused me to see that "distance" was not so much a barrier to experience that telecommunications technology could overcome so much as it was an *experiential resource* that caused all of us to see things we knew in new ways—including ourselves.

The students in my own classroom did see issues of concern to them appear in the works of the Cariboo Hill students, but more important, they saw their own views— and one another—as credible. On-line, their views had weight and currency in their notions of learning and being learners, *including the creation of their own*

learning—and, perhaps best of all, they could see this sense of credibility reciprocated by the students in B.C.

> What a WONDERFUL learning experience it has been. It has given me a new perspective on learning, and learning how to learn. With other writers of the world, we have all responded and contributed to one another. I see this as something that has changed my life...education shouldn't always be within classroom walls. —YYT, student (Owen, 1991, p.7)

The students also saw that they controlled this learning through their relationships with other learners, and in their use of technology:

> There is a transition from thoughts to words, a mechanical process of the brain that fills a 7″ by 10″ screen. I discovered that the best part about writing is writing. And being read is rather fun, too. In the past electronic writing conferences, I was most surprised by the reactions of those who read my pieces. I came to realize that when someone read my piece, the words were no longer my own, but rather the reader's. It was the reader's concept of my words, not the words themselves, that had life. The static sentences travelled in the interpretations of the readers. The small screen of the computer holds a great view. Not only can we glimpse the world through the computer screen, but the world can gaze back, into our rooms, into our faces, into our words. —"Rc," student (Owen, 1991, p.8)

And they responded favourably to what they saw as a difference in the way teachers viewed their work. One student said simply that "it was an odd pleasure to be taken so seriously." ("helga" in Owen, 1991, p.9)

Marion Poggemiller, the teacher at Cariboo Hill, observed a number of these points as well, and offered several recommendations in response:

I was delighted to be involved with your computer/writing project, as were my students. Our main regret was that we were involved for such a short time that we were just beginning to know you and your students and to realize some of the possibilities of the project. Anything that makes writing special, as your project clearly did, is very worthwhile. Even in the short time we were involved, there were a number of benefits for my students:

- The sensitive, encouraging, and helpful comments from yourself and Lionel Kearns were especially valuable and only possible because of the computer link.

- The students were thrilled that a "professional" poet would take their work seriously.

- They were beginning to understand revision and to attempt real changes.

- They were far less fearful of any criticism via computer than they were of even my gentlest in-class comment.

- They were particularly excited that people their age in Toronto were reading and responding to their work.

Most are somewhat intimidated by the machine (still being a pencil and eraser writer, I understand their trepidation) 3 of 18 students use the computer for composing from the beginning. The others use it for revision and preparation of final drafts.

As they became more familiar with their programme, they got much better with the mechanics of spelling, punctuation and grammar. And they appear to take much more pride in their work because it looks so good. Some of them became quite distraught when the printer did "funny" things.

Some possible variations have occurred to me that you might want to consider:

- If not horrendously expensive a phone link early on and towards the end when the students know one another better.

- Students might write a biography of themselves in any form they choose

- More emphasis on revision

- Continued efforts to have students criticize one another's work

- Try some specific activities that they all do e.g. the same topic-the colour purple or trees, or faces etc., or the same form-limerick, haiku etc., mostly for fun and to see the infinite variety possible.

- Videotape a poetry reading in which they read their own and a student's poems from Toronto or Burnaby as the case may be.

etc. etc., - the creative juices are running a bit dry, it being the end of June.

Again, many thanks for involving us in a stimulating and productive project. I certainly look forward to exciting things for next year.

Kearns also offered his own comments on ELECTRO-POETS. I have set some of his comments in **boldface** type, which I will discuss following the passage:

Message: 2736268, 86 lines
Posted: 2:26pm PST, Tue Dec 18/90
To: Trevor Owen
From: Lionel Kearns

As a "Writer-in-Electronic-Residence" I came into the classroom through the wire. **Other than that peculiarity, I carried on my instruction in much the same way that I do in a regular creative writing workshop.** That is, I tried to set up a situation in which the students could present their work to a small, articulate audience. It is not always an easy thing to do, especially with a group of students who know each other and have to function in a social way outside of the workshop. Students are generally intimidated by such a situation, and must get over their fear of exposure before they can enter into the give-and-take of the workshop.

The hardest part of creative writing for a student, or for any inexperienced writer, is the idea that one's creation is both an actual message and a piece of art that goes out into the world and

takes its knocks from an audience. It is hard on the ego, sometimes even for veteran writers who are accustomed to looking at their own work with a certain degree of detachment and objectivity. But that detachment and objectivity is what has to be learned in the process of becoming an artist. Without detachment from the work, the creative life is too painful to tolerate. And if a young writer does not take that chance of exposing the work to the critical gaze of others, he or she will never learn how to write something that moves a reader.

Literary exposure on-line is less threatening than in face-to-face situations. Students do not have to worry about their physical appearance or the many features of personal style that make teenagers overly self-conscious. In the electronic workshop, impressions are made purely on a literary basis, because all actions and reactions are written. Personality becomes a function of the words you write. You put your work into the conference and presto, other people read it and comment. You reply. Someone else joins in. **It is conversation**, but who are the participants? Names--which begin to stand for literary, on-line personalities. You choose a name. **Perhaps you choose two names, and develop two on-line personas, each with a different writing style and set of values.** It becomes very dramatic.

I developed three or four student personas myself. In fact, these were the "students" who frequently offered rude remarks about other people's poems and wrote their own terrible poems, which were immediately attacked by Lionel Kearns, Writer-in-Electronic-Residence, and were then often defended by other students. The result was a bit of blood letting and a lot of heated and honest discussion about the poems. However, the serious victims were my phantom student personas rather than the actual students, who nevertheless jumped into the fray, and in the process learned a little about how to create literary effects. Seldom have I been able to generate such detached participation in regular face-to-face creative writing workshops.

On-line conferencing is both public and private at the same time. Although anyone on the conference could **read** what everyone else was putting on the screen, we were also participating in a very personal way. The students, in their conversations with me and with each other, came into my private study at any hour of the day and night, whenever I had the time for them. It was a very convenient way to manage consultation and conversation.

I did not think of the students as being in a physical classroom at all, although that is where they were **when they wrote** what **I was reading**. It was in front of the screen where we met, each of us with our eyes on the words written in pixels of light and **our finger tips on the keyboard, alive to each other in the acts of creation and response. The experience was real, and immediate, and intensely literary, because it was all done through the written word: thought and speech and feeling and gesture transformed by the struggle to put it into the form of the written word.**

Electronic conferencing is a marvelously appropriate medium for developing the craft of writing, and for learning other subjects as well. Ideally, students should be able to connect with the on-line workshop on their own time, as I did. The electronic classroom is not constrained by time or space. It is therefore redundant that anyone should have to participate in it from inside a regular classroom. Of course we are still dependent on the old idea of school. If electronic conferencing becomes an accepted component of our educational system, we will be less dependent on the rigidities of time-and-space bound classrooms, and that would be, in my opinion, a very good thing.

Kearns' notions revealed to me, initially at least, how his own embrace of telecommunications technology was based first upon his ideas about writing, creative writing workshops and his own role as a writer and instructor. They also reveal a shift from seeing the on-line environment as a place of discussion, or what we might consider at first to be a verbal, talking act, to a place of writing. This conception of what was happening on-line in ELECTRO-POETS would shape my understanding of its value as a "written world," as Feenberg described (1989, p. 22). To review these, please refer back to his remarks for a moment and consider the portions I have set in **boldface** type.

Jack

At the end of the ELECTRO-POETS project, both schools arranged to hold a class "together" so that we could read and discuss works from the project. We did not

have video-conferencing available to us, so we each arranged for speaker phones in our respective classrooms. Both schools videotaped the class locally so that we could send a copy to each other in the Post.

We were all very excited as we could hear the phone ring over the speaker. The students had a good deal they wanted to say to each other, and as soon as the connection was made, my students unleashed their first question, and within it, an assumption they didn't realize they had made until they asked:

"Where's Jack?" they demanded.

We learned more than we had bargained for in the response from Cariboo.

"Jack who?" they said. *"We thought he was with you!"*

I board the subway train. I am trying to decide where to sit when the train jerks and I grab a pole to balance myself. Three teenage girls—about my age—giggle about something. One of them, a blonde with high cheekbones, a long straight nose and mouth painted red, makes contact with me for a moment, then her eyes proceed to skim over me smoothly, finally resting on my face again. I suppress a strong urge to slap her, burying myself in a niche with an obscure, orange vinyl-covered seat that is sectioned off from others. I slide down deep into the vinyl and pull the faded collar of my denim jacket up around my jaw in an attempt to hide myself from her judgmental green eyes. I decide I hate her. I hate her glossy blonde locks and her friends and their happily arrogant faces. I decide that The Blonde didn't have to work to pay for her creamy sweater or the soft, supple leather jacket on top of it. It enrages me that girls like her never have a hair out of place.

Alice Lee (excerpt from "Journey Home," which took first place in the 1989 Short Fiction Contest operated by the Toronto Council of Teachers of English)

The second project, NEW-VOICES, expanded the role of on-line activity within existing classroom programs, involving another school from Ontario and Cariboo Hill in B.C. Two writers, David McFadden of Toronto, and Guy Gavriel Kay of Winnipeg, served as the writers in electronic residence for the entire project, which ran between January and June, 1989. Later in the year, novelist Katherine Govier joined in as well. Once again, a grade ten English class and two senior writing classes participated in NEW-VOICES from Riverdale, although this time, all were housed in the school's computer lab as their regular classroom. Unlike the ELECTRO-POETS project with Lionel Kearns, NEW-VOICES did not involve a face-to-face visit from an author at the beginning of the program, although Katherine Govier did visit my classroom prior to her participation on-line, which began in April.

Two students from RCI, Ekaterina Catsiliras and Erifili Morfidis, served as the

editors of NEW-VOICES. I have followed the same **bolding** emphasis, introduced

above, in the following excerpt from the introduction of their report about the

program:

> In the 1988/89 school year, Riverdale Collegiate Institute (RCI)
> operated "NEW-VOICES," a conference which involved the
> contribution of original works-in-progress and commentary on
> the works of others. The writers-in-electronic-residence were
> David McFadden, Guy Gavriel Kay, and Katherine Govier. **The
> pieces which the students submitted were read, studied,
> commented on and sent back with questions and remarks.**
>
> The comments encouraged students to **read over and revise
> their work. Revision was a crucial part of supporting the
> development of student writers.** The ardent responses of the
> students were overwhelming. Many students felt free to
> respond to the writers' opinions and were not intimidated by
> the fact that they were questioning the opinion of a professional.
>
> In this manner, (participants) were able to join individual
> discussions and **voice their own ideas.** David McFadden
> shocked us all with his semi-cynical comments, which were of
> course designed to improve our writing skills.
>
> The conference NEW-VOICES was not confined to the writers
> and Riverdale students. Cariboo Hill Secondary in Burnaby B.C.,
> and Owen Sound Collegiate and Vocational Institute also took
> an active role. (August, 1989)

Revision, Voice and Response

Erifili and Ekaterina's comments begin with ideas about WIER as a place to improve

writing through revision. The prompts for revision are seen, initially, at least, as

properly guided by the writer, a view that I would describe as based upon a

conception of the writer's role as the "expert." There are several examples of this in

the conference, and Alice Lee's story, "Journey Home," above, is one of them. The

response that "Journey Home" received from one of the writers was longer than the

story itself. Alice was startled by the intensity of the comments she received, although she also took the them seriously. Alice explored her views in an interview for a literary magazine. The interview also involved several students and teachers from writing programs in other schools as well as Ritz Chow, who remained active on-line throughout her first year at university:

> **Ritz Chow** I find that good criticism is hard to find. I've sent some stuff for David McFadden to comment on on the computer and this helps a lot. He was actually getting into my work and changing things, playing with it...
>
> **what magazine** Is that what you call "good criticism"?
>
> **Alice Lee** I liked it myself, it was direct—it was a little overwhelming, though.
>
> **what magazine** Was it directive though. Was he telling you how to write a poem?
>
> **Alice Lee** My initial reaction was, like, I was stunned. I didn't expect that much from him.
>
> **what magazine** Did you feel compelled to take his suggestions?
>
> **Alice Lee** In the beginning, yes, I must admit that I felt like he was telling me which way to go, but then I thought about it and I read it over again.
>
> ("what" magazine interview, "Writing in the Schools," June, 1989, p. 5)

She considered what the author was suggesting, selected what seemed useful, and posted a revised version that accepted some of the suggestions while rejecting others.

Alice's exchange with writer David McFadden, taken together with comments like those in the *what* interview made me realize how important it was to remember that students might feel compelled to accept advice from "the pros" in the kind of "new orthodoxy" of "compulsory revision" that Willinsky observed (p. 39). Alice observed the same possibility and developed her ideas about this in a Hilroy-sponsored report for the Canadian Teachers' Federation:

> (WIER is) a good place to get exposure and feedback—safely. By that I mean that you don't have to be identified. It gives time to reflect on the comments and allow them to sink in, in your own privacy before facing the comments. It also gives you control. You get to hear what others think, but you don't have to listen. Who are they? Teachers, peers, PROFESSIONAL WRITERS. It's difficult to learn not to take advice or criticism that you don't agree with. Especially if these people are supposed to know what they're talking about. This is not to say that these people shove their opinions down your throat. They generally don't.
>
> What is difficult for a new writer, who may also be impressed by PROFESSIONAL WRITERS or anyone else, is to learn when not to listen. It is possible to get so many responses to your work you feel overwhelmed by these people who are telling you how "you might want to" raise your children. What do you do when one person tells you he likes one thing, while another thinks it's excessive? This project can present problems like this. One that is definitely worth solving. One that makes this program that much more valuable.
>
> —Alice Lee (in Owen, 1991)

In their report, Erifili and Ekaterina also note—accurately, in my view—how the on-line exchanges came to be seen as part of their regular class work and discussions. Like many of the students in the class, they were quite taken by the often provocative comments they received, particularly from David McFadden, and it is clear that they felt they could respond openly. In my view, the sense of confidence and belief in the value of their own work, as Erifili and Ekaterina themselves

describe, above, leads them away from their view of WIER as a place of "revision" toward notions of written voice, or what Graves would describe as "the imprint of ourselves on our writing." (in Willinsky, p.46)

The potential for this "voice," as it is summoned and sustained in the context of WIER, is linked to my own notions of the "electronic residency" and WIER as a "legitimate catalyst for revision" (Chapter 3, p. 18) through written reflection and "considered response." (Chapter 2, p. 6) What Erifili and Ekaterina saw—i.e., revision as a means of developing their abilities to "voice their own ideas"—I began to see as the *centrality of response* to the on-line experience. Response mattered more than anything to the students. While revision might be an outcome of the responses they received, revising *per se* was a secondary issue to the students involved.

David McFadden demonstrated the power of response as well when he submitted twenty-five of his own poems to NEW-VOICES and asked the students whether they might like to serve as "writers in electronic residence" for him. The poems are not re-printed here, but in his introductions to twenty-one of them, McFadden develops, discovers, perhaps, a most remarkable example of collaboration in, and a distinguishing feature of, the electronic residency—his own desire to participate in the exchange. It is interesting to note that McFadden sent the sequence of poems, along with the introductory notes that I have included here, over a six hour period on February 25, 1989. In my view, he is declaring the kind of relationship he wants to have with the students, and that he is inviting them to realize—and accept—the respect he feels for them. McFadden received two responses for each of these poems from the students. I have selected four of these responses, which follow the sequence.

13594.Deep Insight into Life
    David McFadden   16:44 Sat Feb 25/89   52 lines

Dear Students: Here's your chance to hammer me the way I've been hammering you. This little piece has never been published, in fact this is the first time it's been shown. I chose it because it's anecdotal rather than overly philosophical or intellectual or abstract and it's about high school students. So give it to me good. See if you can get me to change it -- or maybe even to scrap it.

13596.Spirit Bay
    David McFadden   17:37 Sat Feb 25/89   82 lines

Dear Students: Here's another one on which you might wish to sharpen your critical hatchets. This one is less anecdotal, more meditative, and it even contains a real vision (oxymoronically speaking). Let me know what you think. And then I'll return the favour!

13600.On the Way to Spirit Bay
    David McFadden   17:58 Sat Feb 25/89   54 lines

Dear Students: Here's another. Give it to me straight, mate. When you get a chance. Note: "Pakeha" is a Maori word meaning "person of European extraction."

13602.What All New Zealand Writers Are
    David McFadden   18:58 Sat Feb 25/89   79 lines

Dear Students: Here's another. It occurs to me you might wonder why I'm doing this. Fact is, I care very much how you respond to these poems. Besides, I'm on the verge of sending these to my friends Down Under and maybe to literary magazines down there too and maybe even to publish them as a book so any comments you have will be greatly appreciated. And I'll get to know you better and our discussions can be more interesting thereby. Notice in this one how there's a certain ambiguity in the first line, based on the title. Like, at first you think that New Zealand writers don't dress very well, then you realise it's the Canadian poet who is unkempt. The question implied in the title isn't answered until the second line of the fifth verse. Does this work for you or is it annoying? Serious question. Is this a serious poem?

13603.How to Get a Free Trip to New Zealand
    David McFadden   19:22 Sat Feb 25/89   38 lines

Dear Students: Here's another one. Any comments appreciated in advance. What do you think of the title? Is it a grabber? Does it disappoint you?

13604.Danger Down Under
    David McFadden   19:49 Sat Feb 25/89   47 lines

Dear Students: It's always a problem to put dream material into a poem, at least if you want someone to read it. It's like when you have a dream that is interesting to you and you try to tell others about it their eyes glaze over. Ever notice that? So it's always a problem to try to make it interesting. Sometimes I write it in such a way it seems like real life and only gradually does the reader get the sense that it's not quite real, not quite normal, kind of unsettling. My rule often is never say it's a dream, let the reader come to that conclusion himself. But in this case I not only say it's a dream but I compare it with other dreams in the past. But it's in the second person rather than the first, which makes it (I hope) seem more interesting because I'm not saying it happened to me but rather that it happened to the anonymous reader, or perhaps to a friend to whom I'm addressing the poem, perhaps a friend who has told me this story. And I hope this makes it more interesting. Also the thing about being Down Under, and the strange upsidedownness of the book. Which gives a sense of disorientation, I hope, and danger....

13605.Te Maori
    David McFadden   20:40 Sat Feb 25/89   50 lines

Dear Students: The Te Maori show represented the first big exhibition of Maori art. It was a travelling show and was up for a month in each of the five larger New Zealand cities in the winter of 1986-1987. It was a big event for the Maori people, whose art is unusual and unique and of a very high quality, for this was the first time the art has been taken seriously by the country as a whole. It was sort of a coming-of-age event for the indigenous peoples of New Zealand, at least as far as their sense of being treated on equal cultural terms by the "Pakeha."

13606.Impressions of Fiji
David McFadden   21:00 Sat Feb 25/89   59 lines

Dear Students: Not much to say about this one, except that it tries to capture the atmosphere of Fiji on the eve of the election that resulted in an almost immediate military coup and the breaking of relations with Britain, which up to that point were very good.

