Contrapuntal writing: Student discourse in an online literature class

JAMES NAHACHEWSKY
Faculty of Education, University of Winnipeg

ANGELA WARD
College of Education, University of Saskatchewan

ABSTRACT: *There is a continuing need to investigate how contemporary students in schools are writing the word, and their world, beyond modernist parameters of the page. This article explores the online writing of a senior English world literature class, located in a Western Canadian city, as examined through a recent qualitative case study. Borrowing a 17th century musical term meaning "of counterpoint",* contrapuntal *here is used to describe the visibly polyphonic and layered writing by students and their teacher in the online course. Complex constructions and understandings of situated self/culture in relation, or as counterpoint, to other members of the class, their teacher, and their various prescribed/personal texts were made throughout the course. Discordances were voiced, but also played out as silences. The class's emergent and evolving writing provides a grounded glimpse into critical literacy practices. Particularly evident was a developing meta-cognition throughout the students' writing – their ability to "read" the other writers so that they could be reflexive about their own practices. Yet, little was done by the students to critique or transform the constructs of the course itself. This seemingly contradictory aspect further manifests an equally important, yet for critical literacy theorists, frustrating characteristic of contrapuntality – that the various composers/voices follow strict structural rules.*

KEYWORDS: *Online writing, critical literacy, discourse.*

INTRODUCTION: WHAT DO WE MEAN BY CONTRAPUNTAL?

> **counterpoint: n** – from medieval Latin contrapunctum "(song) pricked or marked over against (the original melody)", from contra – against + punctum (to prick); **v** – emphasize by contrast (Soanes & Stevenson, 2003, p. 395).

Bach, amongst other 15th and 16th century composers, explored counterpoint through a range of instrumental genres, including keyboard music. Contrapuntal became a term that described music of or in counterpoint. The word counterpoint, as a noun, has two denotations: (1) the technique of setting, writing or playing a melody or melodies in conjunction with another, according to fixed rules (2) a thing that forms a notable contrast to something else (Soanes & Stevenson, 2003, p. 395). Counterpoint is not simply two or three or four interwoven melodies. The themes and episodes of contrapuntal music are transformed by their harmonic contexts and their salience to the ear. The listener may not immediately recognize melodies that have been introduced as mirror or crabwise images of their first entry. The subtleties of counterpoint become obvious on repeated listening. We believe that the art of counterpoint has implications, not only for an early form of musical composition, but

also for 21st century literacy practices – particularly for those students engaging in online writing in "new times" (Luke & Elkins, 1998). We will discuss our claim using examples from research based in a Canadian urban school (Nahachewsky, 2003) in more detail later in our article. First we need to move from the 16th to 21st Century.

Bach to Gould

Canadian pianist Glenn Gould was renowned for his interpretation of Bach – including Bach's contrapuntal fugues. When Gould stopped giving live concerts in 1964, he turned his creative talents not only to musical recordings but also to television and radio productions. His December, 1967n series *The idea of north* engaged in what he called "contrapuntal radio" – polyphonic and overlapping conversations of recorded music, people's voices, technical and natural sounds played out in a counterpoint that was richly textured ([Glen Gould Variations on an Artist](#)). Gould's late 20th-century electronic counterpoint was innovative and technically impressive given that he and CBC radio producer Lorne Tulk were working with monaural sound, analogue recordings, razor-blades and splicing tape (Bazzana, 2003, p. 301). Through his work, Gould was consciously exploring the affordances of the technology of his time and foregrounding the multi-modal and interactive nature of today's digitally-based communications technologies which allow for, amongst other affordances, a re-visioning of "self" and understanding of "other" – be this a represented individual, text, or idea - in online environments.

We also suggest that the term contrapuntal lends itself as a valuable descriptor regarding contemporary educational/educator's D/discourse (Gee, 2003) – in terms of both the larger social cultural network and personal vocabulary – around emerging understandings of writing and literacy in 21st century English language arts (ELA) curricula and classrooms. Here, and throughout the remainder of the article, it is helpful to consider Gee's (1996) view of "Discourse" as a culture or sub-culture with common identities, beliefs, and ways of thinking (for example, the culture of a basketball game, or an ELA writing classroom), and "discourse" as any stretch of language (spoken, written, signed) which "hangs together" to make sense to a community of people (for example, basketball players, referee and time-keeper, or students and teacher). The term contrapuntal, then, becomes important discourse – helping to represent and construct meaning within an ever-expanding Discourse regarding students' and teacher's online writing in new times.

WHAT DO WE MEAN WHEN WE SAY "NEW TIMES" LITERACY?

Today's technological and literacy landscape is very different from that of Gould's analogue electronics era – let alone of Bach's time. This change in literacy's field of reference has been closely associated with significant changes in the ways many theorists have been thinking about text-mediated practices. The rapidly changing nature of the communications technology horizon and its implications has been noted by the New London Group (1996) and the accompanying New Literacy Studies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003) movement. They call for "a much broader view of literacy than portrayed by traditional language-based approaches" (New Literacy Group, 1996, p. 60). Their understanding of new literacies explores the need for "a different kind of pedagogy, one in which language and other modes of

meaning are dynamic representational resources, constantly being remade by their users as they work to achieve their various cultural purposes" (p. 64). Further, Maybin (2000) notes that "the New Literacy studies … reflect the influence of poststructuralist ideas about the discursive construction of knowledge and subjectivity and about its interdiscursivity" (p. 187). Many researchers, including ourselves, are "moving away from the conceptualization of texts, contexts, individuals and communities as stable entities towards more processual notions of text-mediated practices, of the articulation of links between different contexts in producing meaning, and of the ongoing negotiation of individual and community identity across different activities and contexts" (p. 187).

