

Bean, T. W., Valerio, P. C., & Senior, H. M. (1999). Intertextuality and the e-mail discussion of a multicultural novel in secondary American literature. In T. Shanahan & F. Rodriguez-Brown (Eds.), *Forty-eighth yearbook of the National Reading Conference* (pp. 376-386). Chicago: National Reading Conference.

Keywords: technologies, leadership, instructional models, response to reading

Summary: This study examined the e-mail literature discussions between high school students and pre- and in-service teachers. Participants read and discussed *The Kitchen God's Wife* (Tan, 1991) via long distance e-mail discussions and alongside in-class discussions with other class members. The high school students also completed in-class assignments such as written essays. The researchers analyzed each sentence of their e-mail discussions using six categories: descriptive, personal and intertextual, interpretive, evaluative, cultural reference, and miscellaneous. In addition, a questionnaire asked each person which mode of discussion (e-mail or in-class) he or she found to be the most rewarding in terms of richness of opinions and ideas expressed.

Assumptions:

- Computer-mediated communication is an effective way to create long-distance learning communities crossing cultural, racial, and gender boundaries.
- Intertextuality, the ability of readers to make connections between texts, is necessary to build deeper meaning when reading.
- Reader Response Theory depends upon the reader bringing their own ethical, social, and psychological traits to the reading of a text.
- Reader-based instruction often leads to more interpretive and personal associations than does teacher-based instruction.
- While the above may be true, centering class discussion and writing on personal responses may limit critical responses to literature.

Results:

- For both high school and graduate in-service teachers, writing on the computer offered a means of fluid discussion.
- The majority of sentences analyzed contained personal and intertextual statements.
- 58% of the high school students preferred in-class discussions while 60% of the in-service teachers preferred e-mail discussions.

Conclusions:

- High school students were more comfortable with e-mail than were the in-service teachers. (this seems to contradict the last bullet under results)
- Reader-based instruction allowed for a high level of reader engagement via e-mail and class discussion.
- Participants debated gender issues and author voice while struggling with their place as high school or in-service teachers.

- Students struggled with their critical voice when faced with the immediacy of response via e-mail.

Suggestions for Teachers:

- Use reader-based literature instruction to promote more in-depth discussion and writing.
- Consider using e-mail discussions to allow readers of different ages to exchange ideas.

Suggestions for Literacy Leaders:

- Provide classroom access to communication technologies.
- Provide professional development for teachers and administrators in effective use of communication technologies.