13607.Taveeta & Sai
David McFadden   21:23 Sat Feb 25/89   49 lines

Dear Students: Here's one dealing in part with the problems of high-school students in third world countries like Fiji. Elizabeth if she lived in Canada would be winning scholarships like mad, in Fiji she has to drop out because of high tuition fees.

13608.Yaqona Blues
David McFadden   21:49 Sat Feb 25/89   91 lines

Dear Students: This poem still scares me because as you know it's easy to get an infection, like an infected sunburn for instance, in the tropics, and having got one it's easy for it to turn to gangrene if you don't watch it. Combined with sunstroke, it's nasty. Yaqona means kava means grog, a narcotic drink made from the root of a pepper plant and which usually engenders a feeling of not wanting to move from wherever you are, but also as in this case engenders a feeling of being able to do much more than you really can. Stigmata is when highly devout Christian believers get the marks of crucifixion on their hands and feet. St. Francis had it, reliably attested to by hundreds of people. In fact he bled to death from it, very happily too. Singing hymns. Isn't religion wonderful? Taveeta means David. What do you think of these three young women?

13609.The Cleaning Lady at the Little Airport
David McFadden   22:00 Sat Feb 25/89   38 lines

Dear Students: For the most part I consider these poems very relaxed, laid back, not ambitious at all. I like them because of that. Usually my work is much more ambitious and it shows, to its detriment perhaps. This is a particularly unambitious piece. Is it a keeper? What do you think?

13610.Wild Face Tattoos
    David McFadden   22:08 Sat Feb 25/89   32 lines

Dear Students: Another one about a teenager. Easy to relate to, right? Painful though.

13612.Rou Rou
    David McFadden   22:18 Sat Feb 25/89   52 lines

Dear Students: Nothing much to say about this one except I wish I could convey the beautiful sound of the all-night singing.

13614.A Pair of Fijian Tens
    David McFadden   23:24 Sat Feb 25/89   30 lines

Dear Students: I am putting up a rather substantial cash prize (fifty cents) for the first person who can figure out the significance of this title.

13615.Another Dimension
    David McFadden   23:26 Sat Feb 25/89   59 lines

Dear Students: This poem desperately needs a better title. Any suggestions? Love poem, as we find out towards the end, also features a lot of young students from the local high school. If any of you wish to send old magazines to Alanieta, the address is: Miss Alanieta Ratunibulu Koroiboila, Namalata Village, P.O. Vunisea, Kandavu Island, Fiji Islands. Alanieta really is a beautiful and intelligent young lady, very wise (and sad) for a youngster. I have some nice slides of her and her friends. Maybe we should try to get her into Canada where she can get a better education. What do you think?

13617.Prayground
    David McFadden   23:29 Sat Feb 25/89   30 lines

Dear Students: Isn't it nice to be able to read poems like this in the middle of a Canadian winter? Somebody gave me a copy of Pierre Berton's Arctic Grail for Xmas but I'm saving it for the summer.

13618.Qantas Goofs Again!
    David McFadden   23:31 Sat Feb 25/89   43 lines

Dear Students: Is this one okay? Think it could use a better title? Any suggestions?

13619.suva market
        David McFadden   23:33 Sat Feb 25/89   45 lines

Dear Students: Another anti-drug poem. Beware of yaqona/kava/grog. I try for a little magic in this one but end up with pineapple juice on my tie. Please, no jokes about Newfie priests. As for the Japanese soldiers, it's true the Fijians were fierce fighters during World War II and fought many campaigns against the Japanese in various Pacific islands. Some writers have suggested the Fijians, who officially gave up cannibalism in 1870, ate the bodies of the Japanese soldiers they killed, but the Fijian veterans deny this. They don't deny it very strongly though but they always deny it.

13620.The New Chappy
        David McFadden   23:37 Sat Feb 25/89   72 lines

Dear Students: I figure this isn't a poem about violence against women as much as a poem about wondering if you did the right thing, about not having recognised a moral dilemma at the crucial moment and acted accordingly. Do you agree? "Mbula" or "Bula" (less formal) is the famous Fijian greeting, very warm and friendly.

13621.Tri-Colour Aquafresh
        David McFadden   23:38 Sat Feb 25/89   43 lines

Dear Students: Desperately seeking affirmation for this one. Should I put it in the book or in the bottom drawer?

13622.Women of the World
        David McFadden   23:41 Sat Feb 25/89   51 lines

Dear Students: Do you think there is a possibility that someone might interpret this as being a racist or a sexist poem? Perhaps someone who read the poem carelessly and didn't see that it is a satiric portrayal of a racist and sexist person. If you do think there is such a possibility do you think the poem should be rewritten to lessen the possibility? These are real questions, right?

The students in my classes were stunned. They really didn't know what to do. Some of them were worried that they would not be able to offer remarks of value to

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the author *because they didn't know enough.* I asked both of the senior writing classes what they would like to do. and, in the end, they asked me to print up all of the poems and distribute one to every student in both classes. I was not to make any particular selection because the students wanted to deal with whatever they received—*just like McFadden did when the students posted their works.*

They worked hard. They compared their responses with one another. They read and they wrote, and they loved it. A selection follows:

13606.Impressions of Fiji
David McFadden 21:00 Sat Feb 25/89

13606/1. maryl 07:58 Tue Mar 14/89 35 lines

Response to David McFadden:

Hello from Riverdale! My name is Mary L and I am a grade 13 student at Riverdale Collegiate in Toronto. My beloved teacher, Mr. Owen has presented our class with your unpublished pieces and said, "WORK!".

I was given a piece entitled "Impressions of Fiji" and told that I should dissect it as much as possible and then feed the scraps to you. First of all, I would like to say I do NOT know how to dissect. (My experiences in Biology have proven this to me!) But I will give it my best shot anyway.

"Impressions of Fiji"? I had none...no impressions at all... I was a clean, blank, uneducated slate for you to scribble upon. And scribble you did! This may sound `corny' but I felt as though I was in your mind and looking through your eyes as I was reading your description. It was easy for me to place myself among the Fijians and observe their actions and reactions.

WHY? Your description was vivid. You said enough without saying too much. I really liked the style of this piece. Personally, I prefer writing as though there's someone sitting in front of me to bounce ideas off of and if I'm interpreting your piece correctly(?), this is the style you chose. I'm not sure I understand

WHY you wrote this piece but I do appreciate the WAY you wrote it.

In your introduction, (Dear Students:...etc.), you said you were attempting "to capture the atmosphere of Fiji...". In my amateur opinion, you have done so and with finesse!

Thanks and good luck with your publisher!

Mary L
Riverdale C.I., Toronto.

P.S. I hope I haven't CRUSHED your self-esteem! Maybe you can return the favour?

13610.Wild Face Tattoos
David McFadden 22:08 Sat Feb 25/89

13610/3. Hau 06:27 Wed Mar 15/89 39 lines

Dear Mr. David McFadden:

I would like to comment on your piece entitled, 'Wild Face Tattoos'; I really like the way these three words sound together: it's 'catchy' with lots of 'punch'. I also like the way t shirt, jeans and running shoes are presented without pause: it is a very familiar representation of a 'normal Canadian kid'.

I looked up 'local' in the dictionary in search of another meaning different from the one with which I am familiar, but found none...could you please explain what you meant by the use of 'local' in line 20?

I was also trying to find out what form your piece took; I tried counting syllables in each line, counting the no. of lines per stanza, looking for rhyming schemes, even attempting to relate the stress pattern of one line to another: I found no recognizable pattern, and became quite frustrated...I hope you can relieve me of my case of nerves....

In the first 'stanza' I found that your description of the boy's face was open to different interpretations; I had to read it over a few times to understand your interpretation, but was glad it was made clear in the second 'stanza'. (for e.g.., I thought you were

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describing a boy who had undergone many stressful situations, or perhaps, a boy extremely wise for his age.)

I found the title caught my attention while the actual writing kept me interested and amused...is this story 'true'? If so, what made you want to keep a memoir of the occasion through this piece?

Sincerely,

Hau
Riverdale Collegiate, Toronto.

13615.Another Dimension
David McFadden 23:26 Sat Feb 25/89

13615/2. Linda 06:26 Wed Mar 15/89 75 lines

Dear Mr. McFadden

I am responding to your piece titled "Another Dimension". I was surprised to find in your introduction the sadness of Miss Alanieta R. Koroibiola. Perhaps it is because I have never been to the tropical Fiji Islands that I can't even begin to imagine how someone could be sad. I have this vision of Kandavu Island spotted with palm trees and tanned bodies worshipping the sun god who have not the slightest hint of anything further than happiness. You are probably thinking how naive I am because sadness is a universal feeling but it's just that Kandavu Island seems so beautiful and heavenly.

To answer your question of the possibility of sending Alanieta to Canada to get a better education, I would like to answer you with a question. If you say Alanieta reads, speaks and writes "beautiful English" then is it correct to say that it is not a matter of getting a "better education" but perhaps a question of experiencing Western society? This could be the case and is why she asked you to send her some magazines. What do you think?

The first stanza was very inspirational though I have no religion with which I follow. There are many keywords such as moment, joy and thanks which give a great opening introduction to the rest of the poem. I can begin to see already the love poem.

The second stanza, at first, read like a journal only because it was loaded with information about the people of Kandavu Island. The description of the resemblance of Uraia Pulou to a young cannibal king and how the students ran through the jungle "babbling" the names of the flowers given to you and "about everything imaginable" was very whimsical which was in contrast to the feelings felt by Alanieta. There again it struck me. How could someone be so sad in surroundings so delightful as those in Kandavu Island? The personality of Uraia is more the tropical islander I would expect to find in the Fiji Islands.

The vivid images of the third stanza worked very well for me. I could imagine the hungry flies buzzing away over the fish dinner because I was once in China touring and had the exact same experience. It was amusing to read about the attempt made by the foreigner to understand the political conversation held by the hundred near drunken men.

Boy it must have been nice to lie naked and not have to worry about someone looking at you! The fourth stanza is one that I dream of, to be able to sail into the sunset and look at the stars on a vast and open sea. I loved it!

If I were there with you it would be heaven because right now it's minus twenty below!! Sure it would be different is subtle ways but essentially the same.

The only suggestion I have to give you about finding a new title is to look over keywords . The original title didn't do any justice for your great piece. A few of the keywords that I have selected are: moment, joy, thanks, sadness, hoping, thrill, sense, different and same.

Linda
Riverdale Collegiate
Toronto, Ontario.

13616.Explaining Cold Weather to Fijians
David McFadden 23:28 Sat Feb 25/89

13616/1. Nancy 08:14 Fri Mar 10/89 31 lines

Dear Mr. McFadden,

Concerning your "Explaining Cold Weather to Fijians", I think that the first stanza describes cold weather very well. However, if I was reading this, I would like to be able to picture the cold weather as well. Perhaps you could add a line comparing the frost that appears within the freezer to the snow we see on the streets. The reason I suggest that is because I like to be able to picture things in my mind.

The second stanza is wonderfully vivid and when I read it, I felt shivers running up and down my spine. Great effect! All of what you wrote isn't exactly true of Canadian winters though. It is similar to what you described but not all the time. For example this winter in January, we had quite a few warm days. It was surprisingly like spring. I'm suggesting that you could tell the Fijians about the erratic changes in the weather that we endure each and every winter. Perhaps it's not the same in British Columbia. Well, it's just a thought.

The last stanza confuses me. I will tell you what I believe the words mean but I could be way off track. I picture women, out-of-shape, cleaning their homes and the streets. The picture I perceive is not of winter. As a matter of fact, I picture our "Regent Park" area. This is a government housing area and there are many housewives who sweep a lot. Well that's what I think but I don't understand how this connects to cold weather.

I hope these suggestions will be of some use to you. I would like a reply if you find the time.

Nancy
Riverdale C.I.

Guy Gavriel Kay, a writer of speculative fiction, also participated in NEW-VOICES. His observations centre on the relationship between writer and student, and the differences he sees between on-line and face-to-face encounters:

> I appreciate the opportunity to express my thoughts about the Writer in Electronic Residence Program I participated in last year. I have nothing but positive feelings with regard to the program and it is a matter of regret to me that pressing time commitments and deadlines this year prevent me from joining it again.

By way of offering the requested personal comments on my experience, I'd like to focus on what happened to me with the students at an Owen Sound high school.

Through the intermediary offices of Alberto Manguel and Trevor Owen I was contacted by Fran MacArthur, a high school English teacher in Owen Sound. The request, and the ultimate arrangement worked out, was for a visit to the school to speak to her class as a whole and then engage in one-to-one discussions with certain students about work of theirs that I would have read beforehand. This personal visit would be followed by a period of availability on my part as an electronic consultant on-line through services made available by Trevor Owen and Simon Fraser University.

The point I wish to make—and the point that speaks most directly to the optimistic attitude I have towards the future of electronic programs such as this one—has to do with the difference in student comfort and response between the personal visit and the on-line consultations.

The visit to Owen Sound went much as I expected, and much as similar visits to high school classes had gone in the past. The students in the classroom segment were interested in anecdotes and general observations about writing, a little bemused at dealing with a writer, and more than a little shy about raising questions, particularly as related to their own work. In the one-on-one discussions it was a delicately diplomatic exercise to reduce their self-consciousness enough to render a discussion of their poems and stories useful and not embarrassing for them. This is not unusual, nor is it something I mind (nor do most other writers I know who do such work among students).

The contrast however in the electronic medium was exceptional When Trevor Owen writes about increased opportunities for student expression and independence, or of "an atmosphere where tolerance is promoted" (see Appendix 6) I can confirm from my experience that these factors do indeed come into play. The relative "coolness" of the electronic medium, as opposed to face to face discussions across the table made it far easier for these students to address questions to me and to respond (often with intelligent defenses) to queries I raised about their work. In addition, these queries and defenses, because they had to be put in writing carried an increased clarity and focus--and this could, by the way, be true of my own comments. This was particularly

so because many of the exchanges were in a "public" on-line forum and so were uploaded with an awareness that others might read and indeed comment on them. Privacy was of course available for those students who wanted it, through use of "mail boxes" but even here the students seemed to show far less intimidation than they had in person. A criticism is usually easier to take (and, for that matter, so is praise) when it is read in privacy as opposed to being delivered directly. One can think about the comment, weight it and respond at leisure if desired. These are important elements to a useful critical exchange.

None of this is to say that such electronic methods should or can replace direct teaching and discussion. The "coolness" I spoke of has its drawbacks as well, and spontaneity is certainly not part of this method. (Though "real time" on-line forums are certainly possible technically and may alleviate this limitation.) For many students though, the increased control, coupled with the opportunity (and the need) to phrase their questions and comments with care and at their own convenience offer substantial advantages. From the writer's point of view, is seems obvious that if it is possible to participate in this pedagogic exercise from one's desk a great many people otherwise unable to or uninterested in offering their assistance might be induced to do so. This is a not-inconsiderable benefit to teachers desiring such an exposure for their students to established writers.

In conclusion, it seems to me that not only does a program such as this offer extraordinary potential for enabling writers to reach out to students in remote locations--an obvious and a major benefit--but even when the students are living and studying in major centres, with access at times to writers, the electronic process offers a splendid adjunct to such classroom visits and discussions that teachers are able to arrange.

Guy Gavriel Kay
(Owen, 1991)

Novelist Katherine Govier joined NEW-VOICES late in the year. Her first day on-line, April 21, 1989, was a very busy one as she encountered young writers who had something to say, and who had come to value response in the safe environment of WIER that author Kay observes in his remarks, and that student Lee saw as well, above. In this next sample, it is clear that involvement in a discussion with the

writer is what matters most to Ritz. While she seeks some indication of "progress" as a writer, it is in the context of her own earlier material rather than within this particular piece. There is no apparent importance attached to the idea of "revision" here. Instead, she is the first to respond to her own work in an effort to frame her ideas, her concern, and *her desire to invite debate* in response to what she sees as a "barbaric" but "tolerated" act of religious exploitation. "Perhaps, I have only seen the sad side of the tradition," she says. "What do you think?"

15181.inverted flames
Ritz 21:55 Wed Apr 19/89   35 lines

inverted flames

in india, men burn incense and women. the incense has a pleasant aroma; its smoke drifts among rested souls. the women char and scream. their ashes fall and travel through soil, ground deep into the sandals of passing men, the playing feet of children.

religion permits exploitation, permits the disposal of the other gender. women burning beyond lovers' arms. a daughter in a room of bodies. a mother who inhales second-hand sadness. the room is too small for farewell. the body-bag is too loose for death. in the end, nothing is contained.

in the streets, women burn unattended. their flames are blue with oxygen, wavering before the still huddle of vegetable gardens. they stand rigid as lampposts and iron grills. the pattern of fire over sari is etched by artistic winds. uncharred women cry gently by the frames of windows and doors. children run, scared and excited by the warm gray ashes coating their faces and limbs. young men continue, sidestepping spectacles. older men sit on pavement and watch the fires die.

the logic of tradition. the warmth of a wife flambe. the men eat. the women serve. in the house, god is the excuse while men argue reason. in the kitchen, she dines between pots and children. she has not changed since university. a woman is her womb.

in canada, fires are controlled; they dance among cool stones. in fireplaces held by treated logs, in snapped twigs casting shadows into huddled eyes, fires are encouraged and extinguished. marshmallows and meals are heated in festivity. flames affect women differently.

15181/1. Ritz   22:15 Wed Apr 19/89   9 lines

There is a documentary called, "No Longer Silent", made by a women's group in India. I think the National Film Board distributes it or something. Anyway, it deals with the issue of bride-burning, a result of the "evolving" attitudes of some men to the traditional dowry system. It is strange how such a barbaric act (in my view) can be tolerated by a whole society. Perhaps, I have only seen the sad side of the tradition.

What do you think?

15181/2. Katherine Govier   12:25 Fri Apr 21/89   22 lines

Dear Ritz. Wow. This is taking the thing head on. This is looking without flinching at something very ugly. I think it's brave to try to write about something like that. People would rather look away wouldn't they, and mumble something about cultural differences. I very much like the first line which shocks--incense and women, the inanimate and the human juxtaposed. The second paragraph is to me less powerful because you are using general words and speaking "sociologically" --i.e. religion permits exploitation etc. I agree with you absolutely but this becomes more powerful when you use the example. When you make us see as you do later, the blue flame and the children running excited and scared, you are making bride burning REAL to me...almost unbearable. The comparison to a domestic fire here is a difficult thing to do. Marshmallows seems a bit unfair. Are we Canadian women marshmallows? Haven't we got a bit more substance? Can you try to make another scene in the end of this piece...to contrast with the SCENE in the beginning? lets talk more about this.
Katherine Govier

Hi Katherine Govier,
Thanks for the replies. I'm still in the exam mode, so I have to try to keep this short (I hope). I had a few chuckles over the "Canadian marshmallow women" idea. Never occurred to me that I'd come across as labelling women as marshmallows...gee, where would that put men? What I was REALLY trying to do, at least what I thought I was doing, was putting women (Canadian) in control of the fire. The women were outside the fire rather than in it.

Yeah, the second paragraph got away from me a bit. I sound as if I were lecturing rather than writing. It's frightening what eight months of lectures can do to one's mind. I think the second last paragraph is very fragmented, but I laid it out as is anyway. I wasn't sure where I wanted to go with it, so I thought I'd play with it another time.