Willis (2003) believes that "(y)outh are always among the first to experience problems and possibilities of the successive waves of technical and economic modernization that sweep through capitalist societies. Young people respond in disorganized and chaotic ways, but to the best of their abilities and with relevance to the actual possibilities of their lives as they see, live, and embody them" (p. 391). Observations of adolescent students' writing on the interactive screen (Love, 2002; McClay, 2002) have led to findings of the potential for student-centered learning and discursive practices that can be more engaging and democratic than those in the traditional culture of writing classrooms. This has important implications for critical literacy practices. As well, challenges to textual authority and negotiation of power differences are found in the research of LeCourt (1998) and Mayers and Swafford (1999). Other educators (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003) have noted that writing on new communication technologies do not engender new practices; rather, traditional pedagogy, power structures and stereotyped identities are transferred to the spaces of digital communication.

POSITING CRITICAL LITERACY PRACTICES IN ONLINE WRITING ENVIRONMENTS

Online environments offer an intriguing hybrid between public and private written spaces. They provide rich situated communication events in which to consider critical literacy practices. This is further amplified in schooled online spaces where practices of creating and acquiring knowledge cannot be separated from the power that one exercises in negotiating learning (Hagood, Stevens & Reinking, 2002). Interestingly, the critical literacy project of the past decade belies, by its very nature, a monolithic definition. The disparate characteristic of critical literacy D/discourse discourages not only a singular voice, but also a singular understanding of the varied tonal pedagogical approaches and curricular engagements in "new times".

Consideration of online writing in schools adds an important voice to the complex Discourse of critical literacies through its visibly tangible representation of multiple perspectives on self and culture. Such perspectives, as we shall see in this article, are usually constructed within a particular community (online course) by individuals (students and teacher), which in turn serve as counterpoint to re-construct those particular individual's understanding(s) of themselves and their situated community. Through this reflexive and recursive process, educators may not only gain a sense of the polyphonic and multilayered nature of online written discourse, but also

reconsider what import schooled online writing has to the Discourse of new times literacy.

Bernstein (1999), perhaps unwittingly, echoes our contrapuntal theme in his exploration of vertical and horizontal discourses, seeing horizontal discourse as the language of everyday, "oral, local, context dependent and specific, tacit, multilayered, and contradictory across but not within contexts" (p. 159). In Bernstein's view, horizontal discourse evolves in situations where power distance is reduced, mostly in the private sphere. This we believe, along with others such as Giroux (1996), is much more likely to happen where teachers refrain as far as possible from assuming pedagogical and textual authority that prevail in modernist educational enclosures based upon the page or book. An indicator of successful critical literacy practice in cyberspace, then, includes the extent to which students freely and willingly extend not only understandings of the word but also their world (Freire, 1970); how they re/construct understandings of self and other in public and private spheres, as well as their ability to transform personal, social, and pedagogical power structures within schooled online environments (Fairclough, 1992; Giroux, 1996). Such possibilities for critical literacy practices were investigated recently by one of us (James) in a qualitative study which asked: What is the nature of students' literacy experiences while using computer-mediated communication in a Grade 12 English language arts class?

THE STUDY

Methodology

For the purpose of this study, the online writings of a senior, World literature course within a Western Canadian city were documented during one term using descriptive case study techniques. Data collection included (a) observation of the course's student-participants in the class' online environment, (b) two, semi-structured, face-to-face, and two structured asynchronous online interviews with three selected students, and (c) systematic collection and interpretation of the participating class members' postings as archived on the class' private and public bulletin boards. These class writings included 250 public postings and 112 private bulletin board postings.

Although the Web CT software utilized for this class enabled the use of synchronous, or real-time written communications such as Instant messaging and chat rooms, the teacher and students communicated exclusively through the asynchronous modes of public bulletin boards and private bulletin boards which mimic e-mails in their structure and delivery. The students' and teacher's online writing consisted of a socially constructed inquiry and response to the course's prescribed readings, logistics concerning the online class, and occasional social "chat" amongst the members of the class. The online writing served as a focal point for this study. It provided a D/discourse amongst the participants which served, along with the online observations and interviews, as broad and rich data for reflection and insight into the students' online literacy experiences and posited critical literacy practices in their senior language arts course.

Data

Throughout the study one could witness the multi-vocal or polyphonic writing, which represented layers of constructed meaning in this online space through the introduction, re-iteration, and sometimes reformation of course content themes. Also revealed in this schooled online space were interesting paradoxes regarding the affordances and limitations of critical literacy practices. The course's asynchronous public bulletin board housed a large portion of the visibly multi-voiced and multi-layered online writings by the teacher (Mr. Hods) and the students (all others). For the purpose of this article, and to better contextualize the following discussion of the data, four online strands of the students' and teacher's writing are presented as an Appendix. Pseudonyms (as noted above) are used throughout these writings, but the postings maintain their original structure and content. Particularly important to our discussion of contrapuntal online writing are understandings of its multi-layered, polyphonic nature and the accompanying presence of counterpoint and critical literacies.

