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Languaging School into Being : A Discourse Analysis of Online ELA Classes Within the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Languaging School into Being:

A Discourse Analysis of Online ELA Classes Within the Context

of the COVID-19 Pandemic

A DISSERTATION

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by

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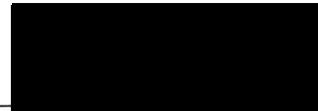
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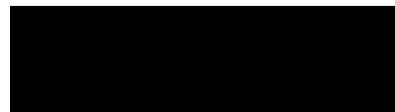
ABSTRACT

Languaging School into Being:

A Discourse Analysis of Online ELA Classes Within the Context

of the COVID-19 Pandemic

By Jason Christopher Toncic

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, school buildings across the United States shut their doors and transitioned students and teachers to remote learning, most often utilizing internet-based technology to provide either asynchronous or synchronous lessons. I was a high school English Language Arts teacher in Stone Valley School District in Northeastern New Jersey when the unprecedented school closures moved my classes online for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year.

As a teacher researcher who specialized in New Literacy Studies, I was particularly sensitive to how students and I used technology to continue lessons after the school building shut its doors. At first, students and I interfaced using the multimedia components of the BigBlueButton platform, an interface which my school district had mandated that teachers use to host synchronous classroom lessons. Soon enough, however, I noticed that students were more frequently turning off their cameras and microphones, sitting in unseen silence on the other end of their school-issued laptops; however, as the cameras and microphones were turned off, the Public Chat box came to life as students began to write messages as their means of participating in class.

Without school buildings, classrooms, whiteboards, classroom desks, passing time, or athletics, "school" nevertheless continued on. I came to the realization that the pandemic had yielded a unique circumstance—a critical instance—during which a teacher researcher could explore the fundamental components of what made "school" (i.e., the institution of school) into

what it was. Furthermore, since school now comprised, nearly entirely, dialogue between myself and my students, I started to conceive of school as something "languaged into being" by individuals who were interacting in roles along certain ways with words. I began to save the Public Chat transcripts, email messages, and notes pages that emerged from 47 synchronous sessions for three Grade 10 English Language Arts classes from March to June 2020.

Using discourse analysis to unpack the ways in which language was used in the Public Chat, I found that students and I had indeed made discursive moves that languaged school into being. Students, for example, wrote in ways that positioned themselves to appear to me as "good" students, those who show to the teacher compliance, achievement, and perceived intelligence. Both students and I also seemed to write under the assumption of routinized habits and routines according to what we believed an English Language Arts class to be. Even when students used non-standard or untraditional discursive moves (e.g., emoji), they did so in ways that anchored them to the curriculum. And in the case of a student who used an expletive in class, it was other students who admonished him and circumscribed his behavior.

Although language was how school appeared to be conjured into being through the dialectic among students and me—as might be expected from a social constructivist epistemology—there were also deeper structures at play that, perhaps, manifested the linguistic moves. The limitations and design of BigBlueButton interface, for example, reproduced traditional classroom learning styles rather than harnessing the full extent of the internet's capabilities. Buoyed by counternarratives in the media about failing schools and 'learning loss' during the pandemic, an adherence to schedules, deadlines, and curricula strongly continued to reify school grades as important markers of success for my students. Furthermore, what I have called *social routines*—ways in which individuals habitually interact with tools and technology

(broadly encompassing both new and old forms of technology)—manifested certain ways of engaging in roles, such as teacher and student.

   With the initial lockdown of the COVID-19 pandemic now in the past, fully online classes for public high school students have become an anomaly of a particular critical instance in history in retrospect. Still, the ways that students and their teacher interacted during these lessons as seen in the discursive moves that people use to language school into being, sheds light on the deeper structures and social routines of schooling that operate on a daily basis. Such insights may help future researchers, whether they examine in person or online schools, to identify social routines, mappable through discourse analysis, that individuals perform as ways of taking part in the educational system. This may be of particular interest for demographics in which these discursive moves and social routines do not appear, for it suggests that there are particular ways of using language that perpetuate the institution of school. Individuals who are predisposed to these habits and routines may be better able to succeed in schools, for they can not only anticipate what is to come in classes, but they also work synergistically with teachers to literally bring a certain kind of education into existence.

   Keywords: COVID-19, ELA, Discourse Analysis, Critical Instance, Case Study

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Special thanks to Dr. Jeremy Price for joining my committee and offering his insights and expertise as I concluded my dissertation.

DEDICATION

For every hour I spent in class or studying, you were there with our children. For every minute I was drafting research, you made sure that our kids were safe. For every second I missed with our family when writing this dissertation, you gave them everything they needed to grow into amazing young people. I could never have done this without you. This, Jen, my incredible wife, is all for you.

To Cole, Kenzie, and Kaia, you three inspired me daily to finish my dissertation. I hope, one day, when you can read this, you're reminded of how much I believe in you and love you. There's an entire universe out there full of things to question that no one else has. Find them.

This is also for my parents. I know how much you sacrificed, how hard you worked, and how difficult it could be. But you raised me to love learning and gave me the forever inquisitive mind I have today. You instilled in me motivation and commitment. I would never have pursued this, let alone achieve it, without you.

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Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

This empirical study aims to better understand the discursive moves that public high school students in a privileged suburb of New Jersey seem to use when writing during online English classes throughout the COVID-19 pandemic throughout the switch to distance learning from March to June 2020. Understanding these moves contributes to better understanding how students use writing during online classes as a means of classroom participation within an interface that was better suited to the passive reception of teacher talk. The findings of this discourse analysis may provide a greater understanding of how a group of privileged, mostly white students "languaged" school into being in the absence of traditional classrooms and school buildings. Current foci on online teaching during school closures tend to focus on teachers and their communicative practices (e.g., synchronous video chat, pre-recorded videos, assigning website resources; see, for example, Reich et al., 2020). And yet my own experiences of teaching subject area English in a wealthy suburban high school suggest that attending to how students themselves are making use of publicly-viewable writing during the ebb and flow of online synchronous lessons is worth attending to. The ways that students wrote during these online class sessions provide insight into the continuity (or otherwise) of learning and education during the coronavirus pandemic, especially in light of the privileged school context in which I was teaching at the time and the disparities that school closures have revealed with respect to students participating in synchronous online lessons (e.g., in terms of access to technology, broadband connections, and environments conducive to learning).

As such, this qualitative study uses discourse analysis to analyze data collected from March 30 to June 18, 2020 in the form of class period chat logs, a class assignment that is used to

triangulate my findings, and teacher-researcher analytical notes and memos throughout the study period. This analytic approach generates insights into how students and I used writing (or did not) during synchronous online classes to answer the following research question: In what ways did high school students and a teacher write during synchronous online English classes within the context of COVID-19 pandemic? Using New Literacy Studies as its theoretical framework and borrowing both method and theory from discourse analysis, this study facilitates a better understanding of students' written participation during synchronous lessons delivered by means of online multimedia conferencing software. Online learning can be quite different from in-person learning, but throughout the duration of my study, I found more similarities than differences and, furthermore, noticed a shift in my own practice toward teacher-centric pedagogy.

A Note on Definitions

Throughout this dissertation, I use terms frequently seen in the relevant literature, such as *distance learning, remote learning, virtual learning, online learning, online classroom, online school, online instruction,* and *e-schools*, to refer to a classroom-like learning experience in which one or more student or teacher participates from a physical distance (usually through some type of internet-based medium). Each of these terms should be understood to refer to classroom-based instruction that is either semi or entirely conducted online and are synonymous in their usage in this paper unless otherwise noted.

Context of the Study

With outbreaks of the novel coronavirus surging in China and Italy at the beginning of March, New Jersey's Department of Education Commissioner Lamont Repollet issued guidance on March 5, 2020 to school districts across the state to begin developing "Emergency

Preparedness Plans" should the need to close down school buildings arise. Repollet (2020) wrote in a memo to school administrators that "distance learning" plans "may include direct services, online instruction, services provided through contract with another district board of education, or any other means developed by the district to meet the needs of its students" (p. 1). As schools began to prepare for a potential shutdown, the virus spread throughout the northeast, finding its epicenter in New York City and, to a smaller degree, the commuter hub of Bergen County, New Jersey, just west of New York City. Along with Repollet, New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy, and New Jersey Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli addressed several hundred school administrators via conference call, informing them of the guidance and enjoining them to begin to plan for a shutdown (New Jersey Department of Education, 2020). Confidence in the ability of school districts to provide online services for public school students may in part have been derived from the prevalence of 'distance learning,' which has played an important and positive role, in countries like Canada, Australia, and rural parts of the U.S. where physical access to schooling is made more difficult by living in remote rural and isolated areas.

It would not be a long wait. On March 12, the Bergen County County Executive, Jim Tedesco, announced that all 75 school districts in the county would close until further notice at week's end (Cattafi, Sobko, & Shanes, 2020). For me, a Bergen County-based English (Language Arts) teacher at Stone Valley High School (pseudonym used throughout), the last day *in* school was one of novels hastily disseminated to students, *ad hoc* lessons about video conferencing software, and nervous anxiety at the slightest cough or sniffle. In my sixth period English 10 class, the sopohmores' desks were adjacent to one another in a horseshoe arrangement around the room, each person side-by-side to a peer. At one tip of the horseshoe, right near my teacher's desk, one student buried her face miserably in her forearms.

I walked around the room explaining online learning, although admittedly I knew little more than the students did about how the next weeks and months would unfold. I instructed them on how to use the video conferencing feature on the school district's learning management system, and they each joined a test online conferencing room to experiment with the capabilities of the software. I explained that online learning would consist of both assignments to complete on their own time (i.e., asynchronously) and live sessions during which I would be instructing class (i.e., synchronously).

Students, for their part, were curious about whether they would still have their exam that was scheduled for the next week and how long-distance learning might go on for. In truth, I had few answers but assured them that I would be open to their feedback and wanted to keep the assessment fair considering the circumstances. At one point, the girl who had been suffering in the sleeves of a baggy black sweater shouted to the girl beside her, "I don't have coronavirus!" But just a few weeks later, the class received a somber message from her, informing us that she had been diagnosed with COVID-19 and that we should all be tested. For me, it was at that moment when it became clear that schools were unlikely to reopen for the remainder of the school year.

On March 16, Governor Murphy followed Tedesco's lead and closed down school buildings across the State of New Jersey with Executive Order No. 104:

> The Commissioner of DOE shall continue working with each public school district, and private and parochial schools as appropriate, to ensure that students are able to continue their educations during this time period through appropriate home instruction. Local school districts, charter schools, and renaissance schools, in consultation with the Commissioner of DOE, shall have the authority and discretion

to determine home instruction arrangements as appropriate on a case-by-case basis

to ensure all students are provided with appropriate home instruction, taking into

account all relevant constitutional and statutory obligations. (Exec. Order No. 104,

2020, p. 6)

Stone Valley School District had already transitioned to its online educational delivery at this

time, facilitated by the fact that students in the district already had school-issued laptops. The

Superintendent of Stone Valley School District (2020) emailed families across the district to

inform them that the high school would continue with its "normal bell schedule" and that

attendance would be taken "by period." The means by which teachers could instruct their

students had been directed, as well. The Director of Curriculum for Stone Valley School District

(2020) wrote on a district message board to teachers that "Schoology (with approved/adopted

third party integrations such as Google, Discovery, etc.) is the vehicle for instruction during our

e-learning days. This is extremely important if and when the NJDOE monitors our online

instruction for their approval." Consequently, Schoology (an online learning management system

purchased by the school district) and BigBlueButton (its integrated video conferencing feature)

became the only means by which Stone Valley School District teachers could host synchronous

sessions with their students.

As the rate of infection climbed, Governor Murphy released on April 7 Executive Order

No. 117, which removed examination requirements for students and waived student growth data

as a measure of teacher effectiveness for New Jersey teachers. New Jersey schools were

ultimately announced by Governor Murphy (2020) to remain closed for the remainder of the

academic year on May 4. In total, the Stone Valley School District engaged in remote learning

from March 17 to June 18, approximately three months in duration. In a letter to parents on

March 16—the day before remote instruction began—the Stone Valley High School Principal

(2020) expressed a desire to maintain "as much **normalcy** as possible for our students and

teachers" (original emphasis) and that the school had encouraged "teachers to use creativity in

their lessons," which meant to include asynchronous work that was not computer-based. Thus,

teachers like myself assigned both asynchronous (i.e., not live, although students still had to sign

in at the beginning of the class period) work and taught synchronous (i.e., live) classes. Each

teacher in the district made these determinations individually as to what was best for their

students and what was practicable with their curricula, as well as considering their own personal

circumstances. No punitive measures were taken against teachers in Stone Valley School District

who did more or less synchronous teaching than others.

Comparatively, teachers and students in Stone Valley School District had an easier time

adapting to and benefiting from distance learning than those across the country, who reportedly

faced various difficulties, especially in the first few months of the pandemic (Ali & Herrera,

2020; Auxier & Anderson, 2020; Dorn, Hancock, Sarakatsannis, & Viruleg, 2020). Media

reports appeared that called into question both the equity and efficacy of online-only instruction.

Many of these reports focused on the "digital divide" between rich and poor, drawing attention to

the country's students who lacked the connectivity or hardware to engage in online learning

(Basu, 2020; CST Editorial Board, 2020; Ernst, 2020; Garun, 2020; Goldstein, Popescu, &

Hannah-Jones, 2020; Herold, 2020; Huffman, 2020; Leone, 2020; Los Angeles Unified School

District, 2020; Mansfield & Conlon, 2020; McGill, 2020; Moyer, 2020; Perry, 2020; Richards,

Cohen, & Coryne, 2020). For students in Philadelphia, for example, just 51% of students in

grades 9 through 12 had reliable access to the internet at home (Mitchell, 2020). Connection

difficulties were especially prevalent in low-income neighborhoods. In 2018, 56% of families

nationwide with an income level of $30,000 or below had home access to broadband internet, according to a Pew Research survey (Anderson & Kumar, 2019). A study of school-age children based in Canada also found that students in low-income families were more likely to only have access to mobile devices (i.e., smartphones, tablets, and ebook readers), which are more conducive toward receiving knowledge than producing it (Frennette, Frank & Deng, 2020). Students in rural areas were also reported to experience connectivity issues at a higher rate than students in cities or suburbs (Hasenstab, 2020). A recent Pew Research poll showed that families in rural areas were 12 percentage points behind in-home broadband connectivity when compared to urban families and 16 percentage points behind suburban families (Perrin, 2019).

In addition to connectivity issues, media reports emerged that cast doubt on the efficacy of online teaching and learning for students with disabilities (Camera, 2020; Jones, 2020; Nadworny, 2020), despite exhortations from the U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos for schools to be "creative" and "flexible" as they offered services to students with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Only 24% of parents surveyed from March 26 to April 1, 2020 in the Los Angeles school district reported that school districts were providing appropriate instructional materials and resources to students with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic (The Education Trust-West, 2020). Policymakers in Minneapolis wrote that educational programs needed to address the needs of students with disabilities, but that it would not be able to be done by forcing a return to "normal" (Alexander et al., 2020), in sharp contrast to Stone Valley High School's principal's message to parents expressing a hope to provide normalcy. Still, other journalists decried distance learning during the pandemic as not fulfilling students' socio-emotional needs; needs, they argued, that could only be met with real-world interaction (Gladstone, 2020; Isselbacher & Su, 2020; Schermele, 2020). Preliminary research

supported the notion that closing school buildings during COVID-19 exacerbated students'

mental illness (Lee, 2020).

Meanwhile, nefarious online hijinks such as "Zoombombing" (i.e., when an anonymous

third-party enters Zoom chats and shares obscene or hateful material) brought internet trolling

into otherwise innocuous book club meetings and musical performances hosted by the video

conferencing software Zoom (Lorenz, 2020). School districts across the country were not

immune to "Zoombombing" (Taketa, 2020), leading some districts—like New York City's

public schools—to forbid the use of Zoom for class instruction (A. Zimmerman, 2020). Finally,

some criticized online schooling during COVID-19 distance learning as being less effective than

in-person learning, even when everything was working well (Barnum, 2020; Bose, 2020; J.

Zimmerman, 2020). U.S. President Donald Trump (2020) opined on Twitter that "Virtual

Learning has proven to be TERRIBLE compared to In School, or On Campus, learning. Not

even close!" Yet while new voices such as these joined debates about remote learning, the

discussions surrounding the efficacy of remote teaching and learning have been ongoing for at

least 40 years.

To begin with, there are numerous benefits and affordances to online learning. Some

argue that online schools increase the efficiency of student learning by means of greater

competition; they can offer a better match between schools and students' individual needs; and

with fewer bureaucratic hurdles, online schools can foster innovative lesson delivery (Chubb &

Moe, 1990; Davies & Aurini, 2011; Levin, 2009; Nichols, 2016). As Ravitch (2013) has noted,

slim bureaucratic costs and little overhead have made online Charter schools into profitable

enterprises. But perhaps the most influential and certainly one of the earliest positive aspects to

online schools is that distance learning can offer isolated individuals educational opportunities

that are not available locally (Huerta, Gonzalez, & d'Entremont, 2006). For example, Scollon

and Scollon (2004) recounted their study of some of the first individuals to participate in distance

learning in the U.S. state of Alaska from 1978 to 1983. Remote learning in this case offered

individuals in physically remote locations the ability to participate in synchronous graduate

coursework via telephone at the University of Alaska.

Today, forty years later and with more advanced technological means, distance learning

continues to offer isolated individuals opportunities to participate in group-based learning. For

example, families in remote areas of Queensland, Australia, who enrolled preschool children in

online kindergarten programs in 2017 thought that the remote learning opportunities addressed

equity and social justice concerns of access to schooling that were otherwise taken for granted in

urban and suburban locales (Dockett & Perry, 2020). However, as a general trend, online K-12

schools in the U.S. today tend to be utilized more by high school students than by those in

middle and lower grades (Gohil, Donohue, & Eugster, 2020; Hart, Berger, Jacob, Loeb, & Hill,

2019; Heinrich, Darling-Aduana, Good, & Cheng, 2019; Miron et al., 2013). Many of these e-

schools offer supplemental online programs (e.g., "blended learning," "hybrid schools"), but

there has been comparatively less research on entirely online schools (see, as examples of

research into entirely online schools, Barbour, 2015; Penkov, 2015). As of the 2017-2018 school

year, there were 420,000 K-12 students in supplemental online programs with 310,000 students

enrolled in online-only schooling across 31 states in the U.S. (Digital Learning Collaborative,

2019). New Jersey, at the time of this thesis, has not accredited any fully online K-12 public

education programs.

Despite the additional access provided by online educational opportunities, there are

competing concerns that call into question the efficacy of solely online learning for K-12

students (Dennis, 2020; Miron & Urshel, 2012; Morgan, 2016; Saul, 2011). The U.S. state of

Ohio, which has approved e-schools since the early 2000s, has produced a wealth of data

regarding online schooling, and the results are grim (Ahn, 2016; Churchill, 2015; Woodworth et

al., 2015). Ahn and McEachin (2017) found that online Charter schools offered to Ohio students

led to self-segregation—low-income white families were more likely to choose e-schools,

whereas low-income black families opted for traditional in-person Charter schools (see also

Mann, 2019)—and that students attending those online schools received lower standardized test

scores when compared to their peers who attended in-person institutions. Lower results for

online-only students were echoed in studies coming out of South Carolina, New Mexico,

Pennsylvania, and Idaho (CREDO, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d), as well as the city of Chicago

(Heppen et al., 2017). However, some studies suggest that the administration of online

examinations may be to blame rather than the schooling itself (Backes & Cowan, 2018; Beck,

Watson, & Maranto, 2019). Some of the results about the efficacy of online schools may also be

confounded by the staff of those schools: to circumvent the need to hire certified teachers, some

online Charter schools have employed a few certified teachers and then designated the bulk of

their educators (who are uncertified) as teacher aides (Berline & Glass, 2014).

This brief review of online K-12 schooling does not capture the complexities of online

education, the various types of programs that are offered (e.g., Massive Online Open

Classrooms, hybrid schooling models, credit recovery programs, etc.), or the debate over the

"best" methods used to instruct students online. It does, though, suggest that despite the growing

prevalence of online schooling, the outcomes of distance education in the U.S. have been, in

recent history, seemingly consonant with the arguments against remote learning during the

COVID-19 pandemic. There are numerous considerations to make before assuming a simple

analogy, however. The aforementioned studies were undertaken with students whose families, by-and-large, opted to enroll their children in online learning. The e-schools were mostly online Charter schools, not traditional public school districts. Some online schools were understaffed, whereas others had few certificated teaching professionals. Students were not necessarily from the same school district, and thus, they were less likely to know one another. Online schools were also designed purposefully to teach students via the internet.

In the case of Stone Valley School District and all of the other schools in Bergen County, and later, all of New Jersey, however, school administrators had less than two weeks from first being informed of the possibility of a school shutdown to implementing fully remote or online learning. Students attended the same school, and they consequently knew one another and their teachers before transitioning to a fully online learning experience. Certificated teachers predominated as the type of educators who continued to teach their students, but they lacked training in teaching online. Families had chosen for their children to attend an in-person public high school, not an online program. These differences materially distinguish the online education that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic from the online schooling that preceded it (although the online-only schools could continue throughout the pandemic without interruption).

That said, it may be helpful to frame traditionally online schools alongside distance learning during the pandemic to, perhaps, better understand the reputed problems with online learning at least within the context of one New Jersey high school's English classes, for these issues would inspire New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy (2020) to tweet on July 27, "Every education expert we've spoken to over the past few months has confirmed that in-person eduction [*sic*] is critical, and that remote learning is only an acceptable substitute when absolutely necessary." In short, online learning—a rich method of educational delivery with

seemingly endless variation—has emerged from the 2019-2020 school year with a less than stellar public perception, seen as a last resort rather than a viable means of learning.

Problem of the Study

The lack of understanding about online teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic necessitates further research into how public school students and teachers interacted during distance learning. It is already well known that the use of institutionalized, school-based Standard English benefits individuals who were born into certain high-value language practices (Bourdieu, 1984; Cummins, 2000; Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2018; Gee, 2015; Lee, 2005; Masocha, 2017; S.B. Heath, 1983; Tatum, 2017; Wertsch, 2009). Furthermore, what is called "white privilege," which includes the benefits provided by proficiency with Standard English language practices, is often itself invisible to those who benefit from it the most (Fiske, 1994; Howard, 2016; Kenny, 2000; Lensmire et al., 2013; McIntosh, 2007; Sue, 2006; Wildman, 1996). Much of the contemporary empirical research today importantly focuses on the direct effects of institutionalized white privilege on students of color (Allen, 2015; Amos, 2018; Borck, 2020; Chang, 2017; Grace & Nelson, 2019; Graves, 2014; Joseph, Viesco, & Bianco, 2016; Makarova & Birman, 2016; Marsh & Noguera, 2017; Ngo, 2017; Woody, 2020). But, as Goodman (2011) suggests, "One of the most challenging aspects of social justice education is working with people from privileged or dominant groups" (p. 1, see also, Bacon, 2015; Curry-Stevens, 2007). Considering the school inequities that surfaced into public and political debate during the COVID-19 pandemic, the invisible, linguistic standards that continue today to benefit students in wealthy school districts may be useful to explore when teaching goes fully online.

Purpose of this Dissertation Study

If the lack of quality of online learning was a rationale for returning teachers and students to school buildings during a pandemic, then one aspect that this research provides insight into is how a group of students from an affluent school district participated by means of writing during online schooling, as evidenced by their discourse during online English (Language Arts) classes. Discourse, in the lowercase sense of "discourse," refers to the written class participation during the course of these synchronous class sessions. Furthermore, considering that some groups of students (i.e., those from wealthy, mostly-white suburbs) had better access to and outcomes from online learning during the pandemic, this research study hopes to provide additional insight into the written language practices that students used during remote learning when operating from a place of privilege.

One of the phenomena that occurred within the context of this Critical Instance Case Study is that all 50 participating students stopped using their cameras and microphones shortly after online learning began, opting instead to use text-based messaging to participate in class discussion. Although I did teach them how to use those features when we were in the school building on the last week before distance learning began, I did not compel students to use these multimedia features during class sessions. Since I was taking graduate courses in the evening at the time, I was aware of how uncomfortable my camera or audio could make me feel, particularly when some unexpected (or embarrassing) event happened in my background. I also felt that students deserved a right to privacy in their homes: their kitchen tables and desk spaces were never meant to become the backdrop for our classroom. Lastly, I knew that "being visible" in a school building was fundamentally different than "being visible" online: when cameras are "on" during video conferencing, users not only can see others, but they have to also see their

own image. For students who struggle with their body image or have suffered abuse, I recognize that staring at one's own image may not be healthy. Consequently, I opted to permit without question students' full and completely natural migration to entirely text-based class participation. I hope that this study can provide some additional insight into the means by which students can participate in online classes, joining a contentious debate among educators about whether students should be required to turn on their cameras and microphones for online class sessions or not, or that "engagement" comes with a spoken language requirement on the part of students, and the like (Bilen & Matros, 2020; Bui et al., 2020; Harwell, 2020; Reich et al., 2020).

Last, by examining the means by which students participated in their online English classes, this study provides more insight into how students might have "languaged" school into being. By this, I mean examining the ways in which students might have been complicit in establishing a context of learning that was understood by participants in those class sessions to be "school," even though the normal trappings of the school experience (e.g., the classroom, face-to-face interaction, group work, hallway passing time, etc.) were no longer in use.

This study also provides additional description of the particular discursive moves (i.e., how students used written language, including words but also typographical features such as capitalization and emoticons, for example) that facilitated the transition to online learning that "closely mirrored"—to borrow a phrase about online learning in my English 10 classroom written by some of my students for a class assignment—what they had experienced in school. In short, this study complicates an understanding of online schooling as transformative but instead as reproducing the practices and structures of traditional, brick-and-mortar education. It explores how district-issued software facilitated the continuity of "school" discourse and how students from this affluent community were particularly equipped to "do school," even when "school"

transformed from being a concrete place to an abstract concept via online sessions. With a better

understanding of how students in this district continued to "language" school into being within

the context of online learning, the results of this study may help other educators to predict

whether replicating the modalities of institutional schooling as understood pre-pandemic may be

fruitful for their student populations. Furthermore, it may also provide additional insight into the

ongoing equity-focused debate concerning whether online learning is best accomplished by

mimicking the traditional structures of in-person schooling.

Chapter 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, I present the theoretical framework that informs this study. The New Literacy Studies—a sociocultural learning theory that emphasizes the dialogic, interpersonal nature of literacy—and its related subset of "new literacies," which mainly focus on the role of newer digital technologies in sociocultural literacy development, are the foundational epistemological lenses through which this study analyzes student writing during online class sessions. From this initial framework, I then introduce social constructivist notions of "languaging" school into being. Discursive moves, that is, how individuals communicate while participating in something like a public high school class, indicate, on one hand, how students might linguistically navigate the institution within which they are communicating and, on the other hand, how socially routinized patterns of interaction help to reify and perpetuate abstract institutions such as schools. In short, language use during classes is both a performance *in* and an enactment *of* schooling.

The abstract, socially routinized nature of schooling emerges all the more clearly within the context of movement to online schooling, when the various trappings and apparati of schools melted away, however ephemerally, to reveal what I saw as the performative, language-based core of schooling. To explore this further, I briefly introduce a theoretical stance toward discourse analysis as an analytic method that is critical and political by nature, one that examines both the nuts and bolts of language ("Grammar 1") as well as the way those components are socially deployed ("Grammar 2"). To this end, I incorporate Gee's theory of d/Discourse, particularly as it pertains to secondary Discourses as the linguistic patterns of social institutions,

noting that the match between some individuals' language practices and institutional language practices are at a higher degree than others.

The New Literacy Studies

The New Literacy Studies epistemologically frame meaning-making as a socially constructed act, one in which individuals dialogically and contextually use language (e.g., Barton & Hamilton, 2005; Gee, 2015b; Lankshear & Knobel, 2011; S.B. Heath, 1983; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Street, 1984). The New Literacies Studies framework suggests that literacies are all socially and historically contextualized. Counter to this view is what Brian Street (1984) called the "autonomous" model of literacy, which posited that acquiring literacy could independently grant individuals higher cognitive abilities and improved academic performance. However, Street (2005) argues that autonomous approaches are incorrectly rooted in Western notions of literacy that locate reading and writing abilities within the individual. This study approaches students' use of written language during Public Chats with a New Literacies Studies framework and overtly recognizes, in turn, that the language used in a class setting—whether in person or online—is shaped and informed by the context of public schooling. That is, literacies are intimately connected to enacted social identities (Gee, 2002; Gee, Allen, & Clinton, 2001). When students, for example, wrote "thank you" at the end of class sessions, the situatedness of their language use suggests that they were thanking me, their teacher, even though students did not identify a recipient for their gratitude. Furthermore, the "thank yous" that accompanied the end of each class seemed to be a ritualistic show of respect: students knew to say thank you to me, but I was not, in the context, obligated to thank them for attending or participating in class. In a different sociocultural context, of course, *thank you* can mean any number of things, but its meaning is continually shaped by the situatedness of its use.

A more particular subset of the New Literacy Studies focuses on "new literacies," which examine how (usually) newer technologies, such as computers and mobile devices, engender new literacy practices that either did not exist or were difficult to perform with earlier tools (see Alvermann & Sanders, 2019; Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2014; Gee, 2018; Knobel & Lankshear, 2007; Lammers, Magnifico, & Curwood, 2018; Lankshear & Knobel, 2018). New literacies are also referred to as digital literacies, multiliteracies, multimodalities, online storytelling, multiple literacies, and computer literacies (Alexander et al., 2017; Black, 2009b; Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2014; Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Kress, 2010; Lammers, 2016; Masny & Cole, 2012; Street, 1993; Thibaut & Curwood, 2017). Given this slipperiness, it is important to pin down what "new literacies" means for this study. According to Knobel and Lankshear (2019), new literacies entail "creating, sharing, and negotiating meanings using forms of inscription that have emerged and evolved with the development and proliferation of digital electronic technologies and networks" (p. 4). Conceptualizing new literacies as social and dialogic meaning making has been taken up in this study as it interprets and analyzes how students communicated in writing during online English (Language Arts) classes within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Much research into new literacies has noted how digital technologies facilitate all participants to take up the roles of learner and teacher (Black, 2008, 2009b; Gee, 2004; Lankshear & Knobel, 2007b), making this orientation particularly useful for my study.