Hmm. With regards to "this is a story", I'd be interested to know where you see the connection with my more recent stuff. Well, better go. I shouldn't be having so much fun during exams, it's unethical.
Ritz

The Learner's Perspective

During both the ELECTRO-POETS and NEW-VOICES writing conferences, additional on-line activities began to emerge. Take, for example, this note from Yana, which arrived just as the NEW-VOICES program was beginning:

Message: 1436369, 24 lines
Posted: 1:37am PST, Thu Feb 2/89

HOW I SPENT LAST TUESDAY
By Yana Tikhonova, a student

Today is Tuesday. My boyfriend Yevgeni is back from the hospital. He served in Afghanistan and was wounded there. I waited for him two long years. And finally we are together. I wanted to forget about anything else in the world. No way. On that day I had an exam in computer technology and design.

I thought I knew the subject fairly well. I am a good student but my emotional state ruined all my plans.

Usually I am the first to answer at an exam. This time I was in a hurry because Yevgeni waited for me in the street. But the teacher decided to quizz me on the whole course. I answered forty five minutes and gave muddled replies because I was so nervous. He gave me a satisfactory mark. It was the first such setback in my five years of studies.

Yevgeni waited for my story but I didn't say a word. I didn't want to disappoint him because he thought so high about me. We walked along the streets of Moscow but I couldn't tell him about my bad luck.

In the evening I told my parents all about the exam and they said I should take a second examination.

I couldn't fall asleep for a long time. The day was over. How can a person be so happy and unhappy at the same time?

These kinds of experiences were easy to embrace. They flowed naturally from the idea of the electronic residency and its place in classroom life at Riverdale. Our student editors, Erifili and Ekaterina observed these developments too:

It was a hazy September morning, the first school day of 1988/89, when we stepped into a room lined with white boxes. What seemed even worse was that we were told we were to actually compose poetry and prose on these THINGS. How can poetry-- the art of sentiment--be composed on a computer? This, of course, was a natural reaction to a concept we were not familiar with. What we failed to realize at the time was that the computer was being used as a mediator in our English projects, and not as a project in itself. Since then, we have discovered that for a writer, the computer offers endless possibilities....

How else could we have been able to receive criticism from a peer in Russia? Pieces of poetry and prose were sent to college students in Moscow in the USSR/CANADA/EXCHANGE project mounted by GERRI SINCLAIR at the Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University. The students reviewed our work and sent us responses that suggested alternative ways of

expressing certain phrases or sentences. It can be said that one of our own classmates could have done the same. A person living on the other side of the world, however, would be able to grant us a varied response. They inhabit a different social environment and have the ability to critique our work from another perspective.

We are eighteen years old and have the means to extend the capacity of our classroom.

What was clearly emerging in NEW-VOICES was the value of response in on-line exchange, and the impact of this response on what I might now describe as the off-line culture of classroom life. Students wanted to be heard, and to feel that what they brought to the classroom had the same currency in school learning that the on-line program was seen to sustain. In our own classroom at Riverdale, I found the students seeking the counsel of their off-line peers more often, asking for time in which to develop and consider *their important ideas*, and expecting that learning, like learning to write, might also mean what Willinsky describes as "in part, a process of learning from oneself" (p. 35).

In our classroom at Riverdale, Willinsky's framing of writing as a process that "had to come from something, had to be worked, and had to be going somewhere..." (p.38) enriched the "common sense of a writing process" that I was looking for in Chapter 3. The "somewhere" in which writing was going at Riverdale was a responsive forum, rather than the "improved" or "finished" or "perfect" work that "publication," or "production" had become to the students I met when I arrived at the school. Choices could be made in this forum—decisions the students began to see as *properly guided by themselves*. Beckstead saw this as well in his study of WIRED WRITERS, which was the offspring of the NEW-VOICES conference under consideration here, and developed his ideas in the context of the role of revision:

Owen (in press) described one of the goals of the program as seen by educators.

> We want them (the students) to consider the value
> of revision in the writing process and the role they
> may play in this—for themselves and for others—
> using language to interpret and understand as well
> as to be understood.

It is not surprising that the notion of revision is seen as one of the cornerstones of the WIER program. Revision has long been a preoccupation with researchers especially since the computer became a part of the writing classroom....many researchers have focused their research questions on revision just within the framework of using computers as word processors. Computer conferencing, however, can provide new possibilities for viewing revision. The simple mechanics of CMC allow the electronic transmission of text and stored in its electronic form is "in principle, infinitely revisable." (Levinson, 1990, p. 5). Going beyond the technology, professional writers receiving the student work will offer suggestions for possible revision. Finally, participants in the WIER program are *exposed to a plethora of student writing which may foster additional reflection and hence revision in their own work.*

The students I spoke with confined their ideas concerning revision to a non-technocentric view. That is, *they saw the possibilities of revision through their contact with the professional writers*—the computer (word processing) was seldom mentioned at any point in the interviews. (1992, p. 61) [emphasis added]

If Beckstead infers from my comments that it is the *revision* rather than the *consideration of its value* that "is seen as one of the cornerstones of the WIER program," then his view appears to be in error. While it would not surprise me to learn that the notion of revision is seen <u>by others</u> as a cornerstone of WIER, what I saw is what I have been describing in this chapter, namely, that WIER provides the opportunity for the students to *"consider the value* of revision in the writing process *and the role they may play* in this—for themselves and for others—*using language to interpret and understand as well as to be understood."*

However, the portions I have emphasized in Beckstead's passage, above, reveal to me his implicit understanding of the point. He goes on to make this explicit a little later in his work when he offers the helpful suggestion that:

> ...the professional writers (might) be made more attentive to the students' intended use of the conference....by having the students include a few lines of narrative with each uploaded piece. The narrative could describe the student's reason(s) for entering the work in the conference (p. 63)

Ritz provided a good example of the sort of "narrative" Beckstead refers to with her poem, "inverted flames." It is clear to me that Beckstead found in his own study that students did, indeed, consider the value of revisions recommended by the professional authors and others on the network, and saw that some students did not, "by rejecting some of the comments, (perceive) the advice given by the professional writers as irrelevant or not worthy of their consideration. Quite the contrary. Students perceived the role of the professional writer in a number of positive and beneficial ways." (p. 65) One of these is choice:

> There are many factors involved in...equating (WIER) with choice. These include the differing roles of the teacher and professional writers and perhaps the face-to-face aspect of a student's relationship with the teacher. The students' views on the topic of revision led me to believe that revision plays a large role, although indirectly, in how students make sense of the conference. Students saw the conference as a place to comment on others' writing and offer suggestions for revision, *but what they liked most was the fact that they did not have to revise their work if they felt it wasn't necessary. There is an inherent choice and space in the conference forum and they saw the choice of rejecting suggestions for revision as a most important feature of the program.* (p. 65) [emphasis added]

Another, which Beckstead describes as a growing "sense of identification with the writers," fostered the "students' views of themselves as writers." (p. 66)

But joining these notions is the students' sense of themselves as learners who possess the necessary control to act on their ideas, as Ekaterina and Erifili understood:

> We are very fortunate to have had this form of communication at our fingertips. With telecommunications available in the classroom, we now believe that there are no boundaries to what can be achieved on a world-wide scale. We hope to see the day when computers along with telecommunications will become part of every household.

Conference WIRED.WRITERS and Conference WRITE.NOW

The next program operated from January to June, 1990. WIRED.WRITERS featured the return of Toronto-based novelist Katherine Govier, and poet Lorna Crozier from Saskatoon, who also served as writer in residence at the University of Toronto (UofT) that year. They were joined later in the project by Vancouver novelist—and Vancouver Province newspaper columnist—Crawford Kilian, who moderated a special conference on student fiction.

By this time, I was beginning to have a much stronger sense that these programs were about writing and communication, embracing instruments of technology as instruments of literacy. Student writing, the reading of student writing, and the discussion of student writing—undertaken both textually and orally, electronically and in the classroom—blended computer word-processing activity and telecommunications-based computer conferencing to provide direct and personal contact with writers and other students in Canada over an extended interval, normally a term or semester.

In ELECTRO-POETS, I had described this application of technology as "computer-mediated writing," and felt it could promote the process of reading and writing to learn in the classroom for two reasons:

> [a] the nature of on-line interaction is textual and, therefore, appropriate to writing and commentary; and,

> [b] the on-line forum provides a certain equity of use, placing students in control of the media before them to broaden the shape and scope of the classroom experience.

But after the experience of WIRED.WRITERS, which involved ten secondary schools in three provinces, as well as a new elementary program with children's author Emily Hearn, I felt prepared to include two additional notions:

> [c] the interaction that is fostered on-line promotes considered response both on-line and in the classroom, engaging the participants in an essentially reflective activity that fosters the acquisition and use of language for reading and writing; and,

> [d] original student writing is validated as legitimate reading material.

It is my view that WIER demonstrates how computer conferencing supports learning through developmental writing and interaction among students. As they read writing from others on-line, the students encounter perspectives that may deal with common, recognizable themes on the one hand, but clearly come out of a particular time and place that may be quite new and unfamiliar on the other. Just as the former offers access to experiences that may be seen as shared, the latter causes students to see they things they know in new ways.

In ELECTRO-POETS, the introduction of a second school, Cariboo Hill in Burnaby, B.C., the student writing demonstrated to all participants that a sense of place was inherent in the text. In WIRED.WRITERS, which extended the reach of WIER in Canada, the impact of this sense of place was felt even more profoundly than before. Here's an excerpt from a story for children by J., who wrote from a community in Canada's Arctic.

> "Narwhals!, narwhals!," screamed Angu, who had been playing with the sand on the beach. Just before the fathers came out, Angu went into the boat. The fathers of the five families went out of the tent, and put on some warm clothes. They went hunting immediately. Without having breakfast. Because of all

the excitement, they didn't notice that there was a boy in the boat. Every man on board started paddling towards the narwhals. Hundreds of narwhals swam away from the men, but the fathers didn't give up. They paddled and paddled until they found themselves in an open sea.

Not one whale was killed.

They couldn't see the land....

I suspect that J. did not set out to write about the Arctic so much as to tell the story of the boy in the boat, but what life is like there is conveyed with what I see as an authenticity that comes from being of a place. In this case, the authenticity I refer to accompanies the urgency of the hunt (They went hunting immediately. Without having breakfast.) and the impact of changing conditions in the Arctic and its impact on the hunt (They paddled and paddled until they found themselves in an open sea. Not one whale was killed. They couldn't see the land.)

The experience of the kind of life expressed in J.'s excerpt was not in the experience of the students in my classroom. But the images that sustained and expressed them were, along with the meanings they conveyed. Here's an excerpt from a piece by T.

> I woke from my daily innocent child's nap, and found out it was late in the evening. The sun was setting in the west and formed an orange colour over us and over the surface on the water. It was the first time in my life to see the beautiful sunset. I looked around and saw my parents sitting there quietly with a lot on their minds....I didn't say a word to them. Although it was supper time, I didn't say so...

> Finally, the entire sky was completely dark, and I felt this certain fear inside me; fear of not landing anywhere. I was no longer hungry because I was too scared, too scared to look into the water, thinking that I might drown if the ship should wreck.

It was so crowded on the ship, practically everyone was sitting up sleeping. Little kids were crying, adults were whispering, and yet, we were in the middle of nowhere.

I looked up at the sky with all those glowing stars and thought, "this is not the worst to come yet," and then I was out cold for the first night of our journey to hope and freedom.

In both pieces, notions of survival are expressed through images of the things that sustained them—water and boats. That one story is set in the Arctic and deals with survival through images of ice and the hunt, while the other is set in the South China Sea and deals with survival through images of escape offered our young on-line writers and readers a chance to associate those things that are partly unfamiliar with those that are partly familiar. The images in these passages are about favourable and unfavourable things; things that both sustain and threaten life. To the young writers and readers who come on-line, they become instruments of meaning. They are compelling instruments too, encouraging response, and inviting students to learn based upon their interest.

Here is another excerpt from another student in Canada's Arctic.

The Struggling Story of Surusimiitut

In the year 1922 a baby boy was born from an Inuk mother. She loved her baby with all her heart. The father of the baby felt the opposite. He was hurt, that his wife had borne a child that did not belong to him. The father knew it was part his fault that his wife had borne a son from a Scottish Whaler for a pair of binoculars. The child was born in a sod house where they would live every summer. In the winter they would live in an Igloo at the edge of the beach. Making these houses took a lot of time, because they had to cut out every block and set everything after the sod house or the Igloo was done. After they settled in, they were very tired from all the work they had done in order to have a comfortable home. (Sue Qitsualik, in Owen, in press)

Clearly, language-based telecommunications links like these offer great potential and opportunity for language development and proficiency in the classroom. But it is also clear that a need exists to interpret experience within a meaningful context. In most cases, this is normally the context of the local classroom, among familiar faces, where students can associate their new, written on-line experiences and incorporate them with things they know. I think if this as a process in which participants give the on-line experience a "local shape," a kind of sense-making of unfamiliar events within the familiar setting of each student's classroom.

It is also clear that teachers need to be able to deal with these experiences, and to feel that their classrooms are equipped to sustain "local shape." In my own classroom, for example, it was quite clear that The Struggling Story of Surusimiitut, excerpted above, incorporated a number of perspectives of the world that were uncommon in the lives of my students. These perspectives needed to be interpreted and given shape, or context. We might have expected the images of the beach, or perhaps, the blocks of snow for the igloo or sod for the house to reveal something about the difference between experiences known to Sue Qitsualik as the author of this piece and the readers in my classroom. And it's true—they do. But the one that my students responded to first is very likely the same one that the reader likely did while reading.

"For a pair of binoculars!" my students cried, recalling the Scottish whaler and the consequence of his visit. If the students were not taken by the enormity of this passage, they were certainly impressed by the credibility of the writing, which

conveyed, if nothing else, at least how different an experience like this was from their own lives.

But for me, as a teacher in a classroom, pieces like these offer another possibility—for students to see themselves in a new way, in response to the ways in which they have been able to "see" others. In this case, the experience happened to concern other Canadians, but Canadians whose expressions about life are completely different than those known to the students in my own classroom, which is also the place where the value of this was demonstrated to me.

When a student of mine read Sue Qitsualik's story, she seemed quite intrigued by it. There were a few comments about how life must be in Canada's Arctic, what "being Canadian" meant there, and then what being Canadian meant—here. In the space of perhaps ten minutes, my student's conception of her own world view changed from one that wondered about "those people," and saw "them" as "different," to one that considered how *she might look to them*.

This poem appeared on my desk:

C.B.C. (To all the tomatoes of Canada)

Brown eyes
BLACK hair
Flat nose

Can't reach the top of the
Blackboard
To reach the
White chalk.

Rolling English
Naaaay ho maaaah, eh?

Chopsticks
Fast food
Fork and knife.

A tomato in a vegetable salad.

I should explain that, in this case, "C.B.C." means "Canadian-born Chinese."

The writing of these pieces clearly reveals how a sense of place shapes, at least partly, our notions of who we are. It is inherent in the text. However, the stronger value for me is to be found in the exchanges that occur in response the writing. Sometimes these responses happen in the on-line conferences, where students, writers and teachers offer their comments to one another. At other times, it happens in the classroom, in response to the on-line experience. As a teacher, I have seen how pieces like the "Surusimiitut" story inspire, even compel students to see themselves as another might, how they might be "different" from others, and to respond to this, like we see in the "C.B.C." poem.

The Learner's Perspective

When I was in school, I thought that every writer was English and dead. It never occurred to me that you could be a poet and be Canadian at the same time. Things worth writing about happened some place else—in London, Paris, maybe Toronto, but never in Swift Current, Saskatchewan. And things worth writing about happened to other people.

This misconception was easily explained. Teachers spoke eloquently of Tennyson, Wordsworth and Kipling, but in the classroom the names Laurence, Ross and Birney were never mentioned. As well, our creative writing exercises consisted of variations on "How I Spent My Summer Holidays" or "The Mountains Majestic Majesty," though my family had never gone on a summer holiday and I had never seen a mountain. And, of course, I had never met a writer. It's odd that I became

one, but I did, and despite my public school education rather than because of it.

My own experience as a student was one of the reasons I accepted the position of Writer In Electronic Residence a year ago. The program is one way of putting a writer in every English classroom so that kids can see that books don't fall from the skies untouched by human hands. Rather, they are created by ordinary people not unlike them, their neighbours, teachers or parents. Books come out of a specific time and place. They come from the mind and pen of a real person who might live down the street, and though students may never get to see the writer they are working with in flesh and blood, they will meet him or her every day on the computer screen. For the hundreds of students involved in this program, to be a writer and to be Canadian—to come from Baffin Island, Saskatchewan or Saltspring—is now entirely possible.

Since becoming involved with the program, I've been pleased and impressed by the exchanges that take place among the students and writers. Everyone takes the work on the screen very seriously, yet the comments are informal and non-judgmental, and no one adopts the role of an authority with a rule book full of answers. Taking the work seriously means that the writers who respond are supportive but also critical. Where appropriate, I point out problem areas in the poems or stories and I make suggestions, but it is always the student who must evaluate what's been said and make revisions that may turn an exercise into a meaningful and memorable piece of writing. By working through the process of creation, criticism and evaluation, by looking at every single word and its contribution to the poem as a whole, students are learning so much about language and the way it works. And they have not only the resources of the classroom and their teachers but also the skills of a practicing writer at their fingertips.

Students are also learning how to motivate themselves, for in spite of the help that others can give them, they are ultimately responsible for what ends up on the page. Perhaps that's writing's biggest terror and greatest reward. It's a self-directed activity that profits from a well-considered, intelligent response, yet it's the writer, whether student or professional, who must finally sign her name at the bottom of the page.

As a writer, I feel privileged to have met so many talented young people from so many places and so many ethnic

backgrounds without ever leaving my study. I delight in the no-nonsense questions they ask about writing and the friendly tone we've been able to maintain across thousands of miles. These students are aware that writers are indeed alive and well in Canada, and I'm aware that there's a whole new generation of poets and story-tellers out there who already know one of the most important things about writing: who you are and where you come from are the stuff that books are made of.

Lorna Crozier, writer (Owen, 1991)

In Chapter 2, I outlined some "key ideas" that promote learning in textual, on-line communities. I noted that successful projects emphasize task, not technology, and that they are language-based, involving participants in actively summoning language appropriate to the tasks at hand, and particular language in particular situations. I said that they engage learners by offering direct and personal access to activities that are relevant now, and that they promote equity, increasing student access to experience by extending one's reach out into the world beyond the school and bringing what can be found there back into the classroom—to meet existing curricular goals. (Owen, 1990a)

These ideas came from the writing and commentary that occur in WIER, but they also emerge in the thoughts that students, writers and teachers have *in response* to their experiences in the program. Poet Lorna Crozier's writing is compelling to me no matter what form it takes, and her remarks, above, are no exception. She covers considerable ground in consideration of what makes WIER work. While I read it, and recognise its ring of truth insofar as my own experiences are concerned, I suspect that she and I might respond somewhat differently to the meanings it conveys. I suspect the idea that WIER students might come to know, as she did, that "who you are and where you come from are the stuff that books are made of" is of primary importance to her. For me, what emerges as most important is really her

sense of personal involvement in writing and learning, and how her beliefs comprise her own attitudes to writing and writers' work. Like the students who are "learning how to motivate themselves," Crozier is engaged by activity that "profits from...well-considered, intelligent response" in a context in which "Everyone takes the work on the screen very seriously," without someone adopting what Willinsky thought of as "traditional notions of correctness and a single standard," (p. 11) and which Crozier saw as "the role of an authority with a rule book full of answers."