Multi-layered writing

One of the most striking features of studying online writing is the visibly multi-layered nature of the postings – not only the many different individuals who post, but also the many topics and perspectives they bring to a seemingly common theme. Although this may not be evident when one is immersed in a "conversation" or correspondence in an online environment such as emailing or text messaging, the Web CT software for this particular course archived all (some of which are accessible through the strands mentioned above) of the public bulletin board messages which the students and teacher wrote throughout the term. During the course, Mr. Hods introduced themes for consideration – much as a musical composer introduces themes in their work – in relation to prescribed world literature texts usually drawn from the Western Literary canon such as Orwell's essay "Shooting an elephant" and Poe's short story "Cask of amontillado":

> posted by Mr. Rosencrantz on Tue Feb 26, 2002 07:49
> > Subject Symbolism in "Cask of Amontillado"
> > The Montresor Coat of Arms and motto has the image of a
> > snake embedded in the heel of a foot… We have two
> > characters (Monty and Fort), and two roles (a snake, a
> > foot). Indicate who you think the foot is and who the
> > snake is. Also, explain why. Post your response as a
> > reply to this one. :)Mr. R

> posted by Sharron on Tue Feb 26, 2002 15:11
> > Subject Symbolism in "Cask of Amontillado"
> > Mr. Hods I think that Monty was the foot and Fort was
> > the snake… At first Fort bothered Monty, just as a snake would
> > bother a person's foot but in the end the tables had
> > turned, Monty killed Fort just as a foot could kill a
> > snake by stepping on it.

> posted by Kathy on Wed Feb 27, 2002 13:23
> > Subject Symbolism in "Cask of Amontillado"
> > Mr. Hods I think that Monty is the foot and Fort is

> the snake. Monty is the foot because he seems to have
> the control in the story. With control comes power and
> the priviledge to destroy I guess you could say. So, the
> foot could step on the snake killing it, just like Monty
> killed Fort…

> posted by Cara B. on Fri Mar 01, 2002 15:45
>> Subject "Cask of Amontillado"
>> I figure that Fort was the foot due to the fact that he
>> had more power. He had the power to step on Mont and
>> kill him. Monty was the snake because he was sneeky and
>> characteristic of when he was drunk resemble a snake and
>> their movements…

> posted by Car on Mon Mar 04, 2002 19:49
>> Subject I got Mixed Up
>> Hey sorry everyone if you were confused by my answer to
>> Cask of Amontilldo i got the names mixed up so just
>> switch them please! thanks peace Car

> posted by Mr. Hods on Wed Mar 06, 2002 08:39
>> Subject Symbolism in "Cask of Amontillado"
>> Some very good responses to this question… I've always seen the snake
>> as being Montressor and the foot being Fortunato. I've
>> come to this conclusion for two reasons…Is this what Poe really
>> meant? Who knows, but if we did know for sure, that
>> wouldn't be as much fun, would it? :)

The students' represented understanding of the literature changed in relation not only to Mr. Hod's themes, but also those ideas introduced by other students. There is a definite multi-layering here; not only a visibly physical layering of the various postings, but also of themes introduced by the teacher and built upon by the students. The multi-layered nature of their writing requires a reflexive and recursive interaction by the students. They are navigating and negotiating the course readings and other students' postings, as well as their own archived writings as seen above.

This intertextuality (Bakhtin, 1986), or appropriation of other's discourse and ideas, is an important aspect to the online writing seen here. It troubles more modernist notions of knowledge transmission and acquisition. Students here are truly writing to learn, as well as learning to write in a unique schooled environment. Several conversations happen at once, with way leading to way in a non-linear fashion. We can see this in the intertextuality amongst personal and schooled events, content, and culture:

> posted by Wil on Tue Mar 19, 23:10
>> Subject Journal
>> Today I had a play performance of _____ for Elementary
>> kids that went over pretty well. Then I came home and
>> had a snack, before going for a half hour nap. Then I
>> ate supper which was a 18 inch pizza.
>> After I had finnished eating I spent a few hours on my
>> english. I completed The bulletin board #2 assingment,
>> as well as the rest of the anwers I had for "My Last
>> Duchess". I have now read through that poem at least 30

- 40 times, and studied it over and over. Yet I still
realized a few new peices that made more sense as I did
the assingment.I then got birthday cake and a few cards
around 10:00pm.

posted by Mr. Hods (elab30) on Wed Mar 20, 07:47
Subject Journal
Hey, Wil -- Happy Birthday! Pizza and My Last Duchess.
What a way to celebrate (lol) :)

Polyphonic writing

When considering the multi-voiced, or polyphonic nature of the teacher's and students' writings, Mackey's (2003) exhortation for "an alert flexibility" is needed. There are many voices represented in the numerous online postings/writing pertaining to the worldly and word-related matters throughout the course's postings.   This polyphony is constructed over time – a few hours in some cases, a few weeks in other instances. But, not only are there many voices belonging to many members of the class in these contrapuntal online writings, at times the tone of a single speaker/writer changes so that a polyphony resides within individuals as well as amongst the course's community. This is particularly evident in Mr. Hod's writing:

posted by Mr. Hods on Wed Jan 30 07:46
Subject Greetings Everyone
Hi Everyone. If you're reading this, then you've jumped
over one of the technological hurdles of the course—
you can find a bulletin board message… If I've learned a few things
that help students, these are the biggies: 1. Don't get
behind 2. There's no such thing as a dumb question
(well, there is, but I don't mind if you ask them)

posted by Mr. Hods (elab30) on Tue Feb 05 15:55
Subject Teacher Thoughts - Week 1
Just a few "teacher comments" for week one work... the essay exists at two
levels: one, it is a narrative of man who is faced with
a decision that he doesn't want to make; two, it is a
testimony to the futility of Imperialism.
The second level of the text can be seen in the symbol
of the elephant. The elephant can be seen as a
representation of British Imperialism… Orwell tells us "that the
British Empire is dying", presumably because of its own
tyranny – it is destroyed by its own attempts at
consolidating its power.