In many ways, new literacies are what made possible online-based schooling within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic; teachers were able to use web-based technology to continue to teach students. In the tradition of new literacies, teachers could use text, image, audio, video in any multitude of ways to continue to teach students (Cloonan, Paatsch, & Hutchison, 2020;

Howell, 2018; Matthewman, Blight, & Davies, 2004), despite not physically occupying the same classroom. In this sense, this study is very much an exploration of new literacy-mediated schooling: within the context of online class sessions, students used new literacy tools (e.g., keyboards) while rejecting others (e.g., cameras and microphones) to engage in their class sessions.

I am struck by the freedom that computer-mediated learning might grant educators: new literacies offer the potential to reframe how schooling occurs (e.g., participatory cultures and peer-to-peer learning, Jenkins et al., 2006; affinity spaces, Brown & Adler, 2008; Gee, 2018; non-commercial educational games, Linderoth & Sjöblom, 2019). Yet I am equally aware that, despite the affordances of technology, teachers in the Stone Valley School District—including myself—nevertheless taught in rather traditional, teacher-centric ways. Technology is also not a panacea to fix learning inequalities nor is it guaranteed to lead to better educational outcomes (Goodchild & Speed, 2019; Selwyn, 2013). Certainly part of the explanation for the use of traditional teaching methods is the relative suddenness of school closings, the limited time teachers had to prepare for online learning, and the lack of training and familiarity that many educators had with teaching online. There is certainly a difference between supplementing in-person teaching with new literacies components, which has become commonplace for some educators (de Koster, Volman, & Kuiper, 2017), and providing an entire curriculum solely through a computer-mediated delivery. Furthermore, some teachers are still hesitant to embrace new technologies, such as smartphones and social media, even in brick-and-mortar classrooms, establishing rules and restrictions around their use (Dinsmore, 2019; Lindell, 2019; Nikolopoulou, 2020; Selwyn & Aagaard, 2020).

However, I believe that, behind these surface-level explanations, the continuity of traditionally teacher-centric schooling that I experienced and observed of my colleagues may also have been a product of the language of schooling, of which the practices and patterns of language use yield certain types of classroom interactions. A meaningful take-up of the tenets of new literacies and the New Literacy Studies requires more than the digitization of the traditional classroom; a new literacies-based teaching methodology should engage with students' unique language practices, use the vast array of multimodal functionality that the web has to offer and restructure learning in ways that are fit to the affordances of the internet rather than a brick-and-mortar classroom (Chase & Laufenberg, 2011; Toncic, 2020). Yet, as will become clear in my later discussion of the BigBlueButton software, the educational technology used in Stone Valley High School was tailored toward the reproduction of "school" in an online space. In a bid for normalcy and continuity, it appears to me that schools like Stone Valley High School forwent many of the benefits of teaching with new literacies and thus circumscribed—whether intentional or incidental—the delivery of curricula to traditional, teacher-centered methods. The critical instance of the COVID-19 pandemic, therefore, becomes an interesting circumstance within which to examine how people communicated as "students" instantiating "school," indeed summoning through their words an abstract institution that clearly continues to exist without buildings themselves: an ingredient being perhaps a particular type of language use.

Discourse Analysis and d/Discourse

Practitioners of discourse analysis fall, roughly, into two camps. On one hand, "descriptive" discourse analysis exponents believe that the goal of discourse analysis is to explain how language functions, akin to a scientist describing the laws of nature (Gee, 2011). This form of discourse analysis attempts to maintain an objectivity that is altogether illusory in

any type of qualitative research. Instead, all discourse analysis—regardless of the pains one takes

to remain objective—is tinged with subjectivity (ibid.). Perhaps the illusion of objective

discourse analysis can be ascribed to what Bourdieu called "genesis amnesia" (Bourdieu, 1987;

Speller, 2011), the theory that individuals temporally distanced from traditions of language and

art believe erroneously in the inherent biological nature of language, which is, in actuality, a

human construct. Having been immersed in language for so long, discourse seems to be

intrinsic—leading some, like the venerable Noam Chomsky (1957, 1987), to argue that humans

are hardwired to produce a "universal grammar."

Regardless of where one stands on the inherent human capacity for language, literacy

(i.e., reading and writing) itself is a historically recent phenomenon, occurring only in the past

10,000 years (Harris, 1986; Olson & Torrance, 2009), and was likely to have been "invented" by

multiple groups of people far removed in time and space (Silberman, Bauer, Holtorf, García, &

Waterton, 2012; Walker & Chadwick, 1989; Wengrow, 2011). According to this line of

scholarship, each civilization independently developed its own writing system complete with

abstract symbols, means of inscribing, and syntactical construction. In short, literacy is a human

construct, one that has been refined throughout generations to fit the needs of particular groups

of people. When certain constructed discourses become institutionalized, however, these

language practices and patterns can seem to be normalized, as if they developed objectively and

represent the "right" way to do things. Keeping in mind that literacy is a human construct,

however, it is clear that institutionalized discourses, such as those in schools, are in no way

"normal" or "natural" except tangentially for the group who have installed such language

practices and patterns into academia.

"Descriptive" discourse analysis seeks to identify in speech or writing acts what Gee

(2011) calls "Grammar 1," the nuts-and-bolts of language often comprising components like

"nouns, verbs, inflections, phrases, and clauses" (p. 50). In contrast, a different way to analyze

discourse is through a 'critical' lens (Fairclough, 1992; Gee, 2011; Jones & Norris, 2005;

Scollon & Scollon, 1981; Van Dijk, 2001; Weiss & Wodak, 2007). Discourse analysis that is

critical in nature (as distinct from particular methods of "Critical Discourse Analyses") interprets

language-use for social or political goals, hoping to enact some change upon the world in a

practical manner (Gee, 2011). While some may argue that this makes the resulting analysis

biased, Gee (ibid.) states bluntly that all language-use is political in nature because of its social

context. In other words, any interpretation of language, even those that attempt to be objective, is

filtered through a subjective lens that understands language and its use in particular ways;

furthermore, the ways in which language is used during discourse analysis cannot be understood

without considering the social contexts within which individuals are conversing. Gee's ideas

develop from those of Wittgenstein (1953), who decades earlier discussed the situatedness of

language in terms of "language-games," suggesting that one would do well to understand the

context within which language—even words and phrases one might find familiar—is used. Gee

(2011) refers to the situatedness of language-in-use as "social languages." In this regard, the

rules (Grammar 1) of a language are the "resources" (Knobel & Lankshear, 2019) that are then

co-opted by particular speakers at particular times and places to converse in specific social

language contexts. Social language, which Gee (2011) refers to as "Grammar 2," is the

functional way in which language is actually used. Whereas "descriptive" interpretations of

language attempt to view the language in isolation, a "critical" discourse analysis based in a

sociocultural epistemology of social languages understands language as a tool for "saying, doing, and being" (Gee, 2015a, p. 1).

Social languages become political because of the sheer multiplicity of different linguistic practices among people. Gee (2011, 2015a) refers to the coordination of language, context, and identity enactment as Discourse (or, 'big D Discourse'). Big D Discourses are ways in which individuals indicate who they are and what they are doing through a coordination of social actions, which include language use, clothing, props, activities, among other defining traits (ibid.). For example, a hockey player will wear and use certain equipment, deploy specific language, and engage in particular activities. Individuals are each born into a single primary Discourse inherited from their caretakers, and they pick up countless "secondary Discourses" (ibid.) associated with institutions and organizations throughout their lives. Gee (ibid.) explains that Discourses are ways in which individuals identify themselves, consciously or subconsciously, as what Hacking (1986) refers to as "kinds of people." The fact that people speak differently or that the same person might communicate in distinct ways in different contexts is no surprise: we address young children differently than adults, bosses differently than coworkers, and spouses differently than strangers. The issue is that, recalling Bourdieu's (1986) 'genesis amnesia,' people are not often aware of the inherited nature of language nor that this inherited nature is not just passed from person to person but also from institution to institution.

In the 1980s, however, researchers began to show how individuals' primary Discourses could lead to advantages in formal institutions whose secondary Discourses shared much in common with one's primary Discourse (cf. S.B. Heath, 1983). In particular, these advantages would play out in school settings from a young age, when students who grew up with a primary Discourse similar to school Discourse performed better on school-based tasks (Cazden, 1988;

Grenfell et al., 2013; Michaels, 1981; Michaels & Cazden, 1986; Michaels & Cook-Gumperz, 1979; Michaels & Collins, 1984; S.B. Heath & Street, 2008; Scollon & Scollon, 1981; Street, 1998). Based on the inequitable nature of formal, school-based language, therefore, any discourse analysis of language use in schools must, by nature, be critical. Discourses are memetic, and individuals transmit them (indeed are compelled to replicate them) by dint of the socially routinized institutional roles and identities they take on. The goal of the discourse analysis in this study, therefore, is to better understand how a group of students in a privileged school district—whose primary Discourses, by-and-large, would have similarities to formal school-based secondary Discourse—used the written word almost exclusively to instantiate "school" during mandated online distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

I, like Gee (2011), find that the theory and method of discourse analysis are inextricable; that is, the discourse analytic methods that I conducted on the class chat transcripts are informed by my theoretical understanding of social languages and primary/secondary Discourses. There is no objective method for conducting discourse analysis, no algorithmic sequence of phrases to parse or verb tenses to examine (ibid.). The methods are informed by the theory, and the theory is one that sees classroom discourse as a socially constructed event: one that both is constructed by and simultaneously continues to construct the institution of school itself (Gee, 2015b).

Languaging School into Being and Proposing a Theory of Social Routinization

I assert that the fundamental qualities of schools as institutions are "languaged into being" (cf. Ryu & Bloome, 2020, p. 18). Like other institutions, schools do not have any inherent or intrinsic qualities; rather, schools are artificial: they are socially constructed by people who, through their participation in schools, perpetuate what "schools" are. By "languaged into being," I mean that teachers, students, and other members of the school community use language to both

"make and break" (Gee, 2004, p. 9) our educational institutions. How students and teachers use language is not only indicative of how they operate within the framework of schooling but also how they are complicit in building (and challenging) the framework itself.

I see language as one of the foundational frameworks establishing what we call "school" here in the United States. To make this point, first, consider the too-simplified notion of the alphabet as "building blocks" of words and of words being the "building blocks" of sentences; the metaphor, which does operate on some basic level, implies that letters and words are tools that can be rearranged according to the whim of the writer or speaker—it appears to me that, embedded in the commonplace description of words and letters as "building blocks," is an ontological metaphysic that fetishizes what language can do, seeming to proffer unlimited freedom to the wielder of language to make words and language as they deem fit. This is simply not the case, and whether one can or cannot use letters and words as building blocks is beside the point. Language is social, and thus language use requires individuals who are speaking or writing to do so in accepted patterns and routines, lest become unintelligible to others (at which point, perhaps ceasing to be language whatsoever). I bring up the alphabet in this paragraph because I think it makes the point more simply: the spelling of "English" is recognizable whereas "njLISyh"—a spelling of my own device—clearly would in no way represent what "English" does to any reader. In short, if letters are "building blocks," then they are so in a rather strict understanding of that sense. They are blocks that are useful only when they align along the internalized Tetris shared by minds in communities. Their use has been delimited by the patterns and routines of social language use. This, of course, is obvious in everyday language use, but perhaps it has become so normalized that examining it more closely may feel strange, the *unheimlich* (Freud, 1919).

The point of the matter is that, even at the most atomic level, language use requires adherence to particular social practices: letters are physically drawn in specific ways to be recognizable and then words are spelled in recognizable ways to convey particular meaning (Crane, 2000). The same can be said for the routinized pronunciation of words, which generate meaning in language through social *repetition,* not through some inherent characteristic of the letters or glottal sounds that comprise the language. Indeed, much of the arbitrary nature between word and meaning was laid bare over a century ago for the Western academy in the lectures and posthumous publication of Ferdinand de Saussure (1916), so this discussion is heretofore retracing steps for the sociolinguistically inclined reader. Work in *universal grammar*—which posited that language is a genetic, inborn, and uniquely human trait that manifests itself in fundamental, universal structures across all languages—examined the structure of language, seeking an underlying commonality (Chomsky, 1957, 1964, 1965; Berwick & Chomsky, 2016). However, challenges to the theory of universal grammar suggest that, in reality, languages are far too diverse to be said to have any "universal" characteristics (Evans & Levinson, 2009).

Gee (ibid.) has suggested that "Discourses" are distinct identities enacted through a "coordination" of particular behaviors: ways of communicating, ways of dressing, etc. What I will call *social routinization* has some overlap with the "coordination" principle of Gee's d/Discourse theory insofar as both address how specific types of actions, behaviors, and language combine to produce particular enacted identities. With *social routinization*, however, I add to the understanding of Discourse coordinations with what Nietzche (1887) and, later, Foucault (1975) referred to as the "genealogy" of social institutions. In short, "genealogy" refers to the social history upon which certain ideologies and practices were contingent; Foucault (ibid.), for example, traced the history of punitive systems in France to explore the gradual

transition from punishment enacted upon the bodies of accused criminals to a bureaucratic

system that silently demanded obedience to the law, often through the measure of some type of

surveilling gaze (i.e., "panopticon"). Foucault also discussed how penal reformations in

surveillance were analogous to changes that occurred in other institutions, namely schools. A

theory of *social routinization* emerges from the intersection of Discourse coordinations and

genealogy.

To better contend with the interplay of language and technology that has emerged from

this study's design, I define in this paragraph what I call *social routinization*, a theoretical

framework that assists in the interpretation of institutional systems by bridging the social roles of

language and technology in defining abstract institutions. By *social routinization,* I mean both

the individual social routines of actions, language use, practices, appearances, roles and

identities, routines, and other dynamics that have developed over time into normalized aspects of

particular institutions as well as the coordination of those social routines into a coherent whole.

These routines are not just indicative of "Discourse" coordinations (Gee, 2011, 2015a), but they

are also the delimiting scaffold that guide future development of institutions. A helpful analogy

might be to imagine a set of "building blocks," as I referenced before. These blocks come in all

shapes and sizes, but they operate under a set of rules; one cannot simply arrange the blocks in

any way, shape, or form upon one another. The block below dictates what can possibly come

next, the size, shape, and arrangement of the rest of the tower. When looking at a tower (i.e., an

institution) one can painstakingly describe each of the components, the colors and shape of each

block that describes what it is within that exact moment. Yet one can also understand the history

of that tower, how one block led to another, how the tower necessitates certain new blocks

(allowing for some variation) to continue its further construction. What is at the bottom dictates

what is at the top; in the case of *social routinization*, the perfunctory aspects of an institution indicate both what it developed from and what, indeed, can come next.

In this thesis, I contend—and develop further arguments from this contention—that, if there is a universality of grammar, then it is in its *social routinization*. One can see this play out in the routinized drawing (and recognition) of letters, the established grouping of oral sounds as the production of specific words and meanings, and the patterned organization of letters to comprise specific words. At its very foundation, language is socially constructed and depends firmly on the social history of that particular routinized letter, sound, or word. As Bakhtin (1981) put forth, on one hand, words can be used in the here-and-now to share the wants, desires, or volitions of the speaker. On the other hand, the same words also simultaneously carry the entire historicity of these words—the ways they were spoken, the context in which they were written, and the institutions that coined or claimed them. This, to me, is the heart of the *social routinization* of language. In each novel usage of a routinized word lurks the entire social history of that word; the selfsame "word," though, may embody an entirely different history in its practical use depending on the context of its deployment. In this way, no use of language exists in a vacuum. Social language does not mean that two or more interlocutors actively engage in dialogue, for even speaking to an empty room is a dialogue between the present and the past. There is a "dialogicality of voices" in every word that imbues it with both its various past meanings and current meaning (Wertsch, 2009). Languages are continually socially mediated chains.

Perhaps the social nature of language would be more apparent if it were not for the prevalence of "named" languages (e.g., English, Spanish, Swahili, Japanese, see García & Kleyn, 2016), which have politicized and consequently standardized particular linguistic social routines.

For example, Ivan Illich (1980) explored Spaniard Antonio de Nebrija's development of the first Western vernacular "grammar" book in 1492, which was offered to the Spanish queen as "a new weapon" that could control the populace. In short, by codifying the language as "Spanish" and mandating its use, the crown could better control what people read, what they spoke about, and who was considered to be a "Spaniard." The establishment of an official language that differed by either small or great degrees from the colloquial languages would, ergo, require official tutors of the language to teach individuals the proper forms and discourses accepted as standard by the state. Although the queen rebuffed Nebrija's grammar book, his ideas set the stage for the proliferation of "named" languages with standardized linguistic practices. Soon enough, at a global level, local varieties of languages were overshadowed by the "named" political languages of states: English, French, and Portuguese, to name just a few. While some local varieties live on, a massive "language death" of many non-politically powerful language varieties has occurred (Baker, 2011; Crystal, 2002; Wright, 2016).

I suggest that, over time, standardized languages became *socially routinized* in societal institutions—to the benefit of some and the deficit of others, particularly in schools (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Cazden, 1988; Cummins, 2000; Gee, 2004; Gibbons, 2002; Macedo, 1994; Michaels, 1981; S.B. Heath, 1983; Street, 2014). As Illich (1980) suggested, standardized languages have resulted in the creation of educators who specialized in the instruction of and in those languages. In the United States, public high school instruction is predominantly in English. There are, however, countless varieties of English across the world (Han, 2019; Schneider, 2020; Smith, 1992; Trudgill & Hannah, 2008). The installation of a "named" language in an institutional setting, in this case public schools, promotes a single language variety into a position of power. However, the language privileged in schools is unlikely to be equally familiar

to all students. And, as Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) contended, "The educational mortality rate can only increase as one moves towards the classes most distant from scholarly language" (p. 73). In short, academic language bequeaths advantages for some students—usually the most advantaged students, who are often white, as are those in this study—and disadvantages for others, particularly those whose home languages differ greatly from the academic English variety used in schools (Schleppegrell, 2001).

Considering that a certain variety of English is expected in schools and confers inordinate benefits to already privileged students, it thus may be of benefit to better understand how language functions in schools. One way to conceive of academic English in schools is as a language-based "magic"—indeed analogous to occult magic spells—that offer its practitioners access to desirable universities and careers. I have described the conflation between language and magic in more depth before (Toncic, 2020a), but suffice to say that the *social routinization* of particular ways with words taking on unreasonable magical power has permeated schooling; schools operate on the premise that the best students speak and write in a certain academic manner. Taken this way, language use in schools is less about using letters and words indiscriminately and more about reproducing expected patterns and ways with words (cf. Michaels, 1981; S.B. Heath, 1983). By way of example, the college admissions tests of the SAT and ACT require students to show a mastery of idioms (i.e., grammar paradigms that are considered accepted but lack a defining rule), such as knowing that one can be "interested *in*" something but not "interested *at*" something, that one can "focus *on*" something but not "focus *at*" something, or that "pointing *to*" something and "pointing *at*" something can both be correct but only in different contexts (ACT, Inc., 2020; The College Board, 2020). This is a rather pedantic example, but it serves to demonstrate a point: performing in the academic language of

schools (e.g., making a claim, providing evidence, and then demonstrating how that evidence supports the original claim) is different from language use in other contexts. This is what Gee (2011, 2015a) distinguishes as the primary (big D) "Discourse" (i.e., ways of communicating, both with and without language, a certain identity) that people learn from their caretakers and the secondary (big D) "Discourses" that they engage with and learn from institutions.

Having now suggested that there is a particular variety of English for schooling, one can then explore whether the use of a certain set of language practices in turn serves the continuity of school-based practices. In other words, does the language that is used within the context of schooling "language into being" the otherwise abstract concept of school? Are the ways that students and teachers use language complementary in the way that they dialogically construct "school" identities (of teacher and student) and patterns of behavior? I contend that language use in schools is based on *socially routinized* patterns and frameworks that influence roles, identities, and procedures within institutional, public high school classrooms. These *socially routinized* practices may appear to be necessary to order, having therefore arisen naturally or rationally within institutions to those who use them, but they are, in reality, arbitrary routines that produce certain types of behaviors and power dynamics consonant with the roles of their interlocutors.

Earlier, I discussed the phenomenon of "named" languages and the role that named languages play in determining institutional social routines. In the United States, public high school classes on Language Arts are often designated with a "named" language: they are "English" classes. In teaching "English," I was simultaneously engaging in both the teaching of literature and the reproduction of "school," a process in which a standard "named" language was the mode of delivery. While teaching online, I recognized that the way this "named" language was used during online sessions might provide some insight into how students and I "languaged"

school into being, for "school" continued even within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, "school" was reduced to two main components, the language used by both students and teachers (as well as the language of the curricular material, which is beyond the scope of this study) and the technology used to conduct classes. Both language and technology (i.e., tools) can be better understood to produce "schooling" through the activation of *social routines*.

Up to this point, I have primarily discussed language in terms of *social routinization*, arguing that language use in schools is strictly guided by the patterns and ways with words associated with institutional schooling. I have posited that the context of the pandemic, in which liberal arts schooling was reduced to language-based communication, is a critical instance that helps to elucidate this unifying theory. There is a prevailing tendency to frame educational technology as helpfully innovative and beneficially disruptive, but *social routinization* suggests that this might not be the case. New technology fits squarely onto old schemas: what *was* is likely to inform what *is*. Although individuals may become immediately preoccupied with novel technologies, our institutions are defined by the ways in which we routinely, without thought, interact with older technologies: staircases, chalkboards, closed-circuit pho
ne systems, gradebooks, projectors, just to name a few. There are certain methods and situations for using each of these technologies that become normalized, indeed no one questions how to write on or what to do with a chalkboard. Thanks to social routines, individuals know that one uses chalk, not a blade, to write on a chalkboard and that one should use that chalkboard as a way to write or draw. New technologies must work within the framework of this vast interconnected web of older technologies and their relevant usage routines for them to be acceptable or adoptable. Whiteboards, for example, fit into the social routines of chalkboard use.

Then, with the advent of new technology, they became digitized. But, despite lacking a physical

board, these digital spaces are often still called whiteboards, such as on Zoom: it was not the

actual physical product that mattered, it was the social routine associated with teaching that was

transmitted.

Chapter 3

CONTEXTUAL REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter, I review some of the literature relevant to this study, which is at the intersection of educational technology software, practices around written synchronous online communication, and the effects of anonymity in educational settings. Educational technology is often framed as both efficient and innovative, an uncomplicated "good" to bring to classrooms. The epistemological scholarship on the New Literacy Studies and its subset of "new literacies" (i.e., novel digital technologies) is often consonant with this finding. Practically, however, educational technology appears to perpetuate traditional notions of teaching and schooling. Educational technology, such as the video conferencing software BigBlueButton that is examined in this study, often entrenches a teacher-centered pedagogy that, framed as a one-size-fits-all solution, establishes the classroom teacher as the focus of class sessions that demands individual accountability from each student.

Within the interface of the BigBlueButton software, students eschewed cameras and microphones during live sessions and instead used the written word to communicate with one another and me, their teacher. In this chapter, I discuss the affordances and practices associated with composing written messages in a chat room in real time, what is sometimes called "quasi-synchronous communication." This exploration facilitates the analytic methods of this study (i.e., discourse analysis) because it helps to explain how certain messages, although separated spatially in the "feed" of the chat, nevertheless were linked together. Furthermore, this review of literature examines the types of discursive moves that are likely to appear in the medium of a live, written-chat setting.

Lastly, I discuss the role of anonymity as facilitated by digital technologies in the classroom, particularly in light of providing feedback and engaging in class discussions. But with a focus on accountability and a teacher-centered approach built-in, the assigned identities within the BigBlueButton software all but obviate one of the most distinguishing components of computer-based instruction.

Software

The BigBlueButton conference software was the platform for synchronous online schooling for my students and me during the lockdown. Hosted by the learning management system Schoology, the BigBlueButton open source platform meant that live video conferences were included in a paid suite of features acquired by the Stone Valley School District in 2018. I find Selwyn (2013) to be particularly insightful in regard to virtual classrooms such as the one constructed by BigBlueButton. For example, Selwyn's critiques of "education" software demonstrate how the virtual classroom perpetuates power relationships from the traditional classroom; in this case, BigBlueButton distinguishes between two types of users: "viewers" and "moderators" (BigBlueButton, 2020). Viewers can write in Public and Private Chat spaces, share their audio with the entire "room," share their video feed with the "moderator" (but not other users), and respond to polls. Moderators can do all this and more: they can mute viewers, restrict them from using Private Chat features, and can allow a viewer to "present" their own screen. As Selwyn (2013) wrote, "These roles and the 'scripts' that are associated with them tend to be laden with unequal distributions of power and control" (p. 57). In practice, this automatically vested the classroom teacher—me—with power. The teacher alone could begin, end, and record video sessions. Students could view only the teacher's video and stream their own image to their teacher: they could not see one another, so they were disembodied even if they were to choose to

use their video cameras. The teacher alone was able to natively share a presentation and could mute the audio of whomever he wanted.

I was struck by the lack of flexibility in the interface. There was no toggle that would allow students to see one another's faces. Students were automatically identified by their legal first and last names in the Public Chat, rigidly fixing them to the expression of a single, assigned identity. Handles or nicknames were not supported. Furthermore, as the teacher—whose username, along with all students' usernames, was imported from the school's LMS—I was automatically assigned in the Public Chat the formalizing "Mr." title. Even if I had wanted to identify as, say, *EnglishLitLover2020*, I was not able to change my username in the conference. Nor could I create a classroom space in which I was not the center of the proceedings because I was always front and center on my students' screens. As one alternative to the Public Chat, BigBlueButton provided a "Shared Notes" tab in which anyone could type without an identifier appearing. While students used this feature rarely, the few times it was used were particularly interesting.

In developing software for the masses, BigBlueButton replicated a normalized, uncomplicated form of teaching that reproduced a traditional classroom dynamic. Generally speaking, designers of virtual classroom software create uniform interfaces that lack nuance, limiting individuality for universal user simplicity (Campanelli, Bardo, & Heber, 2010). From an aesthetic perspective, the BigBlueButton conference interface used, as admittedly eponymously germane, a cool blue design reminiscent of the color schemes of Facebook and Twitter.

According to the BigBlueButton homepage (2020), the conferencing software was "designed for online learning." However, this phrase is more problematic than it might initially seem, for it assumes that "online learning" is synonymous with "online schooling." Online

learning may happen in a formal virtual classroom, but learning is not limited to institutional

programs. Consider the virtual classroom in opposition to (usually online) affinity spaces

(Curwood, Magnifico, & Lammers, 2013; Gee & Hayes, 2012; Lammers, Curwood, &

Magnifico, 2012; Padgett & Curwood, 2016), for example. Affinity spaces are informal learning

sites outside of traditional learning institutions (Black, 2005, 2006; Gee, 2004; Knobel &

Lankshear, 2006; Marsh, 2018; McKenna, Conradi, Lawrence, Jang, & Meyer, 2012). Taking

various forms such as online message boards, video game chats, or fanfiction communities,

affinity spaces function as sites where individuals with shared interests congregate (Lankshear &

Knobel, 2007a). Open to newcomers and veterans alike, affinity spaces do not hierarchically

organize people according to whom individuals are in the "real world." Every participant,

regardless of age and profession, can lay claim to the identities of teacher and learner as they

choose. Clearly, this is oppositional to "virtual classrooms," such as the conference feature of

BigBlueButton, in which participants are explicitly circumscribed with an identity (viewer or

moderator) immediately when entering the video chat.

Affinity spaces are just one example of how online learning can be vastly different from

"online schooling." Online schooling, of which conference software such as BigBlueButton is

but one form, is the replication and instantiation of institutional, school-based education. These

online sessions favor single-subject, scheduled classes that perpetuate the "grammar" of

schooling (Tyack and Tobin, 1994): the institutional, factory-like education model that sorts and

groups students while passing them through pre-packaged disciplines such as English, Science,

and Mathematics courses (see also Friere's "transmission" or banking model of schooling;

1996). Rather than challenge the traditions and habits of routinized schooling, virtual classrooms

actually seem to bolster them. For example, BigBlueButton's video feature allowed only teachers

and students to see one another; students could not view their classmates. Online schooling

eschews the "class" in favor of the teacher, positioning the moderator on every students' screen;

these design aesthetics influence what students can see, affecting the dynamics of the classroom.

The tendency for educational software and programs to mirror traditional brick-and-mortar

classroom structures may be better understood as ways to circumscribe and define the

educational experience so that it may continue to be used as a political tool (compare with

Lyotard, 1984, 1993). Selwyn (2013, p. 54) similarly wrote that "virtual education is not so much

of an escape from the constraints of traditional education structures, routines and conventions as

an entrenchment of them." It was thus in this virtual classroom—which, perhaps, apotheosized

schooling in some ways even more than a brick-and-mortar class—that students and I met for

synchronous online classes over the course of four months from March to June 2020.

Quasi-Synchronous Class Sessions

To maintain a clear category for live teaching, I refer in this thesis to class sessions that

occurred in real time via the BigBlueButton software interface as being broadly "synchronous"

(as opposed to "asynchronous" classes that do not occur simultaneously for all participants). This

distinction allows for a tidy sorting of two types of online teaching protocols, but it is also overly

simplistic in its categorization of what actually occurred during online learning. Synchronicity

implies certain types of aural turn-taking in discourse: usually, one speaker can orally address an

audience at once without their message becoming muddled. This, however, is not the case for

text-based computer-mediated communication in which multiple users can compose and post

messages at the same time.