Earlier in this chapter I introduced several comments written by WIER participants after their initial involvement in the program. The following examples are offered here because they reveal particular views that demonstrate the "profit" Crozier cites, and because they shaped my understanding about the things people found to be important in their own learning in WIER.

In the following example, a student considers what she has learned in the context of *being a writer*, supporting what I see as a sense of identification with the writer, Lorna Crozier, and the transformational power of her reflections on that identification:

> When Lorna Crozier commented that some of the lines in my poem seemed heavy handed, she was right on the button. It's strange because she only suggested they were but as soon as I read that I knew it was true. Without even looking at my poem again I knew it was true. So, when I looked at the good lines I noticed that they were lines that I had written down when I was feeling the emotion. The other lines were ones that had been created to piece together the strong lines. Those that I had created *after* the emotion were too strong and made up.
>
> Fake, I guess you could call them.

So, does that mean that I can only write something that is really effective when *I* feel the emotion? Maybe. It's common sense, I suppose, that what you're writing has to be felt before you can describe it?

I remember when I wrote the better lines in the poem that I really wasn't thinking about what words I was writing down. I was in a bit of a frenzy writing through my feelings. I guess you have to do that to be effective.

Go right to the core.

- D. M., student, Owen Sound

The sense of identification with being a writer that D. M. senses also extends to her identification with being a self-motivated learner who "profits from (the) well-considered, intelligent response" that Crozier notes, above. In the same way as Willinsky sees "a new set of social relationships for the classroom," between what I might now describe as all members of a learning constituency or forum, I believe this sense of identification is also felt by others in WIER as they pursue a changed kind of access to one another. Quite often, this occurs on-line between a student or students from one school and a teacher or teachers from another, and it is clear to me that the impact of the interactions between them is felt by all of them as well. In this next example, teacher Sandra Hawkins of Columneetza Secondary School in Williams Lake, B.C., identifies how the "odd pleasure," which was noted by student "helga" upon feeling that she was "taken seriously" on-line, extends to teachers, and their relationships *with their own students*:

Suddenly, teachers get credibility after years and years of useless circling errors in insulting red. I have some of my best discussions with students on-line. Their comments surprise me and they seem to feel the same about some of the comments I make here. (Owen, 1991, p.25)

Hawkins develops this theme in a paper she wrote for the Canadian Teachers' Federation report:

> At first (the students) were hesitant to offer their own writings (and even more hesitant to offer opinions on the writings of others), but as soon as they recognized the congenial atmosphere set by the professional writers, teachers, and fellow students, they began to enjoy the risk-taking.
>
> Because their writings were instantly published as soon as they sent them, students took more care in writing. They became less grade-oriented and more concerned with writing well for their audience.
>
> When they realized they could sometimes offer helpful suggestions to others, confidence, both as writers and critics, built. They even offered opinions to the professional writers.
>
> Because we couldn't transmit facial expressions on-line, students soon learned that they had to choose words carefully if they wanted to communicate effectively. A number of students messaged other participants privately when they felt they had been misunderstood and were more careful in the conference after that.
>
> Discussions on plagiarism, censorship, and artistic merit arose naturally in our discussions and students became more philosophical, both on-line and off. Since students could really consider opinions before responding, a lot of the dialogue was better than what we could get spontaneously in the classroom—and those who responded weren't "called on"—they were motivated to contribute.
>
> Also, students learned to become very playful with language—a lot of times showing more wit than their classmates and teachers realized they were capable of.

Taken together, writer Crozier, student D.M. (and "helga"), and teacher Hawkins make the *"key ideas,"* above, into concrete messages about teaching:

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- ...students learned to become very playful with language—a lot of times showing more wit than their classmates and teachers realized they were capable of

- ...students could really consider opinions before responding, a lot of the dialogue was better than what we could get spontaneously in the classroom—and those who responded weren't "called on"—they were motivated to contribute

- (...students) realized they could sometimes offer helpful suggestions to others, confidence, both as writers and critics, built. They even offered opinions to the professional writers.

- ...teachers get credibility after years and years of useless circling errors in insulting red

- (...students') comments surprise me and they seem to feel the same about some of the comments I make (on-line)

- I remember when I wrote the better lines in the poem that I really wasn't thinking about what words I was writing down. I was in a bit of a frenzy writing through my feelings. I guess you have to do that to be effective. Go right to the core

- Teachers spoke eloquently of Tennyson, Wordsworth and Kipling, but in the classroom the names Laurence, Ross and Birney were never mentioned

- When I was in school, I thought that every writer was English and dead. It never occurred to me that you could be a poet and be Canadian at the same time

They point to a changing relationship between the participants who are able to engage one another in WIER, which suggests changes in the classroom and in their own conceptions of classroom teaching and learning practice. Certainly this was true in my own classroom, where students clearly developed an expectation to have the same kind of control that they experienced in WIER. But I soon learned that the control they had come to crave was not a desire to become the teacher. Rather, it was the discovery that one could be a full participant in learning:

The students from my school who actively participated in the writing workshop were inspired to write more, and the anticipation of responses to our work kept us rushing back to the computer. We were also introduced to a new type of writing—that of students. Up until now the writing that had most influenced us had been primarily that of professional authors, who are generally adults. Through WIRED.WRITERS, however, we were now not only reading the work of talented peers, but could also comment on the pieces and read the comments of the "real" authors who were participating.

One aspect of WIRED.WRITERS and telecommunicating in general that I enjoy is the social interaction that can take place without any physical contact at all. I enjoyed "meeting" fellow telecommunicators, and "getting to know" people through their words on-line. It is actually possible to develop real relationships with people from other areas of the country (or, occasionally, the world) via telecommunicating much in the same way one develops a relationship with a penpal. The variety of people of different age groups, occupations and interests makes for an interesting experience in social interaction. Through WIRED.WRITERS it became possible to discover personalities by reading people's work or comments.

Nancy O'Connor, student (Owen, 1991)

"We have to be sure," Lionel had predicted, "that it all remains fun rather than turning into a terrible grind."

For my part, I was having the time of my life.

Time Passes

Novelist Katherine Govier and I had met several years before she joined WIER as a writer in electronic residence. She was quite interested in using technology in some way to enhance the place of Canadian literature in Canada's schools. When we began to work together in WIER, Katherine saw that a link could be made between WIER and the Writers' Development Trust (WDT), a fund-raising organization dedicated to promoting writers and writing in Canada. The WDT had sponsored a project known as the Baffin Island Writers' Project and was interested in supporting another educational program. As Chair of the Trust that year, Govier felt that the WDT could support the Faculty of Education at SFU by sponsoring WIER as a new educational initiative of the Trust, securing WIER's financial base through fund-raising, and extending WIER's reach into the writing community. I was excited by the initiative and embraced the idea as a kind of partnership between the educational and writing communities in Canada.

The next two years

Operating under this arrangement, WIER developed and expanded substantially over the next two years, attracting corporate and government sponsorships, and becoming a fully national program in 1992. At that time, the elementary program was divided into two conferences: *Write With You*, which reflected a perceived need to accommodate and differentiate between the nature of interaction with younger students in elementary schools and students in middle schools, and *Word For Word*, a new, separate conference for middle school students. *Write With You* continued with children's author Emily Hearn as the writer in electronic residence,

while *Word For Word* featured Newfoundland writer Kevin Major, a well-known—and somewhat controversial—author of fiction for young adults.

It was also during this period that the two existing studies involving WIER were undertaken. Beckstead's 1991 student case study, and Crichton's 1992 study of expert practice in CMC, both drew on their respective experiences in the secondary level WIRED WRITERS program. Inasmuch as the historical description of WIER that I am setting out here can be found in these studies, I will refer the interested reader there, as well as to my own remarks about them in Chapter 1 (pp. 7 - 14). However, given that my remarks focus primarily on Crichton's conceptions of "expertise" and the role of the on-line moderator (pp. 9 - 14), I would like to take the opportunity to frame Beckstead's study a little more here, particularly insofar as it addresses conditions that affect the likelihood of meaningful student involvement in WIER.

In his study, "I DETEST SCHOOL, BUT I LOVE TO LEARN:" WIRED WRITERS AND THEIR VIEWS ON WRITING, TEACHERS AND THE WRITERS IN ELECTRONIC RESIDENCE PROGRAM, David Beckstead considers the experiences of four students involved in WIER at Riverdale in 1991. His study was concerned with the students' views of participation in WIER.

> Generally, the participants recognized the potentials of the technology used in Wired Writers for them to transcend certain classroom barriers and create an environment of potential freedom and choice in their writing. These attributes were seen as a result of the nature of on-line communication to reach across the country and also the students' ability to remain pseudonymous and hence to be judged on writing alone.
>
> However, some of the students spoke of negative experiences with Wired Writers mainly due to teacher-imposed practices such as quotas or marking poetry. Such practices or routines

infringed upon their freedom and space within the conference forum. (Beckstead, 1992, p. ii)

Beckstead found that the students' experiences could be considered in the context of six areas: technical aspects, revision, the pseudonymous nature of the program, talking versus writing, the role of the professional writers, and the role of the teacher. For the students involved, the availability of pseudonymous participation, and the role of the professional writers and their own teacher emerged as the most compelling of these insofar as they had the greatest impact on the students' classroom experiences in WIER.

- The students felt at ease with the writers in considering the writers' comments as well as communicating with them on-line…. Evident in the (comments) is the relaxed tone and the informal nature of the exchange   I would question, however, if this ease in discussion of the student work would still be evident if the students were face-to-face with the writers in a classroom environment.   Thus the empowering effect through the students' sense of equality with the writers might be fostered by the computer conferencing environment.

- Students felt more at ease, more equal, with the writers (than with their teachers) partially due to the on-line format. This format allowed the users to remain essentially unknown as a physical presence and only identifiable through their writing. In short, pseudonymous.

- During my association with the WIER program, many teachers voiced their concerns over the idea that the students could use pseudonyms. They felt that the participants would not have a sense of responsibility for their work and wondered as to how they could evaluate with not knowing who the writer was. (pp. 67 - 68)

However, Beckstead's study confirmed what I had found in my own classroom experiences with WIER—that *identification did not have to mean disclosure,* and

that concerns that equated the use pseudonyms with a lack of responsibility for one's work were as unfounded as they were unhelpful. While *anonymous* participation presented difficulties for participants in this way, Beckstead saw that pseudonymous identification

> did not refer to a declaration of who the (student) author is but an *identification with the piece of writing as well as the pseudonym*. Rane maintained the same code name throughout the conference that nurtured a sort of identification with the pseudonym.
>
> The students felt content with their lack of physical presence in the conference and being judged on their writing alone. This is consistent with Foucault's (1977) notion of authoring, identifying the writer by name only and not a physical presence.
>
> (pp. 54 - 77) [emphasis added]

Another element that figured prominently in Beckstead's study was the detrimental impact of marking and quotas in the context of WIER.

> the practice of marking (was seen) as detrimental to the classroom experience...instead (it was) proposed that the teacher encourage the work to be written and explore it with the students once it has been written. (p. 77)

In particular, Beckstead is critical of the imposition of writing quotas, which existed in the classroom of the students in his study. Quotas imposed by teachers created a situation that encouraged students to offer writing to the conference that, in the words of one student who had complied in this manner, "was not honest, or truthful, but something done merely for marks." (p. 77)

Beckstead's own learning about teaching within WIER can be framed by the "lessons-from-a-child approach" (Willinsky, p. 44) advocated by Graves, Atwell and others of the so-called New Hampshire School. In this approach, teachers "learn with" their students in the belief that "collaborating with them as a writer and a reader who wonders about writing and reading" makes them better teachers. (Atwell, 1987, p. 3) Beckstead cites an example in which a student who was involved in WIER over two years with two different teachers compared the experiences. In the first year, the teacher was seen to be

> "discovering things at the same time we were", resulting in a more comfortable, equal relationship between the teacher and students as they explored, together, the Wired Writers program. (The student) said that "he made it really simple."

while in the second year of involvement,

> The other teacher...had "major trouble with the system" and "trouble telling us what he wanted." Confusion and a lack of clearly defined goals on the teacher's part contributed to the reasons for (the student's) generally negative experience in her second year of Wired Writers. (Beckstead, p. 77)

I chose the title for this chapter, "Creating WIER," because I wanted to suggest that WIER is, and has always been, a continuous process of creation by its participants— people who have seen something of their own ideas and aspirations as available and sustainable within it. WIER has clearly benefitted as a result of this thinking. David Porter, an educational technology wizard-cum-guru who has been active in many of the innovations supported at SFU and within the province of B.C., once said that, in this sense, WIER was a kind of "guerrilla activity," suggesting

accurately, I think, that its success was also its dependency—it relied on the wherewithal of those who understood it to find ways to proceed.

Ready, Fire, Aim

In a speaking engagement on the subject of technology in education held for participants in the Southern Interior Telecommunications Project (SITP) at the Silver Star ski resort in Vernon, B.C., Dr. Milt McLaren of the Faculty of Education at SFU exhorted his audience to see innovation as a kind of guerrilla process too, as the heading, above, recalls.

I can see something of WIER's creation in that phrase, especially if I pause to consider the work that students, teachers and writers put into it each year, and all the steps involved in its development from an idea on *SwiftCurrent* to the national program that it has become.

In a way, "creating WIER" is the same for students posting a work on-line for the first time as it was for me in the process of establishing the program. Ideas need to be believed in and to have the chance to gather momentum. They need to become more than ideas. Lionel Kearns commented on this regularly in response to poetry posted by students in ELECTRO-POETS:

- The poem...IS valuable, to me and to you and (perhaps) to someone else as well. That is all we can do, as artists—just put our work out there into the world with the idea that it might somehow be useful to someone else. You have done your part now, and can get on with something else, but don't destroy the poem, which now has an existence of its own.

- Like everything else, you learn by doing it. Write everything down. And then, when you are ready, put some of your writing out into the world and see what happens. A writer needs an audience to know whether what he or she is doing

is effective or not. In that sense, that is what this project is all
about.

- Inspiration means, literally, breathing in, and you don't want
  to wait for that. Articulation comes on the outward breath,
  and that is when you do your work. Of course, you can't have
  one without the other.

WIER's Development

For me, there are really three events that have served to put WIER "out there," as

Lionel would say, and to make it possible to become more than just an idea—or

many ideas, for that matter. The first, as I have described, was the convergence of

Lionel Kearns, Gerri Sinclair, and myself. The second was Katherine Govier's work

to develop WIER's financial base and national reach, and, through the WDT,

encourage its links to Canada's writing community. The third, and most recent

event, is the entry of the Faculty of Education at York University, which assumed

WIER from SFU in 1993 in an effort to:

- secure its accessibility to schools on a national scale

- to inform teaching practice in response to what I think of as "on-line learning"
  programs, and

- to extend its reach to a new—and important—constituency of learners: student
  teachers.

Taken together, these "events" frame the development of WIER rather well, in my

view. As the program grows and assumes greater responsibilities and

commitments, it remains to be seen whether WIER's capacity to inspire and

accommodate the visions of those who participate in it is generalizable to a national

constituency of students, teachers, and writers, whether its impact on classroom

teaching and learning will continue to be felt in face-to-face or "regular" teaching

practice and, if so, how that practice might be informed, or whether its impact on creating new—and needed—opportunities for writers' work will upset the balance of the partnerships that have evolved between stakeholders from the education and writing communities.

For the moment, WIER will suspend its growth, choosing instead to consolidate the program across the seventy or so schools involved. Several issues have emerged that necessitate this pause, and which will be addressed in the 1994 program, including:

- development of teacher/moderators
- managing an increasing volume of student writing, on-line and in the classroom
- impact and role of posting class assignments on-line
- a diminishing presence of student interaction and response on-line
- effective training programs for the technical and pedagogical use of WIER
- ease of access
- common user interface
- models for growth

Mission

To support this consolidation, WIER has undertaken the development of a mission statement to help guide and articulate its vision, and to reflect the needs and aspirations of the various constituencies involved. As of this writing, WIER's mission statement exists in draft form.

Mission Statement

The mission of Writers In Electronic Residence is to use telecommunications technology to link students and their teachers with writers and one another in order to promote original writing and written interaction in Canadian schools. Inherent in this mission are elements that comprise the WIER experience:

- reading, writing, and interaction
- learning and teaching
- writers' work
- technology

Goals

With partners in the field of education, and corporate and government sponsors, WIER's mission may be framed in three main areas: education, writing and writers' work, and technology.

Education

In order to guide and accomplish our mission as an educational initiative, we seek:

1. To focus on the use of technology as a catalyst for learning.

2. To promote the process of reading and writing to learn in the classroom.

We believe that:
- the nature of on-line interaction is textual and, therefore, appropriate to writing and commentary

- the on-line forum provides a certain equity of use, placing students in control of the media before them to broaden the shape and scope of the classroom experience

- the interaction that is fostered on-line promotes considered response both on-line and in the classroom, engaging the participants in an essentially reflective activity that fosters the acquisition and use of language for reading and writing

- original student writing is validated as legitimate reading material in school

3. To support the creative use of computers by individuals: writing, composing, designing, analyzing and other extensions of original thought.

Emphasizing that computer use in WIER is about

- education and, in particular, curriculum

- equal opportunity of use

- applications in classrooms within an integrative (and interactive) context in the curriculum

Writing & Writers' Work

In order to guide and accomplish our mission as a writing initiative, we seek:

1. To introduce writers and their work to schools.

- crossing provincial and curricular barriers

- providing paid work for writers, wherever they live

- broadening the audience for writers' work

2. To introduce young writers to their peers in all parts of the country.

- providing a national reach

- conceptualizing "distance" as an resource, rather than a barrier, to experience

- building tolerance and understanding across Canada's regions

Technology

In order to guide and accomplish our mission as an technological initiative, we seek:

1. To help students learn to use microcomputer technology.

- enhancing and extending the dynamic processes of learning and self-expression (sensing, creating, synthesizing, designing, analyzing, and expressing)

- making the content, process, and pace of learning more adaptable to individual students' needs, and to help students develop the basic knowledge and skills necessary for formulating and expressing ideas through words

- encouraging the development of alternative delivery systems for education

- helping students to understand how microcomputer technology is used in everyday life and to foster their ability to use devices based on this technology

2. To provide access.

- offering isolated teachers and schools access to writing coaches without distinguishing between them on the basis of location

- providing models of response to student writing

The draft version of WIER's mission will, in turn, guide the development of specific operational objectives. The process is expected to be completed in the fall of 1993.

In this chapter, I have reviewed the development of WIER as it is revealed in the transcripts of on-line conferences, which includes the response and commentary of participants who are actively engaged in the process of creating WIER.

Chapter 5
Conclusion

High Teach

A teacher in Calgary, Alberta, left me a note on-line. She said that some parents of students involved in WIER had commented on it. One, who was seeking to be a writer herself, as it happened, said that with all this help, her son would likely publish before she could. Another complained that she only got to *read* Susan Musgrave in her book club, while her daughter was engaged in regular on-line discussions with her from school.