Mr. Hod's assumes varying tones in his writerly voice. Although both writings set up expectations around course structure and thematic content, the contrast between the more personal, informal tone of the first posting compared to the second is obvious. A more nuanced example of individual polyphony is evident in Shar's posting:

posted by Shar on Mon Feb 25 23:16
Subject whats going on
Car, you're cracked. 80's music is the best!!! same
with 80's movies!! The Breakfast Club was on this

> weekend, anybody catch it? sooooo good! Here's something
> to think about, back in that day, Molly Ringwald, Emilio
> Estevez, Judd Nelson, Ally Sheedy, and Anthony Michael
> Hall were super popular actors. Now they're pretty much
> unheard of. Ever think that Brad Pitt, Ben Affleck,
> Jennifer Love Hewitt etc. are going to be lost in
> obscurity in the next 10 years? Think about it. i'm a
> dork, i know.

Shar uses popular culture references infused with a critical voice to represent her understanding and connection to course content exemplifying a mature and sophisticated voice that is then subsumed by her salutation: "Think about it. i'm a dork, i know." Here the polyphony of Shar's written discourse serves many purposes including identity formation as a bright individual able to draw on cultural capital across many Discourses (popular, academic, personal and public) as well as for purposes of social acceptance within the emerging Discourse of this particular course's online environment. The multi-purposed, fluid nature of this student's polyphonic writing – the slippery nature of identity and content – challenges more modernist notions of single-voiced, authoritative writing that is often privileged in expository forms of writing in ELA classrooms.

Counterpoint and critical literacy

The complex constructions and understandings of situated self/culture evident in the multi-layered and polyphonic writing seen above are composed, importantly, in relation or as counterpoint to other course members' (both the teacher's and other students') writing. As defined in our introduction, counterpoint denotes a technique of setting, writing, or playing a theme or melodies in conjunction with another according to fixed rules. Or it may be considered as a thing that forms a notable contrast to something else (Soanes & Stevenson, 2003, p. 395). Playing with themes and ideas in counterpoint to others' is clear in the following postings regarding a question of the protagonist's role as hero in Orwell's "Shooting an elephant":

> posted by Car on Mon Feb 11 19:43
>> Subject Hero or Not
>> Was the speaker a hero, no he was not. It takes more
>> than shooting something to become a hero, at least me it
>> does…

> posted by Mr. Hods (elab30) on Tue Feb 12 08:01
>> Subject Hero or Not
>> Hi Car. Just an update on your progress so far.
>> The BB assignment is a little brief. I read the
>> response and your ideas so far are good, but you need to
>> go into a bit more detail in your presentation (see
>> Cyber Orientation for requirements for BB assignments)…

> posted by Ash on Tue Mar 05 16:28
>> Subject hero or not?
>> In the story hero or not, i believe that the man who
>> shot the elephant was a hero. He shot the elephant
>> because it was causing trouble all over the town and so

> that he could be known for someting in the town other
> than a bad guy who wants to casue trouble. On the other
> hand i dont think that he was a hero. He could have just
> put the animal back into a cage in the zoo or somewhere
> that he could not get out. if a person goes crazy you
> dont kill them you get them help…

> posted by Eri on Wed Mar 06, 14:34
> > Subject Hero or Not
> > In this story we see the pressure that is placed on
> > others. He was not accepted into the community so he
> > felt the pressure even more than anyone else would. As
> > a representative of his different culture he felt the
> > need to act a certain way to keep his dignity. His
> > actions in the end were his attempt to keep this
> > dignity. He felt the need to shoot the elephant to show
> > them that he was not a coward. He was a hero to the
> > people...

> posted by Riche on Thu Mar 14 11:15
> > Subject Porphyrias Lover
> > Hey Everyone! What is everyone's opinion on the poem
> > "Porphyrias Lover" ??? Post a bulletin or email me.
> > Thanks.

In the writing above, and throughout the course's online writings, the teacher continues to introduce themes within a set structure that the students respond to in their own writerly voices. As we have seen, these are student voices that challenge modernist notions of more linear, individually authorial, and transmissive expository writing often valued in ELA classrooms. Ideas emerge and change from writing to writing; in relation or in conjunction to other's writing. But ideas around central themes, understanding of situated self and culture, can also change within single individual postings. Critical literacy practices are manifested through this meta-cognition of students reading/writing the word and their world (Freire, 1970).

Critical literacy practices also manifest themselves through students going against the grain. As seen above, Riche's query about "Porphyria's lover" is misplaced amongst the ongoing discussion around "Shooting an elephant". Her attempt at beginning a new strand of writing, or introducing a new theme before the teacher does so, is met with silence. Her writing, amongst other's, does not receive a response. Discordances may be voiced or unvoiced in online writing; the silences play a crucial role also serving as a counterpoint.

A further looming silence which is apparent in the students' writing is the lack of student input into textual choice or course content and structure. Little was done by the students to critique or transform the constructs of the course itself. This seemingly contradictory aspect further manifests an equally important, yet for critical literacy theorists, frustrating characteristic of contrapuntality – that the various composers/voices follow strict structural rules. The apparent lack of voiced opposition, or constructive input into the structure and content of the course, may be due to the students' wariness and, alternately, hopefulness about the transformative possibilities inherent in this online learning and writing environment. These

possibilities are evident in their early postings, which serve as another counterpoint to writing in brick and mortar classrooms:

> posted by Lindsy on Fri Feb 01 11:11
>> Subject Hello
>> Hi! My name is Lindsy and I am 17 years
>> old. This is my first time taking a class through cyber
>> school. I think this will be a different and
>> interesting way of learning.

> posted by Ali on Mon Feb 04, 20:46
>> Subject Hello!
>> Hey everyone! It took me a while to get here, cause I
>> couldn't figure out what to do and by some miracle I am
>> finally here! yaay! Anyway, apart from that, I am
>> really, really looking forward to cyber school although
>> at the beginning I was pretty iffy about the whole
>> thing…

> posted by Rach on Thu Feb 07 09:53
>> Subject right?
>> Good Morning!! I hope this is right...I'm slowly figuring
>> this all out. It sure is different. Have a great day!

FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

The art and act of combining two simultaneous lines (of music, intention, thought…) emerged in musical composition during the 14th century. As discussed at the beginning of this article, the term "contrapuntal" has re-emerged since that time, from Bach to Gould, to denote music or voice in counterpoint with another. This re-emergence has occurred alongside, or because of, developments in society – especially evolving musical and communications technology. We believe that in our own liminal/new times, with its evolving digital communication technology, the term contrapuntal poignantly characterizes the emergent online writing practices witnessed through this study. "Contrapuntal writing" adeptly denotes the multi-layered and polyphonic nature of these students' online writing. It also appropriately captures the paradoxical nature of the students' online writing, at once meta-cognitive in its critical manner – allowing for fluid and emergent constructions of self and understanding of culture in relation to the counterpoint of other's perspectives – yet adhering to strict non-transformational rules of schooled engagement.

Careful consideration of the study's rich data, particularly the class's online writing, reveals a complex learning environment which complicates notions of critical literacy and learning practices in online spaces – both its affordances and limitations. The data from this online World literature course revealed an environment in which students were able to construct and reconstitute understandings of the word and the world through their writing in relation to other's writings (teacher, students and prescribed texts). This fluidity, expressed through polyphonic and multi-layered (contrapuntal) writings, emerged in a space that was at once private yet public. Lankshear, Peters and Knobel (1996) state: "… digital text is experienced overtly as being available for rewriting, reconfiguring and, in general, as a resource or making meaning" (p. 175).

The student-participants alternately found themselves composing and being composed by a contrapuntal communication event as they navigated their way through the multi-vocal and multi-experiential environment of this online World Literature course.

Lankshear *et al* (1996) believe that in such environments, "learners make as explicit as possible their understanding of social practice, subjectivity and identity, modes of regulation and control, processes of legitimation, patterns of social advantage and disadvantage; how these are related; and how they and our participation in them are historical and contingent, and to that extent, amenable to change" (p. 180). The critical nature of this class's counterpoint was manifest, not only in the reconsideration and reconstruction of understanding the word and world through the writer (self or other) but also through discordances. These discordances were either voiced openly as statements or as silences. Fairclough (1992) writes that "discourse is shaped by relations of power and ideologies, and the constructive effects discourse has upon social identities, social relations, and systems of knowledge and belief, neither of which is normally apparent to discourse participants" (p. 18). Paradoxically, within these discordances – either voiced or silent – systems of knowledge and power were not transformed. The students' writing housed a set of contradictions – the fluid construction of meaning/identity within a well-established schooled approach. Even though there was a fluctuation between IM (instant messaging) writing and schooled writing, there were no meaningful or lasting changes made to the course content or structure – this included no new textual choices, or alternatives to representation of understanding beyond an expository or reflective form of writing. For critical literacy theorists this lack of transformative writing is troubling as they would have students and teacher develop a meta-level awareness through their writing so that they could be reflexive about their own practices as members of a self-regulating and self-monitoring learning community (Giroux, et al., 1996).

The idea of contrapuntal writing, as witnessed in this study, provides a unique and valuable perspective for literacy teachers and researchers regarding the actualized nature of situated online learning environments. The term contrapuntal serves as a particularly appropriate description considering the students' visibly polyphonic and multilayered writings, and the counterpoint these writings provide within the class's public bulletin board environment. Interestingly, it also addresses the contradiction inherent in having these critical literacy/learning processes housed within a highly regulated environment. It is important to note that those who historically worked within the contrapuntal format in their own liminal eras, such as Bach and Gould, also pushed at the edges of composition. Such contradictions in the contrapuntal writing seen within this online world Literature course complicate modernist notions of writing. Perhaps, most importantly though, these students' online writings serve as a critical counterpoint to writing practices and pedagogy still bound to the pages of many English language arts classrooms in "new times".

REFERENCES

Bakhtin, M. (1986). *Speech genres and other late essays* (C. Emerson and M. Holquist, Eds.)(V. McGee, Trans.). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
Bazzana, K. (2003). *Wondrous strange: The life and art of Glenn Gould*. Toronto:

McClelland and Stewart Ltd.

Bernstein, B. (1999). Vertical and horizontal discourse: An Essay. *British Journal of Sociology in Education, 20*(4), 157-173.

CBC. (2006). Glenn Gould Variations on an Artist. Retrieved May 19, 2007 from http://archives.cbc.ca/IDD-1-74-320/people/glenn_gould/.

Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. (2000). *Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and the design of social futures.* London: Routledge

Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and social change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Seabury.

Gee, J. (1996). *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourses* (2nd ed.). London: Taylor and Francis.

Gee, J. (2003). *What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

Giroux, H. (1996). Slacking off: Border youth and postmodern education. In H. Giroux, C. Lankshear, P. McLaren, and M. Peters (Eds.), *Counternarratives: Cultural studies and critical pedagogies in postmodern spaces* (pp. 59-79). New York: Routledge.

Hagood, M., Stevens, L., & Reinking, D. (2002). What do they have to teach us? Talkin' cross generations! In D. Alvermann (Ed.) *Adolescents and literacies in a digital world* (pp. 68-83). New York: NY. Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

Lankshear, C., & Knobel, M. (2002). Do we have your attention? New literacies, digital technologies, and the education of adolescents. In D. Alvermann (Ed.), Adolescents and literacies in a digital world (pp. 19-39). New York: NY. Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

Lankshear, C., Peters, M., & Knobel, M. (1996). Critical pedagogy and cyberspace. In H. Giroux, C. Lankshear, P. McLaren & M. Peters (Eds.), *Counternarratives: Cultural studies and critical pedagogies in postmodern spaces* (pp. 149-188). London: Routledge.