Rather than entirely synchronous teaching, therefore, class sessions in which participants

communicate through typed and posted messages are better described as being "quasi-

synchronous." Quasi-synchronous communication occurs when multiple users can construct messages simultaneously, resulting in a fast-flow of discourse—stretches of language occurring within the context of larger Discourses—comparable to a spoken exchange (Garcia & Jacobs, 1999), so the participants must be online at the same time in order to participate (Meredith, 2019; Meredith & Stokoe, 2014). With multiple participants composing messages at once, variables such as typing speed play an important role in determining where messages will relatively appear (González-Lloret, 2011). Individuals may consequently decide when and how to break up messages into shorter bits, sending multiple messages of shorter length rather than composing longer messages that no longer fit into the written conversation because they are out of step with the most recent post (ibid.). In order to ensure that the appropriate recipient knows that a message is directed toward them, writers in quasi-synchronous chats often overtly signal the intended recipient by, for example, typing the "@" with the recipient's name or handle (Garcia & Jacobs, 1999; González-Lloret, 2011; Herring, 2011; Schönfeldt & Golato, 2003).

Because of the relative haste for message composition that online communication necessitates, messages may not only be short, but they also can lack the traditional hallmarks of "standard" English: for example, they may forgo proper capitalization and punctuation— although the social distance of the typing interlocutors may play an important role in the adherence to formal rules (Manness, 2008). Writers may also abbreviate words and phrases with either familiar acronyms (e.g., brb, lol) or those of their own spontaneous creation (McCulloch, 2019). Other general linguistic features of quasi-synchronous discussion, sometimes called "online paralanguage" (Meredith, 2019), include such mainstays as emoji use (Berard, 2018; Danesi, 2016; Hu et al., 2017; McCulloch, 2019; Riordan, 2017; Stark & Crawford, 2015), punctuation to express a particularly toned response (e.g., "??" to express confusion or

incredulity, Crystal, 2001), capitalization to digitally "yell" (Martey & Stromer-Galley, 2007) or

show surprise (Meredith, 2014), nonstandard spelling (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006), word

elongation through either repeated letters (Brody & Diakopolous, 2011) or added spaces between

letters (McCulloch, 2019) to suggest a particular oral pronunciation. Some have even suggested

that keysmashing (e.g., ewfiuegwfifvehjwfhu) tends to follow particular conventions and that

writers will sometimes edit their keysmashes to make them appear more random (McCulloch,

2019; Ygartua, 2018).

Computer-mediated written communication today is largely multimodal, with images and

GIFs appearing alongside or even instead of written text (Tolins & Samerit, 2016); however, the

constraints of the BigBlueButton interface did not allow for students to use either of these in the

Public Chat. This is a noteworthy omission. It is counter to the way that many young people

utilize quasi-synchronous communication in their everyday lives, suggesting that the Public Chat

interface did not entirely accord with students' experiences with written online communication.

Another characteristic of quasi-synchronous communication is message "repair" in which

writers edit their messages both during message construction (before sending) and after messages

are sent, usually by either rephrasing an earlier message (Earnshaw, 2017; Meredith & Stokoe,

2014) or by amending its construction, for example, by using an asterisk with a misspelled wrd

(e.g., word*, see Collister, 2011). For this reason, Beißwenger (2008) calls quasi-synchronous

message production a "discontinuous process" that entails writing, editing, rewriting, and

retrospective revision. Self-repair of a message demonstrates cognizance on the part of the writer

that specific expectations and standards are in play within the sociocultural context of the

particular quasi-synchronous chat (Drew, Walker, & Ogden, 2011).

Some research on quasi-synchronous communication in institutional settings has focused on counseling (Ekberg, Shaw, Kessler, Malpass, & Barnes, 2016; Stommel & Molder, 2015) and library services (Stommel, Paulus, & Atkins, 2017). Eckberg, Shaw, Kessler, Malpass, and Barnes (2015) analyzed 1,279 online text-based therapy sessions. With conversation analysis, the researchers found that therapists' use of commiserating messages were, rather than expressions of sympathy, moves of transition that did not linger on the aforementioned emotion. Stommel and Molder (2015) examined Dutch counseling data corpuses comprising online text-based exchanges and telephone calls. The researchers found differences between the two: namely, client's "advice acknowledgements" were significantly less frequent in online text-based exchanges. These discursive moves usually signal to the counselor that the client is ready to close the conversation, so their absence engenders the initiation of closing on part of the counselor rather than the client. In other circumstances, time simply ran out and the session ended. Stommel, Paulus, and Atkins (2017) examined 200 Dutch and American chats from an online library service. The authors analyzed the use of hyperlinks by professionals, finding that hyperlinks were context dependent—they could function to close the chat if the resource was found to be acceptable, but they also kept open other chats in which the participant was absent.

A large amount of research has examined how English language learners communicate via quasi-synchronous channels (Negretti, 1999; O'Dowd & Lewis, 2016; Tudini, 2010). Conducting research over two decades ago, Negretti examined eight ELL students at a Catholic University who wrote in a chatroom among 28 other native and nonnative English speakers. Using conversation analysis, the author descriptively identified participants' greetings, closings, turn-design, uppercase letters, emoticons, onomatopoeia, and punctuation. Overall, the author found that interlocutors were creative with how they navigated the restrictions of the web-based

chat. Writing more recently, O'Dowd and Lewis (2016) conducted a systematic review of literature regarding the use of online writing and English language learning. The authors found that online written communication improved second language acquisition. They also emphasized an underreported result in online communication: an increase in learner autonomy. Tudini (2010) analyzed the written conversations between undergraduate students learning Italian at an Australian university and native speakers of Italian in Italy. Although they were assigned by the professor, the conversations occurred outside of class time, and there was no teacher directly guiding the interaction. Tudini examined explicitly how conversations occurred *without* the modulating presence of a teacher, noting the ways that interlocutors took on roles, repaired mistakes, and took turns with the other writer, among other focal points.

Research spanning decades has suggested that the use of online text chat in classrooms may lead to greater student participation. Sullivan and Pratt (1996) found 25-years ago that college students were more likely to write and communicate during online sessions. Interestingly, they noted that the teacher's role was minimized during these chats—a stark difference from my findings. Additional studies of primary and middle grade students have found positive outcomes when online-based discussions supplemented or were used during in-class learning (Albright, Purohit, & Walsh, 2002; Carico, Logan, & Labbo, 2004; Zheng & Warschauer, 2015). Albright, Purohit, and Walsh (2002) analyzed online chats from 55 eighth grade students located in New York City's Chinatown. These chats likewise eschewed the teacher; they were conducted by and among students as book talk assignments, printed out, and then submitted to their teachers. Interestingly, students used screen names rather than their real names, but the identities were known to all involved parties, including the teacher. Therefore, these screen names acted more as manifestations of individuality than offering anonymity.

Carico, Logan, and Labbo (2004) examined a corpus of 400 eighth grade students online real-time chats about literature and noted increased engagement of students.

More recently, Zheng and Warschauer (2015) sought to better understand how participation changes over time in a group of 48 fifth grade students. Their results suggested that students participated significantly more each month throughout the school year. They also found that, although the first two months were largely teacher centered, the final two months showed marked collaboration among students in meaning-making. However, it is also worth noting that this may not be a change in the students' behavior alone: what is left unsaid is whether the teaching style, direction, or assessment had changed in some meaningful way that engendered additional discourse (the sheer number of messages in the final two months greatly outpaced the first two months). Additional longitudinal research would be meaningful to understand how chat spaces may evolve for a particular classroom over time.

Fewer studies have examined the contemporary use of quasi-synchronous computer-mediated communication during public high school English Language Arts classes (see, for example, Toncic, 2020b). Exploring the use of "managed ambiguity," participants were able to choose their own pseudonyms—and remain anonymous—during an online discussion of literature. Although the teacher was present in the chat, students' individual identities were secret. The study found that students collaborated with one another to create meaningful answers and ask exploratory questions. Issues of student participation, however, were mitigated by the teacher's physical presence in the classroom: although the teacher did not know students' identities, it was apparent when someone was reading and typing, engaged in the chat process. Both the modulating presence of the teacher and the anonymous student identities were not replicated during my teaching in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Giles et al. (2015) noted in their review of literature that overall research on computer-mediated discourse appeared to be significantly diminished since its peak in the mid-2000s. Considering the worldwide transition to online teaching within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, a more thorough understanding of how some public high school students wrote during quasi-synchronous online class sessions may thus add to our understanding of computer-mediated remote schooling.

Anonymity Online—and Its Lack Thereof

Technology uses considered to be "new literacies" are distinguishable from earlier literacy practices in part by the potential for the anonymization of participants. Anonymity may be either *unidirectional* wherein a single party is anonymous to another or *bidirectional* wherein both parties are anonymous to one another (Panadero & Alqassab, 2019); in the context of schooling, participants may also be anonymous to one another but known to educators or vice versa. In the case of self-selected pseudonyms online, individuals can control how they present themselves through what Jaffe, Lee, Huang, and Oshagan (1995) have called "managed ambiguity." Choosing one's own alias appeared to the authors to give individuals more agency over their roles in online discussions.

Much of the research on anonymity focuses on informal spaces where learning occurs, such as affinity spaces (see, for example, Aljanahi, 2019; Black, 2008, 2009; Curwood, Magnifico, & Lammers, 2013; Gee & Hayes, 2012; Wu, 2016). In informal, online affinity spaces, anonymized individuals are not immediately labeled as either novices or experts by dint of their ages, professions, or real world experiences (Lankshear & Knobel, 2018). While some participants may develop clout or respect in particular affinity spaces, it is usually earned over time from their participation in and contribution to these spaces (Gee, 2005; Hayes & Duncan,

2012; Shafirova, Cassany, & Bach, 2020). Considering the rather critical role that anonymity

plays in affinity spaces, therefore, it is not surprising that only a limited set of studies have

looked at affinity spaces in classrooms, and they by-and-large do not focus on anonymity

(Magnifico, Lammers, & Field, 2018; Marsh, 2018). Still, some researchers have suggested that

anonymized participation in affinity spaces may benefit some students in classrooms

(Halaczkiewicz, 2020), but only a few have utilized anonymity and affinity spaces in public high

school classrooms (Toncic, 2020b).

Of the few studies that explored anonymization in classrooms, whether at the secondary

or college-level, the majority have focused on student-provided feedback (Rotsaert, 2017). A

main contention in support of anonymized feedback is that it can approve the peer assessment

process (Li, 2017; Yu & Liu, 2009). In a Belgium-based quasi-experimental study, for instance,

researchers found that secondary students felt less pressure when providing feedback for peers

through anonymous, web-based channels (Vanderhoven, Raes, Schellens, & Montrieux, 2012).

In a different study, students reported the ability to comfortably give critical, constructive

feedback when they were able to share anonymous written messages alongside raw scores with

their peers (Raes, Vanderhoven, & Schellen, 2013). Yet another empirical study found that

secondary students who received immediate, anonymous peer feedback via a mobile app

perceived that feedback as helpful (Rotsaert, Panadero, Schellens, & Raes, 2018).

I have heretofore briefly addressed anonymity and affinity spaces here in this review of

literature to emphasize that online learning spaces *can* provide innovative ways to reconceive

schooling when it occurs online. However, the BigBlueButton interface that was mandated by

the Stone Valley School District for remote learning did not incorporate anonymity features in its

participant roll or Public Chat features. Instead, the emphasis with software such as

BigBlueButton was on student accountability and maintaining traditional classroom power structures by clearly defining who were students and who was the teacher. Students knew that whenever they type in the Public Chat, their full, legal names would appear next to their words.

Even though the Shared Notes section of the BigBlueButton interface did allow for anonymous participation, this section required for users to navigate to a second screen, gave no notifications whether someone was typing there or not, allowed other students to add to and erase what was written with no way to recover it, and did not have handles, tags, or even time stamps for what was written. Students in this critical instance case study used the Shared Notes feature just twice, both occurrences from the same class period. This is not to say that anonymity in online classes can always be beneficial (Yu, 2012; Panadero, 2016). One college professor found anecdotally that the college freshmen in his class took advantage of anonymity in order to post irreverent content in an in-person class that nevertheless used an online chat interface (Christenbury & Lindblom, 2020). However, it is notable that in this case, anonymity was not even an option.

Chapter 4

METHODOLOGY

This study used a Critical Instance Case Study qualitative design. The data collected comprises transcripts of written messages during 47 online class sessions within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Other sources of data include screenshots of online class sessions and screenshots of private messages received from students during these sessions, a class assignment in which students wrote answers to questions about online learning, and researcher journals. This dissertation used discourse analysis (Gee, 2011, 2014) to interpret the collected data.

Context of the Research: Shifting Method in the Time of Coronavirus

The acrid, saccharine perfume of disinfectant first presaged the untimely deracination of what had been my planned qualitative pilot study. That pilot study, which had received IRB approval in early March 2020, was to be classroom-based. I had intended to record and analyze students' writing practices in their high school English classrooms during a research paper unit. The purpose of this pilot study, also known as a "feasibility study," was to refine my methodology and interviewing protocol to improve the outcomes of my full-scale dissertation research (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002).

Yet as the smell of hand sanitizer and Lysol wipes wafted through high school classes, offices, and hallways, the premonitory rumors of school closings due to the COVID-19 pandemic came to fruition in Bergen County, New Jersey on March 12th when Bergen County Executive Officer Jim Tedesco announced that all 75 public schools were to be closed the next day. Schools throughout the state of New Jersey were subsequently closed by blanket orders from State Governor Phil Murphy on March 18th. And on May 4th, Governor Murphy extended

the school closures to the end of the school year (Barchenger & Tufaro, 2020). So much for my

planned classroom-based inquiry.

Nevertheless, schooling continued, albeit in a rather modified form: teachers took their

lessons online (where technology permitted). I was one of the teachers who brought my teaching

onto the internet. And as I taught remotely, I soon recognized that in lamenting my discarded

pilot study, I was missing what was happening before my eyes.

As a researcher, I had first been interested in how students might be using the affordances

of online technologies, such as artificial intelligence-based grammar and spell checkers, to

compose their classroom work. To this end, my pilot study had as its original research question

the following inquiry: *In what ways does artificial intelligence enter into formal writing*

practices in public high school English classrooms? My intent was to conduct a qualitative

research study in which I observed students' writing practices in their respective classrooms;

after classroom observations, I had intended to conduct semi-structured interviews (cf.

Blommaert & Jie, 2010; Roulston, 2010; Weiss, 1994).

At the outset of the lockdown, I—like other teachers—had to reconcile my obligations as

a teacher with the new reality: childcare, concurrent graduate coursework, and friends and family

growing ill, some dying. This meant from a practical perspective determining whether and when

I would be conducting synchronous or asynchronous classes or some combination of the two

since each offered unique benefits (see discussion in Sistek-Chandler, 2019). Synchronous

classes were held in real-time with students joining a live internet-based session equipped with

video and audio capability as well as a text chatroom. Asynchronous classes comprised teacher-

generated assignments that students could complete at their own pace: for example, reading the

chapter of a novel and answering or creating questions. These asynchronous assignments were posted for students on the learning management system (Schoology).

Ultimately, I used a mixture of both synchronous and asynchronous classes, favoring slightly toward synchronous classes. One of the factors in this decision was external. The high school at which I was teaching had deviated little from its pre-distance learning bell schedule: classes still met during the same class periods and at the same time on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays. Wednesdays were reserved for extra help, so normal classes did not run that day. With these 54-minute class period time slots preserved, it made synchronous classes less arduous to schedule. Additionally, while we were still physically meeting in classrooms, I held seminars with each of my English classes to teach them how to use the Conferencing software; students practiced with the technology and ironed out their difficulties in-person before the lockdown began.

I recognize that I was fortunate insofar that I had time to prepare my students and that each student possessed a school-issued laptop with internet connectivity at home. Had this study been conducted in a different district without these circumstances, it may be an altogether different study. Thus, while I am thankful for the ability to have conducted the forthcoming outlined research and data analysis, I recognize that it is very much a product of the social environment in which I was teaching. As a researcher, I cannot separate the existence of this study from the socioeconomic and sociocultural context in which it occurred, nor do I purport that the study was undertaken in some value-neutral site just because of its mediation via the internet. While the conferencing software may not be a physical location, the individuals who comprise these online classes are both constructed by and construct the wealthy suburb in which they and their families reside.

At the outset of distance learning, I was admittedly reeling from my sudden shift in circumstances. I was not hopeful that in-person research observations would be feasible during the school year, and I was concerned about the reemergence of the virus during the next. At the time in early 2020, one group of researchers out of Harvard suggested that social distancing measures should continue until 2022, and the virus could reemerge as a pandemic until 2024 (Kissler, Tedijanto, Goldstein, Grad, & Lipsitch, 2020). Under these dire predictions, I was wrought with concern that in-person observations might be on hiatus for any number of months or years.

I wrestled with this disquiet while I began to teach my students online. The first few sessions featured both students and myself using primarily video and audio to communicate. The novelty of online learning was exciting. In one class during the first week of remote instruction on March 19 my then three-year-old son joined me on the video to the apparent delight of my students, who both wrote about him in the Public Chat and spoke to him via microphone directly (see Figure 1).
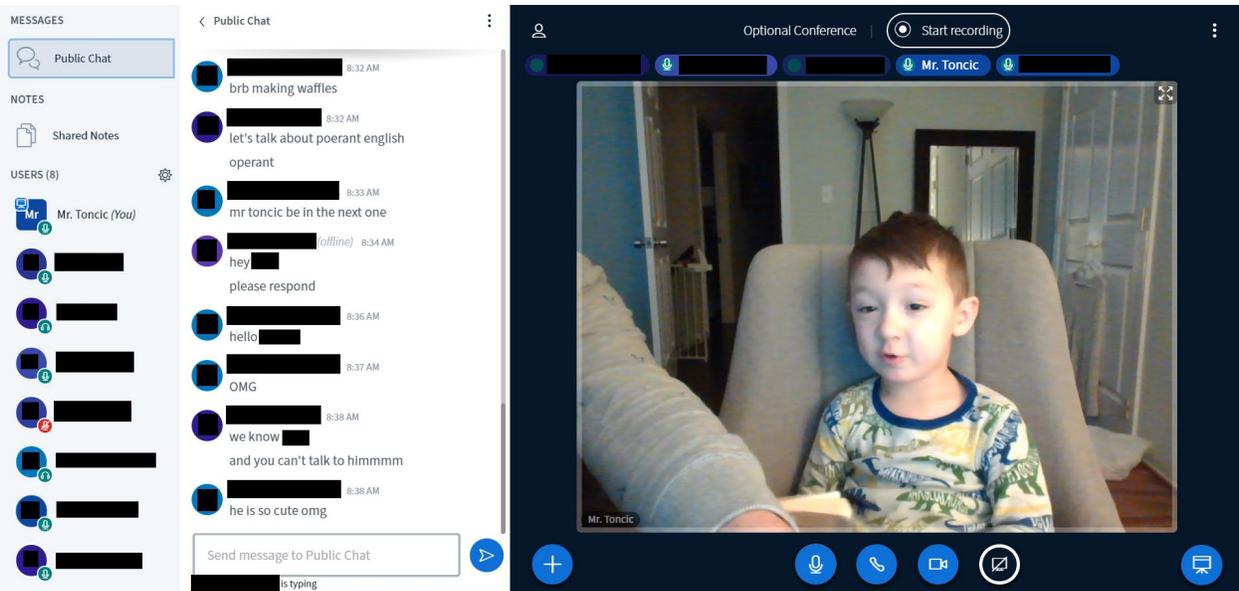
Figure 1. March 19 Online Session Screenshot. A screenshot from a March 19, 2020 optional live session (a review of T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land) with my Period 3 English 10 Advanced class students. Seven of 16 students participated, four of whom were speaking over audio. No students used video. Pictured is my then three-year-old son who joined me on camera. (Names of students have been removed.)

A Shift in Discourse, A New Direction

The early frequency with which students and I used video quickly decreased, however. Fewer and fewer students spoke via audio until none turned on their webcams. I was reminded of a study that I had read in which an early spike in voice assistant use by new users (e.g., Siri or Alexa) gradually flattened out as the novelty wore off (Sciuto, Saini, Forlizzi, & Hong, 2018). As the use of these multimedia aspects flattened out, however, the "Public Chat" (see Figure 1) increasingly pulsed with activity, becoming the heart of student activity during these live sessions. Students wrote to one another, asked questions, and responded to my inquiries—all in text. In their own words, they shared personal losses of family members, anxiety over parents working as frontline healthcare workers, and their ennui as the days turned to weeks and months.

The Public Chat discourse gradually became rich with nuance and was deeply interesting, leading to the following research question: **In what ways did high school students and a**

teacher write during synchronous online English classes within the context of COVID-19 pandemic? I wondered, too, how the writing that students and I did might be complicit in "languaging into being" traditional, institutionalized schooling.

Considering the circumstances of closed school buildings and the transition of public high school classes to online learning, my research is best described by the terminology of a Critical Instance Case Study, which in this study comprised students in three online classes and myself, their teacher. A Critical Instance Case Study typically examines only one or a few sites in order to thoroughly investigate a unique circumstance (Dalton, 2019; Davey, 1991; Epler, 2019; Hayes, Kyer, & Weber, 2015). My study examined three classes of students from Stone Valley public high school using the same software to participate in synchronous online English classes in lieu of brick-and-mortar classroom learning during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of a Critical Instance Case Study was to focus on a special phenomenon rather than a generalizable situation (Hayes, Kyer, & Weber, 2015). However, Critical Instance Case Studies can provide singular insight into overly general or universal assertions that may not prove to hold true (Sammut-Bonnici & McGee, 2015). As Denscombe (2014) wrote, one can "illuminate the general by looking at the particular" (p. 30). Outlier cases, such as online schooling during a pandemic, often disclose greater knowledge than the normal, representative case (Yin, 2017).

I began to download the chat transcripts on March 30, 2020 and continued until the end of the school year on June 18th, 2020. Aside from the screenshot in Figure 1, I did not retain records of the chat transcripts during the first two weeks of distance learning. I recognize that the missing data would have represented an important, liminal period as students and I became accustomed to online synchronous classes. I do not mean to understate this lacuna in any way, for its inclusion would have been telling. But when I think of those two weeks, I recall two

weeks filled with uncertainty (the original lockdown was scheduled for a brief two weeks, after all) during which I, like my students, was undergoing a major transitional process. That gap, to me, represents the way in which this study emerged naturally, for I only conceived of the idea when the discourses among my classes were so unexpected and fascinating that I recognized something altogether unique was occurring in my classes at perhaps the most unprecedented time in modern memory. This study (IRB-FY19-20-1852) was ultimately approved under Exempt 1 protocol by the Montclair State University IRB.

Bounding the Data

This study is methodologically situated in the theoretical camp of constructivist (also known as naturalistic) inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 2013). Lincoln and Guba (2013) suggested that inquiry has two stages, discoveries and assimilation. The discovery phase is the effort to explain, in their words, "what's going on here" (Lincoln & Guba, 2013, p. 63). Yet, in this critical instance case study, I wondered what exactly is the "here" in which discovery was occurring, for I saw multiple candidates: my home in which I was working and teaching; the classroom that we had left behind; and the patchwork of online spaces and communications through which students, teachers, and administrators communicated. Each of these has a valid claim to the "here" in Lincoln and Guba's rhetorical inquiry to explain "what's going on here." However, building from Lincoln and Guba (ibid.), all environments can be said to be virtually constructed by one's own conceptions, even those considered to be part of the real world.

Whether online or in the classroom, the "here" that I analyzed is the text-based discourse (i.e., the written messages that comprise class participation and a continuous "conversation" within the Public Chat space) that occurred in the synchronous Public Chats that were part of each BigBlueButton synchronous class beginning on March 30, 2020. It is a "here" of my own

construction, as any "here" must be from a constructivist lens. I do wonder about those first two weeks of online courses, but regardless of when I choose for my data collection to begin, there always appears a hypothetical *before*—for example, the first two weeks of distance learning is a *before*, sure, but even *before* that would be the few weeks prior to distance learning began, and prior to that are the class sessions from earlier in the school year, etc. There was, too, more data I could have chosen to include—homework submissions, essays, personal emails, the local and international news, and so forth. While I did not formally analyze these as data, I consulted them to triangulate my findings.

Aware of the trade-offs involved in bounding my data analysis as I have outlined (see Miles & Huberman, 1994, pp. 16-18), I believe that focusing my study on 47 Public Chats documented over 45 hours of synchronous class time across three high school sophomore English classes comprising 50 students facilitates loose and emergent findings while remaining strict enough to not confuse or obfuscate my data by including everything tangentially related to distance learning.

Teacher Research

Many teacher-researchers have reflected on their insider research within educational institutions, both private and public (Hermann, 1989; Kim, 2012; Mercer, 2007; Unluer, 2012; Vass, 2017; Wilson, 1995; Wong, 1995). Emerging from a movement against some of the central tenets of positivism in the 1960s and 1970s (Elliott, 2002; West, 2011), teacher action research gradually gained momentum in the 1990s, asserting that teachers were experts in their fields and could produce valuable knowledge, rather than universities producing new understandings alone (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Doyle, 1990; Hall, 1978; Leglar & Collay, 2002; Maruyama, 1974; Reason & Rowan, 1981; Shulman, 1987). Action research originated with a design that

aimed to make practical incremental improvements through a recursive, spiraling process (Lewin, 1946). Some definitions of action research require a spiraling component to the undertaken research for it to be classified thus (Glanz, 1998; Green, Britt, & Parker, 2002; Jordan, Henry, & Sutton, 2000; Lewin, 1946). However, still others have defined action research as any form of study undertaken by a teacher-researcher, even if it is missing the spiraling component (Calhoun, 1994). Robbins, Burbank, and Dunkle (2007), who conducted a study based on the latter definition, opted to use the nomenclature of "teacher research" rather than "action research" to describe research undertaken by teachers without a specific spiraling component. Considering that my methods do not include an explicit spiraling component to influence classroom teaching practices, I choose to use the nomenclature of "teacher research" to describe my research practices.[1]

Teacher research is not without its criticisms, however. One of the most frequent criticisms of the even-more removed field of ethnographic research is that 'observer effects' often induce changes in the group being studied and thus skew the research findings (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982; Monahan & Fisher, 2010; Spano & Reisig, 2005; Wilson, 1977). In short, such criticisms arise from a positivist epistemology that asserts the importance of an unbiased, removed observer for empirical research. However, postpositivist epistemologies have challenged the notion of objectivity by questioning whether any research can truly be undertaken in an objective or neutral manner (Giroux, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Hesse, 1980; Lather, 1986; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Some have argued that the goal of qualitative researchers should be to identify and then mitigate any possible observer effects on the research to improve the

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[1] Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) suggest that "teacher research" eventually yields into "action research" whenever the teacher's discoveries engender changes in the classroom, suggesting that the two are not altogether separate entities but perhaps different aspects of an overall approach.

credibility of the resultant data (Komarovsky, 1982; Lather, 1986; LeCompte & Goetz, 1982; Spano, 2006). Considering the inability of a teacher-researcher to reduce observer effects in his own classroom, this method of research necessitates a different epistemological underpinning: being a participant observer is not necessarily a detriment to research. As Monahan and Fisher wrote, "Observer effects can and do generate important data and critical insight" (2013, p. 358). Or, as Peshkin (1988) exhorts, the aim is to be in search of one's own subjectivity to carefully consider how one's subjectivity might influence their research. The goal for me as a teacher-researcher was to be aware of my own role in the data collection process (cf. Chavez, 2008), which relied on my researcher *reflexivity* as both a participant and observer in my class-based research.

Reflexivity is "commonly viewed as the process of continual internal dialogue and critical self-appraisal in research" (Berger, 2013, p. 2). In other words, it is the action of reflecting back on one's own positionality and situatedness within a qualitative research study, explicitly considering how one's own place in a study may affect the outcomes of such research (Berger, 2013; Bradbury-Jones, 2007; Dodgson, 2019; Finefter-Rosenbluh, 2017; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Janzen, 2016; Mason-Bish, 2019; Pillow, 2003; Stronach, Garratt, Pearce, & Piper, 2007; Watanabe, 2016). In teacher research, the researcher is intimately involved in classroom practice. Reflexivity is a means by which the practitioner can increase the credibility of their findings, explicate the research process, and allow others to understand the rationale behind the study (Berger, 2013; Bradbury-Jones, 2007; Gemignani, 2011; Pillow, 2003; Probst & Berenson, 2014; Yamaguchi, 2020). Furthermore, by exploring one's own positionality, the researcher shows an awareness of the power relations within the study dynamic, and they demonstrate an empathetic stance toward their research participants (Berger, 2013; Pillow,

2003). A detailed, introspective explanation of researcher reflexivity can help to build an extensive "audit trail" that shows careful consideration of the researcher's situatedness within the study (Probst, 2015). Researchers can practice reflexivity through techniques such as "repeated interviews with the same participants, prolonger engagement, member checking, triangulation, peer review, forming of a peer support network and backtalk groups, keeping a diary or research journal for 'self-supervision,' and creating an 'audit trail' of researcher's reasoning judgment, and emotional reactions" (Berger, 2013, p. 4).

The School

The red and white brick facade of Stone Valley High School emerges naturally from the surrounding suburban homes and green lawns. Students walk along the nearby streets as they plod their ways toward the school building; others wave from car windows to their friends or hurriedly disembark from stop-and-go automobiles to join with a group of peers. There are no general population buses that bring students to Stone Valley High School, for the one mile area of the school district assured that even the most remote student can reach its doors by foot if need be.

Nestled a short distance across the Passaic River from Paterson, NJ—a low-income city with a working-class, immigrant base—Stone Valley is a staunch reminder of *de jure* segregation in New Jersey. The high school itself was established in 1956, just two years after the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision in which the Supreme Court ruled segregation in schools to be unconstitutional. Walking down the halls of Stone Valley High School, one can find the yearbook photos of this first graduating class hanging in one hallway—notably, each framed student donning a cap and gown was white. Today, the vast majority of enrolled students are also white. According to demographic data collected from 2013 to 2017, over 80% of the students in

the public schools identified as white, whereas under .5% of students identified as black or

African American. Over 10% of students identified as Asian, and nearly 7% identified as being

of mixed race. I share this racial demographic data, at the risk of simplifying complex identities,

in order to more fully flesh out the population of the district and, thus, in my classes.