WIER can present problems like these. This concluding chapter will offer some thoughts on dealing with them. Where it counts—in the classroom.

Writing With A National Reach

The WIER program connects writing and language arts students in Canada with writers, teachers and one another in an often animated exchange of original writing and commentary. The writers, who are all published, well-known authors in Canada, join students and teachers to read and consider the student works, offer reactions and ideas, and guide discussions between the students.

The program began in the 1987-88 school year at Riverdale Collegiate Institute (RCI), an inner city secondary school in Toronto, Ontario, and Cariboo Hill Secondary School in Burnaby, B.C. following some trials that involved electronic mail-based exchanges between writers and students. These were undertaken on *SwiftCurrent*, a Canadian "electronic literary magazine" used by a number of writers in Canada in

the 1980s. The WIER project was established at, and supported through its first five years by the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University (SFU) thanks to the efforts of Dr. Gerri Sinclair, and Lionel Kearns, who was the first writer in electronic residence. In 1990, the Writers' Development Trust (WDT), an organization dedicated to promoting Canadian writers and writing in Canada, emerged as a stakeholder, to secure the program financially through fundraising, and to provide a link to the writing community in our country. The involvement of the WDT came thanks to the efforts of novelist Katherine Govier, who began serving as a writer in electronic residence that year. In 1993, The Faculty of Education at York University assumed the program from SFU thanks to Dr. Stan Shapson, Dean of the Faculty.

WIER is now a national program in Canada. As of this writing, the program has just completed its sixth year, operating in some seventy schools with eleven writers. There are programs for elementary (Canadian grades 1—6), middle school (grades 7—10) and secondary school students (grades 9—12). There is some post-secondary involvement through the community college system and in teacher education programs.

How It Works

Students use word processors to compose their works and responses to the works of others before incorporating telecommunications into the process. When the students are ready to offer their work to the program, their writing is sent to the on-line conference, which runs on the host computer at York. Most schools are able to connect with a local area call, or via the services of Datapac or iNET 2000, which are commercial data networks in Canada, or via the educational *Internet* network.

Most of the original writing is poetry and short fiction. Students are encouraged to submit works they consider to be in draft stages rather than finished works in order to sustain the value of their interactions with writers and others on the system. Another reason for this is that issues regularly emerge that encourage writing in other forms, often in response to particular issues or concerns expressed in one or more of the submissions. Not surprisingly, textual discussions develop on-line in which students explore their ideas with one another.

A Reflective Community

In each of the projects WIER's goal has been to embrace telecommunications in general, and computer conferencing in particular, as a textual medium capable of promoting considered response through written expression and interaction to build a reflective community—on-line and in the classroom. Throughout its existence, this goal has been guided by three primary learning objectives for students:

- to be in control of the media before them, and to utilize these media to broaden the shape and scope of the classroom experience

- to consider the value of revision in the writing process and the role that they may play in this—for themselves and for others—using language to interpret and understand as well as to be understood

- to revisit their thoughts in light of the ideas they receive—to see the world as another might—and to respond in the textual environment that on-line computer conferencing systems offer them.

Partly On-line, Mostly In The Classroom

On a given day, students attending schools from Baffin Island in Canada's high Arctic, to urban centres in the south, and from Newfoundland in the east to British Columbia in the west, offer their own works for reading and comment by the writers and other participants in the program.

What they find is remarkable writing—student writing—which reveals that (and how) who we are as Canadians is at least partly the result of where we're from. Imagine, for instance, how Inuit students from Baffin Island might express notions about survival. Their ideas are quite different from those expressed by students who may identify themselves as Canadian-born Chinese from Toronto schools. And they are quite different from Vietnamese students who write about war, about the boats, and about escape and betrayal, yet who also search for ways to express fond memories of family and home, the value of trust, and the details of life as they lived it in Hanoi. Still others consider equity and gender, race, freedom of expression and other issues of importance to young people.

Impact on Teaching Practice

I have had the opportunity to visit WIER classrooms in several provinces. On one trip, teachers in British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario reported how they had "changed their teaching" in response the manner in which the professional writers interacted with the students. They spoke about how they had seen writers "focus on the writing" rather than on the student. And several noted that they had altered their teaching and evaluation practices so that they were spending more time responding to student writing—with the students—and less time "giving marks" or "marking kids" in isolation. They spoke about how writing had improved in their classes, and how their students demonstrated a "greater investment" in their own learning.

Now that WIER is old enough to have something of a history, teachers have taken the opportunity to reflect upon their experiences and to consider the impact of WIER on their teaching practice. For my purposes here, their reflections may be considered in two broad frames:

- development of successful initiatives to integrate WIER into the curriculum

- impact of WIER on "regular" or "off-line" teaching practice

During the 1993 program, I made arrangements with two journals to publish a series on WIER in which teachers who were interested in examining their on- and off-line teaching practice were invited to write articles on their experiences. This first excerpt is taken from *"Implementing Writers In Electronic Residence in an Adult High School—Round Three"* by Barbara Stevenson:

> Teachers often comment that they are successful the third time they try a new teaching approach. As we begin round three of the Writers In Electronic Residence (WIER) program, we can look back at the process of implementation and determine whether we can claim success.
>
> We have over 3,500 students at Viscount Bennett Centre returning to upgrade their high school qualifications. Our students, aging from 19 to 69, attend for reasons that vary from the need to improve their marks to the desire to improve on a life dependent on social assistance. We have several good writers, many passionate writers and a wealth of life experiences to write about. It seems an ideal place to implement an enriched opportunity to write and edit.
>
> We are fortunate to have an equipped physical setting and people to support the technology. The Learning Resources Centre (a renovation of the library) in the centre of the school, consists of a traditional quiet work area on the lower level and an upper level with a computer lab, plus several stations with differing technology available. Students are free to pursue independent learning or to work in groups on projects. One corner of the Center is devoted to the concept of a Writers' Corner. It is a place for writers to meet and share; a place for tutorial help with writing across the curriculum. Four months after opening, WIER became a part of this corner with the simple addition of a telephone line and modem to one computer station.
>
> We do have some unusual difficulties to work around. Our teachers are all part time, making communication with them a

challenge. Our students have busy lives; many have work and young children to care for outside of class. Like the teachers, the students are also not at school every day. Another problem is that WIER begins in January, in the midst of departmental exams, well before our second semester begins. Students in the fall and summer semesters miss out entirely on the experience of using telecommunications with writers and students across the country unless an alternative project is planned.

As the Project Teacher in the Learning Resources Centre, I signed on to WIER for the first round January of 1991 and then attempted to have the teachers buy into the concept. A few teachers sent their students with writing which I sent on-line. I also captured and printed out all pieces of writing and stored them in binders in the Resources Centre. I sent copies to the teachers of particularly informative critiques by the authors participating in the project. It seemed as though we had expanded our teaching force by the number of authors in the WIER project Some teachers brought their classes in to the Centre to read the writing in the binders and they wrote responses to some of the writing . We were invited to do a Show and Tell to senior administration. It all sounded wonderful, as many innovations do, but we were failing to attract all but the few teachers who already had a comfort level with word processing. We needed to get others involved. Very little writing by other students was being read. Students were thrilled to get responses to their work, but they never continued the dialogue with the writer on-line. They sent and got their reply - period. It was the same as handing back a paper with red circles--it went no further. We wanted the students to see their writing as a process. That was not happening.

The following fall two teachers decided to try to offer the experience of telecommunications to their classes. We identified a project already planned on the K12 Net bulletin board where schools were gathering information across the country for a geography assignment. Our two classes would answer their questions. In return, they would respond to questions sent by our students on topics related to conflict resolution . The students wrote a series of interview questions directed to three people: another student, a member of the community, and a student from a school in another part of the country, via telecommunications. Students had several writing assignments within the project which culminated in a video taped "Oprah" style talk show. For the show, the students assumed the persona of one of the people they had interviewed

and answered the interviewer's questions. It was a special experience for the class. We learned the value of making the telecommunications experience not only personal, but shared with the whole class. However, next term - the teachers did not want to do it again. It had taken too much class time for the quality of responses received from the students who responded on-line. A telecommunications project that has a core of organizers such as WIER has to keep things running and to ensure that appropriate replies are sent removes the need for the teachers to spend excessive amounts time.
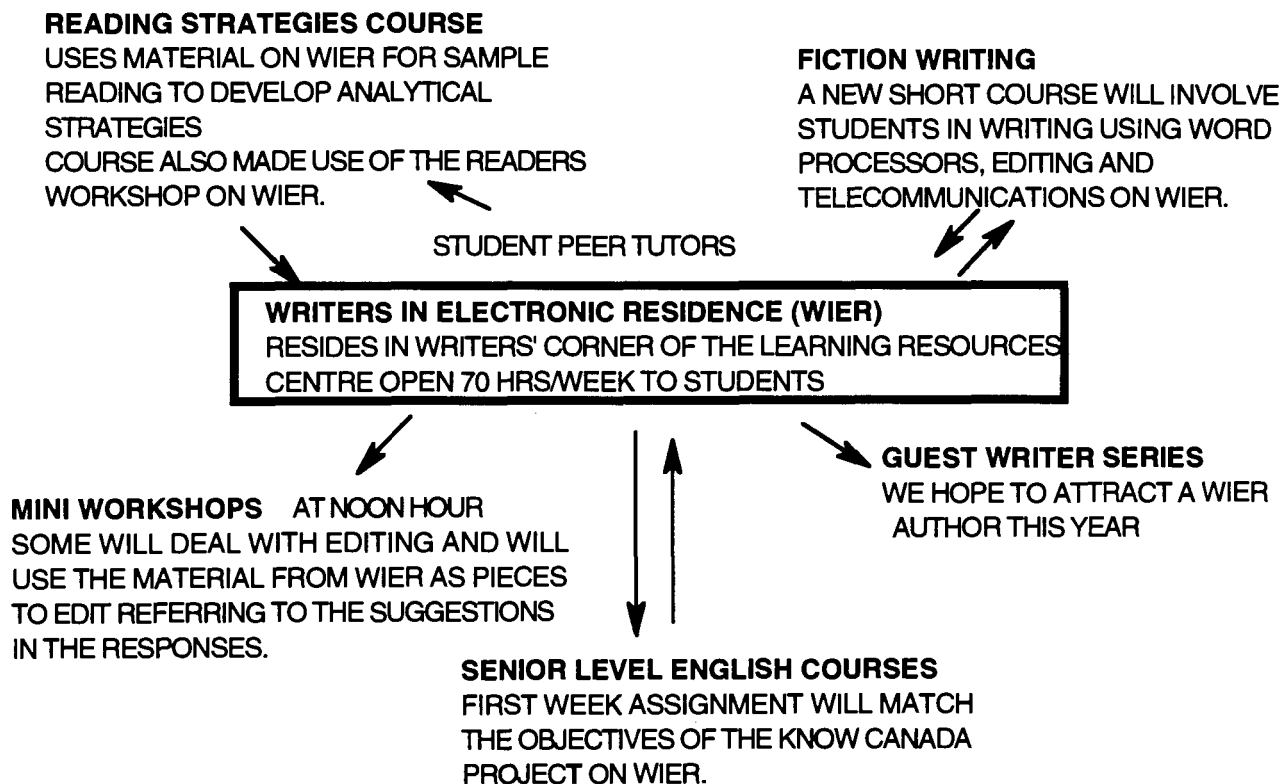
In the winter semester we signed onto WIER for the second time. Interested teachers selected some keen students to send and capture student work using a Macintosh and a modem in Writers' Corner. While the students involved enjoyed it, the activity was still outside of the classroom and WIER was seen by most teachers as valuable, but extra. None of our senior level classes participated due to a perceived lack of time and the pressure to prepare students for the diploma exam. After all, passing the exam is what the students paid for!   Adult students themselves tended to view activities like WIER as extra and some even felt the teacher was shirking her duty when time was spent on activities not directly tied to the topic being taught.

This past fall WIER offered the reading workshop project. This allowed us to lure the teachers who were teaching reading strategies. Although the timing did not allow direct on-line activity, we still found the captured material formed wonderful resources for further teaching of reading and strategies. Now we could use WIER even when we were not on-line. Our pool of interested teachers was growing and we had a pool of students with some experience with telecommunication. We were moving to a 'critical mass' that would make the project viable. We are ready for round three to be the best yet.

While this process has been evolving, the Resource Centre itself has also evolved. We are involving more people in a wider variety of ways. The Writers' Corner has grown to include peer tutors for writers and noon hour workshops by teachers on selected topics. Students this term will be offered a series of workshops on "editing on the computer". In addition, we have added a new course in reading strategies. Writing, captured on-line from WIER, will be the reading material used to learn strategies for improving comprehension. The writing on WIER will also be used for editing on the computer since it is already typed with editing suggestions in the responses. As more

teachers take ownership of WIER, we will get closer to our goal of having telecommunications integrated with classroom activity.

Figure 1 - Operation of WIER at Viscount Bennett

READING STRATEGIES COURSE
USES MATERIAL ON WIER FOR SAMPLE
READING TO DEVELOP ANALYTICAL
STRATEGIES
COURSE ALSO MADE USE OF THE READERS
WORKSHOP ON WIER.

FICTION WRITING
A NEW SHORT COURSE WILL INVOLVE
STUDENTS IN WRITING USING WORD
PROCESSORS, EDITING AND
TELECOMMUNICATIONS ON WIER.

STUDENT PEER TUTORS

WRITERS IN ELECTRONIC RESIDENCE (WIER)
RESIDES IN WRITERS' CORNER OF THE LEARNING RESOURCES
CENTRE OPEN 70 HRS/WEEK TO STUDENTS

MINI WORKSHOPS AT NOON HOUR
SOME WILL DEAL WITH EDITING AND WILL
USE THE MATERIAL FROM WIER AS PIECES
TO EDIT REFERRING TO THE SUGGESTIONS
IN THE RESPONSES.

GUEST WRITER SERIES
WE HOPE TO ATTRACT A WIER
AUTHOR THIS YEAR

SENIOR LEVEL ENGLISH COURSES
FIRST WEEK ASSIGNMENT WILL MATCH
THE OBJECTIVES OF THE KNOW CANADA
PROJECT ON WIER.

The diagram illustrates that implementing a telecommunications activity has been a process. I feel that we have reached a point in the process where we can claim some success. I doubt the process will end with round three. (Stevenson, in press)

Stevenson's remarks are instructive, beginning, as they do, with the value of

learning from one's experience and moving toward the creation of theory that, in

turn, guides the Viscount program to build approaches to learning that had not been

imagined before the school became involved in WIER. Like other teachers—myself

included—her notions begin with the value of incorporating student voice in the

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program at Viscount, but what stands out for me is how this acceptance seems to make technological hurdles, like adding a telephone line and modem to a computer station, the "simple" problems. To me, this is a fascinating glimpse into WIER's workings because it is clear from her remarks that, compared to the substantial issues of changing conditions of work, evaluation, and the resistance to change she faced the curricular front, issues of technology were the least of her worries. These she could control.

What made WIER work at Viscount was Stevenson's discovery of its value as *reading* material and a willingness to accept her discovery as, in effect, theory that could guide and inform new practice. Such a view can be seen in Willinsky's explorations of Paulo Freire's ideas as well:

> "Reading does not consist merely of decoding the written word or language; rather it is preceded by and intertwined with knowledge of the world." What that intertwining can mean...is a transformation of the world: "reading the word is not preceded merely by reading the world, but by a certain form of *writing* or *rewriting* it, that is, of transforming it by means of conscious, practical work." (pp. 77-78) [original emphasis]

Part of Stevenson's re-conceptualization of teaching in the library appears in the form of her view of WIER as a kind of "partner" in her teaching practice. In no way is WIER a "service" she needs to deliver. The library at Viscount Bennett reveals to the visitor how the acceptance and inclusion of such a partnership is intertwined with the activities that occur there. It is the same kind of transformational "writing and rewriting" I had seen in Ritz's photograph paragraphs (see Chapter 3), and later, in the developing conceptions of the value of reading student writing that followed the experiences of ELECTRO-POETS and NEW-VOICES. (see Chapter 4)

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Todd Wright, a middle school teacher with the York Region board of education in Ontario wrote about this as well in his article, "A WIERd Experience," in which he explores how WIER became "the centre of my creative writing program."

The addition of the Writers In Electronic Residence (WIER) program to my classroom has presented an opportunity for significant change. After an initial exposure to it in 1992, WIER has become the core of my English program. The opportunity to interact with writers on-line occurs between January and June, but the preparation for the effective use of that time now begins the first day of school.

The reason for putting WIER at the centre of my creative writing program relates to the way in which my class and I experienced WIER for the first time last year. As much as we benefitted from that experience, there was a sense that much more could be done.

(Initially,) there was tremendous reluctance among class members. No one wanted to go first, although they were all excited about the prospect of on-line "talking." After spending some time "lurking" and reading the work of other students from other schools, we began to send our own work. Things rapidly developed from there, and the kids could not get enough. Once a story or poem was sent, we all checked, with much anticipation, the responses that would come back.

At first, the novelty kept things moving, but soon the lack of responses from other student writers became a problem. The on-line authors in residence did a wonderful job of responding to the writing, and their comments and criticisms were pertinent. Students came to see their writing in new ways. They recognized the importance of process in a manner I have never been able to get across before. Yet there was a sense of disappointment that grew in some quarters as weeks would go by and their work would have generated only two or three responses. This is one problem that can be addressed easily through more thorough preparation for the WIER experience.

One of the greatest potentials of WIER lies in the interaction of students from the many diverse areas of our country. The professional authors also recognized this and tried hard to

encourage the development of more student-to-student interaction.

As a teacher, I decided to make response the key issue for the final few months. I did this based on the recognition that the students I was teaching could learn as much from reading the writing of others as they could from doing their own writing. Also, in adding their own written responses, they were forced to think hard about what effective writing was. The results of this response-based effort were quite rewarding. Students learned more about writing and also about regional interests exhibited in the writing of others. This, in turn, forced some introspective writing of our own, with consideration given to what made us unique as writers from Southwestern Ontario.

Building on last year's experiment, we developed a school-wide program that would encourage all intermediate students to become involved in Writers In Electronic Residence. We developed an "Integrated Language Arts Program" that had a variety of activities, including WIER. Through a rotation system we covered all one-hundred intermediate students. All received initial exposure to WIER-based activities. This took place from September to October, long before WIER was even set to begin. Most activities merely simulated the WIER experience; students realized that they were in training for the on-line version, which we will begin in early '93. Through this program we have prepared all students for WIER: we have learned to focus on the writing process and especially on how to respond to the writing of others.

The development of student writing as an emerging form is an important concept to convey, and this is done well within the structure of WIER. It is also important to note that risk-taking is crucial, and must be developed delicately. Within the context of a process writing program there should not be much difficulty acknowledging the on-going quality of change that is important to writing. Still, with many students there will be a real fear of this next step.

The sharing of writing with a wider audience is a scary prospect. The movement from reluctance to acceptance to enthusiasm is an exciting one. Not all students overcome their reluctance, but in many cases, the chance to share in a national dialogue on writing through writing, was enough to provoke an increased interest in writing. Learning happened naturally, and emerged according to the needs of the writer. I remember one student in

particular. She was a very good writer, yet was antagonistic toward the idea of sharing her work in this new way. After much encouragement, she took the plunge. Once she had done so, she could not wait to see the reaction to her work. Enthusiasm built as the responses came in, and she became a regular participant in WIER, both in her writing as well as her responses to others. The skill of appropriate response became one of her finest resources.