LeCourt, D. (1998). Critical Pedagogy in the computer classroom: Politicizing the writing space. *Computers and Composition, 15*(3), 275-279.

Love, K. (2002). Mapping online discussion in senior English. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, *45*(5), 382-396.

Luke, A., & Elkins, J. (1998). Reinventing literacy in "New Times" .*Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 42*(1), 4-7.

Mackey, M. (2003). Researching new forms of literacy. *Reading Research Quarterly*. *38,* 403-407.

Maybin, J. (2000) The new literacy studies: Context, intertextuality and discourse in D. Barton, M. Hamilton & R. Ivanic (Eds.), *Situated literacies: Reading and writing in context*. New York: Routledge.

Mayers, T., & Swafford, K. (1998). Reading the networks of power: Rethinking "critical literacy" in computerized classrooms. In T. Taylor and I. Ward (Eds.), *Literacy theory in the age of the internet* (pp. 146-157). New York: Columbia University Press.

McClay, J. (2002) Hidden 'treasure': New genres, new media and the teaching of writing. *English in Education*, *36(*1), 46-55.

Nahachewsky, J. (2003*) Reading the writer: Multilayered literacy experiences in an online senior language arts classroom*. Unpublished master's thesis, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, SK.

New London Group (1996). A pedagogy of multi-literacies: Designing social futures. *Harvard Educational Review*, *66*(1), 60-91.

Soanes, C. & Stevenson, A. (Eds.). 2003. Oxford dictionary of English (2nd revised Ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.

Willis, P. (2003). Foot soldiers of modernity: The dialectics of cultural consumption and the 21st century. *Harvard Educational Review*. *73,* 390-415.

APPENDIX

Strand one

posted by Mr. Hods on Wed Jan 30 07:46
Subject Greetings Everyone
Hi Everyone. If you're reading this, then you've jumped
over one of the technological hurdles of the course—
you can find a bulletin board message. What I want
everyone to do is to post a short little introduction.
I'll start.
I am in my 15th year of teaching. I like strong coffee,
the Boston hockey team, and golf. I have 2 kids—Saul is 4,
Samantha is 2. I love to read legal thrillers in my spare
(?) time. This will be my fourth time teaching this
class on the internet. If I've learned a few things
that help students, these are the biggies: 1. Don't get
behind 2. There's no such thing as a dumb question
(well, there is, but I don't mind if you ask them). I'm
looking forward to working with you this semester. :)

posted by Shan on Thu Jan 31 20:54
Subject hey everyone
Hi, My name is Shan, I'm 17 and I go to HC.
This is my second cyber school course and I'm
taking it because it gives me a spare. For everyone
thats confused about cyber school, don't worry, you'll
get the hang of it soon enough. I like travelling and
shopping. I also really enjoy sleep.

posted by Ali on Mon Feb 04, 20:46
Subject Hello!
Hey everyone! It took me a while to get here, cause I
couldn't figure out what to do and by some miracle I am

finally here! yaay! Anyway, apart from that, I am
really, really looking forward to cyber school although
at the beginning I was pretty iffy about the whole
thing. I am 17 years old and attend Trinity and I
enjoy listening to guitar solo's and 80's rock music (I
am not ashamed to say it either!) I hope I get to know
everyone of you guys better and enjoy your second
semester!!

posted by Mr. Hods on Tue Feb 05 08:03
Subject Hello!
Finally!!! Someone appreciates 80's music!!!
I may have to put some sound tracks into the course for everyone to
enjoy—Dexy's Midnight Runners, Soft Cell. Tears for Fears . . .
(I'm getting a little misty right   now) ;)

posted by Sar   on Wed Feb 06 16:16
Subject Hello!
i loooooove 80's music! it's nothing to be ashamed of.
you know what else is sweet? 80's movies. The breakfast
club, pretty in pink, sixteen candles, weird science...john hughes was a god.

posted by Rach on Thu Feb 07 09:53
Subject right?
Good Morning!! I hope this is right...I'm slowly figuring
this all out. It sure is different. Have a great day!

posted by Mr. Hods on Thu Feb 07 15:37
Subject right?
You got it. It does get easier. :)

posted by Rach on Fri Feb 08, 09:18
Subject First Three
Good Morning everyone! How is everyone doing on those
first three assignments? I'm not very good at this part

of english. Any pointers? Thanks.

posted by Car on Mon Feb 25, 22:07
Subject whats going on
hey everyone my name is cara and i was wondering how
cyberschool was going with everyone! and a little note
to sara if you read this........80's music sucks i
have no clue what you are talking about! love

posted by Shar on Mon Feb 25, 23:16
Subject whats going on
car, you're cracked. 80's music is the best!!! same
with 80's movies!! The Breakfast Club was on this
weekend, anybody catch it? sooooo good! Here's something
to think about, back in that day, Molly Ringwald, Emilio
Estevez, Judd Nelson, Ally Sheedy, and Anthony Michael
Hall were super popular actors. Now they're pretty much
unheard of. Ever think that Brad Pitt, Ben Affleck,
Jennifer Love Hewitt etc. are going to be lost in
obscurity in the next 10 years? Think about it. i'm a
dork, i know.