As a teacher in this wealthy, suburban school district in New Jersey, I am reminded of

Jean Anyon's (1981) descriptor of the "affluent professional school" derived from her research

in northern New Jersey, as well. Stone Valley High School where my students attend is well-

defined by Anyon's moniker of an "affluent professional school," a district in which families are

majority white with high incomes. According to the National Center for Data Statistics (2020),

the median household income of parents whose children attended the public schools in Stone

Valley school district was over $195,000 and approximately 95% of residences were single-

family homes, based on demographic data from 2013 to 2017. More recently, David Nurenberg

(2020) has described privileged white students, such as those who attend Stone Valley High

School, as "young people of sufficient material wealth, class background, and white racial

classification who are, on balance, more advantaged than the majority of their agemates

nationwide" (p. xvii). I use the phrase similarly in this dissertation.

In nearly all regards, the vast majority of the population in this school district comprises

some of the most privileged students nationally. I am a researcher with an interest in the critical

theory of Ladson-Billings, Said, Spivak, Butler, and Foucault, so such a largely homogenous,

privileged population may seem to be a discordant choice for this study. However, the context of

this study also offers a unique opportunity to examine the language that privileged white students

write in their online English classes. Underlying my understanding of context is Weis and Fine's

(2012) notion of *critical bifocality*, an understanding of which suggests to me that my Critical

Instance Case Study on the discursive moves of high school sophomores during online classes may not offer a complete story without also considering both the micro (i.e., the classroom discourse) and the macro (i.e., the institutional structures that are the creator of and created by schools that serve affluent, majority-white students). Critical bifocality provides a lens, therefore, that reminds me to—even amidst conducting a detailed discourse analysis—consider the context beyond the classes themselves. It is important to note, for example, that schools are increasingly segregated: in the U.S., the typical white student attends a district in which an average 77% of the school population is also white (Nurenberg, 2020). Furthermore, advanced, honors, and AP classes are also frequently more predominantly white than the rest of the school population (Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Nurenberg, 2020; Oakes, 1985; Oakes, Maier, & Daniel, 2017; Sutton, Bosky, & Muller, 2016).

Normally, schools are a melange of physical buildings, intermixes of people, configurations of furniture, and aesthetic choices—to name just a few aspects of schools that come to mind. During the COVID-19 pandemic, however, the buildings closed. Extracurriculars and sports were canceled. Yet despite abandoned school buildings, like Stone Valley High School, sitting vacant for months, school continued. The purpose of this Critical Instance Case Study is thus to examine some of what was left when the buildings shut their doors. The resounding answer to what is left, of course, is language. By examining the language used by privileged students—and myself, in some cases—during distance learning, I hope to better understand how "school" is languaged into being. Because of the computer-mediated nature of the classroom interaction, the context of the study was also defined by the software that facilitated the synchronous classes (as discussed in my literature review).

Identification of Participants

The participants of this study were 50 sophomore (Grade 10) students, demographically similar to the town's population, who were enrolled in three of my English classes at Stone Valley High School during the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, which led to the subsequent closure of school buildings and the onset of "distance learning." I selected these three classes because my two remaining classes were Journalism electives and did not suit my purpose in conducting a discourse analysis of writing in ELA classes. My identification of my own students as participants for this study occurred naturally during the first few weeks of online schooling during synchronous lessons in which I was the teacher. Two of the classes were considered to be "Advanced," and one class was considered to be "College Prep," which was considered to be a lower track than the "Advanced" course.

I note gender identity (see Table 1) because it has been previously demonstrated to be an important component of literacy and motivation (Bugler, McGeown, & St. Clair-Thompson, 2016; Logan & Johnston, 2010; McGeown, 2015; McGeown, Goodwin, Henderson, & Wright, 2012; van Steensel, Oostdam, & van Gelderen, 2019); furthermore, Labov (2001) has suggested that linguistic change is gendered, with women more likely to follow prescriptive sociolinguistic forms but also more likely to lead innovative language change when communicating outside of overtly prescribed language use—what Labov (1990) called the "gender paradox" of language change.

Limitations: Explaining the Absence of Student Interviews

To deepen my understanding of students' discursive moves in the Public Chats and to serve as a "member check" on my own data analysis (Burkholder, Cox, Crowford, & Hitchcock, 2019; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), I had originally intended to interview

my former students after the school year had officially ended. In an interview-based member check, qualitative researchers speak to participants in an attempt to improve the accuracy and validity of findings from a research study. My goal in speaking to my students would have been, first, to bring in other voices alongside my own to temper the one-sidedness of my analysis. Furthermore, considering the power dynamics already instantiated in virtual classrooms, interview-based member checks would have been an opportunity for me to intentionally challenge the power imbalance by promoting dialogue between me (as teacher-research) and student-interviewees (see also Tanggaard, 2008). My aim in these interviews had been to respect students' opinions and value the insight they had into their own writing practices, thereby improving the overall validity of any findings. However, due to restrictions from the Stone Valley School District Superintendent, I was not permitted to interview students. Unfortunately, due to this limitation, I fear that the students whose writing fills these pages have had silenced the ability to speak for themselves and contribute to this research. I regret that I am unable to triangulate the findings of this study in this way without student input. What is notable, though, is how this refusal by the Stone Valley School District Superintendent demonstrates that students may participate in "languaging" school into being, but they have little control over the contexts or environments in which they communicate. This will certainly be an important dimension for me to examine post doctoral studies.

Researcher Role and Positionality

My positionality as a teacher-researcher examining my own students at first seemed to me to be a detriment; I had unwittingly adopted the positivist mindset that I, as a researcher, should be objective and removed from my research study participants. In some ways, I still have trouble shaking the sentiment that I have my hand on the scale by conducting ethnographic

research on my own classes. That said, without my identity as the teacher who had spent a full

school year with these students before being denied access to interview them, I would have much

less confidence in the accuracy of my analysis as a researcher. Although I was not able to

interview students to include their voices in the analysis of the classroom transcript data, I am

fortunate to have been their classroom English teacher throughout the entire school year. The

teacher-researcher role that I outline here is nowhere as neat as this may suggest, so I have

expounded in more depth on this complexity in my earlier theoretical framework section.

As distance learning proceeded, my students, by-and-large, had eschewed both video and

audio multimedia features and were predominantly using the Public Chat to communicate during

synchronous sessions. I had at first expected their written discourse to mirror the orderly,

grammatically correct writing that I had grown accustomed to through my students' various

assignment submissions (e.g., essays) and email correspondences with me throughout the year.

That is, I had expected students to use Standard "Academic" English when corresponding during

class sessions because they had already demonstrated proficiency in writing in this manner

throughout the school year, so I was surprised that not only were students seeming to to be

forgoing available multimedia features (e.g., video and audio), but they also employed a variety

of writing practices in the Public Chat.

My initial research design had included writing a reflexive researcher journal (Luttrell,

2010; Ortlipp, 2008) and analytic memos, as well as conducting member-checking through

participant interviews at the end of the prolonged (four-month) research period; however, due to

restrictions from the school district Superintendent, I was not able to hold interviews with

students. Consequently, my means to practice reflexivity with the data were moved to

introspective research journals regarding my thinking as a teacher researcher who was

simultaneously enrolled in his own graduate classes that were being conducted through online learning, affording me some insight into what a student in an online classroom might experience—however, the experiences of an adult taking elective graduate school classes and teenagers in compulsory public school education are by no means directly analogous. I thus remained aware that while my experiences as a doctoral student might provide some limited insight into what my students were experiencing while participating in distance learning, I could not be overly zealous about making analogies between the two.

Data Sources and Collection

The data for this study were collected as natural parts of high school Grade 10 English classes from March 17, 2020 to June 18, 2020. "Natural," in this sense, refers to the assignments, classwork, and participation that occur as regular parts of students' experiences in school, rather than undertakings specifically devised for a research study. The data comprise 47 chat transcripts from synchronous class sessions, 16 screenshots from 8 of these sessions, 8 private messages and emails sent to me from 7 students during these online classes, and a classwork assignment collected on April 24 for which 50 students independently provided feedback about their distance learning experiences at that point in the class. I also reference my lesson plans, posted assignments, and other relevant course artifacts to provide insight into the context of class session discussions.

Text Chat and Synchronous Class Sessions

The main source of data for this study will be 15 weeks of text transcripts of student writing during synchronous, approximately hour-long classes hosted on the conferencing software BigBlueButton, collected during the period from March 30 to June 18, 2020. Aside from the first two weeks of online classes, the data set represents all synchronous classes I held

with these classes throughout this duration. However, not all class sessions were synchronous, so

only those which were live are listed in Table 1 (below). I determined when to hold synchronous

and asynchronous class sessions depending on the course material needing to be covered and my

personal issues to be addressed (e.g., during one school day, the roof of my home was being

replaced and the cacophony right above my head led me to switch the scheduled synchronous

class that day to an asynchronous class instead). See Appendix B for additional scheduling

information. As per district policy, attendance was taken daily at class time, regardless of

whether a class period was synchronous or asynchronous. Anything outside of synchronous

classes was not included as data. Table 1 provides a detailed breakdown of the class periods,

capturing the student enrollment, the number of transcripts, the assigned unit, and the dates of

each synchronous class session.

Table 1: Chat Transcripts By Class, Date and Topic, and Student Enrollment			
	Period 6 "Advanced English 10"	Period 3 "Advanced English 10"	Period 1 "English 10"
Student Enrollment	21 (13 girls, 8 boys)	16 (12 girls, 4 boys)	13 (3 girls, 10 boys)
Total Number of Chat Transcripts	17	17	13
Dates of Transcripts	**Grammar & *The Sun Also Rises*** April 2 April 17 April 23* April 24* May 1 May 4º May 7 May 11 May 21	**Grammar & *The Sun Also Rises*** March 30 April 2 April 14 April 16 April 23 April 30 May 4* May 11 May 19º May 26	***The Martian*** April 30 May 7º May 14 May 18º ***The Great Gatsby*** May 21 May 26 May 28*º June 2 June 4*

	The Catcher in the Rye May 27 June 1 June 3 June 5 June 9 June 11 June 15 June 17	*The Catcher in the Rye* May 28 June 2 June 4 June 8 June 10⁰ June 12 June 16	June 8 June 10 June 12 June 16⁰

Note An asterisk (*) indicates that screenshots were taken during this class period. A superscript zero (⁰) indicates that a private message was received during the session from a student participating in that session.

**A screenshot from March 19 was also taken of this class period, my only record of students' discursive moves from the first week of online learning.

These chat transcripts, generated by the conferencing software, include all of the text written by students in the public chats during their synchronous chat periods. The three classes comprise a total of 50 students. Included on the chat transcripts were students' full names (first and last) and a time stamp (e.g., 9:45) indicating when a message was posted. To de-identify the data, I have removed students' full names and replaced them with pseudonymic first names. Normally, I would ask participants to choose their own pseudonyms, but, as I was not permitted to interview students, I used the website www.name-generator.org.uk instead. The transcripts are arranged in a linear, chronological order; messages posted first are at the top, followed by subsequent messages below (see Figure 2).

```
[10:09] Zoe : i can hear u
[10:09] Henry : i finally go tin
[10:09] Cora : I can hear you
[10:10] Susan : I can hear you
[10:10] Russell : ok im fine now as well
[10:13] Dorothy : The audio keeps cutting out.
[10:15] Mr. Toncic : Any questions?
[10:15] Mr. Toncic : Why are there 3 Kimberlys? -_-;;
[10:15] Henry : lol
[10:16] Tobias : when can we not use active
[10:16] Dorothy : Are you talking?
[10:16] Kimberly : Oh because I opened the conference 3 times
[10:16] Kimberly : cause it wasn't working
[10:17] Henry : its very glitchy again
[10:18] Mr. Toncic : Please open up TSAR
[10:18] Mr. Toncic : And go to Chapter 2
```

Figure 2. Period 3 Advanced English Students Tech Problems on March 30, 2020. Students in Period 3 enter into the BigBlueButton session on March 30, posting about their difficulties in joining the chat and hearing my audio. Students' names have been de-identified and replaced with pseudonyms. One student, Tobias, asks about "active" voice during the grammar lesson, but technical problems lead to a change in the lesson.

Although these transcripts are rich with data, they are not all encompassing. They do not include any insight into any other student writing occurring during the class period (e.g., class notes, private text messages to friends or family, etc.). I was not able to video or audio record the class sessions, so the Public Chat transcripts also do not capture any spoken language. The vast majority of spoken language not captured in these was my own instruction, but there was the rare occasion when a student chimed in with a brief spoken word or phrase—followed by a re-muted microphone. For example, I recall a student from Period 1 who turned on her microphone momentarily to comment that something was "funny," then immediately remuting her microphone. These were neither captured nor written by students, so they are not part of the discourse analysis. However, I intend to use my own researcher journals and lesson plan artifacts to cross-reference the focal points for each class session.

Some transcripts are accompanied by additional material. This supplemental data composes either screenshots of the BigBlueButton software as it was in use during that class session or a message sent to me privately by a student who was simultaneously participating in the synchronous online session (see Table 1). I took screenshots to capture events that I found to be unique, such as when some students were writing in the "Shared Notes" section of the software interface—which did not identify writers by name— while others added seemingly unrelated text (e.g., "pizza pizza," Shared Notes, April 23, 2020, Period 6 Advanced English). I also collected as data private messages that were sent either through private messaging within the conferencing software or in a private email through the school's Learning Management System if they were sent by a student enrolled in the live class and received during the duration of the class period, since this seemed to indicate a particular student choice about the type of message some elected to send privately rather than publicly.

Adapting a Class Assignment for Triangulation Purposes

As a classwork assignment, I asked students on April 24 to answer, as homework, some open-ended questions about distance learning and their experiences thus far (see Appendix A). These questions included, for example:

1) What does "distance learning" look like from your eyes for my class?

2) How does your written work during/for class compare to your written work during/for class when we met in-person?

The goal of this assignment had been to get students to reflect on their new learning environment since we had analyzed, in the first semester, how classroom structures might engender certain roles and, furthermore, to give them an opportunity to be introspective about their learning. This set of questions resonated with my interests as a teacher researcher, but it was not intended to be

part of my data. Simply put, the questions lacked the rigor required of survey-collected data in qualitative research. For example, students did not ask for clarification while answering, I was not able to ask follow-up questions of them, and the question progression was worded in a way that could have been leading to certain answers. Consequently, this assignment was, at first, just part of their normal classwork; similarly, other high school teachers in the Stone Valley School District asked their students to provide information about their online learning experiences, feedback that was then collected and collated by the district's Director of Communications.

I became concerned that my interpretation of students' discursive moves would become unduly biased because I was not including students' own insight into how they were writing during our class sessions. Thus, I find that their assignment responses are better than nothing insofar as student voice is concerned, and the responses may help to triangulate my findings, even if just by a modicum. I was originally hesitant about using these open-ended responses because they did not rise to the rigorous methodological research standards that I hold myself to, but I felt that, ethically, lacking student feedback on their own online learning would be the more grievous omission.

Data Analysis

For this critical instance case study, I incorporated an iterative analytic process with multiple coding layers based in discourse analysis (cf. Black, 2009a; Gee, 2011, 2014) as a means to analyze the discursive moves students used during public high school English classes during online distance learning captured in large part by the public chat transcripts of the conferencing software. There are many different approaches to discourse analysis available to researchers, ranging from finely-targeted and microanalyses of talk (e.g., conversation analysis) through to examining patterns of practice understood as "discourse" in a large or macro social or

cultural sense to do with "ways of being in the world" (Gee, 2007). The method of conducting

discourse analysis is to analyze text-based data. Then, from the interpretation of observable

"literacy events" (i.e., instances of text use arising and shaped by social practices, Barton &

Hamilton, 1998) to better understand the "literacy practices" (i.e., what is done with literacy

situated in the context of larger social practices, ibid.) that guide the observed practices. In this

case, I looked at student written participation during online English classes.

Analytic Approach

This study has used discourse analysis as its analytical framework. As one way to

perform a discourse analysis, Gee (2011) suggests that one should consider how social languages

are used in three coinciding ways:

1. The "Grammar 1" language aspect of Discourses (i.e., the traditional or formal

   grammatical structures, such as one might learn when learning a standardized

   language different from one's own).

2. The enacted identity (in that moment of discourse) and its purposeful use of

   language, what Gee (2011, 2015b) has called the "whos-doing-whats." Since each

   individual can deploy multiple Discourses (sometimes simultaneously) and for

   different purposes depending on the situation, understanding social languages

   relies on a contextual understanding of language-in-use (Knobel & Lankshear,

   2019). Two levels on which to consider identities are *social distance* and *socially

   significant kinds of people* (Gee, 2011). *Social distance* distinguishes between

   intimates, associates, and strangers, but can also be thought of in terms of a

   continuum from solidarity/bonding at one end to status/deference at the other

   (ibid.). *Socially significant kinds of people* refers to identities that are performed

and recognized by various groups as being certain kinds of people (e.g., "teacher" and "student"). These identities are not always fixed, agreed upon, or given the same label, nor are they socially positioned in the same ways to different groups. These enacted identities are products of history that play out within interactions, but which are also always in a state of flux and change.

3. The way that functional language *in situ* (i.e., Grammar 2) is created through the incorporation of elements from Grammar 1, which can be understood through the "patterns in them" (Gee, 2011, p.50) that interlocutors can contextually decode and then attribute "situated identities" (ibid.) to the speaker/writer.

Gee (2011) suggests that speakers and writers have two "design" jobs that they carry out through language. The first, *recipient design*, is how speakers/writers must consider the audience to whom their language is addressed. The second, *position design*, is how speakers/writers craft language in order to make the recipient(s) think, feel, or act in certain ways; that is, when speaking or writing, the individual tries to actively position the listener/reader in some way. For example, a teacher may use formal language when interacting with a student to try to influence the student to take a similar approach to language use.

Likewise, listeners and readers also have two distinct jobs to undertake according to Gee (ibid.). The first, *situated meaning*, explains the way in which listeners/readers decode what an interlocutor has said or written in order to demonstrate a certain way of being or of perceiving the world. Language has specific situated meanings that depend on context, but they also simultaneously shape context during their use. Wittgenstein (1953) exemplified this concept through an individual's proclamation of "Water!" which, he explained, without context could have been a statement of fact, a call for help, or an answer to a question, among other

possibilities. The single word of "water" had its meaning both shaped by and then shaped the

context of the discourse; likewise, student literacy, learning, and identity enactment are formed

by and also form their computer-mediated interactions (Black, 2009b; Jensen, 2003). The second

job of the listener or reader, *response design*, is for the listener or reader to consider how they

will reply to what they have heard or read, which then impels the listener/reader to take their

"turn" or remain, in a socially significant way, silent.

These understandings of social language as occurring within discourse invariably guide,

in large part, the methodical approach of discourse analysis. In a chat space, however, the

disembodied nature of written text may incidentally decontextualize the ongoing discourse

because I did not have insight into how each individual was engaging with class sessions; as

such, using Spradley's (1980) Descriptive Question Matrix, I asked myself reflexive questions

throughout my discourse analysis. For example, using the space/time dimensions, asking myself,

"Where do time periods occur?" and using the actor/space dimensions, asking myself, "What are

all the ways space is used by actors?" The rationale is that this type of questioning, with some

insight as their classroom teacher from September to March and what they wrote in their open-

ended responses to the distance learning assignment, helped me to better contextualize the

discourse that occurred in the public chat space during the live classes from mid-March to June.

Furthermore, by having a large set of data (nearly 47 synchronous class sessions) and the ability

to loosely triangulate some of my data with students' answers to the online learning assignment,

I was able to better grasp the prevailing discursive moves students used throughout their online

class sessions.

Again working from Gee (2011), one method for analyzing textual data for a discourse

analysis that yields multilayered patterns and insights is to first break down messages—or strings

of short messages—into "idea units" (ibid.) or "*lines*" (Black, 2009a, original emphasis) that

introduce new information. Then, the "idea units" or "lines" are grouped into what Gee (2011)

calls "stanzas," groupings of lines that refer to a single topic written in a tight, unified way. Due

to the computer-mediated nature of the data, much of the text is short and disjointed; students, of

course, determined how to construct submitted messages themselves, so the "stanzas" can be

partially "determined by the writers' own spacing" (cf. Black, 2009a, p. 407). However, stanzas

in this study also comprised messages written by (often different) people so long as the messages

appear to be written about the same overall topic and occur within relatively close proximity to

one another (i.e., within a few minutes). By grouping text into stanzas in this way, I was able to

analyze discursive patterns that "hang together" even if they were interrupted by other written

conversations or teacher instruction, as is wont to happen in a quasi-synchronous chat setting.

  To guide my discourse analysis, I also borrowed inquiry questions from Knobel &

Lankshear (2019) to preface each of three different analytic angles associated with Gee's

discourse analysis. Fairclough (2003) suggests considering *genre* (actions expected during

specific social interactions). In context, this is the type of student participation expected in a

traditional high school English classroom (e.g., answering and responding to teacher questions

using evidence from a text). And in practice, comprises what Gee (2011) calls the "whos-doing-

whats," To that end, moving from the general to the specific, I conducted a line-by-line analysis,

guided by the following questions:

1) "What kind of person is speaking here? What identity markers seem to be present?"

   (Knobel & Lankshear, 2019, p. 7)

2) "What is being done in this exchange? How do [I] know?" (ibid.)

3) "Who does this person appear to be in relation to what's being done?" (ibid.)

Then, to analyze social language use—what Gee (2011) would call the bits of Grammar 1 that come together to comprise Grammar 2—in the transcript, I asked these two lines of inquiry:

1) "What's going on here? What specific information conveys a sense of Discourse(s) in play? Which Discourses?" (Knobel & Lankshear, 2019, p. 6)

2) "How confident [am I] that [I'm] not reading too much into [my] analysis of Discourse(s) and imposing my own assumptions on the data?" (ibid.)

Finally, since I was not permitted to interview students to confirm my analyses, I needed to "guard against over-interpreting elements" (Knobel & Lankshear, 2019, p. 7). With this in mind, I borrowed these following two inquiry questions in a final read through that examined the students' use of "Grammar 2" language design choices:

1) "What look like linguistic or semiotic *choices* made to communicate meaning or to convey a particular purpose, idea or identity etc.?" (original emphasis, Knobel & Lankshear, 2019, p. 7)

2) "What evidence supports [my] ascription of *design moves*?" (original emphasis, ibid.)

In addition to social languages, Gee (2011) suggests that discourse analyses should consider both "Big 'C' Conversations" (i.e., that language borrows from broader social issues and themes) and intertextuality (i.e., that language is derived from or references other texts). Paired with the preceding, my discourse analysis was also informed by other works that explicitly addressed discourse analysis of computer-mediated communication (for example, Anderson, Beard, & Walther, 2010; Androutsopoulos, 2006, 2008; Beißwenger, 2008; Bou-Franch & Blitvich, 2018; Cherny, 1999; Danby, Butler, & Emmison, 2013; Darics, 2013; Garcia & Jacobs, 1999; Gee, 2014; Greenfield & Subrahmanyam, 2003; Herring, 2019; Jepson, 2005; Jones, Chik, & Hafner, 2015; Kalman & Gergle, 2014; Kapidzic & Herring, 2011; McCulloch,

2019; Recuber, 2017; Sargeant & Tagg, 2014; Scollon & Scollon, 2004; Tagliamonte & Denis, 2008; Thurlow, 2018; Thurlow, Dürscheid, & Diémoz, 2020; Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011; Tynes, Reynolds, & Greenfield, 2004; Yee, Bailenson, Urbanek, Chang, & Merget, 2007). These works directly and indirectly suggest that the *mediating* components of the interface—insofar as to *how* users can create and share messages—are integral aspects in the analysis of chat-based transcripts. Through iterative, reflexive interpretation of the data, my goal was to produce a rich, methodical analysis of the data collected from my synchronous online high school English classes during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chapter 5

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the written communication of students and their teacher in high school English Language Arts classes during 47 online remote learning class sessions in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. In light of my review of existing literature and considering relevant theoretical frameworks—as well as being an active participant in the class sessions as the teacher—I anticipated finding that students and I, the teacher, would 'language school into being' through our discourse during class sessions. That is, I predicted that my discourse analysis would provide insight into the language patterns that were frequently used in this type of school during student-student(s) and teacher-student(s) interactions during this particular period in time, without what I saw as complicating factors that arise from in-person schooling (e.g., desk arrangements, student and teacher proximity). I hoped to discern more about the role that language plays in not only facilitating interaction among people in the classroom, but also in creating 'school' as an institution to begin with. In some ways, my findings helped to support my expectations. The classroom discourse did seem to both enact and recreate 'school.' However, I found more often my initial vision of school as a simple construct of discourse interactions to be limited, for the interactions were mediated by powerful forces that seemed to mold how, when, why, and what type of interactions could occur—like how a vessel defines the shape of its liquid contents but does not alter the fluid itself. Some of these forces preceded the advent of online remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, but others were new (or renewed) apparatuses for circumscribing classroom behavior in online classrooms.

In both this and the following chapter, I unpack how discourse in the context of this critical instance case study indeed showed how these students and a teacher continued to

'language school into being' despite the absence of a physical classroom, paying attention to particular language choices (and linguistic patterns) used during synchronous online remote learning English Language Arts class sessions. Much of the broader discussion around the COVID-19 pandemic and schooling rightly centers on technology—both its disparities in availability and how these technologies (particularly those used for remote learning) may continue to enact changes in the classroom, even as schools return to full, in-person attendance. This chapter illustrates how the COVID-19 pandemic offered a unique opportunity, captured in this critical instance case study, into the way that language shapes—and is shaped by—the institution of schooling. To this end, I will explore discourse that explicitly discusses school and its facets, the prevalence of schedules and deadlines, testing and grades, student privacy, students' audience and identity formation, and resistance to school.

Across the next two chapters, I demonstrate how particular instances of discourse positioned students in the eyes of multiple audiences (e.g., the primary peer recipient, the passive classmate recipients, and the teacher overseer). Overall, students appeared to me to be largely attempting to enact identities (Gee, 2011) associated with traditional I examine how these text-based interactions 'language school into being' while intersecting with other secondary Discourses, such as those from online message boards and texting. While this discourse created what was considered for us to be public schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic—and also sheds light on how student and teacher discourse serves to enact and perpetuate 'school' as an institution—it did not occur within a vacuum. This discourse analysis also explores how external forces (beyond the immediate control of the students and the teacher) guided, by an invisible hand, the way that school transpired during online remote learning.

Rather than pivoting to alternative methods of teaching and learning highlighted by the new literacies studies, the switch to online learning in this case study revealed a resurgence of traditional schooling methods, such as a teacher-centered classroom and the prevalence of lecturing by the teacher. In the wake of vast disruption to traditional schooling, poised to embrace technologies once prophesied as liberating and equalizing, the discourse analysis of this critical instance case study may provide insight into how and why traditional approaches to teaching and learning became the standard during the COVID-19 pandemic in my English Language Arts classes at Stone Valley High School. This exploration provides insight for teachers and teacher educators who are reflecting on the COVID-19 pandemic, providing an unprecedented look into how great change yielded an even more dogmatic clinging to tradition. In brief, I found that student-teacher discourse during synchronous online high school English Language Arts classes within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic revealed (and perhaps reinstated or maintained) a teacher-centered status quo that progressive teachers—myself included—had previously tried to resist. Certainly, my influence in shaping language practices, both in what is voiced and my silence, cannot be understated. The idea that teachers like myself could eschew power in a system in which adults are endowed with all kinds of power (e.g., grades and disciplinary actions, most obviously) is disingenuous. I was well aware that although students could resist and transgress, it was the adults who needed to resist with them to shift power. What was surprising to me, upon reflection, was the lack of mutual resistance to traditional schooling that I saw in my own teaching during these first few months of lockdown.

In the remainder of this chapter, I share findings regarding the use of school-referential language; the use of names; messages about time, schedules, and deadlines; phatic greetings and goodbyes; teacher and student-initiated transitions; and non-standard English, including

emoticons and other typographical nuances. I found that students and I actively reinforced

traditional notions of schooling through repeated references to the school institution. We did so

in alignment with a digital framework that continued to prioritize the hierarchical nature of our

respective roles in the class. This was done through discursive moves around naming that

uniquely grouped individuals (i.e., teacher and student). Even though there was a place for

students to communicate anonymously (i.e., a Shared Notes section in which students could

write without their name tag showing up), it was soon abandoned by students who were

frustrated by a peer or peers who continually sabotaged their notes.

The binary between teacher and students was, in some part, built upon school-based

social routines around schedules and deadlines, such as the assignment of marking periods

grades and scheduled final examinations. Many discursive moves suggested to me that classes

occurred according to preformed patterns, beginning with phatic greetings, containing some

curricular material, and ending with student goodbyes or expressions of gratitude. Interestingly,

although I was in control of when these patterns would begin (for students would not start

communicating prior to some message from me), the institutional class period schedule was truly

in charge, determining when our class would both begin and end, as well as holding students

accountable for being "present," although what that means in an online classroom differs from an

in-person one. Furthermore, although I may initiate class, I found that the social routines around

curricular tools, such as the novel is used in the ELA classroom, largely influenced how classes

were organized and determined the content of the sessions. Deviations from the curricular

material were met with resistance *by students* who themselves initiated transitions back to what

they thought we "should" be reading. These actions seemed to be aligned with my pupils acting

like "good" students, which seemed to incorporate compliance to directions and adherence to

school-based topics. Even when students used nontraditional discourse, breaking from Standard English, they did not move far from the curricular material—likely using the deviations as ways to stand out in their writing rather than as representative of a true encroachment of different Discourse practices into the chat. In fact, students seemed to echo my use of the emoticons and kaomojis rather than initiate usage on their own volition, suggesting that students were concerned with meeting my expectations for Discourse practices in the chat. Ultimately, I found that students and I were often performing the roles of students and teacher; there were moments of transgression and resistance—and I was certainly aware of my own uncharacteristic retreat to traditional teaching practices—but my findings most strongly suggest that these acts of resistance were, for us, subsumed by the social routines that prompted certain behaviors around the technologies of (i.e., the apparatuses of) schooling that persisted even when physical school buildings closed for the lockdown and classes were held online.