As a teacher in this class, the writing program suddenly had a logic to it that did not seem to be present before. It was both easier and harder to teach writing skills. Easier in that the needs of the students became more obvious. These needs were also shown to be supported through the comments of others. More difficult in that the on-line work, the guidance of students through the paths of CMC, and the overall planning for this new learning environment demanded a sustained commitment of time and energy. (Wright, 1992, p. 7)

There are a number of striking elements in Todd's article that guide an understanding of WIER's central place in his writing program—his notion of a "reluctance to acceptance to enthusiasm" continuum, the impact of a burst of "novelty" and inevitable sense of loss as the novelty fades name a few. But the one that stood out to me was how WIER represents "significant change" to his sense of what happens in a writing program. This has more to do with his discovery of a "logic" to his writing program, which I see as his discovery of a way to understand his teaching practice as an effective support to his students' "natural" learning.

Writing, Not Computers

I learned from them, as I had learned from my own experiences, that the language that is stimulated through participation with WIER—both orally and in writing, on-line and in the classroom—demonstrates that it has value in school learning. The experiences are about tasks more than technology. They are about literacy more than computer literacy. And they demonstrate that the power of on-line interaction

is found first in involving learners in their own learning, and then in valuing what they say.

In this next section, I want to consider by way of review how the WIER program embraces telecommunications-based experiences as, essentially, experiences of language through interaction, reflection and writing rather more then as experiences of technology through information, immediacy and talk. To begin, then, I want to consider some ideas about what these experiences are, and how they are shaped by the metaphors that are commonly associated with them.

Information and . . .

[a] Age

First, I do not mean to suggest a sequence to words that might reasonably be associated with the idea of "information." I could consider (and will) words like "processing," "delivery" and "technology" too. But that word "age" is, for me, the most compelling of this group, and I want to deal with it a bit before moving on to some other ideas by considering another communicative technology.

The "Post" literate Society

It may be that people were enthralled by the technology of postage stamps when Rowland Hill invented them in 1837. Both England and the United States were impressed enough to press them into service over the ten years that followed, but these stamps—what I am calling "technology" in this paragraph—supported some key principles too. Postage rates, for instance, could then be fixed across the country without worrying about the distance letters might have to travel. And, perhaps best of all, these adhesive newcomers to communication could be prepaid.

It's my guess that people weren't as taken by the technology as much as the desire it served, namely, a craving to communicate, a certain relish one takes in extending one's reach. Perhaps it can be said that the world as it may have been understood in 1837 was not in need an "information age." And perhaps the fairly common tendency to think of our present as being in one represents our understanding that we can neither "know" the world nor what is in it enough to avoid allowing ourselves to be at least partly overwhelmed, even numbed, by it and in it.

But it does seem fair enough to say that we are in an information age now, and that people will feel they share an understanding of what it means to be in one or, perhaps more accurately, to be affected by being in one.

Words like "information age" suggest ways of imagining the world, along with new sets of definitions that govern how one conceptualizes that world. They serve as metaphors of our "time," our present, our *age*.

[b] Processing: The Delivery Metaphor

"Processing" is a good example of how "information" is defined. To *process information* suggests that the information is worthy of care and curing, manufacture and moulding. One shapes and formulates what one processes, including one's conception of what information is. (Even the Grolier Electronic Encyclopædia, an on-line information source, notes that some "fifty per cent of all workers in the United States today are in some way involved in information processing. Many people do not receive the right information at the right time, however, because they are not aware the information exists, because they do not

know where to look for it, or because it is buried in a mass of extraneous information and is difficult to find.")

Notions of needing to process information help to define how one might deal with the results of what one has done, fostering what I think of as the *delivery metaphor* for our "information age."

[c] The Technology Frame

It's also why I've left "information technology" to last. Technology helps to produce and present information to such an extent that the idea of an "age" is possible. But technology is also affected, and even shaped, by its ability to have its way with information and to do what people ask it to do.

What I want to do here is to look for a moment at information processing and information delivery as causes of an information age somewhat more than the results of one.

Northrop Frye's notion that we each have a "motive for metaphor," (Frye, 1963, p. 1) or a desire to associate what goes on inside the mind with what does on outside it, is what Donald Schön might call the "accounting for our perspectives in the world: how we think about things, make sense of reality, and set the problems we later try to solve...a certain kind of product—a perspective or frame, a way of looking at things—and a certain kind of process—a process by which new perspectives on the world come into existence." (Schön, in Ortony, 1988, p. 254)

Schön's notion of *problem setting*, or framing the purposes to be achieved more than the means by which they might be achieved, is useful here, I think, because it

suggests that the ways in which new ideas are encountered will lead one to reflect and then interpret metaphorically. (p. 256)

In this case, however, I regularly feel that the wrong problem has been set, and this is the problem I have been trying to set here—or, at least, set straight.

Information Technology

There was a wonderful cartoon taped to the loans desk of the library at SFU throughout my time on campus. A student sits studying at a desk in a library. The stacks are huge and cover all of the considerable background around him and the few books at his meagre table. The books are laughing at him, and calling out "You will NEVER know what's in me!"

Perhaps the acceptance of ideas about information technology come partly from a sense of awe one feels when encountering it or, more properly, more and ever-increasing amounts of what one has assumed it must be and how one must respond to it. In my own work in WIER, I have come to recognise the idea of information technology as a kind of numbing enemy. Helpful, yes, but not as a metaphor for what one might actually want to do or become so much as what one can—or, more likely, what one cannot—"get."

I think that one is liable to interpret what understanding one can make of "information technology" by seeking out—and then using—words that serve to sustain the contexts that existed when encountering it. Words like "delivery," for instance, become important because they address a need to use the technology to disseminate what the technology was used to find. Other words, like "distance," have also become important in the lexicon of information technology. In my view,

this is largely because distance is imagined as something that can—and should—be *overcome by the technology* available to us.

It is true that distance can be seen as "overcome" using the technology available. Take the use of telecommunications in distance education programs offered by institutions like the Open University (OU) in the UK, for instance. The OU began offering DT200, an introductory information technology course, using telecommunications to facilitate the delivery of assignments to students. Tutors were hired to mark these assignments, and to moderate so-called face-to-face and on-line tutorials. DT200, "An Introduction to Information Technology: Social and Technology Issues," was one of the first undergraduate courses at the OU to include even a small on-line component. It operated in 1988. (Mason, in Mason and Kaye, 1989, pp. 115—145)

I think that the "technology frame" for understanding information summons and sustains a perspective of an "information age" as having something more to do with technology than the stuff one does with it, and about being—or more often, becoming—"computer literate," as if a metaphor for a kind of technological grammar was required before actually considering the tasks that might be important to those engaged in technology-sustained activities.

It is good luck, perhaps, that people in Rowland Hill's time seem to have managed to keep their cool when it came to dealing with the technology of adhesive-backed stamps. Their "Post" literacy seems not to have lost its perspective on the problem it set out to consider—that people might actually have something valuable to say and appreciate the opportunity to express it.

Interaction Technology

My own work in WIER is often taken for information technology. And it is true enough that it is, of course, especially if one accepts the idea that *everything* available using the computer is information in one sense or another. But what I want to do here is consider framing it from another perspective.

What would happen if information technology was—and was seen to be— *interaction technology*? How would our understandings of what it might mean to us change? Would the place currently occupied by notions of "delivery" change? And how might the idea of "distance" develop?

The Currency of Distance

I used to think that the currency of distance was the kilometer, but now I'm not so sure. The use of telecommunications for writing and interaction in writing and language arts classrooms suggests some other possibilities. In my own work to bring students, teachers and writers together in WIER, "distance" becomes more experiential than geographical. When students and writers actually have the opportunity to interact freely with one another, and to control their own participation in the meaningful exchange of ideas, the currencies of distance change shape and tone. Once "distant" constituencies begin to learn more about each other through considered, textual interactions that are *sustained more by the experiences they are writing about than by the technology that links them.* And, perhaps not surprisingly, they learn more about themselves in the process.

Talking or Writing?

WIER embraces the reflective nature of asynchronous communication and the considered nature of writing to nurture interaction among students. Schools, for instance, are encouraged not to undertake their participation while on-line. Rather, they are asked to capture or download new submissions and responses frequently, print them up and offer them to students as part of the regular, in-class reading programs in the schools. Students then have the opportunity to consider their thoughts, compose them at a word processor, and save them to diskette as files. The files are sent to the on-line conference when the students are ready to offer their comments to the rest of the on-line group. In this way, WIER views computer conferencing as a medium of writing and task more than as a medium of technology.

In this next section, I want to consider how this view is distinct from the "technological frame" I noted earlier, in which a certain "immediacy" is associated with the tasks undertaken on-line because of the immediacy of the technology that sustains them. I think several notions emerge as key from what I have come to see in the technological embrace of on-line communication that permeates many educational telecommunications-based projects. I believe that the ability to use technology to facilitate the immediate transfer of information has an impact on how people use the medium by encouraging immediate response in on-line exchanges. This kind of exchange is much more like "talk," or what one might associate with patterns of talk, than it is like writing. Given the communicative possibilities of telecommunications-based interactions, namely electronic mail (and even so called "chat" systems) and computer conferencing, I believe there is a progression in which

an embrace of the medium as "immediate," which I see as a technological embrace, instills, and even develops, notions of how the medium will be used.

In electronic mail, it is common to find "one-to-one," or even "one-to-many" (see Harasim, in Mason and Kaye, 1989, pp. 53-54) messages and responses that, while written, are tapped out on the keyboard as if one were carrying on a verbal conversation. Notes are often short to enable reading on-screen, and encourage participants to respond immediately—while on-line—in the familiar "call and answer" style of face-to-face discussions. Electronic mail-based interactions tend to accept notes in the same ways that face-to-face interactions accept conversation—without too much concern for grammatical structure, or spelling/typos and so on.

Reflection Is Asynchronous

However, computer conferencing is distinguished from electronic mail in its ability to sustain opportunities for what has been described as "many-to-many" communication (Harasim, 1990). There is a greater opportunity to engage in what I have called "considered response" here, or what might now also be thought of as reflection through writing. (see Chapter 2, pp. 1 - 3)

While student responses in WIER are often conversational in tone, they are *considered* responses. They have been composed—off-line—in response to writing that students have read—also off-line, and normally in print—from the computer conference. The students' textual interactions reveal their reflections on their experiences, and it is precisely this reflective response WIER seeks. As the program has developed, it has become ever-clearer that reflection through written interaction is well suited to computer conferencing because both depend on asynchronous processes.

It may be useful here to consider some details about the conferencing system in use at SFU during the first four years of the WIER project, particularly with respect to notions about written interaction that governed how the project developed.

First, the system was old. Based on the Michigan Terminal System (MTS), an operating system, WIER used an older conferencing system known as FORUM. It is possible to think that this turned to an advantage insofar as promoting written interaction on-line is concerned because newer systems like those noted earlier (see Chapter 2, pp. 1 - 2) present the on-line learner with new material easily, but make navigation to older material more difficult. Compared to the environment of FORUM operating under MTS, which offered few options, newer systems encourage movement forward rather than back, or movement forward rather than no movement at all. On FORUM, participants were not asked to make a decision immediately about how to deal with a particular note, and the ability to access previously read material was as easy (or as difficult) to accomplish as accessing new material was.

While a better user interface may have been desirable on this or any other system, what is important here is to consider that this ability to access all material—new or old—without having to decide what to do with it immediately, helps to promote a view of on-line interaction as a medium of writing in which access to the "entire history" of the group can be maintained.

For my purposes here, the idea of "reflection" emerges in the form of written interaction that promotes considered response within a community—both on-line and in the classroom.

WIER participants have come to see their on-line communities of students, writers and teachers as ones that are reflective and able to support the notions expressed, above, especially with respect to student control of the media, the impact of this control on classroom experience, and the role these ideas might play in helping students to interpret and understand experience, for themselves and for others.

Encouraging a "task" or "writing frame" for CMC is the kind of thing I want to do in the WIER program. Certainly I want to encourage that more than a technological one, in which distance and time are seen as inhibitors, things to be overcome. Indeed, in this program, distance and time are the experiential resources that allow technology to build a writing frame.

Summary

This study developed an historical description and analysis of the "Writers In Electronic Residence" (WIER) program. Description in this thesis focused on recounting events in the context of the experiences reported by participants in WIER, while analysis focused on various roles of the participants and the impact of participation in WIER on teachers' reflections on their teaching practice. Sources for both description and analysis were drawn from:

- on-line transcripts of the WIER conferences

- documents and correspondence about the program, which I have collected over the years

- studies undertaken on WIER by David Beckstead, and Susan Crichton, respectively

- articles by teachers and, in some cases, students, who have undertaken to inform and advance their own understandings of WIER by reflecting on their own experiences, and reporting their findings

The study considered the development of WIER, from its first conceptions as a "student writers' database" through to its current operation within a computer conferencing environment, the Faculty of Education and the Writers' Development Trust, and how this development provided some useful notions about how teachers might benefit from using computer-conferencing in the context of their teaching practice as a form of "reflection" sustained by written interaction.

My observations—both as a teacher using WIER in my own classroom, as well as an observer of how the program operated in other schools—of changes in written expression among the students in my class suggested that increased student confidence and independence resulted from an increased sense of authenticity of "voice," or what Graves would describe as "the imprint of ourselves on our writing," (in Willinsky, p. 46) on-line in WIER. I have described how I began to see WIER as a kind of environment that was at once written and experiential, combining opportunities for reflection and reflective writing, or what I think of as *considered response*, with a sense of the immediacy of experience that is sustained by telecommunications technology.

Taken together, the experiences I have described in this study have lead me to believe that WIER is capable of providing opportunities for language development

and proficiency through written and verbal interaction, as well as collaboration—electronically during the on-line conferences, and verbally and in print during face-to-face interactions in classroom situations. I have described the WIER program as an example of the use of CMC as an environment for writing, reflection and response, and noted how the asynchronous nature of CMC has an impact on writing, and on the design of computer conferences that seek to promote writing—a process I have called Computer-Mediated Writing.

I have also described my acceptance that it is neither possible nor desirable for me to engage in a research activity like this and suggest or claim that it is interest-free or value-neutral (Hesse, Reinharz and others in Lather, 1991, p. 50). I am involved in WIER. And although I have also accepted that I must remain "self-conscious" in my role as researcher and author (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, p. 207; Van Maanen, 1988, p. 4) who is also "part of the world" under study, (Hammersley and Atkinson, p. 14) the creation of this thesis has necessarily been, in part, my own narrative about that involvement.

The stories that WIER participants have to offer are personal ones, and some of them are mine. Accordingly, this thesis documents how my understanding of teaching as a result of participation in WIER began to be guided and shaped by my own involvement in the program. This thesis, then, accepted that my own involvement in and understanding of WIER provides the framework within which other methods of inquiry may be linked.

While grounded "within a broad structure of both explicit and assumed propositions" (Denzin, in Glesne and Peshkin, p. 21) about writing, about telecommunications technology, and about the things that happen when they are

blended into classroom activities and contexts, including face-to-face interactions and talk, I accepted as well that my research "may or may not eventuate in statements of theory that are grounded in the data" (p.21). Those that are include a view of the asynchronous and written nature of CMC as a means of promoting considered response in WIER, and stand in some contrast to the rather technocentric focus of the literature. Some key ideas were presented that support this contrast, including the emphases that:

- WIER promotes task rather than technology through language-based interactions that involve participants in actively summoning language appropriate to the tasks at hand, and particular language in particular situations

- WIER is participatory, engaging learners in activities that are relevant to current experience, and offering direct and personal access to writers, students and teachers

- WIER embraces distance as a resource rather than as a barrier to experience, drawing on the local classroom to provide context, or "local shape"

- WIER presents a "writing frame" for understanding an educational application of technology, in contrast to a "technological frame"

- WIER promotes equity, increasing participants' access to new experience and linking it to current experience

- WIER is an essentially reflective and responsive program, drawing upon a social structure based on the written word and "voice" to build a sense of community through multiple forums in which participants construct understanding from one another

- WIER is a reading program that accepts and embraces the transformative nature of participants' involvement with it

The study also considered issues of

- computer use in schools, ranging from issues associated with implementing what is seen as an "innovation" into "regular" programs, to CMC as a collaborative environment

- how WIER created conditions under which students' control might come to be acceptable, even desired, components of the writing and literature or reading curriculum in schools—on- *and* off-line

- writing processes, particularly with respect to notions of revision, voice and response, as a continuum properly guided by learners

In WIER, there is a "residency" for students to learn about the practice of writing and responding in a considered manner. The same is true in many ways for the teachers as they participate in what becomes for them a community of practice, or in Schön's terms, an "apprenticeship" in writing, or a set of "studio-like" experiences. While this apprenticeship is similar in form to what what Grunau and MacKinnon see as "communities" of discourse and reflection, it is distinct in that the residency includes the entire practice of writing. In this study I have shown how involvement in WIER has influenced participants' understaning of teaching and learning processes, in much the same way as Schön speaks of "framing" understaning, or Frye speaks of "associating" things that are known with the things that are not. On the basis of this insight, I would hypothesize that involvement in WIER would be a useful addition to a program of teacher education or development in the sense that it may help prospective and practicing teachers to relinquish control for the purpose of realizing, embracing students' sense of themselves as thinkers, and capable of thinking through the experiences of their own learning.

Learning from the experiences of wired writers

I chose the title for this thesis, *High Teach*, to suggest what I thought the use of "hi tech" in schools really was. Just as Matthew's ideas about the "modem and the world" lead me to consider how communications technology could involve learners in their own learning, it is clear that WIER regularly causes teachers to re-think their changing conceptions of what teaching is as they encounter *helga's* "odd

pleasure" at being "taken seriously" in school, D.M.'s journey "going right to the core," or some other powerful lesson about teaching that is repeated for teachers time and again in WIER (see Appendix 7 for articles by teachers). It is the requirement, really, that teachers see learners as legitimate informants on the process of their own learning, and the understanding that learning with technology is still learning. To this extent, on-line teaching practice is no different than off-line teaching practice.

Time Passes

Mayling was in grade ten during my first year at Riverdale. She was a good student, and while she did not participate in any on-line activity during her high school years, she taught me a compelling lesson about teaching—on-line or off—and what students already know about themselves as learners.

One day, a student called attention to Mayling's practice of bringing a small teddy bear to class. This was not a common practice in the school, the student protested, and he wanted to know why I would "allow" it as the teacher in charge of the class. It seemed a bit odd to me that anyone would think to ask, but I am glad that the question was raised. I didn't have an answer, so I turned to Mayling and asked why she brought it.

She hugged her bear and spoke her answer softly, knowingly.

"Because I can."

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Appendix 1

SwiftCurrent

This description is taken from *The SwiftCurrent Anthology*, the first and only publication of works from the *SwiftCurrent* project. The volume was edited by Frank Davey and Fred Wah.

Introduction

SwiftCurrent, the world's first on-line electronic literary magazine, began operation in September, 1984. Its UNIX based software had been created that summer by Laura Creighton of Softquad Ltd., and installed on a VAX 750 at York University in Toronto, Canada. For the first few months of operation, it was available in all major Canadian centres by collect call on the Canadian data packet-switching network, Datapac, and by those international data services, such as Tymnet, that connect it.