Strand two

posted by Mr. Hods on Tue Feb 26, 07:49
Subject Symbolism in "Cask of Amontillado"
The Montresor Coat of Arms and motto has the image of a
snake embedded in the heel of a foot. Very few of you
indicated in your responses who the foot was and who the
snake was. So, here's your chance. We have two
characters (Monty and Fort), and two roles (a snake, a
foot). Indicate who you think the foot is and who the
snake is. Also, explain why. Post your response as a

reply to this one. :)

posted by Shar on Tue Feb 26, 15:11
Subject Symbolism in "Cask of Amontillado"
Mr. Hods I think that Monty was the foot and Fort was
the snake. I think this because Fort died and Monty did
not. At first Fort bothered Monty, just as a snake would
bother a person's foot but in the end the tables had
turned, Monty killed Fort just as a foot could kill a
snake by stepping on it.

posted by Kath on Wed Feb 27, 13:23
Subject Symbolism in "Cask of Amontillado"
Mr. Hods I think that Monty is the foot and Fort is
the snake. Monty is the foot because he seems to have
the control in the story. With control comes power and
the priviledge to destroy I guess you could say. So, the
foot could step on the snake killing it, just like Monty
killed Fort.

posted by Car on Fri Mar 01, 15:45
Subject "Cask of Amontillado"
I figure that Fort was the foot due to the fact that he
had more power. He had the power to step on Mont and
kill him. Monty was the snake because he was sneeky and
characteristic of when he was drunk resemble a snake and
their movements. Humans have more power of the animals
in most cases and here a human charcteristic overpowered
a weak reptile.

posted by Car on Mon Mar 04, 19:49
Subject I got Mixed Up
Hey sorry everyone if you were confused by my answer to
Cask of Amontilldo i got the names mixed up so just

switch them please! thanks peace

Strand three

posted by Lindsy on Fri Feb 01 11:11
Subject Hello
Hi! My name is Lindsy and I am 17 years
old. This is my first time taking a class
through cyber
school. I think this will be a different and
interesting way of learning.

posted by Mr. Hods (elab30) on Mon Feb
04 08:43
Subject Journal Work
Student Bulletin Board Journal
Students need to keep a log book (journal)
of their
on-line behaviour. In this journal, the last
thing you
do before logging out of your Cyber Class
is to come
here and state in a few words what area
you were working
on, what you found interesting, or what
you need help
on. This will become a primary means of
communication
between the student and the instructor. It is
one of the
means for me to know where you are at
and how you are doing.

posted by Mr. Hods (elab30) on Tue Feb
05 15:55
Subject Teacher Thoughts - Week 1
Just a few "teacher comments" for week
one work. The
two poems were relatively straight
forward, and all of you
handled them fairly well. "Shooting an
Elephant" is a
little more difficult, so I thought I would
share some
insights into Orwell's essay. The essay
exists at two
levels: one, it is a narrative of man who is
faced with
a decision that he doesn't want to make;
two, it is a
testimony to the futility of Imperialism.

The second level of the text can be seen in
the symbol
of the elephant. The elephant can be seen
as a
representation of British Imperialism.
Accordingly,
"the Burmese population . . .were quite
helpless against
it." The elephant (Imperialism) destroys
the black
Dravidian coolie, and the Burmese did
little, even when
it was "ravaging their homes". Now, the
Burmese were
excited to see it shot, but only when they
were at a
"safe distance". The fact that elephant
ultimately dies
is part of Orwell's point. He tells us "that
the
British Empire is dying", presumably
because of its own
tyranny – it is destroyed by its own
attempts at
consolidating its power.

posted by Will on Tue Feb 05 19:48
Subject Hello
Hey Everyone!
My real name is Will but you can call me
Bill. I am 17 and turning 18 next month. I
like
Wrestling and Tae Kwon Do for sports
and am veryi
involved in my school, with SRC, Light &
Sound, etc.
One thing I am looking foreward to right
now is that I
am leaving on a Missions Trip to
G_____ next Thurdsay
for two weeks and a few days.
Talk to ya all later!

posted by Car on Mon Feb 11 19:43
Subject Hero or Not
Was the speaker a hero, no he was not. It
takes more
than shooting something to become a hero,
at least me it
does. The reason that I say he is not a hero
is because
of the simple fact that he only shot the
elephant
because there was people watching. If
those people

hadn't been there would he still have
shot?? I don't
believe that he would have. He tried to use
the fact
that the elephant had killed the coolie. Yes
it was a
good reason but for all anyone knew the
man just could
have gotten in the way. Like honestly,
how hard is it to
get out of the way??. Espcially out of the
way of an
elephant.

afew people for hypocracy and fraud but a
good portion
of mankind. He had a strong belief in
libety , i think
everybody should fight for liberty and
freedom. This
was an amazing quote "When a white man
turns tyrant, it
is his own freedon he destroys. He is not
going to make
the world worse but tried to make it better.
These were
points that stuck out at me and made me
decide my
answer.

posted by Mr. Hods (elab30) on Tue Feb
12 08:01
Subject Hero or Not
Hi Car. Just an update on your preogress
so far.
The BB assignment is a little brief. I read
the
response and your ideas so far are good,
but you need to
go into a bit more detail in your
presentation (see
Cyber Orientation for requirements for BB
assignments).

View the BB assignments as mini-essays.
You need to set
them up for context, and then explore the
topic. Hints:
1. Exactly what is a hero? 2. Does the
speaker fit this
criteria? Why/whynot? 3. Refer
specifiaclly to the text
in your response.
If you wish, you may re-submit your BB
response. :)KH

posted by Lindsy on Sat Feb 23 11:41
Subject Journal
I actually really enjoyed Chaucer. I have
to say that
it was one of my most favorite things I've
done so far
in this class. I don't really like things like
Shakespeare and stuff like that because its
hard to
understand the language, but i really
enjoyed this.
Well, I got my Weekly E-Mail 4 sent
away this morning. Hope you enjoy
reading it!!