Languaging School Into Being: References to School

Gilles Deleuze has posited that individuals "are habits, nothing but habits—the habit of saying 'I'" (Deleuze, 2001, p. x). In this statement, Deleuze was suggesting that one's sense of self is an illusion developed through the habitual repetition of self-references. This notion, which is still open to debate, yields further layers yet—if individuals are themselves habits, then so too are the institutions that these individuals have created; in short, while schools may be physical locations on one hand, they are, on the other hand, also manifestations of habit formulated by the attestation that they exist through its relevant lexicon. Words like 'school,' 'class,' and 'teacher' may be descriptors, but they also conjure up these institutions, bringing the ideas behind them into "reality." And, through their repetition, perpetuate their own reified existence.

One striking component of the discourse used throughout the class sessions in this study was the frequent use of school-referring language. Indeed, although I fostered the expectation that typed classroom discourse would be instrumental in 'languaging school into being,' I nevertheless did not expect to see such an obvious manifestation of students referencing school-based topics explicitly. However, throughout my discourse analysis, I found that students and I both mentioned 'school' and school-related concepts with astonishing frequency.

School as a Place

Explicit references to 'school' tended to position it as what was left behind: the physical building of school. For example, when one student referred to returning to school, she seemed to mean the physical building rather than the process of schooling. Her classmates responded in kind:

> **[1:56] Alice:** what are the chances we actually go back to school
>
> **[1:56] Wesley:** probably low
>
> **[1:56] Alice:** I'm guessing 0% right?
>
> **[1:56] Niall:** 1/100000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000
>
> (Synchronous Class Session, Period 6, April 23, 2020, 1:56)

Alice's question suggests she thought of school as a physical place rather than an ideological institution or a practice. She asked about "go[ing] back to school," despite the fact that she wrote her question during a synchronous high school Language Arts class. When her classmates Wesley and Niall responded that it was unlikely that we would return to 'school,' they correctly interpreted her contextual use of the word 'school' as a referent to the location of school rather than a statement about 'schooling.' This use of the word 'school' as solely signifying the place of education was echoed by the larger dialogue in the State of New Jersey, where the largest state-

wide news provider, nj.com, frequently released updated lists "of schools that have closed

because of COVID-19 cases" (Pries, 2020). But it was a school *building* that had shut its doors

while, in the vast majority of cases, classes continued online. In short, both students and the

media often used the word 'school' to specifically reference the physical site of learning rather

than the process.

As the teacher, I was sensitive to the distinction between the two and would recoil when

individuals both in the media and in my personal life referred to schools as closed—to me, the

term 'school' was a process *and* a place, not a place alone. I elaborate on this distinction and

seek a unifying theory later in Chapter 6, but suffice to say at this point that the question of

whether school is a physical location or a process doable online is an important distinction but a

false binary, for it supposes that the two are inherently different. As suggested through my

discourse analysis, regardless of whether students referred to school as a place or a process

underscored that they perceived school to be a series of routine activities that either were or were

not (in their perspective) being performed during online schooling. What students implied,

therefore, when they had suggested that school was a place we were no longer inhabiting was

that certain social routines around particular tools and technologies of schools, which they

understood to be the defining elements of school, were no longer being performed online. One

way of understanding this is that online interfaces such as BigBlueButton may have provided

some analogous experiences to the traditional in-person classroom, but it may have missed others

that were tantamount to a school-based education for some students.

Chats, such as the one used during our class sessions, are forms of quasi-synchronous

communication, sometimes called "one-way" (Herring, 2007) or "half duplex" (Cherny, 1999)

since users' messages can only be seen after they have been identified as complete (usually by

pressing "enter"). During these synchronous online class sessions, students would normally

communicate in the chat box, an "upwards-scrolling, dialogic chat interface" (McCulloch, 2019,

p. 211), with one another while also responding to my queries or requests for student-generated

questions. In the case of Alice's question of "what are the chances we actually go back to

school," did Alice include me, the teacher, in her use of the word "we," or was her audience

limited to her classmates? There were classes during which I would also primarily type

comments and instructions into the Public Chat, teaching through the written word rather than

the spoken one. In this class session, however, I had communicated with students almost entirely

through my laptop's microphone, so the chat box was, at this point (just a few minutes into the

beginning of the class session), solely a place of student discourse. Despite my lack of

"presence" in the chat box, which I define as the appearance of a message written by the user, the

chat space itself was both private and public simultaneously. The chat was private in the sense

that its participants were finely bound as members of that class period, and only users currently

logged into rooms could participate in chats (Paolillo & Zelenkauskaite, 2013). Yet it was also

public in the sense that, even if a conversation occurs between two users, the messages were

visible to all those currently logged into the chat, for there was no direct or private chat feature

for users to communicate with one another. Shortly after Alice posed the initial question, she

followed up—in the same minute—with "I'm guessing 0% right?" This discursive move

clarified her original question as the preamble to her own prognostication for whether schools

would reopen during the 2019-2020 school year. By first posing the question, she could then

offer her own opinion. In short, the intended audience of her initial question appears to include

everyone but to also serve as a discursive move for her own follow-up response. Perhaps she did

not simply attest the unlikeliness of returning to school in a single declarative sentence because

she knew there was at least one other person in the chat who may have more information than she did, the teacher. In her responses to the questionnaire regarding online learning the next day, Alice wrote that she found that her English class's synchronous conferences made me, her teacher, "very accessible" (Alice's Response to the Questionnaire Regarding Online Learning, April 24, 2020). Considering the adjacency of these two events, it seems likely that my presence in the chat played a large role in how she had framed her statement, thus making it likely that I was part of the "we" who might "go back to school." Her seemingly broad question nevertheless could have had particular discursive purposes: 1) positioning herself as one who did not have the most information, 2) preparing for her own follow-up response, and 3) welcoming in other responses (both from me, the teacher, and her classmates).

School as a Process

Alice was not alone in referring to 'school' as a place, or in using the ambiguous word "we" to make an initial query. In a different class period, another student wondered whether they would return to the school building the next school year:

>   **[10:17] Carlos:** If we go back to school will it be next September?
>
>   **[10:18] Lukas:** right next to new york
>
>   **[10:18] Lukas:** It's dumb to risk coming back too soon
>
>   **[10:19] Lukas:** I have seen things that talked about our immunities being extremely bad
>
>   because of quarantine
>
>   **[10:19] Lukas:** Like it was bad to be in quarantine
>
>   **[10:19] Chloe:** considering the amount of cases we have now, we should just cancel
>
>   Earth until November
>
>   (Synchronous Class Session, Period 1, April 30, 2020, 10:17-10:19)

In this parallel case, the student Carlos used the word 'school' to refer to a place to return to, positioning it as a location. The responses of his classmates, however, were more nuanced. Unlike Carlos who had framed the return with the phrase "go back to school," Lukas wrote that he thought it was unwise "to risk coming back too soon." The use of the phrase "coming back" is particularly interesting. In English, one can use either "come back" or "go back" to refer to returning to a specific place, but the phrase "come back" also carries with it the connotation that one is currently in the place being referred to. That is, if one were to say that they hope to "come back to the vacation resort," then they are currently at that place (or have only recently left it). In comparison, if one were to say that they would like to "go back to the vacation resort," then it is implied that they were no longer there. The internal contradiction in Lukas's statement, which nevertheless aligns quite sensibly with reality, was its suggestion that he was both at and not at school simultaneously. The fact that Lukas did not echo Carlos's phrase of "go back" while seamlessly responding to his inquiry suggests that Lukas may have framed school differently in his mind, as both a process he continued to engage in and as a place he, in that moment, no longer visited. When Chloe added that she thought "we should just cancel Earth until November," she presumably was seemingly not suggesting that the entirety of the planet be closed down but rather that the events and interactions that took place in public spheres be cancelled (perhaps also repurposing the term "cancel," which had been popular gaining traction at this time in the phrase "cancel culture"). In this regard, she positioned "Earth" as both place and process.

The discrepancy between different students' use of 'go back' or 'come back' might be attributable to their personal experiences and perceptions of online learning. In the Questionnaire Regarding Online Learning, Chloe had described her perception of online learning for her

English Language Arts class as "exactly like a regular class, except it's online" (Chloe's Response to the Questionnaire Regarding Online Learning, April 24, 2020). Lukas described the online English Language Arts class sessions as "Perfect" (Lukas's Response to the Questionnaire Regarding Online Learning, April 24, 2020). Carlos, however, wrote that he perceived things differently: "For me it looks like we are doing work such as reading and vocab work and that seems to be it. We don't do the conferences to read together like we did a long time ago. Instead we read the book on our own" (Carlos's Response to the Questionnaire Regarding Online Learning, April 24, 2020). Students' experiences and perceptions of online learning were not homogenous, and individual differences emerged even within the same classroom. Whereas Chloe found the in-person and online class sessions to be facsimiles of one another, Carlos thought they were structurally different and framed in-person classes as occurring "a long time ago." These two students were friends, often talked with each other both during in-person and online classes, and yet they had oppositional perceptions of the same class sessions. Students may have participated in online class sessions using the same BigBlueButton software interface, but they each participated from different spaces, in unique conditions, and under varying circumstances. The chatroom interface, with its formulaic structure and style, obfuscated the individual student's experience, making it appear that the class sessions were solely occurring in a digital space; it would be equally right to say, though, that the class sessions were independently and simultaneously occurring in the proximity of each individual participant, their personal surrounds encompassing both the BigBlueButton interface and their physical environment. The point is that individual experiences likely varied widely, even if students were ostensibly attending the same online class.

Although I have and will continue to discuss the idea of "languaging school into being," the aforementioned discourse discrepancies in how students wrote about either 'going' or 'coming' back to school underscore possibly different understandings of what 'school' was perceived to be and, therefore, what it means to "language 'school' into being." For some students, 'school' was literally the place where they had attended classes, while others had a more nuanced understanding of school as a process, one that we were continuing in online sessions. This discourse analysis as a whole primarily focuses on the latter of the two interpretations, but it should be noted that the understanding of school as primarily a place ran counter to my own understanding but is, perhaps, more consonant with the public discourse surrounding building closures within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. I address this further in my **Discussion** chapter in which I suggest that place and process are two manifestations of social routines enacted around the objects and technologies of school.

Naming and the Reinforcement of School Roles

In large part, references to school were not carried out during the online class sessions through the use of the word 'school,' but rather by means of allusions to different aspects of the school institution. Synecdoche, that is, rather than metonymy (conversely, I will discuss "school" as metonymic in **Chapter 6**). The use of particular words and phrases throughout the online class sessions suggests the social routinization of school, the way that "schooling" had transcended place to habit. Pierre Bourdieu's work on *habitus*—what he called the "generative principle of regulated improvisations"—implies that social routines and habits are what generate quotidian accord among individuals of the same social class during daily interactions (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 78). The habits of language surrounding school are no exception. Without deviation, students conformed to standards of naming that suggested an implicit understanding of how schools

traditionally work. For example, students referred to me as "*Mr.* Toncic" but not "Toncic" or

"Jason" or some other moniker. To address their classmates, they used first names or nicknames;

they did not use the Mr. or Ms. title that was regularly affixed to my name. Such conventions are

commonplace, but their banality does suggest a pervasive—and uninterrogated—alignment with

institutional power norms that follow a hierarchical model. Still, it was in part the uniformity

among students in the ways that they referred to me and one another that facilitated the

performance of our ELA classes. If the debate were about how to refer to one another, a line of

logic might go, then questions might emerge about *who* gets to name others, for in the act of

naming is an enactment of power.

   In schools, teachers enter their classrooms with roll calls replete with every students'

name. Students are assigned a schedule with their teacher's name on it. In most contexts,

however, names are shared quite differently. As danah boyd (2012) put it, "People do not share

their names with every person they encounter. Rather, names are offered as an introductory

gesture in specific situations to signal politeness and openness" (p. 30). When the ability to

choose to share one's name or not is circumvented, individuals are cast into preset roles of social

power. The teacher holds the list of many names, whereas the student has just the one—their

teacher's. The tacit assertion is that there is *one* central teaching figure, the educator whose name

is on the schedule. The multitude of classmates who also attend the same class are not identified

as 'teachers' and therefore not positioned by school institutions as individuals to learn from.

   As part of the BigBlueButton chat interface, teachers and students were automatically

assigned their real names at the beginning of class sessions, much like in other platforms used for

online school within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as Zoom and Google

Hangouts. However, this is often not the default case online, in which anonymity can play a large

role, such as in affinity spaces (Halaczkiewicz, 2020; Liu, 2016), although the outcome of such

anonymity can be a toxic online culture (Willet & Carpenter, 2021). Within the framework of

our online class sessions, no one was able to alter their display name or choose a pseudonym. I

was identified on-screen as "Mr. Toncic." My students were identified by their full first and last

names. Obviously, there was a difference between how my name was represented—with the

courtesy title of Mr. affixed before my surname and the omission of my given name—and how

students' names were displayed. This distinction likely deeply influenced how students

addressed me as their teacher, as seen below:

> **[12:56] Lisa:** should we put the answer to the chapter 8 question in today's discussion
>
> **[12:56] Lisa:** ok
>
> **[12:56] Jacob:** Mr. Toncic I got the answer to two final jeopardys right in the past two
>
>   weeks bc of you
>
> **[12:56] Wesley:** just so you know, my conference keeps glitching
>
> (Synchronous Class Session, Period 6, April 17, 2020, 12:56)

In this set of temporally adjacent messages—although largely unrelated in topic—three

different students addressed me directly in entirely separate ways. At first glance, it may seem

that only Jacob targeted me, the teacher, directly; however, all three students made it clear

through the practices aligned with deep structures of classrooms, reified in their discourse, that I

was the intended audience. To begin, Lisa asked a question about class procedures and signaled

that the question was to me by identifying herself as part of a "we," the students in the class. She

asked "should we put the answer" as a way of positioning herself as part of a group of students

who were following the directions of the teacher. Jacob, taking a different approach, referred to

me directly with the title of "Mr. Toncic," making his intended audience and subject matter clear.

By signaling my name, Jacob was also conveying to me, his teacher, that he had paid attention in class, that he had retained information, and that he had applied that knowledge elsewhere—in this case, a trivia game show. Both Lisa and Jacob's messages, although targeted at me in unique ways, nonetheless carried with them identifying markers of who they were and what they hoped to signal to me. Lisa's message carried with it deference to the authority of the teacher; Jacob's identified him as the type of attentive student who watched Jeopardy and succeeded because of his diligence in my class.

Wesley's message, the last of the three, identified me directly with a second-person pronoun in the idiomatic phrase "just so you know." His message appeared to be both a conscientious forewarning and a predictive apology. Since connection errors were common in mid-April 2020 on the online class servers, his message might have been a way for him to inform me, the teacher, that other students may be experiencing similar problems. It may also have served as an anticipatory apology if he were to miss class material or suddenly be logged out from the session. Wesley's message, like Lisa's and Jacob's, centered the classroom teacher as the main figure of the classroom; his was a message that took into consideration *accountability*, the fact that students in online school were expected to be present and attentive during instruction. Jacob made clear that he answered the two questions correctly "because of [me]," not his classmates. Lisa asked for clarification as to my expectations for how students were to share their written answers.

Within this short, rather unobtrusive snippet of a larger class discussion, school-based social habits and routines were languaged into being. By framing me, the teacher, as a unique other, the students differentiated between me and their peers. As seen, some messages did not need to explicitly state my name to indicate that the teacher was the intended recipient, even

though the posts were equally visible to all the users of the chat. Instead, the social routines around school were manifested in and by the way students wrote: they deferred to their teacher's expectations, they identified themselves as attentive students, and they responded to perceived threats against their accountability as students.

Worksheets in Disguise: Using Classmates' Names to Perform as "Good" Students

Even when writing to one another, students often did so within the context of teacher direction. For example, one lesson I instructed during my Period 1 English 10 class had students respond to questions about the novel *The Martian* by Andy Weir. Unlike in a traditional written response, however, students needed to answer the questions "as a class," which meant that they were supposed to read and respond to one another's responses, ask further questions of previous statements, and provide additional evidence for support. For the first question, I asked: "What do we learn about Mark Watney's home life from the novel? Aside from the little you respond with to the first part, why do you think the author is intentionally scarce with the information provided about his life on Earth? Why would Watney not share this in his video logs?" Initially, students wrote their independent thoughts, but they ultimately appeared to respond to one another:

> **[08:10] Carlos:** For the situation and all I think Mark Watney made light of the whole situation so I feel that's a personal trait he originally has from his home Earth.

> **[08:11] Chloe:** Adding on to what Carlos just said, maybe talking about his home life would make him feel more negative

> **[08:11] Keira:** I think he understood that to get home he had to rely on himself alone and so by bringing persay a wife or kid into the equation he could get distracted

[08:12] Nicole: I agree Keira, he has more pressing matters he needs to tend to. He doesnt have time for daydreams.

[08:13] Carlos: Mark Watney made fun of himself while on Mars and that could've been his escape. Since normally a human would go insane when being alone for so long.

[08:13] Lukas: I agree with Keira that he uses it to isolate Mark, and allow the reader to understand what being absolutely alone feels like. Remember everyone at home thinks he is dead at first.

(Synchronous Class Session, Period 1, May 18, 2020, 08:10-08:13)

Yet although students may appear to have been communicating with one another to formulate class responses, there was, in fact, little genuine discussion happening among them. Students wrote that they agreed with one another, but the statements that followed were close-ended, reiterating what had been said before. Students were seemingly using one another's names as another way of "doing school," behaving, or, perhaps more specifically, acting to signal to their teacher that they were doing school. At the time, I had thought that the conversation was rather good, since I was simply looking at what 'appeared' to be conversation - they were using one another's names and many messages were appearing in the chat, so I had assumed that they were actually dialoguing. It was only after my discourse analysis that I realized that what had appeared to be dialogue was more likely attempts by students to follow my prompt and appear to me to be "good" students, understood in this study as students who attempted to demonstrate to their teacher compliance, achievement, and personal intelligence. They primarily used one another's names not as a way to communicate with peers but rather as a way to demonstrate to me, the teacher, that they were ostensibly following my instructions to

work together as a class to develop answers. In this context, a student's use of a classmate's name did not invite that person to respond; rather, a name appeared to be included for one main purpose: to complete the school task I had delineated. In short, although my hope was to create genuine dialogue among students to generate new ideas, students were using one another's names to give the semblance of discussion.

Liminal Times, Glimpses of Authentic Discussion

Students were more likely to use each others' names in discussion when they were not explicitly working on assignments, usually in the liminal times before classwork or between formal, announced class activities. During one class session, students in my Period 6 Advanced English class, early in the period, had a free discussion. After one student asked whether I had yet counted extra credit points (which were offered to students if they used a particular vocabulary word in a larger assignment), I responded in the affirmative orally and then asked my students, as a wellness check, how they were doing. Although some students responded to me directly, others engaged with one another:

> **[12:57] Wesley:** wut is ec
>
> **[12:58] Wesley:** btw
>
> **[12:58] Aidan:** Niall how did u just do the hw
>
> **[12:58] Joel:** extra credit
>
> **[12:58] Wesley:** oh yeh
>
> **[12:58] Niall:** I did it yesterday Aidan
>
> **[12:58] Joel:** I'm good how are you Mr. Toncic
>
> **[12:58] Lisa:** I used it in a dinner discussion the other day and I earned some cool points
>
> > from my younger sister

[12:58] Wesley: I know someone whose cat is dying of kidney failutr

[12:58] Niall: yeah I saw

[12:58] Lacey: i don't have the virus anymore. queen

[12:58] Wesley: *failure

[12:58] Aidan: oh i was so confused

[12:58] Chelsea: yay lace!!!!!!

[12:58] Joel: yes lace

[12:59] Lisa: wesley tell them I'm sorry

[12:59] Maria: my uncle just passed away so that makes 3 dead relatives in a week

[12:59] Wesley: sorry, maria

[12:59] Niall: Sorry

[12:59] Lisa: i'm so sorry Maria

[12:59] Maya: yea two of my relatives passed away

[12:59] Niall: my condolences

[12:59] Joel: sorry maria

(Synchronous Class Session, Period 6, April 17, 2020, 12:57-12:59)

In this exchange, multiple discrete conversations occurred nearly simultaneously, often overlapping one another. This disrupted (or false) adjacency frequently occurs in chat sessions with multiple participants because messages are organized sequentially (i.e., whenever anyone hits the "enter" button to send their text), not by topic (Markman, 2005; Paolillo & Zelenkauskaite, 2013). Although numerous threads may be interwoven and ongoing, users are typically not confused and can follow multiple conversations at the same time (Dresner & Barak, 2006; Herring, 1999). Students in my online class sessions seemed to be no exceptions and were

able to disentangle the different threads. For example, right after Wesley asked generally about the acronym "ec," which a student had used earlier in the class, another student asked a classmate about homework. When Joel (who did not originally coin or use the "ec" acronym) then wrote "extra credit," Wesley understood that it was Joel's message, not the previous student's question to a different classmate, that was intended for him, and he responded, "oh yeh". Aidan, who had sent his message just after Wesley's query about the acronym "ec", on the other hand, was not seeking general clarification from any classmate but rather needed to target a specific classmate as the recipient with his message. Aidan's message of "Niall how did u just do the hw" specifically identified Niall as the target audience. Although everyone else could read Aidan's message, by tagging the question with a name, Aidan made it clear that Niall was the recipient. Yet considering that Aidan was aware that others could see the message, including the teacher, it may be that more was occurring than just a simple request for information. Aidan's use of the word "just" to refer to time—asserting that Niall had done the homework on the day it was due rather than the day prior, when it perhaps "should" have been done—positioned Niall as a potentially "bad" student, and in contrast, carried with it the suggestion that Aidan had, in contrast, completed his homework assignment when he believed it should have been done. When Niall responded "I did it yesterday Aidan", he made a correction that realigned himself as a "good" student who completed his homework before class. Niall's inclusion of Aiden's name appears superfluous, since users can follow multiple threads without being confused by responses, unless it served a discursive purpose, such as drawing the attention of others to Aiden for writing an accusatory question during a class session overseen by a teacher, my name with its defining "Mr." always visible to students at the top of the participant list.

Early in Chapter 1, in **The Problem Underpinning this Study** section, I had introduced a girl who, when schools were still in-person in March of 2020, had appeared to be ill in my classroom and then later revealed (online) that she had been diagnosed with COVID-19. This was Lacey, who in this chat session declared, in response to my spoken question about how everyone was doing, "i don't have the virus anymore. queen". It had been over a month since she first had shown symptoms in the classroom. Through her declaration of being virus free and its additional sense of exaltation with the otherwise non-sequitur word 'queen', which read to me, at the time, almost as if it were doing the work of the corresponding emoji, Lacey not only responded to my general inquiry but also took the opportunity to share the news—seemingly for the first time—with many of her classmates and friends. The responses of "yay lace!!!!!!" and "yes lace", by using a shortened version of her name, connote familiarity with Lacey and share in her good news. The use of her nickname also, however, clarified that their celebration was for Lacey and not in response to an earlier message from Wesley, in which he shared somber news about an ill cat. Then, to clarify which of the two threads she was writing in response to, Lisa used Wesley's name in her message, offering an empathetic response.

Perhaps in response to Lacey revealing her recovery from COVID-19, though, a different tenor of messages emerged: Maria then shared that she had been less fortunate in her encounters with virus, losing an uncle and two other relatives in just a single week's time. Some of her classmates responded with messages of condolence, using her name. For example, Wesley wrote, "sorry, maria". Interestingly, the only participants who wrote to Maria to offer messages of condolence, despite a roster of 21 students, were those who had already been participating in the written chat: Wesley, Niall, Lisa, and Joel. No student aside from those already actively writing messages in the chat offered Maria condolences. This may be because those who were already

actively chatting had a "stake" in the chat, thus they might seem like they were ignoring her message if they did not respond, whereas others might have felt like they were intruding into a conversation that they were not a part of already. Those who were participating used her name, thus indicating that they were reading and reacting to Maria's message; in this context, the name "Maria" functionally served as a marker of transition, indicating that they were no longer responding to the previous threads. In fact, Maria's message brought the participants of the two separate conversational threads (about the sick cat and Lacey's recovery) together, ending those two topics.

Although I highlight throughout my discourse analysis sections of text that are representative of the larger transcript, it should be noted that the routines (e.g., phatic greetings) that I identify and analyze are *not* mechanistic reproductions day after day. If school is, as I will later explore in Chapter 6, a socially constructed institution defined by its habits and social routines around the technologies, tools, architecture, and objects that we identify with schools, then it is also affected by the same tensions that define other habits and routines. Habits are not definitive or inflexible; they can be challenged, broken, or channeled into other avenues (Chun, 2017). Suggesting that schools are social routines, which are by nature enacted through habitual performances by groups rather than individuals, allows for the daily challenges to school hierarchy and institutional structure that may occur on the local level; they provide an understanding for the reproduction of school while also suggesting that, like one can change a routine, there is room for a new approach. Within the class session transcripts in this critical instance case study, students largely followed the social routines traditionally associated with school, but there were notable occurrences of resistance that I will take up later in this chapter. In short, a belief in the social routines of school that are constructively practiced by role players

within that system (i.e., administrators, teachers, and students) does not preclude an active resistance to school. Some habits, after all, are hard to break.

Private Communication During Class

Some students took to making oblique references that only certain friends might recognize (e.g., one student wrote the message "dub city" without context, which lacked meaning to me as an outsider without the requisite knowledge for interpretation), thus providing them a way of indirectly communicating with particular people but only through subtle innuendo (McCulloch, 2019; Oolo & Siibak, 2013). Students, of course, could communicate with one another through channels outside of our class session; they were not restricted from texting one another, talking on the phone, or even being in the same physical location. It was a different story, though, if students wanted to communicate with me directly.

Throughout the 47 class sessions, I received 8 private messages and emails sent directly to me from 7 students *during* the class period; in other words, students were able to ask their questions or make the statements expressed in these messages in front of their peers in the Public Chat, but they intentionally chose to seek a private medium. The content of these messages varied, but largely these messages seemed to pertain to students saving face academically, suggesting to me that the culture of academia in some of these classes was perceived to be socially meaningful for some students, so much so that they did not want to post a message for their classmates to assume that they might be struggling with a certain academic topic. For example, in one message from a student in my Period 3 Advanced English class, the student wrote, "Hi, sorry I didn't want to write this in the conference, but I restarted the book a couple days ago and I am a good amount in, but could is [*sic*] there some places in their travel that are completely unimportant…" The student's question pertained to Ernest Hemingway's novel *The*

Sun Also Rises and the film *The Way*, the two of which I had assigned for students to write about through the lens of the itinerary of the Way of Saint James, a medieval Christian pilgrimage route through Europe rumored to have restorative properties. The message, which was sent through private email, provided a means for the student to write to me directly without other students seeing their message; in short, the alternate delivery method demonstrated the way that the student was managing their image among their peers.

Rejecting Anonymous Identities

Students' attempts at reclaiming the ability to have anonymous identities also were futile in the context of this case study, as seen when students attempted to use the Shared Notes functionality on BigBlueButton. Unlike the Public Chat, anything written in the Shared Notes section appeared on-screen without any writer's name (unlike in Google Docs, for example, which shows the writer as they are composing). In other words, the Shared Notes space was one that allowed for individuals to claim anonymity; they could write without anyone—neither teacher nor classmate—knowing who they were. Despite the promise of anonymity, however, students predominantly opted to write in the Public Chat: they spontaneously used the Shared Notes space just twice, with both times culminating in users 'sabotaging' the written class notes, either by adding in unrelated words or by erasing the notes altogether. For example, on April 23, 2020, during a grammar lesson that I was teaching in my Period 6 Advanced English class, students began to use the Shared Notes space to write down the grammar paradigms for all to see (see Figure 3). Since students were anonymous, I was and remain unaware which individuals were using the Shared Notes space.

Aside from the apparent anonymity that students were granted when writing in the Shared Notes

space, they had another capability that was not in the Public Chat: they were able to directly
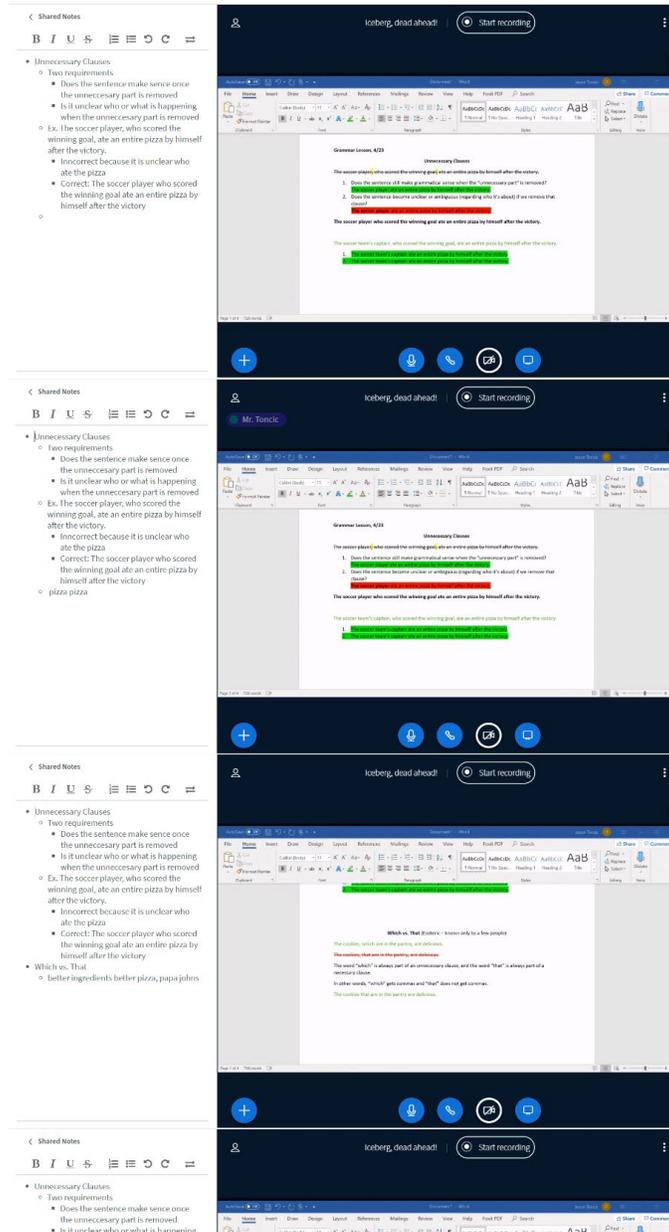
Figure 3 Shared Notes, April 23, 2020, Period 6 Advanced English. The thinner, leftmost section is the Shared Notes area. The wider, rightmost area is a Google Docs screenshare where I was writing grammar examples. The four frames below show a chronological series during which a student (or students) wrote on-topic, anonymous grammar notes while another student (or students) added unrelated phrases, such as "pizza pizza". Ultimately, the class stopped using the Shared Notes feature after two sessions.

interfere with one another's writing. In the Public Chat, students could write whatever they wished without anyone else being able to erase or alter their messages. The Shared Notes space, however, allowed for multiple editors simultaneously. In order for it to work well, individuals would have needed the same objective in mind; they also would have needed to be embodying, while writing in the Shared Notes, what might be perceived to be the behavior of "good" students—that is, not just a good student but rather a collective of good students. The individual(s) who initially wrote in the Shared Notes section assumed that others would share their mindset, that they too would want to develop a collective identity as 'good' students, even though they would not individually receive recognition. This was, clearly, an incorrect assumption.