The concept of such an electronic magazine had been devised by Frank Davey and Fred Wah, the current managers of SwiftCurrent, with input from Dave Godfrey. Their first thought had of a diskette-based journal, distributed by conventional mail, but they had rapidly turned to attempting a magazine that would be accessible to nearly all brands of microcomputer and distributed electronically rather than physically. Davey and Wah described the preferred features of such a magazine to Softquad, a small Toronto company that specializes in UNIX software, which then translated these into an interlocking system of UNIX programmes that provide the user with self-prompting menus and completely screen her from the UNIX operating system.

In its first year SwiftCurrent was used almost solely by writers in Toronto and Vancouver, who appear to have adopted computer technology more readily than writers elsewhere in Canada. Latterly, writers throughout Ontario and the western Candian provinces have begun using SwiftCurrent, but only a few from Quebec or the Maritimes. Personal subscriptions to SwiftCurrent have been from the beginning concentrated in the Toronto region, even though the collect-Datapac service offers identical-cost use throughout the country. Institutional subscriptions have been slow to arrive, and difficult to process. Libraries and bookstores have been slow to develop policies for using a service like SwiftCurrent; when they have developed such policy they invariably attempted to communicate with SwiftCurrent by conventional mail — rather unsuccessfully, in many cases, since SwiftCurrent accounts can only be obtained by an on-line request.

SwiftCurrent was conceived as a low-maintenance electronic magazine, one in which the managers duties would be restricted to responding to electronic mail, verifying that the writers who sought to use the system were indeed "writers", and maintaining and circulating user manuals. The selection of work for the magazine is done by the writers themselves, & to a lesser extent—through local deletion—by the subscribers. As much as possible, operations such as file deletion, the setting-up of new accounts, and responding to subscriber problems is computer-aided.

The software for the magazine was created to meet specific needs which the designers expected its users to have. It was anticipated that the catholicity of the magazine—anyone who can establish ther seriousness as a writer and who owns an appropriate computer can submit work to SwiftCurrent—

would lead readers to want to individualize their own reading of it. Consequently, each reader is given her own set of directories, from which she many delete (or to which she may later restore) particular texts or individual authors. It was also anticipated that, as well as submitting their own texts, writers might wish to collaborate with other writers in other parts of the country, and so a 'collaborations' directory was provided, together with instructions for its use. To date, no signigicant use appears to have been made of 'collaborations'. No complaints have been made about SwiftCurrent's catholicity; perhaps the 'D)elete' option gives users a more satisfying way of expressing their editorial feeings than does complaint.

The problems of SwiftCurrent users have been almost entirely problems in their learning to use either SwiftCurrent software or their own communications software. Some users, particularly those in Kingston, Ont., have been unable to recall the login names they have selected for themselves, or to distinguish upper from lower case letters in those names. Many Datapac users have floundered because of an inability to distinguish full from half duplex communications. Others have suffered because of misunderstandings of parity, or of data bits and stop bits. Some have been stymied by the lack of a 'control' key on their machines (SwiftCurrent requires a 'control-d' to close and confirm every electronic letter or text file). A few writers have been blocked from contributing because their wordprocessing software does not format their texts into separate lines; a few Apple IIe users have been hampered by their communications part's tendency (at the relatively high transmission speed of 120 baud) to lose the initial two or three characters of every lines sent or received.

These problems, however, have become more peripheral as the magazine has developed. At first they may be intimidating to the novice computer user. But most writers seem to be so interested in communicating with other writers they persevere through the initial problems in order to avail themselves of the directness and speed of the magazine's mail utility. In fact, it is this communicating aspect of the magazine which gives it the more acute sense of a newsletter. One attraction of the electronic magazine is its immediacy.

Another is the magazine's geographical and aesthetic breadth. We have tried to establish contributors-as-editors in various parts of the country. Though many regions have been slow to respond, those that have bring with them regional sensibilities. The possibility of an exposure of differences is a force that keeps the magazine going.

Appendix 2

The Arts Resource Function

October 15/84

TO: Ken Turner
        School Superintendent
        Area East

FROM: Trevor Owen

RE: Arts Resource & Databases for Writers

I would like to follow up on our meeting of October 2/84
concerning the Arts Resource function, the possibilities of
utilizing the services of SwiftCurrent, and the development of a
students writers' database in Toronto schools.

As you will recall, SwiftCurrent is a database for Canadian
writers which operates from York University in Toronto and Simon
Fraser University in B.C. During the demonstration, the
possibilities of utilizing the services of SwiftCurrent as well as
the development of a student writers' database in Toronto schools
were discussed. I would like to address two things in this
writing:

(1) that the Arts Resource function is an appropriate vehicle
through which these possibilities may be pursued and developed;
and,

(2) that these initiatives are timely given, for example, current
funding possibilities at the Metro level, the relevance to
language development and proficiency, and other initiatives which
are concurrent and appropriately related to the ideas I have
expressed.

SwiftCurrent

This database was developed through the auspices of the Canada
Council under the direction of Canadian writer Frank Davey. Its
primary purposes are:

(1) to provide Canadian writers with a vehicle through which
their works may be offered to subscribers and to one another for
comment and distribution; and,

(2)   to provide the Canadian publishing industry with the
opportunity to distribute those works which are not profitable to

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market by other means but which are important works in the
Canadian writing mosaic.

SwiftCurrent boasts a respectable list of contributing authors,
many of whom have either begun or are pursuing word processing and
personal computers for their art and craft.

I have met with Frank Davey to discuss the possibility of
SwiftCurrent in the schools and he is very supportive. Imagine
the opportunity to "download" an author's most recent works into
the English classroom.

Subscribers may offer comments to authors on their works, but may
not mail one another. Authors have the ability to respond to
comments through the electronic medium.

A Student Writers' Database In Toronto

While SwiftCurrent offers distinct benefits to schools in terms of
the distribution of Canadian works with the opportunity for
subscriber comment and author response, it was not intended to be
as interactive a tool to the degree schools pursue in the area of
language development and proficiency. When I first read about
SwiftCurrent in the summer, it occurred to me that **a student
writers' database in Toronto schools could be a highly
interactive tool** in these areas, as well as building upon the
support of writing and the arts already established in our Board.

Accordingly, I have had several meetings and discussions with
Toronto Board personnel about the establishment of such a
database. I am now confident that it could be established in a
material way fairly easily, given that the appropriate hardware
and software to support it already exists within the Board. The
development stage would, however, require that attention be given
to working with programmers to configure the software in manner
that would permit students, teachers and authors to send and
receive mail as well as writings. Help and assistance sections
would be available as well.

Some of those with whom I have spoken include (a computer
consultant) concerning his experiences in the development of the
"Student Writer" word processor, (the computer co-ordinator)
concerning feasibility, and (an assistant co-ordinator) confirming
the compatibility of existing Commodore equipment with respect to
terminal transmissions. Further, I will be meeting with (the
consultant) again to discuss the possible utilization of the
"Student Writer" word processor within the database I propose, and
with (the assistant co-ordinator) to investigate appropriate modem
programs.

As you know, this concept has been included in the Board's
submission to Metro concerning funding for database initiatives,
and I expect to hear about this in the coming weeks.

<u>The Arts Resource Function</u>

It is quite clear to me that my role in the Arts Resource position
provides appropriate opportunities to pursue these ideas not only
in the necessary development stages, but in implementation within
schools and classrooms as well.

It is also clear to me, however, that things having to do with
computers are often seen first as machines requiring technical and
programming prowess. I am aware that you share my view of
computers as **applications devices** and, accordingly, would like
to address my role as an Arts Resource Teacher from this
perspective. The duties of Arts Resource Teachers, as outlined in
the Final Report of the Work Group on the Performing Arts include:

(a) co-ordination of Arts activities within the family of schools;
(b) assistance to Consultants re in-service in all Arts programs;
(c) assistance in integrating Arts programs;
(d) responsibility for continuity between levels of schools with
respect to Arts programs; and,
(e) responsibility for close knowledge of and liaison with local
artists, and for promoting working relationships between such
artists and the schools.

Given the view that computers are applications devices and hold
great opportunities for highly interactive learning situations (as
expressed, for example, by Anthony Adams), there is no question in
my mind that my role as an Arts Resource Teacher can serve to
enhance the relationship between the Arts, all areas of the
curriculum, and the school experience. In this case, the
relationship between computers and writing holds great promise in
language development and proficiency in a manner which encourages
the sharing of experiences within schools, among families of
schools, and more. Opportunities, for example, for (a board
student publication) may well be enhanced through the use of such
a database, as would the opportunities you had described for Basic
Level schools. And these mark only the initial possibilities.

It is my view that the Arts provide, as language does, **"the means
by which individuals process experience and give meaning
to it, both for themselves and for others"** (Language Across
The Curriculum) and that, in support and pursuit of the
interactive view expressed by James Britton in On Writing As A
Means Of Learning, the time that I would spend on this as an Arts
Resource Teacher would be in accordance with the duties as
described in the Work Group Report.

In my own mind, once the software has been configured, a suitable
beginning might include one or more schools. (One school) is
already experimenting with SwiftCurrent through my personal
subscription and facilities. As an Arts Resource Teacher, I would
be available to assist schools in utilizing SwiftCurrent and our

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own student writers' database just as I have in my experience in this position.

In short, I would like to ask for the support of the Area Office in identifying this activity as a priority in my role as an Arts Resource Teacher and articulating this in an appropriate manner. I would be pleased to discuss this proposal in greater detail at any time.

Trusting this to be the information you require, and thanking your for your consideration in this regard, I remain,

Yours sincerely

Trevor Owen
Arts Resource Teacher
Area East

Appendix 3

Letter to Principals

November 1/84

Dear (School Principal Name):

<div align="center">Re: SwiftCurrent</div>

Please find enclosed a reprint of an article on SwiftCurrent, a
database featuring the works of Canadian writers. I have seen
this database and believe it may well interest staff in the
Language Arts area.

I would appreciate your assistance in forwarding this information
to any of the staff at (school name) who may be interested in
utilizing the services of SwiftCurrent in the classroom.

SwiftCurrent operates out of York University in Toronto and Simon
Fraser University in Vancouver. Yearly subscription rates are
$25. for individuals and $100. for institutions.

<div align="center">Requirements</div>

Participating schools will require the use of one existing
microcomputer (PETs are fine), a disk drive, and access to a
printer. Additional requirements include a modem and access to a
telephone line.

<div align="center">Funding Available</div>

I have some limited funding available which will assist a few
schools in the purchase of a modem (if one is not currently
available) and a one year subscription to SwiftCurrent. These
funds are available on a cost-sharing basis.

Because funding will limit this offer to a few schools, I would
ask that you contact me through the Area Office as soon as
possible.

Thanking you for your assistance in this regard, I remain,

Yours sincerely

Trevor Owen
Arts Resource Teacher

Appendix 4

Original Proposal

Lionel Kearns: Writer-In-Residence

An Experiment In Electronic Composition & Presentation

Part One: The Writer In Residence

This proposal assumes that the creative writing process can be encouraged in the classroom by the presence of a professional writer working directly with the students. It further assumes that computer based word processing and on-line communication can be used in this setting by the professional writer to:

- enhance students' creative writing skills,
- give students added insights into the craft of writing; and,
- increase their writing productivity.

Part Two: The Writer In Electronic Residence

To the extent that writer/student interaction takes place on-line, that is, through the use of a computer linked conferencing system, the writer is present electronically rather than physically, and therefore able to participate in the process from a remote site.

We are, therefore, taking into account this unique feature of currently available communications technology, to propose an extraordinary project_in which the

visiting professional writer is present to the students, at least part of the time, electronically rather than physically.

A Note On The Nature Of On-line Interaction

There are several advantages to asynchronous on-line writer/student interaction. To begin with, on-line communication is textual rather than oral, a feature that is particularly appropriate for those engaged in producing literary texts.

Secondly, given the liberation from the regular real-time constraints, the same number of student/writer contact hours can be extended over a whole semester rather than a few days.

And finally, asynchronous on-line conferencing is a medium particularly suited for idea generation and workshopping. As in the case of Cyrano de Bergerac (or his contemporary incarnation in the current film, Roxanne), literary personalities frequently blossom when freed from the constraints of physical presentation. Students who are otherwise shy in putting forward their opinions, ideas, and literary works often acquire an ease of expression when communicating in their own time and in the privacy and security of their own work stations. In addition, electronic conferencing retains an intimacy and a sense of personal connection that makes it a very human environment in which to act, and interact. It is, therefore, a particularly productive context in which to teach and to learn the craft of creative writing.

The writer will be physically resident at Riverdale for a period of five days, during which time he will engage in the following activities:

(1) He will present himself, his ideas and his works to various groups of students.

(2) He will conduct a seminar for teachers and interested students on the implications and potential of recent developments in personal microcomputers, on-line communication, and optical data storage devices (laser disk and CD-ROM) for literature and education.

(3) He will spend time in classes inspiring and encouraging students to develop their own individual creative writing talents. He will give them ideas and strategies to get their imaginations going, to get their words down in textual form, and to edit these texts into works that are valuable to others.

(4) He will work with individual students, wherever possible making use of a word processor, to develop, amplify and edit their own literary creations.

Following his physical residency at Riverdale, the writer will spend the equivalent of 10 days (60 hours) spread over the remainder of the school year to interact with students by means of an electronic conferencing system. (Permission to use the Simon Fraser system has already been acquired, although an Ontario based system may well be used if this becomes feasible. Both the writer and school have experience in the use of SwiftCurrent, the Canadian Writers' database, which is currently under revision). During this time, students and writer will present, examine and discuss their literary creations, their aesthetic opinions, and creative ideas.

This electronic workshop will be an open forum, and as such will have the potential to develop beyond the temporal boundaries of this project. For example, if the

student participants find it appropriate, they could **invite other professional** and student writers to join their on-going discussions. **Because** electronic communication is unrestricted by geographic limitations, **the future for** such an ongoing student literary workshop becomes very interesting, indeed.

Appendix 5

My Father

9698. MY FATHER

Jack Koisumi   *11:19 Wed Mar 16/88*   *36 lines*

MY FATHER

The anonymous Canadian with a
Japanese face, my father, why can't we
talk, you and I?

I say, tell me how it was in the camps,
and you say "Never mind that now."
"It's different now. Now we are just like
everyone else."

But I want you to tell me of the pain and
humiliation. How they came to the door
with the notice. How they arrested you
and sent the family to the cattle stalls at
the PNE and then deported you to a
shanty town in the mountains in the
middle of winter. How they confiscated
everything especially your honour. How
they have never given it back.

They called you Enemy Alien though you
were born here in Canada. Here in the "true
north strong and free". What a joke!

And now you say to forget it. You say we are just
like everyone else. But I am not like everyone else
because I have a father who is the anonymous
Canadian.

9698/1. Trevor Owen   05:25 Sun Mar 20/88   18 lines

A powerful piece both in subject & expression. I especially like the way the second &
third verses give each other strength: one wanting to be invisible, the other not
permitting it. Some words that I particularly like here are: "came to the door/with the
notice", "cattle stalls" (PNE is the Pacific National Exhibition), and the idea of

deportation within one's own country. I think these words let readers see & feel for themselves. They stand on their own while tracing out, as closely as you have been able to say in words, how "honour" gets "confiscated".

There are two spots where I wouldn't mind fewer words: "of the pain and humiliation" in the third verse, and "What a joke!" in the fourth. I think these ideas are already quite well expressed & don't need reinforcement.

Is there something we recognize in poems about parents/families? The specific situations we remember are quite unique, yet there is something common too. I wonder if this might be a good theme to explore in this conference.... TO

9698/2. Lionel Kearns   02:04 Mon Mar 21/88   14 lines

I like this poem. It is personal and revealing and gut wrenching. At the same time it speaks to a wide audience. It has particular appeal to anyone who feels critical of a parent, and even more, it has a powerful implied criticism of Canada, a country which has been highly unjust to a group of its own citizens, and is still refusing to compensate them and their families for that injustice. All this is done with a few well chosen words, a few telling images. Trevor's remarks make sense too. "What a joke" is really redundant. The poem implies this without your having to state it.
I wonder how the other readers take this poem, especially about the idea of making strong personal statements like this in public. LK

9698/3. Response deleted.

9698/4. Jack Koisumi   11:41 Tue Apr 5/88   51 lines

Here is a new version of my poem that I have written after reading and considering the comments that were made on the old one.

THE ANONYMOUS CANADIAN

The anonymous Canadian with a
Japanese face, my father, why can't we
talk, you and I?

I say, tell me how it was in the
camps, and you say, "Never mind
that now." "It's different now."
"Now we are just like everyone
else."

But I want you to tell me how they came to the door
with the notice, how they arrested you and sent our

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family to the cattle stalls on the grounds of the Pacific National Exhibition, how they put my mother and sister on the train to the shanty town in the mountains in the middle of winter.

9698. MY FATHER

I want you to tell me how they
confiscated everything, even your
honour. How they have never
given it back.

They called you Enemy Alien though
you were born here in Canada. Here
in this "true north strong and free".

Of course these were not normal times. In Germany
they were also putting certain groups of their own
citizens into trains for resettlement in the east.

And now you tell me to forget. You say we are
just like everyone else. But I am not like
everyone else because I have a father who is the
anonymous Canadian.

                                    Jack Koisumi

9698/6. Lionel Kearns   00:44 Fri May 6/88   10 lines

Now that is what I call a productive revision. Not only have you taken out the few redundant passages, but you have added concrete, specific detail that has grounded the original emotion and made it much more palpable. You have also extended the poem by including that powerful parallel allusion to the holocaust. THAT is the way to channel your irony, rather than in the sarcastic comments of your first version. I am very impressed. Give us some more pieces like this one. LK

Appendix 6

Canadian Teachers' Federation/Hilroy Foundation Report

In May 1990, the Writer In Electronic Residence program was awarded a grant
for Teacher Research on Literacy under the auspices of the Canadian
Teachers' Federation/Hilroy Foundation.

I am very pleased that our program was recognised under the terms of this
program, and to offer our report.

The projects that form the basis of this report involve the creative use of
technology by students for writing and communicating. The manner in
which these activities are undertaken supports the view of literacy expressed
in the "Criteria for Proposals" that

> "in order to participate fully in today's society it is necessary not
> only to have basic skills in reading, writing and arithmetic, but
> also to be able to use those skills to carry out more demanding
> intellectual tasks."

As noted in our original application, this report considers the thesis that
"literacy increases where meaningful opportunities for literacy exist." This
report will show how our application of telecommunications technology both
summons and sustains meaningful opprotunities for literacy.

Background

For several years, I have been active in developing projects that brought
word-processing and telecommunications to the English classroom. In each

case, the purpose has been to contribute to human communication by placing students in control of the media before them, and then to utilize these media to broaden the shape and scope of the classroom experience. Taken together, our projects promote language development and proficiency, overcoming distance and time to bring the world to the classroom.

In this program, which originated at Riverdale Collegiate Institute, an inner-city secondary school in Toronto, technology is used for writing in English and Language Arts classrooms, and for extending student experience by communicating with writers, teachers and one another, throughout Canada, North America and the world. Over the past three years, these projects have involved students from Baffin Island to Williams Lake, Owen Sound to Vancouver, and elsewhere. Additional links have been made with schools at all levels in the United States, Europe and Britain.