Strand four

posted by Court on Fri Mar 01 15:55
Subject Definatly NOT a Hero!
The man is definalty not a hero becasue
shooting amazing
wild anaimals is not somthing to be proud
of! Also how
hard is it to shoot a slow moving animal
like the
elephant! The only reason that he did
shoot the elephant
for, that he gave, was becasue it killed the
coolie.
That is the way of nature lets not stop it!
And we all
know that the man could of easily got
away! The man
really shot the elephant becasue he wanted
to impress
the people around him! Would he of done
it if the people

posted by Paige on Fri Feb 22 16:49
Subject 1st bulletin board
political issues have always been a major
probln in
societies, from capitalism to idealism.
I think
that he is a hero. He shows a kind of
patronage. He has
experience which caught my eye. He was
a soldier in a
socialist military unit. He learned that was
a way out
in a time where no one was secure. He did
not blame

weren't around??? I think not!

posted by Ash on Tue Mar 05 16:28
Subject hero or not?
 In the story hero or not, i believe that the man who
shot the elephant was a hero. He shot the elephant
because it was causing trouble all over the town and so
that he could be known for someting in the town other
than a bad guy who wants to casue trouble. On the other
hand i dont think that he was a hero. He could have just
put the animal back into a cage in the zoo or somewhere
that he could not get out. if a person goes crazy you
dont kill them you get them help. I think that it should
be the same for animals also.

posted by Sar on Tue Mar 05 16:42
Subject Bulleton #1 Hero or Not
Popularity is a struggle with people now a day, just
like in this story about the shooting of the elephant,
only to show he had power and wanted respect he went out
and shot an elephant that was under care by an Indian in
the town.   No,the narrator was not a hero because he shot the
elephant for himself to look good and not for the
people. He was no hero.

posted by Eri on Wed Mar 06, 14:34
Subject Hero or Not
In this story we see the pressure that is placed on
others. He was not accepted into the community so he
felt the pressure even more than anyone else would. As
a representative of his different culture he felt the
need to act a certain way to keep his dignity. His

actions in the end were his attempt to keep this
dignity. He felt the need to shoot the elephant to show
them that he was not a coward. He was a hero to the
people. They have a new respect for him because of what
he did. He is not a coward in the sense that his actions
were not fully justified. ha he continued on walking a
found the elephant to be a threat then it would have
been alright. Since he did not continue on his actions
are full of cowardice. He reacted to the pressure and
not to the need. It is not us that should decide whether
or not he is a hero. We have no understanding of what
happened after or of his thoughts and feelings after the
shooting. To the people he may have earned some respect
and have become their hero. But it is how we feel about
our actions that decides whether we are the hero or not.

posted by Will on Sat Mar 09 23:24
Subject Bulletin Board Entry #1
Was he a hero or was he not?
I believe that the narrator was not right in shooting
the elephant. He fell under the pressure of the people
around him. He may have portrayed himself as a hero
during the shooting but in reality he was not. He should
have watched the elephant, and ensured that everyone was
safe.
The Elephant was going Mad around the town, ravaging
homes and even killed a man. As the story explains the
scenario we find that it is common for elephants to go
through a time called "musk". If the elephant had been

in the middle of this rampage the time would have been
right to shoot it, but as the narrator and a few other
characters mention the elephant had seemed to settle
down. The narrator had come to the conclusion that the
Elephant ought not to be shot. After looking through the crowd the narrator had
instantly fallen under pressure as thousands of people
who regularly laugh at the narrator are watching him in
anticipation for a kill that would benefit themselves,
with food for the day along with a bit of entertainment.
The narrator should have stood up to the pressure, stuck
with his original beliefs and made sure the elephant was
not going to cause any more trouble. Falling under this
pressure showed how he had a weakness when standing up
to people. He should of done a better job of presenting
his beliefs. He did try to do what he thought was best
for his empire. However this pressure only had to do
with the peoples immediate satisfaction.

During the time of the shooting he may have thought of
himself as a hero. The gun he had in his hand presented
him with the power of life or death for the elephant. In
having the power to access the gun, and have proper use
of it meant that he had the authority to call the shots.
In reality the elephant was no longer a major threat,
and had a greater purpose in being alive than dead. It
was only the pressure given to the narrator by the
people that caused him to turn from what he had known
was right.

posted by Riche on Thu Mar 14 11:15
Subject Porphyrias Lover
Hey Everyone! What is everyone's opinion on the poem
"Porphyrias Lover" ??? Post a bulletin or email me.
Thanks.

posted by Zac on Thu Mar 14 11:42
Subject everyone's progress
Hey all, just wondering what week everyone is workin on
in the course. I am so far behind is is outrageous.

posted by Mich on Thu Mar 14 14:38
Subject everyone's progress
LOL! Good old Zac! Never give up! I'm caught up and
on schedule. I'm sure you'll catch up sooner or later.
Good luck!
:)

posted by Kris on Thu Mar 14 19:03
Subject everyone's progress
haha hi! i'm behind to so don't worry! i am just
finishing up week 4! I hope ya can catch up! don't give
up!

posted by Will on Thu Mar 14 22:26
Subject Journal
Today I got a lot accomplished, both in school and out.
As for English I printed out the week five poems and
have gone through the poem "My Last Duchess". The first
few times it was a bit hard to read, but after going
through the description of where they were, the poem
started making a lot of sense. I found it quite interesting
as I would realize something new every time I read through the poem.

posted by Court on Tue Mar 19 17:41
Subject BB1 Im going to resubmit this
Thanks Mr Hods for letting me resubmit.