The next class period, on April 24, 2020, the Shared Notes page was further sabotaged when the entirety of the class notes that had been written there throughout the class session was permanently irretrievable after a student replaced the eight lines with the word "potato" instead. One student, tellingly, wrote in the Shared Notes in reply: "is this jim". After this incident, no one used the Shared Notes section again: it appeared to me that students who were trying to appear as being 'good' students then recognized that there were classmates who did not share their same buy-in to the institution of schooling. By returning to the Public Chat, students appeared to welcome the institutional control that could be enacted upon individuals through their naming. To them, anonymity was unwanted, for individuals who could undermine their 'good' student identities lurked among their classmates.

Throughout the remaining sections of my Findings, I will explore how these habitual social routines were expressed by students' and my written language, which in turn languaged school into being. One of the main focal points around which our written language swirled was

the construct of time, reified as it has been into a technology by schooling in the form schedules, deadlines, and school years.

The Reification of Time: Procedures, Schedules, and Deadlines

When I say that school was languaged into being, what I mean is that language gives form and function to deep structures (i.e., routines, habits, patterns) that are part of the very fabric of school. By identifying the basic building blocks that comprise how schooling at Stone Valley High School operates at an institutional level through discourse analysis, I can better identify social routines that successful students in a privileged school district perform habitually. These social routines will lend toward a potential reconception of school that goes beyond place or language and instead begins an investigation into the constellation of human constructs—and how people interact with them—that have defined the normative notion of what schooling means, a premise that likely is tacitly understood and enacted by some students better than by others, with particular bias toward socioeconomic and racial identity.

Through the methodological framework of discourse analysis, one can explore how the language of the online classroom may have constituted school in function, but that its form and structure were mediated by deep social routines around the artifacts of school. These items and technologies are numerous and ubiquitous, but the enactment of them in a series with other routines leads to what appears on the surface to be a choreographed performance. To this point, I found that much of the written chat discourse within any class session proceeded along similar routinized paths despite differences in class composition and subject matter. Some of these routines were 'phatic,' contextually relevant social phrases that serve as a way of acknowledging another individual without expressing original thought and thereby inviting further conversation (McCulloch, 2019). For example, one person might ask an acquaintance, "What's up?" and an

acquaintance—likely even if they were struggling with a life crisis or difficult decision—would respond perfunctorily, "Not much." This response is not an indication of the actual state of the individual, nor is the first interlocutor truly inquiring about the other person's life—this phatic dialogue simply follows a social script. The two may then part again without another word, or they may settle into a more sustained conversation.

Similar phatic greetings were commonplace in the class sessions' chat boxes. One such set of greetings at the beginning of a class session went as follows:

[08:49] Mr. Toncic: Good morning, all!

[08:50] Kimberly: good morning

[08:51] Tobias: Mornin' to yah

[08:51] Mr. Toncic: How are you all today?

[08:52] Kimberly: pretty good

[08:52] Jodie: good, how are you?

(Synchronous Class Session, Period 3, May 19, 2020, 08:49-08:52)

At first glance, these phatic greetings seem rather mundane—indeed, among the six turns, the word "good" was used in four of them; the word "morning" in three of them; and "how are you?" in two of them. There was not much variation in diction or content among these phatic greetings. However, phatic greetings operate according to social scripts, and if school is less a location and more a process of language, then these conversational turns are part of the social institution of school. For instance, considering *who* was writing (and who was not), it becomes clear that these phatic turns were initiated by me, the teacher. Indeed, there was not a single message shared prior to my written greeting.

The turn-taking style of the chat room that exists today was not always a given. In the early 1970s, a system called TENEX used a confounding letter-by-letter chat system in which users could both input letters at the same time but without any clear differentiation between who was writing (e.g. "how are yougo todayod"), a method that was briefly revived and then once again exorcised after 2009's Google Wave (McCulloch, 2019). Turn-based chat systems privilege the message—the turn—as the basic block of conversation, not the single letter. These turn-based systems gained popularity in the 1990s and 2000s as chatrooms proliferated, bringing together a mix of individuals with common interests. Since these chats were nearly continuous, joining a chatroom meant entering a discussion that was unrolling in real time. Automated system announcements such as "USER has entered the chat" were commonplace because they signaled to those already engaged in the conversation that a new interlocutor had entered the space. This was not the experience, however, of users during our synchronous class sessions. The students and I did not enter into a conversation that was already ongoing, nor did we seek out this particular chat because of a shared common interest (such as might happen in affinity spaces, cf. Gee, 2005). Rather, these class sessions were predicated and initiated by an outside force: the institutional schedule.

Students' Silence before the Teacher

Although school buildings had closed, online classes still followed a schedule set by school administrators. Classes occurred at predetermined periods so there would be no overlap between different teachers' synchronous classes. Even in the case of asynchronous class sessions, students were required by the district to make a post into a thread within the first few minutes of class in order to account for their attendance. As such, the beginning of the Period 3 class on May 19, cited above, coincided with the scheduled start of the class session. By writing

"Good morning, all!" as the first interlocutor in the chat session, I was both greeting students and enacting a part of my institutional role. I was, as the teacher, an extension of the institution and thus adhered to the timetable set out by the school district. I began class at set times, and I initiated first contact.

When I wrote to students, my messages were often targeted at everyone, using the word "all" as part of my phatic greeting messages. Students, though, responded to me alone. Tobias's message of "Mornin' to yah" and Jodie's "good, how are you?" were each targeted at me, their teacher, not one another. This was a frequent conversational dynamic. I would address the class at large with a question or statement, and students would tailor their messages to respond directly to me. That is, as the teacher, my audience was often conveyed by the second-person plural (e.g., "you all") whereas the students' audience was almost always written in the second person singular (e.g., "you"), whether they were writing to me or one another. The second person plural was enacted from and also conferred a position of power; it centered me, the teacher, as the *only* individual in the chat session who wrote to everyone (and no one in particular) at the same time. Simultaneously, it also linguistically reduced the individual members of the class to a group; while in a classroom, I could have addressed students individually just by making eye contact, no such corollary existed in the impersonal space of the Public Chat. In contrast, students were not writing to a homogenous group. The frequent lack of the second-person plural in students' messages suggests to me that they were aware (whether consciously or not) of a classroom hierarchy between them and their teacher: not every recipient of their message was of equal status. Therefore, they more often had to direct their messages at one another by explicitly using names or other, more subtle conversational cues.

Consider how in the phatic introduction below, my use of the second-person plural with the word "everyone" initiated a written dialogue with a single student who responded directly to me:

[07:50] Mr. Toncic: Good morning, everyone!

[07:50] Keira: good morning

[07:51] Keira: should we finish reading the martian and then join the conference?

[07:51] Mr. Toncic: Your assignment for last week was to finish the reading this

weekend. :(

[07:53] Keira: I have like 3 pages left

[07:53] Mr. Toncic: Okay, finish up now. :)

(Synchronous Class Session, Period 1, May 18, 2020)

Keira initially responded to me phatically, following a socially expected script. Then, when she asked about the procedures for the conference that day, Keira used the word "we," a first-person plural pronoun that suggests cognizance of our different positions and groups. When I communicated, I did so to the entire class; when she responded, she did so, positionally, as de facto emissary of all the students. This discursive move positioned her as an equal to her peers, in contrast to using the word "I," which might have implied that she considered herself to be different from her classmates.

Standard English lacks a true second-person plural pronoun, so the word "you" can imply both a single person and a group of people. When I responded to Keira with "Your assignment" (rather than, for example, "The assignment"), my response indicated to the group of students that they had a certain assignment that was already supposed to be completed, but it also simultaneously responded just to Keira in the second-person singular—as in, she was already

supposed to have completed this assignment. That is, I responded both to Keira's positionality as

a student (and therefore one of many who had the same assignment) and to her directly,

deploying a frowning emoticon to make it clear that her individual assignment was overdue.

Keira understood the marked disappointment implied in my writing, and clarified that she had

just a few pages remaining. At this point, she also switched from using "we" to "I," once again

protecting her identity as one of the student group by making it clear that it was only she who

had not finished the assignment. In contrast to before, her use of the word "I" here does separate

her from the group, but it does so to protect the group identity and her place within that group.

The Schedule's Implicit Discursive Control

The beginning of online class sessions often went similarly to this: I welcomed students

with a phatic greeting (in the second-person plural, e.g., "you" meaning "you all") and one (or

occasionally a handful of students) might respond. Indeed, the most frequent response from

students was not a phatic greeting but instead silence—so much so, in fact, that I suggest that the

silence was phatic in itself. Silence operated as a means of deference; to write anything meant to

emerge from the ether of the "participants list" and to assert one's self as standing apart from

others. As the default was silence (i.e., all students appear "silent" when not writing messages),

to write was to stray from the norm. In normal classroom discourse, conversational gaps are

avoided through the use of phatic pragmatic markers, such as gesturing agreement and verbally

offering encouragement (Stenström, 2014). In synchronous online classes, phatic silence

appeared to be an acceptable social response, much like how during a teacher's lecture, the

expected behavior is silence, not response. In short, my findings suggest that, despite the

dialectic appearance of the chat box, the teacher (and, by proxy, the institution of school) were

responsible for the flow of "time" within the online class sessions.

These online class sessions were not open spaces of public discourse tailored toward learning in some particular field, but rather they were initiated and controlled by me acting in my prescribed role as a teacher in the school institution. In their silences, students were abiding by deferential customs afforded to a lecturer; they were respectful silences, but more to the social expectations of the classroom than to me as an individual. Thus, in their silences both before and after I started class—initiating the session with my words—students were also languaging school into being. It was just the deferral of their own language in deference to the privileged language of the teacher that did so—in short, school was languaged into being in part by social routines around who has the right to speak and when.

The respect shown to me by students' silences was, in actuality, largely a respect for the expectations that go along with schooling, the deep social routine structures of school— foundations that not only students but I, as well, were subject to. Later on in the same synchronous online class session, students responded to questions that I had written to them in the chat box about the novel *The Martian* by Andy Weir. Toward the end of the scheduled class period, at 8:42 a.m., I asked, "What are some 'science' facts you've learned? What are you taking away from your readings in Science Fiction?" (Synchronous Class Session, Period 1, May 18, 2020). The preponderance of students (11 of 13) responded to the question including Harold who wrote, at 8:46, "The way that Mark was able to figure out how to get a steady flow of water dropplets' " (Synchronous Class Session, Period 1, May 18, 2020, 08:46). Two minutes later, at 8:48, although other students were still responding, Harold wrote another message: "class is over mr toncic" (Synchronous Class Session, Period 1, May 18, 2020, 08:48). Harold was not demanding that I end class, nor was he declaring by his own volition that class would be over because he had said so; there was no one with the power to end class, for as he put it, class was

already over. The class period began and ended without our input; it existed on a plane exterior

to us, dictated by others, calibrated by the standardized and synchronized clocks emblazoned in

the bottom corner of everyone's laptop monitor. Harold's message prompted me to end class by

writing: "Thank you for your input everyone. Talk to you all on Thursday" (Synchronous Class

Session, Period 1, May 18, 2020). After being reminded by Harold that the class period had

already ended, I proceeded to remind students, using the second-person plural twice (i.e.,

"everyone" and "all"), that we would meet again on Thursday, the day set by our school

calendars.

Perhaps more than any other discursive marker, references to time, schedules, and

deadlines appeared in the discursive patterns of student and teacher messages alike. Harold's

statement that class had already ended languaged school as an institution into being, reifying the

schedule that dictated what days and times our class was to meet. Much like Harold, I did the

same in my closing message, asserting school as not a process of place or location but rather of

time. In some cases, students themselves jockeyed over whether or not the class period should

end. For example, in the Period 6 April 23, 2020 class, the class period had nearly ended when

one student, Maria, asked whether class could end and her classmates pushed back:

>**[14:44] Maria:** can we be done
>
>**[14:44] Wesley:** NO
>
>**[14:44] Alice:** no
>
>**[14:44] Lisa:** jessie what about peter and evan
>
>**[14:45] Maria:** can i go
>
>**[14:45] Wesley:** this is my only chance to socialize cause i have no friends
>
>**[14:45] Niall:** NO

[14:45] **Maria:** i wanna read

(Synchronous Class Session, Period 6, April 23, 2020)

Maria first asked whether "we," the class or perhaps just the students, could be done with the session. But when her classmates pushed back against her with two stated "nos," she switched her diction to "can i go," referencing only herself. When Wesley wrote that "this is my only chance to socialize cause i have no friends" (although he later wrote a message that attested it was a joke borrowing from the Discourse style of the online social board community Reddit), he did so by framing the class session in terms of time rather than place. He wrote that it was his "only chance," rather than the 'only place,' for example. In other words, Wesley's message, whether sincere or not, framed class as an opportunity etched in time, one that should not be truncated because it alone offered the ability to socialize with classmates during the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, in reality, the scheduled period had almost come to a close at that point of the class session. The administrative schedule determined the course of action—just a minute later, I formally ended the online class.

Students telling me that class was over occurred a number of times. For example, during one June class session with the students in my Period 6 Advanced English Language Arts class, we were in the midst of discussing the novel *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger:

[08:36] **Niall:** Why did Stadlater ask the kid who was failing all of his classes to write his composition

[08:36] **Lisa:** is that why he invites people to the movies that he doesn't necessarily want to see a movie with

[08:37] **Niall:** yeah, but does Stadlater know that his failing grades are just due to a lack of trying

[08:37] Niall: oh

[08:38] Lisa: he made up some excuse for that, right

[08:38] Lisa: saying that it was because he took the same class before

[08:43] Thomas: He looks out the window at the end

[08:45] Lisa: It's 8:45

[08:45] Niall: thank you

[08:45] Joel: thank you

[08:45] Sylvia: thank youu

[08:45] Chelsea: thank you

[08:45] Lisa: thank you

[08:45] Wesley: Thank you!

[08:45] Abby: thank you!

[08:45] Thomas: Thank you

[08:45] Chadia: thank you

(Synchronous Class Session, Period 6, June 3, 2020, 08:36-08:45)

My teaching style for literature often incorporated having students generate questions based on their assigned reading, as seen in the first three messages above. Generally, students asked questions and, usually, I answered them—at times, their classmates would respond, as well. For example, Niall wondered why Stradlater, Holden Caulfield's roommate at the boarding school, Pencey, in the novel, asks Holden to write a composition for him, when Holden is the one who had failed out of school. I responded orally, suggesting, I recall, that there is a difference between "failing" a class on paper and intelligence, and Holden had also not failed English. To this, Lisa added that Holden's "excuse" for passing English was that he had taken a course with a

similar reading list. A few minutes later, Lisa wrote, without context, the time: "It's 8:45." Such a message, without context, seems out of place—why has the student who was so keenly observant regarding the literature moments before simply stated the time? Within the context, however, the meaning was clear: class was over. Lisa did not state that class was over; she did not just log off, either, deferring to me to formally end class. Her message, a statement of the time, was a cue to me that the class period had ended; it was a message that there was some other mechanic that was holding all of us together as a class. After her message, I told the class that we would be ending the session since the period was over, and not a single student said goodbye. Instead, my students departed with a veritable sea of "thanks" and "thank yous"—much like they did most other class sessions.

Phatic Farewells

Along with phatic greetings at the beginning of class sessions, students also often wrote phatic goodbye messages at the end of class sessions. These phatic farewells would include the more pedestrian "bye" and "have a good one," but the most frequent signoff students used across all classes periods and sessions was to say "thank you" or "thanks". Instances of all variations occurred at the end of one class session with my Period 3 class:

> **[09:28] Mr. Toncic:** If there are no further questions, we can wrap up now. Good luck on
>
> your exams!
>
> **[09:28] Tobias:** bye
>
> **[09:28] Kimberly:** hae a great day
>
> **[09:28] Neha:** thanks!
>
> **[09:28] Tobias:** thanks
>
> **[09:28] Demi:** thank you!

> **[09:28] Carmen:** thank you
>
> **[09:28] Niki:** thank you
>
> **[09:28] Dorothy:** thank you!
>
> (Synchronous Class Session, Period 3, May 19, 2020)

Although the class session was scheduled to run for another fifteen minutes, I had ended the class early without pushback from students. Why, in comparison to when Maria had asked whether class could end early, was there no resistance to ending this class earlier? Some of this can be ascribed to the fact that it was a different class period consisting of its own unique students on a separate day and time. Yet it can also be attributed to the fact that the teacher may be viewed by students as a proxy for the school institution (Robinson & Aronica, 2016). As proxy, the teacher cannot exceed the parameters of class time set by the school district; however, the teacher can end an online class session at nearly any point within the scheduled hour (due to the fact that during online sessions the physical bodies of students were not occupying the actual classroom building). Maria had to ask permission for class to end, but I, as the teacher, did not.

Once I announced that the class period was ending, students responded with phatic goodbyes. Tobias initially wrote, "bye," but a few moments later, within the same minute, he added, in a separate message, "thanks". Among the seven different students who wrote some sort of signoff message, six of them wrote a form of "thank you." In this case, students were not just expressing gratitude for me wishing them luck on exams; this was the sort of phatic goodbye that occurred in nearly every class session. Expressions of gratitude generally are expressed in exchange for something; when someone aids another person or provides a wanted item, the utterance of "thank you" is a way of showing appreciation for the actions of the other person. It is an acknowledgement that the other person has helped to bring about the desired outcome or

object. It is also phatic insofar that it conveys a contextually relevant, societally acceptable phrase at the appropriate time. When someone holds a door for another person, the individual walking through the doorway is nearly obligated to express appreciation. To say nothing would be a transgression, snubbing the other individual. In this sense, the phrase "thank you" serves as a way of maintaining social relations and good rapport with another individual.

At the end of the class sessions, my students' chorus of "thank yous" would often come in clusters, much like in the example above. Take Tobias's first message, for instance, in which he simply wrote "bye". Shortly thereafter, Neha sent the message "thanks!" and seemingly initiated a torrent of other gestures of appreciation; Tobias, who had indeed already written a phatic goodbye message, nevertheless wrote yet another: "thanks". To use "thank you" at the end of a class session was to show deference to the teacher, to imply that the teacher (and, notably, only the teacher) deserved to be thanked for something non-specific—the general act of teaching. It was, like other messages, also a way of asserting oneself in the class: one could have left the class without writing a message—and, in fact, many did—so the act of writing "thank you" positioned the writer as a particular type of student. To write "thank you" situated the writer as a "good" student who had shown appreciation for the teacher's class, for the "thank you" was not directed to classmates but directly to the teacher. In an online class where silence was the default and "presence" could only be asserted by writing a message, it was a way for a student to claim an independent identity from among other students by demonstrating appreciation for the teacher. Once Neha had written her thanks, she manifested to other interlocutors that there was something worth thanking the teacher for. To not say "thank you" at that point might be perceived as an insult, akin to snubbing a person who held open a door; thus, while the first "thank you" was a phatic way of offering appreciation, the subsequent ones were, perhaps, phatic

obligations: perceived-as-necessary sign offs that should not be substituted for the valueless "bye" or "have a good day" that preceded them.

Students may have written their "thanks," but it is notable that I never said "you're welcome" or even tendered a response to their messages. While one interpretation might be that I was behaving like an uncouth swine by not responding, in many different circumstances I have responded "you're welcome" or "no problem" to a message of appreciation. It was not my lack of decorum that determined my silence but rather the social context of the interaction. The message of thanks would often be the final statement that a student would deliver, and they would immediately depart, so there was often not enough time to respond. Furthermore, since multiple students would frequently write a "thank you" at the end of the class session, it was unwieldy to respond to each of them—how could a student even tell whether my "you're welcome" was directed to them or a classmate? If my "you're welcome" was deployed too early and more students continued to write their thanks, would I just continue to furiously type more messages until the room was empty? In practice, this did not happen.

The reason behind my silence is in part attributable to the power dynamics of the classroom and its intersection with polite language. Polite language is more frequently used toward a superior. As Gretchen McCulloch (2019) wrote, "...politeness decreases with power—you're more polite to your boss than to your underling" (p. 123). In other words, students' messages of thanks and my silence were an additional way of languaging "school" into being, giving voice to the power dynamics inherent in a traditional classroom. As the teacher, I received thanks from students who felt obligated to be polite to an individual with greater contextual social power, yet I did not need to perform the same politeness in return. Of course, some students remained entirely silent as they departed: perhaps their silence was, in some way,

challenging the system of school. If school was something that we were languaging into being, then what better way to oppose it than by refusing to take part in its language altogether?

With the phatic greetings and goodbyes as bookends, the class session becomes rather bound. At the outset, I, the teacher, initiated class sessions by either speaking or writing a welcome to the group, reducing individual students to a general gesture. This welcome occurred at a particular time and in a certain place set by the school district, so the class period, although enacted by a certain set of individuals, was transposed atop its assigned time slot. This time slot dictated much of the class sessions' discourse, for it was within it that we all "languaged school" into being. When that assigned period ended, students were quick to remind me that it was over, asserting the schedule's abstract power. I was a proxy; the schedule was in charge. I contend with the deep structures of time as manifesting school into being later in Chapter 6.

Teacher-Initiated Transitions and an Arena for Performance

Within the period itself, students and I languaged school into being through a number of discursive moves, particularly through transitions from one portion of class to another. Underlying these transitional statements was the shared assumption that class time was to be filled with something, that particular "school" activities comprised a class session. This is, after all, how teachers often educate their students, crafting lesson plans that draw students through multiple activities in order to construct knowledge. Within the normal context of school, these transitions may appear to be controlled by teachers who plan and then orchestrate their lessons. However, as will become apparent in this section and the next through discourse analysis, I was not the only one generating transitions. Students, too, anticipated, expected, and insisted upon them.

Transitions from one part of the class to another were almost always explicit, formally announced statements to begin or to move to some other topic or task. For example, during a class session on May 28, 2020, I quickly transitioned from phatic greetings to a review of assigned reading:

[09:51] Mr. Toncic: Hi, everyone!

[09:54] Mr. Toncic: How are you all today?

[09:54] Tobias: tired

[09:54] Russell: Good how about you?

[09:55] Mr. Toncic: I'm doing well. I'm juggling watching my two little ones right now, hence why we're not doing audio today. Please bear with me.

[09:56] Mr. Toncic: That said, I'm going to rely on you all a bit more today to carry us forward.

[09:57] Mr. Toncic: Can we begin with your thoughts, points of interest, and questions regarding Chapter 2 of The Catcher in the Rye? Feel free to pull up your books and reference it directly.

[09:58] Tobias: The old man seems to not know what our main character is trying to do with his life. That's probably because he has no idea what he wants for his life.

[09:59] Tobias: Holden seems to have absolutely nothigng together

[09:59] Lillie: Did Holden go to visit his teacher to actually say bye or was it just more of an obligation? When I read it at first I got the impression that he wanted to, but then the moment he sat down with him he seemed like he just wanted to get out

(Synchronous Class Session, Period 3, May 28, 2020, 09:51-09:59)

As previously mentioned, class began when I, as the proxy for the school institution, wrote a message with a phatic greeting directed to all students; students, in kind, responded to my question directly—if at all. This has already been discussed, but it is worth noting here again, for it situates what happens next as part of a larger pattern, one that not only occurred in this one class period but is part of the deeper structure of the schooling, which we enacted each class session through our discourse. When a student asked me how I was, I responded phatically at first, adding that, in the strange circumstance of school and childcare center closures during the COVID-19 pandemic, I was also responsible for watching my two young children during that class period. I exhorted my students to "carry us forward" toward a destination, which, presumably, we all already knew. In this instance, I relied on my students' understanding of the structure of our class sessions in order to have class despite my limited attention. I had not explained what it meant for students to "carry us forward," nor did I provide a scaffold or study guide for students to complete. Students, I presumed, understood how we had previously discussed literature, and I would therefore rely on the patterns established in previous classes to reappear.

At this point, I explicitly transitioned to the new topic, writing, "Can we begin with your thoughts, points of interest, and questions regarding Chapter 2 of The Catcher in the Rye? Feel free to pull up your books and reference it directly." Although framed as a question, in practice, this message was an announcement of my expectations. By framing it as a question and notably using the word "we" instead of "you," I had tried to position this schoolwork transition as a task that would be undertaken together. My diction attempted to suggest that I was working alongside them and seeking consent to begin a certain task, but practically, this was an imposition of an

assignment. This was also not my first time using the word "we" within these few transitional

lines. Earlier, I had written to my students that, since I was watching my children, "we're not

doing audio today." Yet, in simple truth, my students rarely, if ever, used their microphones—the

only person who would be "doing audio" would be me. In both of these instances, I minimized

my own "special" role in the classroom by using the word "we." In regards to audio, I shifted the

phrasing from, for example, 'I won't be speaking out loud,' to "we're not doing audio today."

"Audio" implies the act of listening rather than speaking, so by shifting my diction, I was writing

as if I were one of the students who would be listening, by point of fact, to myself. In doing so, I

circumvented that I was the only person speaking, and I minimized my role (at least in the

message) as a special person in the classroom. Similarly, when I had written "Can we begin…",

the assumption was that class was something constructed together, that students and teachers

worked harmoniously together to create learning. Although my word choice tried to frame the

class session as a co-construction of knowledge, there was no further discussion about what we

would be doing or how we would be continuing with class. In short, my statements dictated how

class would transpire, and although students had latitude within those parameters to write and

ask different questions, there was not the co-construction of learning that had been suggested by

my message's wording. My writing was aspirational—I wanted to weaken my role as the center

of the class (or I at least wanted it to appear this way). I had hoped that the class session would

be more student-directed and less teacher-centered. Yet what soon emerged from this transition

nevertheless perpetuated a teacher-centric style:

    [10:08] Mr. Toncic: Okay, so a few things I want you to highlight in your notes. You

can

                                do this now.

[10:08] Mr. Toncic: 1) Discussion of Holden's family/family members

[10:08] Mr. Toncic: 2) Disappearing/vanishing/falling

[10:09] Mr. Toncic: 3) Egyptians/mummies

[10:09] Mr. Toncic: 4) His red hunting hat

[10:09] Mr. Toncic: 5) Ducks

[10:09] Mr. Toncic: 6) Windows

[10:09] Mr. Toncic: Whenever you notice these as you're reading, take particular note of them.

[10:10] Mr. Toncic: If you noticed any of these so far, jot them down in your notes first and then bring them up here.

(Synchronous Class Session, Period 3, May 28, 2020, 10:08-10:10)

Throughout the above two minute sequence of messages, I was the only individual writing in the chat. In fact, I transitioned students *away* from the chat, undermining their ability to respond, ask questions, or add their thoughts by instead directing them to their notes. My intentional directing of students to their notes was a common occurrence during many of the class sessions throughout the study period, another form of transition that occurred in the class sessions. At this time, I had assumed that taking good notes might help students to focus on the class session more; after all, if they were being tasked with writing notes about certain topics, then they needed to be listening, avoiding the sundry distractions that I had imagined might be surrounding them in their homes and at their computers. Despite my intentions, I did not consider the actual ramifications. I transitioned students away from the chat by directing them to their notes. In the resulting vacuum, I was the only one who would not be taking notes and thus

could write in the chat, and, markedly, any pretense of using the pronoun "we" was gone from
my messages.

Ironically, as someone who believed in the co-construction of knowledge and that
learning occurs during the interaction between people, I had nevertheless waged a battle against
distraction and sacrificed what I have held to be the tenets of learning. That is, I may be someone
who has researched new literacies and pedagogy, yet I still assigned students to complete
mundane note-taking tasks as an anodyne to my fears about attention, creating a vacuum in
which only I, as the teacher, could participate. With a complete lack of perspicacity that I had
unwittingly created the very silence that I would momentarily rail against, which had little
precedent in earlier class sessions, I soon felt that students were not participating enough (they
had replied with just ten messages over seven minutes) and wrote the following messages:

> **[10:19] Mr. Toncic:** Just a note--from when I wrote to ask for your extra participation
>
> today, only 5 students have actually participated.
>
> **[10:20] Mr. Toncic:** What's going on?
>
> **[10:20] Mr. Toncic:** There are 16 of you in this class.
>
> (Synchronous Class Session, Period 3, May 28, 2020, 10:19-10:20)

In these messages, I read my own anxieties and fears as they projected onto what students were
or were not doing—which, of course, I had no insight into aside from their messages written in
the chat. Their cameras and microphones were, as usual, off. Yet I had, minutes prior, directed
students to go back into their books, find instances of my listed points, and then put those points
into their notes. None of these tasks would have occurred in the chat but rather on paper or in
separate documents that I would not be able to see. In a void of my own creation, then, I
questioned my students as to why they were not participating. A number of students who had not

yet participated wrote messages over the next few minutes:

> **[10:23] Cora:** Is he close with his brother? Because it says that his brother visits him
>
>> every weekend
>
> **[10:24] Jian:** Didn't he essentially call his brother a sellout?
>
> **[10:24] Henry:** what grade is he in when he gets kicked out of school
>
> **[10:24] Mr. Toncic:** Remember that the beginning of the book is actually the end of the
>
>> events in the novel, and the events in the school (Pencey) are
>
>> happening in retrospect.
>
> **[10:25] Cora:** ohhhh right
>
> **[10:25] Dorothy:** ohhh
>
> **[10:25] Zoe:** So far, it seems like Holden has no sense of home or family to connect with.
>
>> It doesn't mention any of his friends yet either. He seems very isolated and
>
>> has no one to talk to. Maybe this is why he feels uncomfortable when he
>
>> went to Mr. Spencer's house even before the lecture.
>
> (Synchronous Class Session, Period 3, May 28, 2020, 10:23-10:25)

The messages above (10:23-10:25) were all written by students who had not previously

posted a message in the chat about *The Catcher in the Rye*. The responses (that students wrote

after I had asked for more participation [or, at least, participation that was explicitly written in

the chat that I could see and hold them accountable for]) show a diverse array of their beliefs as

to what "doing school" in my class meant. For instance, Cora wrote a question followed by her

reasoning based on the text of the novel, echoing traditional strategies for developing arguments.