Instruments of Literacy: Reading & Writing To Learn

These programs are about writing and communication, and they embrace instruments of technology as instruments of literacy. Student writing, the reading of student writing, and the discussion of student writing—undertaken both textually and orally, electronically and in the classroom—blends computer word-processing, telecommunications and computer-mediated communication (CMC) to provide direct and personal contact with writers and other students in Canada over an extended interval, normally a term or semester. We have called this process "Computer-Mediated Writing."

Initially, we focused on using this application of technology to promote the process of reading and writing to learn in the classroom for two reasons:

[a] the nature of on-line interaction is textual and, therefore, appropriate to writing and commentary; and,

[b] the on-line forum provides a certain equity of use, placing students in control of the media before them to broaden the shape and scope of the classroom experience.

These ideas have been reported widely since the program began in 1988. However, as a result of our work this year, we are now prepared to include these additional notions:

[c] the interaction that is fostered online promotes considered response both online and in the classroom, engaging the participants in an essentially reflective activity that fosters the acquisition and use of language for reading and writing; and,
[d] original student writing is validated as legitimate reading material.

What We Have Learned

We know now from our work that these links offer meaningful opportunities for language development and proficiency.

Students control their own experiences in an atmosphere where tolerance is promoted as a natural result of seeing the world as another might. But we know, too, that a need exists to interpret experience within a meaningful context. A clear example emerged in our first project when the Riverdale students began receiving poems from students attending Cariboo Hill Secondary in B.C. The themes present in their poems were quite similar in many cases, but the images that supported them clearly revealed that a sense of place and region was inherent in the work—their own and others. Images of urban traffic congestion in one setting gave way to mountains and oceans

in another, and the students began to discuss—as a group, within the context of their own classroom—how to respond to the new experience.

Local Shape

To this extent, then, it is clear that this language-based use of technology offers an oral possibility in addition to a written one, especially when the telecommunicated experience is incorporated into an existing constituency, like a classroom. We have identified this need to interpret experience within established, participating constituencies as "local shape."

Over the last year, we have seen this idea of "local shape" develop in classrooms as students encountered ideas that were partly unfamiliar, but partly familiar too. In effect, the students called upon themselves and one another to consider, reflect upon, and express how "who we are" reveals "how we are where we are," and their abilities to summon language appropriate to their desire to respond and interact were based upon a sincere wish to be understood as well as to understand.

Their writing is remarkable.

In the course of their writing, Inuit students in Baffin Island, for example, revealed notions about survival in ways that were quite different from those expressed by students who identified themselves as Canadian-born Chinese from urban Toronto or rural Ontario. Vietnamese students who wrote about war, about the boats, and about escape and betrayal, also searched for ways to express fond memories, the value of trust, and the details of life as they lived

it in Hanoi. Still others considered issues of equity and gender, race, and freedom of expression.

However different the students were from one another, all were exposed to a shared sensitivity. All searched deeply. And all controlled their own partitipation in an atmosphere of co-operation and trust.

In this report, we view the telecommunicated experience as a means by which language is experienced, and we believe that many meaningful opportunities to summon language flow naturally from these links—both online and as a result of having been online.

Our Purpose & Research Design

As we noted in the original application, our work to date has been carefully documented. We have emphasized observational study of how the classroom experience is shaped by the online experience, and especially on how student expression and independence is increased through these opportunities for language development and proficiency. We have also considered how these opprotunities operate under the students' control, within an collaborative context.

Our students may now reach out—electronically—into the world from their desks and bring what they find there back into the classroom.

They can do this to meet existing curricular goals too. But more often than not, we are seeing that new, more active components to learning with the curriculum we have are beginning to emerge.

We have, and will continue to have, questions about the impact and possibility of this work, but we have considered the issues we set out to consider in our application about what the impact of increased student control over access to these and other opportunities might mean to learning in the classroom, and what role there might be for the online experience—as an instrument of literacy—in the classroom, to meet exisiting curricular goals, across subject disciplines.

We believe the notion expressed in our application—that literacy increases where meaningful opportunities for literacy exist—is as true online as it is in the classroom, and we have some thoughts to offer about how the classroom will deal with this experience.

And in this report, we will hear about these things—from the writers, from the teachers, and, above all, from the students.

Submissions by our writers were commissioned with funds made available under the Grant for Teacher Research on Literacy. Submissions from teachers and students were made without charge.

Appendix 7

Teacher Articles on WIER

WRITING WIRED:
Administering Electronic Networks
by
Marlene Bourdon-King, Malvern C.I., Toronto

Imagine typing a piece of writing into computer and being read by who knows how many interested writers, both student and professional, from across the country! Not only are you read by them, but they can also write back to you, responding to your work, making suggestions or offering encouragement or heaping praise, all without ever having to worry about the price of stamps!! This is not a fantasy, but a real opportunity that we have been able to offer our students at Malvern Collegiate Institute in Toronto, Ontario for the last three years, through the Writers In Electronic Residence program operating out of the University of British Columbia.

For the most part, student reaction has been enthusiastic, particularly of course, among the really committed young writers. The sense of accomplishment that they gain in not only conquering the computer, but also "surviving" criticism beyond peers and instructors is at least, gratifying and at best, exciting. To actually hold in your own hand the printed response to your own writing from a published, even famous, Canadian author is a moment of real import for these kids: it reinforces that they are real, that they have been heard, and that their work is important beyond generating marks.

From a teacher's point of view, the benefits easily justify the effort in launching the program. It is, nevertheless, time-consuming and a lot of work. At Malvern, the workload has been shared by my department head, Mary Rintoul, who has been very generous with both her expertise and her time. Over the years, and especially this past one we have developed a few procedures to streamline everyone's involvement.

At Malvern, we work out of a computer lab that is not used exclusively by the English Department. However, we have always been able to block in a class time to facilitate the students' participation in the program, and are able to leave resources in the lab for students to use on their own time. Each month, we begin a new binder to keep hard copies of new conferences (i.e. new pieces of writing that have been entered into the network.) This binder is labelled "Wired Writers for _____." As the new conferences were printed, I numbered each one. If it had more than one page, I added lower case Roman numerals to the original number to indicate that the piece continued; for example, li, lii, liii, and so on. When a response to that piece came in, I placed

it in the binder directly after the original, and labelled each response with the original number and a lower case letter, 1a, 1ab, and so on. Students were instructed to read not only the original piece, but also all the responses before writing their own. I kept an updated table of contents at the beginning of each binder which listed title, author, genre, and place of origin (when that was available) so that students looking for work to respond to would not have to flip through the whole binder, but could choose the piece by any of the designations. As each new month began, so would a new binder; the previous month's would be kept in circulation until enough work had come in the new month to retire the old; thus variety was maintained.

I also instituted a Master and Individual Log system to keep track of student input and to facilitate sending pieces into the network. The Master Log stayed in the computer lab, and the Individual Log stayed in the student's notebook. Because participation in Wired Writers (we purposely changed the the spelling of WIER Because too many students would have started calling it "weird" writing--! was an assigned part of the Writer's Craft class (a graduating class credit,) I required to enter one new piece (for five marks), **and** to respond to someone else's work (for the remaining five marks.) Each log entry of new work was to list the piece's full title, its genre, the number of pages, and the entry number (that meant the number of times this particular piece had entered the network; most pieces only went in once, but sometimes revisions were made, or a long piece was entered in segments.) Responses were logged with title, author, binder month, page number and conference title (if it was different from the piece's actual title.) Most important for BOTH kinds of entry was the FILENAME. This type of detailed logging-in allowed us to easily find the pieces when it came time to send them. Log sheets were permanently formatted to try to eliminate errors or omissions in the procedure. I simply made master class lists with appropriate space to fill in and photocopied enough for each week of the program. I would collect the log sheets at the end of each week, both to keep the students up-to-date in their course work, and to better manage my evaluation of their work.

Needless to say, I suppose, is the necessity of bolstering procedures with written instructions. I provided my students with two pages of typed instructions, outlining assignment requirements as well as program procedures. These instructions were of a step-by-step nature, assuming neophyte status in their computer literacy. I also provided a checklist for possible "enter" at the end of each line to avoid "textoverrun" when trying to send; not saving in "TEXT"; naming files incorrectly; not saving in .WIR until the piece was complete and ready to send; not completing the master and individual log sheets accurately; or not signing their work! We also found it useful to have the students submit a hard copy of the material they had entered and wished to have sent; this particularly expedited evaluation, but also helped when there were transmission difficulties. Reading through the notes, I would from time to time find further requests or suggestions that

I would copy and pass on to the students, along with the usual reminders to READ their instruction sheets, and to BRING them to the lab, and to FOLLOW along step-by-step...but those are the mundane realities of anybody's teaching!

Before the program began, I had, of course, introduced my students to the various authors (i.e. writers in electronic residence) who would be participating, shown them books bu them, and recommended reading lists. It was with some amusement then, (although I probably should hardly have been surprised) that an offhand comment I made about one author's response to a student's work brought the amazed and revelationary remark that so-and-so wasn't a student??!! It was fun watching the renewed vigour of their participation after that realization, believe me!

In the end, we felt we'd had a very successful year. We were not, unfortunately, able to give each student who participated a response to their work, but that is not necessarily because one was never sent. End-of-year time constraints probably meant that our notebox was not cleared before the end of classes. That was the only complaint I heard from students; even then, they felt the experience had been worthwhile. I feel more than ever that writing "WIER"ed talented young writers, and their audiences, throughout Canada. I'm hooked, (or should I say "wired") and hope that our administrative tips will be as useful to you as they have been for us. And so, write on!!

FOR RESPONSE:

Choose a piece from one of the binders. Begin your file with:

Response to "TITLE" (in capitals in quotation marks) by Author (NOT the name in capitals at the top; author name is usually at the beginning or end of the piece)/Binder Month and page #.

Compose your response as a letter, i.e. Dear ----,

Please consider your comments carefully: you know the kind of comments that are useful to you when you ask for evaluations of a draft. Do your authors the same favour. Make comments that will help the writer to know what you specifically liked about the piece, what you had difficulty with, and any suggestions for revision that you feel will improve the piece. Remember, you are being evaluated on the quality of your responses, not just on quantity. Responses that are unhelpful or inappropriate will NOT be sent, an you will receive no credit for them.

Make sure to press Enter at the end of every line. Make sure to sign your name and Malvern C.I./Toronto at the end. Anonymous responses are unacceptable.

To save (when complete) go to FILE/Save As. Title the file as (your initials)resp(wk.#).WIR

e.g. Zelda Glotz's response for Week 3 would to filenamed:

zgresp3.wir

Enter your information on your Individual log sheet, and in the Wired Writers Mastersheet Log Binder.

Save in TEXT. OK to save without formatting, etc.

CHECKLIST:

LOGIN S35

ALL lines have an "enter" symbol at the end.

File is saved in TEXT.

Filename is no longer than 8 characters, no spaces, caps or lowercase does not matter. File is named .WIR when it's ready to send. If file is incomplete, save in .WPS

Filename is logged on individual sheet in the appropriate slot, and in Master Binder in the correct slot on the appropriate week's page.

Response filenames have the appropriate week# after "resp" and before ".WIR"

NAMEWIRED WRITERSOAC II

NEW WORKRESPONSE

Full title/Genre/# of pgs.Title, Author, Binder month,

Entry #pg. no.

CONFERENCE TITLE

Week of:

WEEK 3

Date:

Week of

WEEK 4

Date

NameWIRED WRITERS LOGWEEK 10OAC II

ending May 22

NEW WORKRESPONSE

SAMPLE ENTRYFull title/Genre/# of pgs./Title/Author/Binder month/

Entry #pg. no.

"CONFERENCE TITLE"
\
Filename:

BRACKLEY, RebeFN:FN:

NEW/ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR WIRED WRITERS

1.Ladies and Gentlemen, **USE** the "Procedures for Wired Writers" sheets I gave you. Both pages. **READ** them! **BRING** them with you to the computer lab! **FOLLOW ALONG** step-by-step! Make notes to yourself if you need further help in "How-To"!!!!!

2.Go through the **CHECKLIST** at the bottom of page 2.

IT'S VERY IMPORTANT TOP FOLLOW THOSE GUIDELINES. If you want your stuff to be sent AND evaluated by me, you have to follow these procedures! You MUST **save in "Text"**. You must **label files correctly and accurately,** again according to guidelines. You must then **transcribe the FILENAMES** *correctly and accurately on your individual log sheets as well as in the Master Log Binder.*

3.**Print a HARD COPY** of all your work as you complete it. As soon as it's saved, send it to the printer. *Make sure it is appropriately titled and identified with your name!* You must sign your work!!!

4.**End of week deadlines are firm.** (Unless you've been legitimately ll for the whole week, or on a sanctioned field trip, or something of that ilk... which you have apprised me of!) Master logs are collected and evaluated weekly. Lost marks are not reclaimable. If the work is not done, or is not logged, it cannot be evaluated. Period.

5..In binder, check behind original work for pages with same #, plus a), b), c) etc. These are responses to that work which should be read before you do your response. Pieces that are more than one page are numbered i), ii), iii) etc.— read the whole piece!

WIER WRITE ON AT CHURCHILL!
by
Marywinn Milne, Churchill P.S., North York, Ontario

For the past two years, the students at Churchill have been introduced to the written world of computer-based telecommunications with their involvement in the Writers In Electronic Residence (WIER) program. This program is a project of the Writers' Development Trust and is hosted by the Faculty of Education at York University under the leadership of Trevor Owen and Katherine Govier. Churchill students from Grade 1 to Grade 5 create their own stories, poems or letters and send them on-line to well known childrens' author Emily Hearn, our Electronically Resident Writer. At the same time, our submissions are viewed by other Canadian schools participating in WIER. The students are encouraged to read other student writings and respond to other work.

WIER was first brought to my attention by one of our parents who had read about this program in the newspaper. A proposal was made to our Parent Teacher Association for funding (which has continued for a second year) and with much apprehension on my part we became a participant. Many extra hours were spent with a very knowledgeable parent learning the system. Churchill will forever be indebted to Ed Leslie. His programming of the software White Knight enables our students to click a button and send their own work with very little or no teacher supervision.

Because of the involvement of our Parent Teacher Association, I felt it necessary to make WIER a school-wide project and involve as many students as possible. As ambitious as this sounds, it does present problems. The younger students (grade 1 and 2), our beginning writers were just learning to use a word processor. It didn't seem fair to expect them to write by hand, and then type their stories and only one of these classes was using a computer which allowed the students to save as text. The students in Grades 3, 4 and 5 were expected to type their edited stories. Once the stories were typed, they had to be edited again before being sent. This became a very time-consuming and tedious task and was slowing down both the writing process as well as promoting telecommunications. Fortunately, with the assistance of parents and staff, WIER was off and running.

After several months of testing, students began sending their stories and were thrilled to receive responses from Emily. Her responses are written with much thought and sensitivity giving each child praises for their accomplishments and ideas to enhance future creations. It was indeed a pleasure to have Emily 'come out of the computer' to meet the students in person. As an extension to WIER we began exchanging stories and responses with Satoo Elementary School in Edmonton and electronic pen pals were

formed. By the end of 4 months we had over 275 submissions. Not bad for a school of under 300 students!

This enthusiasm continued in November when we participated in a Book Chat program for 2 weeks. The students, once again, became familiar with Emily through her poetry. Over 150 students wrote poems of their own and Emily responded to all. One of our Grade 1 classes read her 'Bubblegum' poem and wrote their own bubblegum poem to her.

This January more apprehension surfaced as WIER changed to a new Data Network which meant a new system had to be learned. Once again Ed Leslie was with us every step of the way and the students were thrilled to start sending work. Emily's responses arrive on-line within several days and on occasion within HOURS, and are full of both positive suggestions to become a better writer and encouragement to 'keep on writing' and 'do send more'.

Students in all classes are encouraged to send any writing. Often teachers use WIER as an extension of their writing programme. After studying dinosaurs, some of our Grade 1's and the Primary Language class wrote stories about 'My Pet Dinosaur'. What a thrill for one of our students when he received a letter from students at 150 Mile House, a school in British Columbia!

Our Grade 3 class read a colour poem written by a student in Rosemere, Quebec and used his idea to write their own colour poems. Many of these students even took the time to revise and rewrite their poems using Emily's suggestions.

Our Grade 4 class created HyperKit stories. The students sent a partial text of their stories to Emily (who came to Churchill on her own time to see what HyperKit was capable of doing). She then made suggestions and guided these students through the development of their stories.

This year I am encouraging our students to write responses to other student writers as well as send a thank you to those who take the time to comment on any of our submissions. This is proving to be a challenge for young children but one worth pursuing. All schools involved are marked on a Canadian map on our WIER bulletin board. The students' submissions and Emily's responses are compiled in class books and are also on display in the Resource Centre.

The Writers in Electronic Residence program is one of the best things I have seen in my career for encouraging elementary children to write. Through this program, the children are being introduced to the conventions of writing, editing skills, keyboarding techniques and telecommunications. The children at Churchill have become more confident, successful writers and are looking

for every opportunity to log on. Thanks to Emily Hearn, our program has been a huge success and WIER write on at Churchill!

TWO SUBMISSIONS AND COMMENTS
TITLE: Dinosaur Story
Once upon a time, I imagined a dinosaur. His name was Justin, and he ate plants. He ate all our cheese, and all our trees. We had to plant more trees and more kinds of plants. He got bigger and bigger. My mother and father didn't know what to do. We didn't have enough money to buy any more plants so my Dad worked and worked and worked to get more money to get more plants to feed the dinosaur. He got enough money for the dinosaur to be fed. Everyone was happy because the dinosaur was getting all the food he needed.
By Ashley Fung, Grade 1

COMMENT:
Dear Ashley Fung: Just think how hard your dad would have to work to feed a real dinosaur. It's a good thing for him that you 'imagined' Justin! I liked your story very much because in describing it growing bigger and bigger and hungrier and hungrier you brought it to life for your readers. Keep writing with this kind of detail, Ashley! Emily

TITLE: What is Aqua?
Aqua is the lovely water in the river where the salmon shine
Aqua is my favourite colour because it calms me down when I am mad
Aqua is the beautiful grass to match with the beautiful sunset
Aqua reminds me of the San Jose hockey team.
by Aaron Pass, Grade 3

COMMENT:
Dear Aaron: I like the originality of your AQUA choices in your colour poem, meaning that I can tell that they've come from your thoughts, your feelings and no one else's. It's what lies at the heart of a poem, the expression of an individual person. San Jose will be honoured by your mention of it. I haven't watched them play but I'd like to think that wearing aqua has a similar calming effect on a player that's ready to fight! 'where the salmon shine' gives us a vivid picture. I think 'beautiful' is used too much and wish you'd skip its use before 'grass' and find a more descriptive word before 'sunset'. Doing that will show its beauty without having to use that overrated word. More soon?! Emily

REVISION: What is Aqua? by Aaron
Aqua is the lovely water in the river where the salmon shine
Aqua is my favourite colour because it calms me when I am mad
Aqua is the colourful grass to match with divine sunset
Aqua reminds me of the San Jose hockey team.