Jian sought clarification for a part of the text by using the phrase "didn't he essentially", a

discursive move that allowed Jian to simultaneously demonstrate that he read the book while also

seeking further clarification. Similarly, Henry asked about the protagonist Holden Caulfield's grade level "when he gets kicked out of school," yet another way of bundling a question with an indication that the student has completed the requisite reading. What is not clear, however, is whether these questions are authentic or are merely ways for students to showcase that they are "good students," for in both of these messages, the "answer" is part-and-parcel of the question.

Due to the pace of incoming questions, my written response addressed Cora's question alone. Instead of answering Cora's question directly, I instead enjoined the following: "Remember that the beginning of the book is actually the end of the events in the novel, and the events in the school (Pencey) are happening in retrospect." By starting with the word "Remember," I situated her question as something that was already established by the novel; the fault was not with comprehension, my statement suggested, but with recall. That is, I wanted to respond to the student to provide an answer and clarify that this was already established in the text, but I attempted to do so in what I perceived to be a less threatening way. My assumption was that I needed to safeguard students' self-esteem, particularly the ego of one who had not been participating, and I could do so by presenting my answer as something she had forgotten rather than a part of the text that was not understood or, perhaps, never read.

What I was acting to preserve, though, was the use of the Public Chat, one that I myself had invaded in this class period with my presence, my name popping up time and again in a space that otherwise had mostly belonged to the students alone as I spoke orally. With my presence affixed in the chat box itself, I believe that students felt more monitored, and thus, they tried to give me what I, as the teacher, was looking for. In other words, my teacher-led transitions were interpreted as exhortations for students to "do school." I pulled Zoe, for example, from one form of learning happening in her notebook into the chat because I wanted

the class's work to be visible to me in some way, which I called "participation" in this case. The

chat box became a place not for dialogue or discourse but an arena for performance. This is

likely why most informal dialogue occurred in the liminal times before formal transitions. The

transition, announced by the teacher, signaled to students that they needed to once again perform

as students—they were being called upon to act in an academic way. As Sherry Turkle has

written, "Whenever one has time to write, edit, and delete, there is room for performance"

(Turkle, 2017, p. 180). When I made clear that not enough students (or, perhaps 'performers'

may be a more fitting word) were writing in the chat, soon others joined in to "do school."

      Cora's response of "ohhhh right", as well as Dorothy's "ohh" (her first message of the

class session), further suggested performativity: students had been called on to participate, and

these two subsequently produced phatic messages showing that they were attentive. Notably,

both of them elongated the word "oh" as either "ohhhh" or "ohhh". Word elongation through

repeating letters is often used as a means of demonstrating sentiment, and the most commonly

elongated words are those representing emotion (Brody & Diakopolous, 2011). The goal of word

elongation is usually to represent speech in writing (McCulloch, 2019). My two students did not

choose to use "oh," an ambiguous exclamation with a range of meanings. By elongating the

word, they were representing how they would have said the word in person, the kind of "ohhhh"

one says to an interlocutor to express that one is receiving and processing new information.

Interestingly, expressive lengthening is affected by social context, with individuals using it more

often in private text messages or private chats than in public posts (Brugman & Conners, 2019;

Schnoeblen, 2013). This tendency adds evidence to a possible line of reasoning suggested

earlier: students often engaged in chat sessions as if they were communicating primarily with

me, their teacher, despite the presence of their classmates. After all, students would frequently

write to me directly, using the messages they wrote to signal to me that they were a certain type of "good" student.

Notably, students did not directly respond to one another during this class session, suggesting that, rather than thinking of the chat session as between 17 interdependent nodes, it could also be thought of as 16 (possible) parallel chat sessions, each between the teacher and one individual student. Overlap and crosstalk could occur, but it often did not. For example, Zoe's multi sentence response reads more like an answer on a worksheet or a quiz than a message in a chat; it is too long, too formally written, and too properly punctuated, after all. But Zoe, according to her answers to the questionnaire about online learning on April 24, 2020, was taking notes by hand. She had explained, "During conferences, I have my notebook out in front of me while you are talking. I take notes by hand and write down anything that is important" (Zoe's Response to the Questionnaire Regarding Online Learning, April 24, 2020). From Zoe's perspective, she had been first told to write down notes regarding the various topics from *The Catcher in the Rye*. She would have thus switched to her notebook, taking her eyes and fingers away from the computer, and begun to write her notes. Then, she would have seen a message from me that chastised the class for limited participation. She next typed a response into the chat that responded to the first on the list of focal points I had written. The response was not in dialogue with her classmates or even me, per se, but in response to the school-based prompt of notetaking that I had assigned before. It was her way of demonstrating participation and of presenting herself as a "good" student.

The chat structure assumes dialogue; we are accustomed to reading a chat as if multiple people are talking in a conversation. After all, prototypical networked writing, as defined by Androutsopolous (2011), is 1) "vernacular, in the sense of non-institutional writing that is

located beyond education or professional control," 2) "interpersonal and relationship-focused rather than subject oriented," 3) "unplanned and spontaneous," and 4) "dialogical and interaction-oriented, carrying expectations of continuous exchange" (p. 1). However, in this class session, students vyed to show me that they were "good" pupils, and they did not follow the traditional conditions of networked writing. In this finding, I was not alone. Jocuns et al. (2020) likewise reported that teachers in China during the COVID-19 pandemic found that "communication within the online environment was more between teacher and student" and that "the move online had a negative impact on interaction between students" (p. 134). In my online session above, the meeting was a veritable 'worksheet' that was masquerading as a chat session, yet the technology, which presents itself as a 'discussion' in form and structure, obscured that fact.

In summary, my teacher-initiated formal "transitions" to different parts of the class bequeathed to me an unstated power, one that quieted informal discourse between students and instead summoned students to "perform" their best renditions of what it meant to them to appear to be a good student. These transitions also bring to light that just because a class session occurs within the confines of a "chat" that it does not by necessity yield authentic discourse; in fact, I imagine that a number of class sessions were facsimiles of question-and-answer worksheets but with the added onus of a timed response. I further believe that some students, surrounded by a sea of blackened screens and muted peers, engaged solely in conversation with me—the teacher—felt largely alone in a chat room filled with their peers. Since classroom literacy experiences centered on discussion-based approaches yield better student outcomes and more autonomy to complete difficult literacy tasks on their own (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003; Nystrand, 2006), the idea that the chat-based discourse may belie its own name

and not be authentic "chat" discussion is concerning. This suggests to me that social routines and habits around the technologies and tools of the ELA classroom may have been more at play in these class sessions than co-constructive meaning making.

Student-Initiated Transitions: Class Time is not for "Just Vibing"

From March to June in 2020, teachers in the Stone Valley School District had the latitude to choose when to have synchronous classes online and asynchronous classes in which students completed assigned work independently. Regardless of which a teacher chose to have on a particular day, the choice would appear to be purposeful to students. Work that was assigned asynchronously could be completed independently; likewise, when teachers brought students together for live, synchronous online class sessions, there was also an assumed rationale. Students' underlying assumptions about synchronous classes emerged during one online Period 1 class session on April 30.

To begin this class, over the first fifteen minutes, I had simply engaged with students—it had been a few days since we had our last class session, and I wanted to give them an opportunity to chat, share their thoughts, and connect with their classmates. The conversation ranged from what video games students were playing to how one student was coping with a parent who worked in a hospital and had to socially distance from their own family. While discussing when someone should get tested for COVID-19, one student suddenly asked why we had met for the conference in the first place:

> **[10:07] Chloe:** so what exactly was the whole point of this conferece or are we just
>
> vibing
>
> **[10:08] Carlos:** everything up till the disaster seemed so good. It look like his chances
>
> seemed rlly good. But now not so much.

[10:09] Chloe: it's ironic that you said "it doesn't seem like something he thought about" cuz honestly it seems like he's thought out every situation up until this point

(Synchronous Class Session, Period 1, April 30, 2020)

Chloe's question—"so what exactly was the whole point of this conferece or are we just vibing"—came 15 minutes into the class, a period of time long enough to distinguish it from the normal phatic greetings that would often mark the beginning of a class session. Up to this point, Chloe had been participating fully in that day's discussion, one of the most prolific users of the chat box. She had also been primarily writing to one of her classmates, Carlos. This message, though, had a different intended recipient. It was written with the belief that the conference was held in order to accomplish some task that needed to be done in a live lesson, for having a synchronous conference took more volition than the asynchronous alternative. The message also suggested that Chloe presumed that what had been occurring in class, what Chloe called "just vibing", was not likely to be the purpose of a live class conference.

Chloe, in fact, established a binary: on one hand, there could have been a purpose to the class that I was intending to enact, but on the other hand, "we"—including me—could be "just vibing". The use of the collective pronoun "we" was used in relation to the more meandering, directionless communication that had signified the beginning of the class period. By way of this pronoun, I was temporarily included as part of the collective whole, one of the many nodes communicating with one another in the chat box. "We" was not, however, written into the other side: it was absent when referencing the purposeful, intended meaning behind the conference. This suggests that although it was possible for discussion that was less determined by hierarchical positions to occur, the specter of "purpose" always lingered in the shadow of the

teacher. My presence as teacher brought with it assumptions about why we were all together, for

I was the one who convened the meeting in the first place. Formal assignments and activities

were part of the social routines of school, Chloe was suggesting, and without those, the class

conference had no purpose. In fact, it was not even a class: it was "just vibing".

Chloe's message was written in response to what she assumed to be absent within the

class session, a missing teacher-initiated transition that had defined classes she had experienced

before and therefore expected to encounter again. Her message, although she did not appear to

intend it to have this effect, functioned practically as a fulcrum that began a transition into a

more topical discussion. Moments after she wrote her message, I asked students aloud about the

novel they had been reading, *The Martian* by Andy Weir. Her message had prompted this

transition, but it was I who had been spurred to bring the class to a discussion of school

assignments. As the teacher of the class, after all, I was both an embodiment of and responsible

for school routines.

Student Initiated Transitions: What "Should" Students be Doing?

Although teacher-initiated transitions were the rule of online class sessions, in their

absence, some students brought transitions about themselves. Like Chloe, other students on

different days and in other class periods wrote messages that initiated a change to a new topic.

On June 1, 2020, amid the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic and the social justice

movement against the murder of George Floyd, my Period 6 students discussed with one another

the protests that had been occurring in cities across the U.S. It became clear that some held very

different perspectives on the protests, particularly the violence and looting that had characterized

some of the protests during that time. Earlier in the school year, we had read and discussed

Henry David Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience*, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s *Letter from a Birmingham*

Jail, and Malcom X's *The Ballot or the Bullet*. As I read the discussion, I was thrilled as an educator to see my students connect the topics of our class to their understanding of the world:

> **[08:01] Alice:** I agree I believe the looting is unneccesary however I think its been clear that peaceful protests aren't working anymore, and at many of the protests the police started the violence
>
> **[08:01] Niall:** I was thinking of the our unit on MLK jr. and Thoreau and was wondering what happened to peaceful protest.
>
> **[08:02] Alice:** I mean while there was MLK there was also Malcom X and the black oanthers
>
> **[08:02] Alice:** they took the more aggressive aproach
>
> **[08:02] Mr. Toncic:** I'm glad you were thinking about that, Niall, so was I. I was thinking about 'The Ballot or the Bullet" speech by Malcolm X and Letter from a Birmingham Jail.
>
> **[08:02] Maya:** yea and didn't malcom X believe that violence was necessary at some point
>
> **[08:02] Alice:** ^^
>
> **[08:03] Niall:** MLK was arguably more affective
>
> **[08:03] Alice:** I know but that isn't to say Malcom X didn't make a significant impact as well
>
> (Synchronous Class Session, Period 6, June 1, 2020)

Occurring within the first 15 minutes of class—prior to a teacher-initiated transition to a formal school assignment—this open discussion was not formally "school work," and there were no

grades or expectations. I did not ask students to engage in the discussion, nor did I task them with having the discussion, although I did take part in it in a limited way.

One initially striking feature of the discussion was the pace at which it occurred. Users typed rapidly throughout the two or so minutes captured above, writing a total of 136 words. Speed is one of the defining features of chat-based communication, and it is one of the characteristics most conspicuously absent after transitions to school material. Furthermore, students wrote multiple messages rather than just one. They clarified their meaning and responded to their peers. After Niall brought up our earlier classes on Martin Luther King, Jr. and Henry David Thoreau, Alice quickly responded, "I mean while there was MLK there was also Malcom X and the black oanthers", and then added a second message, "they took the more aggressive aproach". Alice defended her earlier arguments with these messages, countering Niall's overly generalized statement about peaceful protest. Alice did what I had also tried to do, but she responded more quickly. My message was written more formally and, consequently, appeared later: "I'm glad you were thinking about that, Niall, so was I. I was thinking about 'The Ballot or the Bullet" speech by Malcolm X and Letter from a Birmingham Jail." I did not explicitly state that I disagreed with Niall, for I wanted to encourage critical thinking and to not overly emphasize my own perspective lest students might be afraid to speak up if their positions were oppositional to my own. Instead, I offered the suggestion that both Martin Luther King, Jr.'s writings *and* Malcolm X's writings might be applicable here.

Alice and I had different goals. As a student of equal position to that of her intended audience, she sought to convey her argument using what she saw to be a convincing piece of evidence: material from earlier in the school that Niall had overlooked. From my position as teacher, however, I chose to write in a way that did not directly impose my own thoughts about

the social justice protests onto my students, instead attempting to remind Niall about the work we had learned in class; still, it is possible that some students may have gleaned my sentiments from this and other comments made throughout the school year. Much like my message to Cora discussed in the previous section (Synchronous Class Session, Period 3, May 28, 2020, 10:23-10:25), I positioned myself as someone who was "reminding" students of material that they had already reviewed. In both cases, I was writing directly to a particular student, so it seems likely that this move was meant to both avoid an explicit statement that the student was wrong or made a mistake. These messages also, however, emphasized the continuity of my class's history: it was not enough to respond in the moment, but I expected—and made that expectation clear in messages such as these—for students to bring to discussions what had been learned before. When Maya then responded "yea and didn't malcom X believe that violence was necessary at some point", she both supported Alice's point and demonstrated her reflective thinking. Unlike Maya, however, she couched her phrasing in the form of a question, a hedge against the possibility that she was wrong. This discursive move may have emerged because of the adjacency of my message. Regardless, Alice responded "^^", a message that indicated support of or agreement with a message directly above the writer's message. The caret symbol can be quickly deployed, so it was likely that the user's message would achieve the desired adjacency that would be unlikely in a larger message. Alice and Maya were now collaborating and building off of one another to develop their argument.

Over the next eight minutes, the dialogue continued between students, as they discussed real world current affairs vis-a-vis curricular material, such as the Boston Tea Party. At 8:12 a.m., however, over 20 minutes into the official start of the period, two students initiated a

transition to curricular material in the midst of the continuing discussion over the social justice

protests:

> **[08:11] Niall:** The governments for the most part have been trying to listen to the
>
> > protesters. They punished the officer who killed George Floyd, and they
> >
> > are already trying to train officers so that this doesn't happen again.
>
> **[08:11] Maria:** okay I understand they are hurt and they have the right to be hurt but why
>
> > is the solution to hurt other people that does not make much sense to me
> >
> > at least
>
> **[08:11] Maya:** Yes but you can not control people. Just because that training takes place,
>
> > doesnt mean it won't happen again
>
> **[08:12] Alice:** I agree Maya
>
> **[08:12] Katie:** Mr Toncic what chapters should we be reading
>
> **[08:12] Mr. Toncic:** We can keep discussing the real world events, but let me add a
>
> > different dimension.
>
> > Over the weekend, you were supposed to read Chapter 2 of The
> >
> > Catcher in the Rye. Let's start there. What did you notice in the
> >
> > chapter? What stood out to you? What questions were raised?
> >
> > What was unclear?
>
> **[08:12] Amber:** Yeah are we supposed to be reading the book right now?
>
> (Synchronous Class Session, Period 6, June 1, 2020, 08:11-08:12)

Maria had joined Niall in arguing against the violent aspects of the social justice protests, and

although the four were apparently disagreeing on the finer points of protest, they seemed to agree

on the underlying need for protest. They were, in other words, at differing points on the political

spectrum, but they were both based in liberal ideologies.

While political ideologies might ordinarily not play a role in a discourse analysis of

classroom discussion, the polarizing subject matter at the heart of this conversation suggests that

it is relevant. Notably, the two students—Katie and Amber—who would then initiate the

transition to schoolwork came from families with conservative viewpoints. Katie, for example,

had often arrived at school driven by her mother who had displayed a "Make America Great

Again" cap in the back windshield of her car. Amber was her best friend in the English Language

Arts class, and they had sat near each other whenever possible before the building had closed.

Neither of them had been overtly political in the past, though. In this class period, they had

avoided taking part in the discussion altogether. Then, in the midst of her classmates' discussion,

Katie wrote, "Mr Toncic what chapters should we be reading". Her message was directed at me,

using my name with its formal title to identify her audience. Katie was not asking her classmates

or taking part in the discussion; she made it clear that she wanted the teacher to respond.

Furthermore, her phrasing of "should we be reading" was written with the assumption that the

conversation currently happening in the class session was not what "should" be happening in the

class session but rather extracurricular, beyond the scope of the class. Furthermore, by writing

my name and then switching to the word "we," Katie positioned me as the "other" in the class,

the one (i.e., "Mr Toncic") who could impose what students ("we") should be doing in

accordance with the curriculum. Katie's phrasing of "should we" also seemed to presume that I

would agree with her (i.e., that students should have been completing work on the current novel,

and the conversation about social justice was beyond the bounds of class).

Unbeknownst to Katie at the time, I had already written my questions for the class regarding the second chapter of *The Catcher in the Rye*, but I had intentionally not sent them as a message into the chat because I did not want to interrupt the ongoing conversation. With Katie's message, however, I felt that I either had to explain that what was occurring was materially related to the class, even though it was a free-flowing discussion that I had not initiated myself, or I would have to transition to the curricular material. The point of the matter is that doing the former is significantly harder than the latter, for students come with certain expectations about what a class (and, in particular, our class) would be like, and when certain activities transcended the expected habits and routines of a classroom, they were perceived by some as transgressions against the class's intrinsic structure rather than as beneficial alterations or additions. I was additionally aware that Katie's mother held a position of authority in the school district, one that impacted me directly—and with students learning at home during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was altogether possible that my audience included not only the students who were logged in to the class session but also others in their proximity, as well, including individuals like her mother who held direct sway over my employment. My message in reply to Katie, therefore, attempted to strike a balanced tone, one that would permit the ongoing discussion of the protests and also broach curricular material related to the students' homework. Although the conversation regarding the protests in honor of George Floyd continued briefly, they gradually vanished in lieu of the discussion of *The Catcher in the Rye*:

> **[08:13] Niall:** Also we are missing the main point, which is that this is not a protest. This
> is senseless violence. People are angry, which they ought to be, and they
> are taking it out violently. Stealing stuff from a store does not prove
> anything about police brutality, but a picture of police firing on a peaceful

protest does.

[08:13] Maria: I agree with niall

[08:13] Lisa: it's not just black and white (pun somewhat intended)

[08:13] Alice: They aren't "senseless protests" they are doing it to get the attention from the government they have been trying to get that peaceful protests have not been accomplishing

[08:14] Joel: I have a question about Chapter 2... We previously discussed that the narrator is in a home with his brother and that this story is told through flashbacks. However when Holden was talking to Mr. Spencer he says that he was 16 at the time, but know he was 17. Was this part of the story not told through flashbacks or is this the current age of Holden?

[08:14] Joel: *now

[08:14] Maria: This should not be the type of attention they want, the government will not want to help people that are trying to ruin cities

[08:14] Mr. Toncic: Holden is 17 years old when he's "telling" the story, but he's 16 when the events are unfolding in the narrative.

[08:15] Lacey: I noticed that Holden repeated himself a lot when he spoke. Like he would say the same thing multiple times in a sentence. I don't know if that means anything but it happened a few times.

[08:15] Aidan: When Holden's history teacher read his essay on Egypt, Holden was uncomfortable that it was read out loud. I just thought it was interesting that he is fine with failing everything, but still feels some kind of shame when he hears the low effort work that he writes out loud

[08:15] Alice: Yes but what help have they gotten in the past from peaceful protests

[08:15] Joel: Is Holden ill then?

[08:15] Joel: Or is the "home" considered to be his house.

[08:15] Mr. Toncic: You're right, Aidan. He also knew that it was terrible---it wasn't a matter of the material or work being beyond him.

[08:15] Lisa: Holden was being slightly hypocritical every time he said something that annoyed him about Mr. Spencer

(Synchronous Class Session, Period 6, June 1, 2020, 08:13-08:15)

Reading the class discussion in retrospect and seeing discussion of the contemporary social justice protests fizzle out in lieu of the 1951 novel, I cannot help but feel disappointed. *The Catcher in the Rye* has been a frequently banned or challenged book over the years because it contains material that was found by some to be controversial, yet here it was, instead, sterilizing the conversation, removing discussions of current events, equity, and police reform, and replacing them with an innocuous Q&A about a rich, white boy in a boarding school traversing a seemingly monocultural New York City. The curricular material functioned as a shelter from real world discussion, a place of safety from controversy, disagreement, and the unknown, which offered, instead, clear answers that could be shared by the teacher. Much like the student-initiated transition brought about by Chloe in the Period 1 class, Katie's statement also signified students' understanding that classes that did not contain curricular material were functionally transgressions from the norm, breaking the unwritten rules of what should be happening in a class session. Notably, both classes had been discussing current events. In Chloe's class session, students had been conversing about the coronavirus pandemic; in Katie's class session, her

classmates had been discussing the protests around the killing of George Floyd. In both instances, the relevant and contemporary ultimately gave way to the curricular.

The transitional shift initiated by Katie and seconded by her friend, Amber, gradually subsumed the entire conversation about social justice. At first, the two continued in parallel. For example, just after Alice contended that the protests were not "pointless," Joel asked a question about Chapter 2 of *The Catcher in the Rye*. He began his message with "I have a question about Chapter 2…" Ellipses, when used by writers who are part of the younger generation, often are being deployed semantically, a way of implying an unstated idea (McCulloch, 2019). In this case, the ellipses likely signified Joel's intended tone as he tentatively 'voiced' a question about the literature into a chat space that had been, up to that point, used predominantly to discuss social justice protests. What exactly was left unsaid in that message or the intent that Joel had, however, is impossible to presume. Functionally, the ellipses helped to inject his question about literature into the stream of discussion on social justice protests. It was, perhaps, a hesitant apology to his peers, yet it also was unflinching—his question followed in the very same message. He did not wait for the go-ahead from me, or approval from his peers, before writing it. The ellipses, therefore, also served as a way of separating the intention of his post—announcing that it would have to do with the novel instead of social justice—from the question itself. It was a tag that identified it as dissimilar from adjacent messages.

Joel's next message, the repair move of writing "*now" to clarify a misspelling in the phrase "he was 16 at the time, but know he was 17", further suggests that he had moved away from his peers' social justice conversation. From 7:57 (when the conversation about protests began) to 8:14 (when Joel made a correction with the asterisked message), not a single other repair had been made, despite the fact that at least five other misspellings were written (e.g.,

"black *oanthers*", "*they* ocean was kinda ruined", "those who are most affected *my* covid", "they *arennt* getting treated right", and "the already *exisitng* problems with racism" [emphasis added]). The difference, then, seems to be the context in which the writing happened. During the dialogic conversation about protesting among classmates, students did not use repair to fix minor misspellings. The use of repair signals that the writer was aware of certain normative expectations and standards for message composition (Drew, Walker, & Ogden, 2011), so the sudden presence of repair after its long absence suggests that a more subtle transition had occurred. The social context of the chat had changed.

When students began to write about *The Catcher in the Rye*, students who had been discussing the social justice protests no longer maintained that parallel conversation. However, in most chatrooms, many different conversational threads can occur simultaneously without interlocutors being confused. The final message on the topic of protests was at 8:15, a question from Alice that ultimately was never answered: "Yes but what help have they gotten in the past from peaceful protests". Notably, none of those who had been involved in this conversation wrote again, except for Maya who, in the very last message of the class session, wrote "thank you," a phatic farewell, which, as previously discussed, likely aligns with students' perceptions of what it means to be a "good" student. The gradual cessation of the social justice protest conversation was, after all, unnatural. It ended with a question that was never answered; there was no concern about overlap, for individuals could have engaged in multiple threads simultaneously without confusion; and I had explicitly written permission for the topic to continue.

The reason that the discussion of the protests stopped, I believe, is that the language of school had reasserted social routines around novels at this point; I do not mean the quasi-formal,

academic style of writing that most students had already been doing, even when discussing the protests. Instead, I mean the social routines that are languaged into being by students and teachers by certain discursive moves: the way in which teachers and students enact school through particular linguistic patterns. School, I have contended, is not primarily a place, but rather a set of patterns enacted through discourse. The institution of school was languaged into being when, for example, Katie had asked what she and her classmates should have been reading. It manifested itself in the repair that Joel suddenly found necessary to make. Once students were aware that a school-based topic was being discussed, to continue to write about the protests would have been beyond the curriculum. And being a "good" student—as Katie had suggested, they were 'supposed' to be doing work assigned by the teacher—meant conforming to the expectations of school. Notably, this does not mean that their conversation about protests had been unacademic or written in a way that had eschewed school-based Discourse, which I use here in the sense of Gee (2007, 2011), for much of their writing still maintained the style and tone associated with school-based writing. It highlights to me that authentic social learning, epitomized by students co-constructing knowledge dialogically, struggles in the traditional class session—brought about by discursive moves that language it into being—which asserts a hierarchy in which each student, rather than engaging in conversation, instead performs what it means (to them) to be a "good" student for the grading eyes of the teacher, or they slip into anonymity by writing nothing at all. Better to not exist, the silence suggests, than to openly transgress the standard. Much of the time, there was no 'chat' in the chatbox: there were messages, certainly, but these messages could hardly be qualified as authentic chat. They were discursive performances of identities as each student jockeyed for my attention. The language of school implicitly subjugates other Discourses; it demands adherence to a certain "school"

standard language for those who wish to perform the identity of "good" student, which in Stone

Valley School District, one of the top performing schools in the State of New Jersey, included

many of the students in attendance (compare with Bucholtz, 1999).

Transitions as Social Routines around Novels

English Language Arts classes at Stone Valley High School, like those of many other

high schools, comprise a curriculum of writing and reading. One of the traditional components of

Stone Valley High School's curriculum is the centering of novels as the focal point of many of

the lessons. It was also inextricably related to time and identity for some students in my classes.

In late April, for example, one student asked whether the next novel that we were to be reading,

The Catcher in the Rye, would be the final book of the year—this question coming two months

prior to the calendrical end of the school year:

> **[14:39] Aidan:** i just realized, is this the last thing we're reading this year?

> (Synchronous Class Session, Period 6, April 23, 2020, 14:39)

Aidan's statement underscored numerous tacit expectations for an English Language Arts class:

novels would take numerous weeks to read since the act of reading was punctuated by discussion

and assignments, all students would be reading the same book, and reading the novel precluded

other types of reading. By asking whether the novel was the final "*reading* [emphasis added]"

this year, Aidan seemed to make an epistemological statement about English Language Arts

classes. For one, all academic classes regularly engaged in reading at Stone Valley High School.

Secondly, Aidan could have used any number of similar words in this context (e.g., studying,

learning, using, practicing). The fact that Aidan used the word "reading" might suggest that he

perceived English Language Arts to be a school subject that epistemologically entailed the joint

act of moving sequentially through a novel over an extended period of time. The social routines

around the teaching technology of the novel, therefore, might be said to define much of what schooling in English Language Arts meant to students like Aidan. To triangulate this conclusion as much as possible without student interviews, I compared this message Aidan's answers to the questionnaire I gave students as a class assignment the next day. Aidan wrote that our Advanced English class was "able to do most of what we usually do," that it was "something similar to what would be done in school," and that he was "okay with the current situation" (Aidan's Response to the Questionnaire Regarding Online Learning, April 24, 2020). If Aidan were considering English Language Arts as a subject whose class sessions were predetermined in large part as reading a novel over time—an act both individual (for students read independently, even if in the same room) and collective (as they are simultaneously reading the same parts of the book)—then he had already perceived our class as a function of time and processes rather than one of space. It thus is sensible that he did not identify much interruption to what he had come to understand English Language Arts class as. The class*room* may have been displaced, but the temporal social routines around school objects (i.e., the novel in this case) remained as the determining factor of the class schedule and future curriculum.

For other students in Stone Valley High School, as well, reading a novel appeared at times to be the defining quality of our English Language Arts class. When the Period 6 Advanced English class was, for example, openly debating the murder of George Floyd by a police officer, two students who were not participating in the conversation wrote the previously shared messages that implied that English Language Arts classes were "supposed" to be structured around books:

[08:12] **Katie:** Mr Toncic what chapters should we be reading

…

[08:12] Amber: Yeah are we supposed to be reading the book right now?

(Synchronous Class Session, Period 6, June 1, 2020, 08:12)

Within this series of messages, the two students made an assertion as to what they believed an English Language Arts class was supposed to be: the supposition was that English courses should progress by reading different literature, which then indirectly determined the schedule and class topics. It also presumed that what they saw as aberrations from this overall structure were not what was "supposed to be" occurring.

Although some academic researchers have written before about how students who come from certain types of families have advantages because their linguistic patterns more closely match those performed in school settings (cf. S.B. Heath, 1983), I think what this data also suggests is that "good" students understand the behaviors and social routines that linguistic transitions in schools demand of them. They know, for example, that a transition to academic work means a cessation of conversation with peers, that they should initiate conversation directly with the teacher. They understand that classes follow certain patterns and, when those patterns do not emerge, they create them. This is not to be confused with a desire for learning, though. It is an obeisance to the social routines of school enacted through discursive practices of teachers and students. And it continues to be done even when students in the class sessions seemed to be breaking grammar and spelling rules; even when they brought in the typographical features of texting and online forums; even when they deployed emoticons, kaomojis, and emojis; and even when one wrote a curse word in the middle of a class session.

NoNtRaDiTiOnAl DISCOURSE 😛

Within a classroom setting, one might assume that even casual writing in the chat would largely conform to the standards of a traditional essay in which students follow grammar rules,

craft sentences in objective and abstract voices, and provide evidence for their claims or thoughtful questions. This expectation does hold true in part, for students often generally followed grammar paradigms and syntax while discussing topics largely 'appropriate' for a Grade 10 class. Yet even in the two English 10 Advanced class periods (3 and 6) reported in this study, students—who often signaled that they were 'good' students to me—frequently transgressed, albeit in small ways, the expected norms of the academic essay and used discourse variations that might be otherwise unexpected in a classroom context.

Acronyms

In any synchronous online chat, being a part of the conversation requires messages to be relevant and, therefore, produced and submitted quickly. As a consequence, acronyms— shortening of words or phrases into representative letters—play a role in this type of communication. For the sake of this discourse analysis, I eschew acronyms that are not associated with online discourse (e.g. NASA, BLM). Examples of relevant acronyms that appeared across the class sessions included the following: np ("no problem"), omg ("oh my god"), btw ("by the way"), ik ("I know"), jk ("just kidding"), ofc ("of course"), lol ("laughing out loud"), wth ("what the hell"), thot ("that ho over there"), ec ("extra credit"), and lmao ("laugh my ass off"). All occurrences of acronyms were student generated; I did not use acronyms in my writing, which suggests that, on one hand, I intentionally tried to maintain a formal tone in my writing, for I have used acronyms in informal writing, and on the other hand, that students did not always try to write in a formal, essay-like way.

Discourse analysis, by definition, requires 'discourse' to be practiced; however, discourse is a dynamic practice that comprises both written messages, the style of those messages, and meaningful silences within the discourse. Although much of my discourse analysis has looked at

smaller representative instances within class conversations, I want to zoom out to the perspective

of the larger context of all class sessions to note one particular type of silence. In online

discourse, there are certain high frequency words or acronyms that appear ubiquitously across all

different types of chats, for example the acronym *brb* (literally "be right back," although the

usage can be far more nuanced than that alone) (Freiermuth, 2015). Despite the high usage of

"brb" in other contexts, it was never used whatsoever during the 47 class sessions. The absence

of this otherwise mundane acronym hints at differences between traditional chatrooms and the

way that the classroom Public Chat. In the prototypical chatroom, the acronym *brb* is used to

indicate to other interlocutors that the individual's pursuant silence is to be interpreted as the

absence of that person from the chat space, not as though they are ignoring what the other

individual is saying. It is a prosocial type of message, one that shows the writer is aware that

silence will be an aberration from their usual behavior. By explaining that silence beforehand,

they seek to explain that silence in a way that is socially acceptable. The use of *brb* also indicates

that the user intends to be away for what they perceive as a short period of time, although this is

a subjective measurement. It is analogous to someone excusing themself from a conversation to

use the restroom.

What Was Said by an Acronym that Was Never Used

Since students did not have their cameras or microphones on, it was impossible for me to

know when or if students were present. But it would be misguided to assume that, throughout the

47 class sessions, not one of the 50 students excused themself from their computer to attend to

something else. However, when doing so, students never used the acronym *brb*. I consider this

missing acronym to be further evidence that what transpired in many of the class sessions was

not authentic chat or discussion but rather traditional classroom recitation exercises in the guise

of conversations (cf. Backer, 2017). When users type *brb* into a chat, they are signaling to the other party that they are going to be absent: yet in an educational setting, when one traditionally has to ask the teacher permission to leave the physical classroom, to type *brb* into the chat is to excuse oneself from class, undermining the teacher's traditional authority. Additionally, typing *brb* draws attention to one's absence. I have already discussed how messages written into the chat were often phrased in ways that made their writers appear as "good students"; a message of *brb* would risk the opposite, that the teacher would then become aware of a specific student's absence. To write a message meant to emerge from silent anonymity, so to announce one's temporary lack of presence in a way that asserts one's presence seems counterintuitive. Lastly, the acronym *brb* is used when one is engaged in conversation, when one's silence would be anomalous within the context of the chat and thus needs to be explained beforehand. However, when the default is silence, as was the case in these class sessions, the absence does not need to be pre-explained before it occurs. If individuals can leave without a word and return without anyone being the wiser, it would be inaccurate to call what was occurring a conversation, discussion, or chat. Instead, it is more like temporarily exiting a darkened movie theater to use the bathroom: one leaves in the shadows and the show goes on.

Implying a Shared Understanding with Acronyms

In the cases of other acronyms beyond *brb*, the vast majority of acronym usage was from the Period 6 class, eclipsing the other two classes, combined, in acronym usage by an almost 4-to-1 ratio. In fact, one student who used ten acronym usages alone tallied double the total usages in the Period 1 and 3 classes. These findings are surprising, for they suggest that although students occasionally used acronyms, they largely avoided them in their writing across the three class periods. Furthermore, the fact that the preponderance of usages were in one class—and

indeed one person—implies that the individual culture of a class period is likely to impact how students communicate during class periods. Overall, it appeared that non-standard usages tended to give rise to additional non-standard usages. When students used acronyms, others were more likely to join them. For example, seven of the 25 occurrences of acronyms occurred in a single class period, the Period 6 class session on April 17, 2020.

The use of acronyms implies a shared culture since it assumes that other chat participants know what these letters imply. That is not, however, always the case. For example, when a student asked the meaning of *ec*, "extra credit," an acronym that one of his classmates had used which was previously described. At other times, some students used acronyms differently than their classmates interpreted them, such as when one student wrote the acronym "lol" during a heated discussion about the social justice movement and the George Floyd protests. One student, Carmen, had been writing arguments in support of the Black Lives Matter movement and its ideology, while Henry and, to a lesser extent, Tobias, took positions that pushed back against the progressive ideologies she was supporting. At the end of one message, Carmen wrote "lol," which Henry then used to question her empathy and attack her (rather than her position):

> **[10:49] Carmen:** That proves the point. There shouldnt ever be someone shot to death or
> killed in any way because of their skin lol

> **[10:49] Henry:** lol

> **[10:49] Henry:** lol means laughing out loud

> **[10:49] Tobias:** But saying that there are no white people who are disliked fro their skin
> color is not valid

> **[10:49] Henry:** you are talking about someone getting shot for their skin color and just
> said lol

> **[10:50] Mr. Toncic:** I'll keep this room open, but class time is wrapping up. I posted
>
> your reading assignment for next class on Schoology.
>
>
> To me, this conversation has been far more important to have today
>
> than artificially discussing TCitR.
>
> **[10:50] Kimberly:** TOBIAS! White privilege, please please think about it.
>
> **[10:50] Carmen:** uh henry i said lol because the counterpoint to what i was saying is
>
> ridiculous
>
> **[10:51] Demi:** I think this was important too, have a good day
>
> (Synchronous Class Session, Period 3, June 2, 2020, 10:49-10:51)

Certainly, one might interpret *lol* explicitly as "laughing out loud" with the action implied by the

acronym read quite literally. Carmen, however, had used "lol" ironically, emphasizing later in

her reply that she "said lol because the counterpoint to what [she] was saying [was] ridiculous".

To me, Henry's misinterpretation seems forced, a rejoinder on syntax rather than on substance.

As Gretchen McCulloch wrote in her exploration of online discourse, *Because Internet*,

"Including 'lol' indicates there's a second layer of meaning to be found, telling the recipient to

look beyond the literal words you're saying" (McCulloch, 2019, p. 105). Only very rarely is lol

used to represent actual laughter aloud; instead, lol has joined the category of emblems like

emoji and emoticon, which will be discussed later in this section. Carmen's ironic use of lol was

written with trust in her audience that they would interpret correctly the irony of her comment.

Henry's misinterpretation, whether intentional or forced, is a transgression of the implicit trust in

Carmen's usage of the ironic "lol". If sharing in the implied ironic meaning of an expression is a

way for individuals to implicitly signal that they belong to the same Discourse community, then

misinterpreting that irony is a rejection of social bonhomie. Henry denied membership in

Carmen's group, and their disagreement never resolved.

At other times, though, acronyms bridged the gap between academic Discourse and

teenage Discourse in this particular group. For example, while discussing the complex, jezebel-

like character of Lady Brett Ashley in Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, one student in

the Advanced English 10 Period 6 class recast Lady Brett Ashley's infidelities in terms of the

modern acronym *thot* ("that ho over there"), a derogatory way of referring to a woman who has

many sexual partners:

> **[13:19] Mr. Toncic:** Lady Brett Ashley is married to Lord Ashley. She's in love with
>
> Jake Barnes. And she's engaged to Mike Campbell.
>
> **[13:20] Jacob:** So she's a thot?
>
> **[13:20] Niall:** of course
>
> **[13:20] Wesley:** yes jcob
>
> **[13:20] Wesley:** *jacob
>
> (Synchronous Class Session, Period 6, April 17 2020, 13:19-13:20)

The acronym *thot* is a problematic one, which will be discussed shortly, but first it is important

to consider whom Jacob had in mind as an audience when he wrote the message, "So she's a

thot?". Acronyms can be dated back to the ancient Romans who inscribed *SPQR* ("*Senatus*

Populusque Romanus") to refer to their government (McCulloch, 2019); the Latin script only

used capitals letters (as we call them today), so this may partially explain the vestiges of

capitalization that often accompanies acronyms today (e.g., NASA, USA, MIA, etc.).

Additionally, capitalization clarifies that the acronym is not and should not be read as a word but

rather as representing a phrase through its constituent first letters. However, this formal

capitalization did not occur in the data collected. In nearly all of the students' messages

throughout the data collected (there is just one instance when a student wrote *IRL* in capital

letters), students did not capitalize acronyms, instead writing them in lowercase letters.

Due to this change, these lowercase acronyms no longer read like acronyms; they read

like words. In fact, Jacob had used *thot* as if it were a noun rather than an acronym as well. If we

were to expand the acronym out, his message would instead read: "So she's a *that ho over*

there?". This phrasing no longer makes grammatical sense, but Jacob did not seemingly mean for

the audience to expand it out. Students, despite their occasional usage of non-academic

Discourse, still tended to follow syntax rules in the construction of their messages. Consequently,

Jacob appears to use *thot* as if it were a word itself, a synonym to "jezebel" but with a modern,

urban, and derogatory connotation. His usage matched the way the word had also been used by

popular music artists, such as the rap artist Shamir in his 2015 debut album, *Ratchet*. In the

album's debut single, *Call It Off*, Shamir raps that one "just can't make a thot a wife." Along the

same lines, Jacob's usage of *thot* is less about its acronymic form and more of its usage as a

noun—apparently a synonym for the derogatory term "slut" on some level. Jacob's audience,

therefore, would be those who would understand his usage of the term as members of a shared

Discourse community.

Notably, two boys responded affirmatively to Jacob's question as to whether Lady Brett

Ashley is a *thot* but no girls sent a message—although female students had been actively

participating up to that point. This may be because of the nature of the word and its social

implications: *thot* is a gendered acronym/word used only for women that criticizes female sexual

behavior. While a full exploration of gendered derogatory slang is beyond the scope of this

dissertation, it is worth briefly noting that vernacular that stigmatizes female sexual promiscuity

is much more common than that for males (McAlinden, 2018). Jacob's message thus perpetuated

notions of female promiscuity as being transgressive and improper; just as Western society had

named people as "witches" as a way of stigmatizing women who did not appear normal to the

powerful in society (Toncic, 2021), so too do words that castigate sexual promiscuity seek to

reinforce a gendered norm by negatively identifying its transgressors.

Despite this blatant sexism, in the case of Jacob's use of *thot*, no one expressed

disapproval (although I later show how other students did just that when a classmate wrote an

expletive). This may be that, by using *thot*, Jacob was also identifying Lady Brett Ashley as an

"other," one who did not meet the values of upper middle class propriety that students of Stone

Valley High School might hold, and so the derogatory term was not just cast on females

generally, but rather on a specific group of women. As Amanda Hess (2014), a writer for *Slate*,

put it, *thot* is not synonymous with slut because *thot* is "more about race and class than sex." As

it is used, someone identified as a *thot* not only is promiscuous but is also identified with both

cheapness and with blackness (ibid.). Indeed, sexually derogatory terms often narrowly define

women of color in degrading terms (Moody, 2012). Stone Valley High School was a school with

a predominant white majority, and there were no students who identified as black in this

particular class. In short, the acronym *thot* was a way for Jacob to "other" Lady Brett Ashley,

casting her in a negative light that his classmates might understand. It may have been ostensibly

an acronym, but Jacob's way of using *thot* semantically indicated how he wrote with a particular

audience in mind, one that did not, it seems likely, include me. As many of students' discursive

moves appeared to intentionally highlight their role as a "good" student to me, it seems

meaningful that one of the few occasions wherein students had their peers (generally, instead of

one specific person) as audience was a moment of transgression: using an acronym, a derogatory

one at that, which likely would be understood by individuals in a similar age and cultural group.

Emoticons as Illocutionary Force Markers

Part of the appeal of video conferencing, in theory, is the ability to communicate along

different channels: tone of voice, for instance. Yet during the online class sessions, students did

not turn on their multimedia equipment (i.e., microphones and video cameras), so their words

were almost always typed out in the chat box. Despite the auditory silence, students were still

able to convey tone through typographical choices, such as repeated letters (see the discussion on

the message "ohhhh" in the section **Teacher-Initiated Transitions**). However, not only can

one's words convey meaning in spoken dialogue, but so too can, for example, the accompanying

body language, such as facial affect and gestures.

Without cameras on, there were limitations to how students could convey their messages;

for that matter, there were days when I, too, typed instead of spoke to my students. In these

cases, despite the missing presence of an actual body, writers in the chat were able to

nevertheless make use of another channel of expression—one similar to the "gestures" of faces

and hands (see Gawne & McCulloch, 2019, p. 3; McCulloch, 2019, p. 158)—in the forms of

emoticon, kaomoji, and emoji. Although the three are distinct, their differences are more

chronological, geographical, and technical than differentiated by usage. In short, emoticons and

kaomojis preceded emoji, repurposing punctuation marks and letters into the semblances of

faces. Emoticons, more prevalent in the West, were first used in 1982 and feature a horizontal

orientation of the face (i.e., :-)). Kaomojis, a portmanteau of the Japanese words *kao* (face) and

moji (character), were functionally similar but aesthetically different: unlike emoticons, they

have a vertical orientation (i.e., ^_^). Emojis, a small digital image expressive of a certain thing

or idea, appeared most recently. One noteworthy characteristic of emojis is the universality of its images, which was not always the case—only through the integration of Unicode were different devices able to "speak" to one another and display the same image, so a sender's intended meaning was not misinterpreted when a recipient viewed a different-looking emoji image. However, a device or interface needs to be programmed to automatically convert text into emojis, and BigBlueButton did not auto-convert, although it could display emojis if it were input into the chat box by some other means. Consequently, students and I were limited to sharing emoticons and kaomojis with one another, except in rare circumstances in which students either wrote out the emojis (e.g., *smiling emoji*) or inserted it into the chat, using either copy/paste or a mobile device with an emoji-compatible keyboard, which I will discuss later.

Emoticons were by far the most prolific of the three forms of digital gesture, representing nearly all of the usages. That said, though, across the 47 online class sessions and thousands of messages, emoticons appeared a paltry 30 times. And of those 30 iterations, I was the one who used them most: 23 times in total. In other words, although I represented just 2% of the participants, my emoticon usage was 76% of the total—and there were class sessions in which I rarely typed at all, opting instead to speak aloud. There are a variety of factors that could be at play here—age being one of them (Tagliamonte, 2020; Verheijen, 2015)—but I believe the most salient to be my role as teacher. As they are used, emoticons do not convey the way someone's face looks while writing a message. When writing :), I was not telling students that I was physically smiling. Emoticons, instead, are "illocutionary force markers" that can indicate "pro-social intention on the part of the speaker" (Gawne & McCulloch, 2019, p. 16; cf. Dresner & Herring, 2010; Herring & Dainas, 2017). In this way, emoticons help convey the intent of the writer, just as gestures in the physical world might suggest a speaker's meaning (Austin, 1975).

Much of my personal usage of emoticons was to do just this, pair my text with a signal of the intention of the message to lessen the likelihood of misinterpretation. For example, during a June 5 class session with my Period 6 class, students were discussing their upcoming weekend plans when one student used the word "less" where, according to Standard English grammar rules, the word "fewer" would have been a better fit. This type of ostensible misuse is one that I would frequently overlook or ignore, but in this particular class, I had taught students earlier in the year about the formal distinction between these two words, "fewer" being for countable things and "less" being for those that were not countable. In this particular instance, I corrected the student but also followed up the message with a second one containing a :) emoticon:

[07:52] Jessie: it not illegal if it is less than 25 people and social distanced

[07:52] Joel: ^

[07:52] Chelsea: ^^

[07:52] Wesley: no jessie thats just for memorial day

[07:52] Mr. Toncic: Fewer* (not less)

[07:52] Mr. Toncic: :)

(Synchronous Class Session, Period 6, June 5, 2020, 07:52)

In this exchange, I used the :) emoticon as an illocutionary force marker to clarify the intent of my message (Dresner & Herring, 2010), for as the teacher, a grammatical correction may have been construed by students as a form of judgement or grading. That is, I was aware of the authority with which my messages were packaged. I did not want my message to yield silence in the future in response to my correction, so by pairing it with the emoticon, I sought to indicate to the student that this was meant to be a friendly reminder of the difference between the two

comparative adjectives. Nevertheless, I am also aware that I was acting in a way that identified Standard English as "correct" and thus marked other usage as "incorrect."

Earlier, I noted that, as the teacher, I had used emoticons far more than my students. Although there were occasions when students used emoticons on their own initiative or before I did, I found that students were more likely to use emoticons in those class sessions when I had already written one. In the aforementioned class session, for example, a few minutes after I wrote my message correcting Jessie's comparative adjective, a different student wrote a message paired with the same :) emoticon:

> **[07:56] Wesley:** guys today you can vote for ur class officers
>
> **[07:56] Wesley:** i just did
>
> **[07:56] Joel:** ^vote for me thomas lacie and Chelsea :)
>
> (Synchronous Class Session, Period 6, June 5, 2020, 07:56)

Joel's message incorporated the :) emoticon in a similar fashion as my own earlier usage. Paired with the text in which he semantically commands that classmates vote for him and his peers to be class officers, the smiley face seems to soften the imperative sentence. Interestingly, Joel's message and its illocutionary force marker of the smiley face emoticon were also used in the context of power, for Joel requested that others grant him and his peers positions of authority.

Within this classroom session, the smiley face may have been a reflection on one's own position and status relative to others in the classroom. Its usage was prosocial in the sense that it continued future dialogue. In short, neither my own nor Joel's conversational goal was to obtain only what was ostensibly expressed in our messages (i.e., correcting grammar or getting votes) but to contribute these messages within the context of an *ongoing* conversation—and to keep that conversation going. The :) emoticon was reflective, used when the writer recognized how the

message could be interpreted by its readers. It was, perhaps, a way of dispelling power, or,

perhaps, of exercising one's power in a socially acceptable way.

      Whereas the :) emoticon appeared to be used by individuals who wanted to mitigate the

apparent authority expressed within a message, the :(emoticon was used by one student as a way

of responding to a perceived expression of judgement. During a Period 1 class at the end of

April, one of my students shared that she had been playing the video game Team Fortress 2. I

was familiar with the game, for my brother had often played the game (which was originally

released in 2007). After she mentioned the game, I expressed my surprise that she was playing a

game that was more than 13 years old. Her response incorporated the :(emoticon, perhaps as a

way of deflecting some of the perceived judgement she felt:

    [09:58] Chloe: it's fun no judgy :(

I realized that she had perceived my statement as unfriendly, so I spoke a subtle, humorous

comment to one of the gameplay features. My response elicited a different type of typography

from Chloe—all capital letters:

    [09:59] Chloe: okay that was funny

    [09:59] Chloe: i rlly wish i hadn't muted my mic cuz I CAKCLED

    [09:59] Chloe: I CAN'T BREATHE

    (Synchronous Class Session, Period 1, April 30, 2020, 09:58-09:59)

Like her use of the :(emoticon, the capital letters of "I CAKCLED" juxtaposed with the standard

lowercase text suggests a separate channel of communication. Capitals letters can serve a number

of purposes in a chat, but they most often "implicate a heightening of prosodic features (pitch,

volume, speed, etc.)" (M. Heath, 2018, p. 7). In other words, these capital letters help intimate

the sound of a written message rather than just the words chosen alone. Likewise, capital letters

assist in marking the "linguistic focus" (M. Heath, 2018, p. 9) of the message, cueing the reader

to the part of the message the writer wanted to emphasize. In short, like emoticon, capitalization

can be used to imply meaning through a different channel than just text alone.

As I have been exploring in this findings section how the data collected from these chat

sessions "languaged school into being," it is worth noting that these particular discursive moves

(i.e., emoticons and capitalization) are not traditionally considered to be language in and of

themselves. Still, by considering how they were used to convey intention and meaning—as well

as how they may have positioned individuals in a non-authoritative fashion, such as how I used

the :) emoticon—they are nevertheless part of how students and I languaged school into being

during these online chat sessions. They are, in my understanding, bits of language that respond to

the social dynamics of power and role in the classroom space. When Chloe wrote, " I

CAKCLED," what she seemed to find humorous was the fact that I had subtly referenced a

hobby from her personal life; in short, I had temporarily crossed the boundary that had separated

me as the teacher and proxy of the school and entered an area that she had considered to be a

pastime that her teacher would not understand. The expression of humor, emphasized by the

capital letters of the message along with the apparent haste it was written in (considering the

misspelling), shared her tacit beliefs in the boundaries between school and home. Her message so

indicated the momentary breakdown of that barrier that she then wrote that she wished her

microphone had been on to have better expressed the authenticity of her laughter. While I cannot

come to a definite conclusion regarding her statement, I can frame it in terms of the two

identities that I saw her enact during the class session: those of student and gamer. While the

default for a teenager acting in the role of my student may have been to keep their microphones

off in class, the opposite may be said for one who is in the role of online gamer—who may need to communicate tactics with other players to navigate split second decisions.

Kaomojis and Subgroups

The way that students' and I used written language during our online class sessions reflected the various Discourse communities that we belonged to and enacted during the written chats. Emoticon usage, for example, indicated broadly that the students and I were writing, generally, as part of the Western tradition, since this type of emblem is more frequent in the United States and European countries. Despite the prevalence of emoticons, they were not the only type of facial emblem used during these chats, as students and I drew from other Discourse communities that we were parts of. Individuals who use kaomoji (i.e., the Eastern equivalent to emoticons, which originated in Japan), for example, are often those who are more familiar with online subcultures, *anime*, video games, and forums such as Reddit. Kaomojis, unlike emoticons, have a vertical orientation and use varying eye shapes to express emotion. For example, ^_^ is a cheerful kaomoji, whereas U_U is a somber one. Emoticons differ insofar that they express emotion through changing mouth shapes, with :) representing happiness and :(symbolizing sadness. Of course, these kaomojis and emoticons can be used for a variety of purposes, so the aforementioned purposes are more a general direction than absolute rule, particularly when irony is concerned. Considering the lower frequency with which kaomojis appear in written chats within the United States, deploying these faces signaled the user as a certain kind of person.

Throughout the chats, I used both emoticons and kaomojis. The two served different purposes. Emoticons were general illocutionary forces, helping to convey a particular intention clearly within my messages. I also seemed to use them in ways that minimized my power, using them because I knew that, as the teacher, my students could interpret my messages in extreme

ways and be worried about their grades. The emoticons I used were meant to dispel that concern

by suggesting that, by bringing in informal writing, I was not acting in that moment solely as an

embodiment of the power of my position. Kaomojis had similar functions in the illocutionary

sense, but they had an added dimension. They suggested to students who were familiar with

kaomojis that I was part of a different Discourse community, one that they also were members

of. What I noticed is that when I used kaomojis, so too were students more likely to use them in

the same class session. In one class session with students in the Advanced English Period 3 class,

I was guiding students toward understanding why Jake Barnes, from Ernest Hemingway's novel

The Sun Also Rises, did not engage sexually with the prostitute Georgette at the beginning of the

novel despite her attempt to do so. To do so, students first had to understand what Georgette tried

to do in the taxicab as she and Jake rolled through the Parisian streets. Rather than say explicitly

what was happening, I tried to let the text speak for itself by referencing the text. I used a

kaomoji with horizontal eyes and sweat drops (representing discomfort) to show that the topic

was not one that I was comfortable with addressing directly.

> **[08:30] Mr. Toncic:** Remember, Georgette is a prostitute.
>
> **[08:30] Kimberly:** OH
>
> **[08:30] Mr. Toncic:** When Jake writes, "She touched me..."
>
> **[08:30] Kimberly:** I know
>
> **[08:30] Mr. Toncic:** -_-;;
>
> ...
>
> **[08:36] Cora:** Why is a war injury stopping him from seeing someone?
>
> **[08:36] Henry:** what do u think -_-
>
> (Synchronous Class Session, Period 3, April 2, 2020, 08:30 & 08:36)

I perceive of Henry's reciprocal use of a similar kaomoji later in this conversation as possibly indicative of a few conclusions. To begin, Henry's use of the -_- kaomoji echoes the Discourse of online webboards and nerd culture, suggesting that he is either familiar with this same Discourse, or he is otherwise co-opting this Discourse in order to show solidarity with my own earlier usage. It seems more likely that Henry was familiar with kaomoji usage, however, for he knew enough to edit my original kaomoji—removing the sweatdrop semicolons—for a slightly different meaning in context. Whether he realized that he suddenly used a kaomoji when he had not before, Henry was establishing a tacit camaraderie with me. One explanation for this change might be that Henry perceived benefits—in the form of teacher favor and therefore better grades—by matching my Discourse choices. After all, students whose language choices more closely resemble their teachers' Discourses often do better in school (as represented by grades) than those with non-standard Discourses (Cazden, 1988). As a student in an Advanced English class, Henry may have been perceptive to subtle changes in Discourses and able to adjust his to match.

Regardless of the reason for the change, Henry, although seemingly familiar with kaomoji, had not used them prior to my own usage. This may have to do with his perception of what was the right type of language to employ when participating in an online class session. What I noticed throughout the online sessions was not any singular instance of odd language that felt like students and I were conscientiously languaging school, but rather that the language choices and sentence structures that students and I deployed were bridled to certain types and did not spill over into other Discourse patterns. Students were not using some "different" type of Discourse to communicate during online sessions (e.g., they did not solely write in full paragraphs with a topic sentence and examples); they did not solely use academic Standard

English, that is. But what they did not do was bring in Discourse patterns that they might have used in other communities. Certainly, the same could be said for any Discourse community—it not only has its particular ways of using language to identify an individual as a member of that speaking group (Gee, 2002), but it also has unspoken restrictions on the type of language patterns that are *not* welcome in the community. In short, languaging school into being was a process of subtraction as much as it was using particular types of Discourses. I was perceived as the classroom teacher as the arbiter of the types of language permitted in the classroom, which seemed to be reflected in students' perceptions of the types of language that they *should* use in school. It was only when I indicated that this other form of Discourse—both emoticons and kaomojis for that matter—was permissible in schools (not by explicitly giving permission but by using it myself) that some students felt comfortable using, or at least echoing, the types of non-standard language that I had used in the chat.

Nonstandard English? Only for Standard School Purposes

Students, particularly those in the two Advanced English classes, seemed to be reserved in regard to their use of non-standard language use. When one student used the @ sign, for example, it was couched in an earlier discussion about negative reviews about a novel on Amazon:

> **[12:05] Niall:** So I am kind of confused because it most books, you meet the characters, and then the characters go and do something . However in this book, it seems as if nothing is happening. Is there something deeper that I am not understanding or is the beginning of this book supposed to be this way, where nothing much goes on and you just meet the characters.

> **[12:06] Lisa:** @the amazon reviewer

[12:06] Niall: i know

[12:06] Niall: thats why I asked

[12:06] Wesley: aLl tHeY dO iS dRiNk aNd PaRtY

(Synchronous Class Session, Period 6, May 4, 2020, 12:05-12:06)

The classmate who responded to the message with the @ sign wrote an ironic message with

alternating capitalization of letters (e.g., hElLo HoW aRe YoU) as a way of highlighting that his

message was intended to be ironic, but he too deployed this non-standard form of capitalization

in a message about the relevant school subject matter.

Students appeared to me to be trying to have their messages perceived as "on subject,"

even when they were writing in a somewhat non-standard way. Non-standard forms, though,

were exceedingly rare. Writing out an emoji in words (e.g., *smiley face*), hashtagging, and

using the > ("greater than") sign to represent that something or someone is subjectively "the

best," each of these non-standard usages were used only once or twice across all of the class

sessions, and each usage was related to the class subject matter. Insofar as the written out emoji

was used, a student in the Period 1 English 9 class used it to relate to a read aloud of a chapter

from *The Martian* by Andy Weir:

[10:25] Lukas: cliffhanger

[10:26] Chloe: that was scary

[10:26] Carlos: I think he will figure it out

[10:26] Lukas: *laughing emoji*

(Synchronous Class Session, Period 1, May 14, 2020, 10:25-10:26)

Since students were not able to convert emoji directly with the BigBlueButton interface, and

students were almost entirely using their school computers to attend the online class sessions

according to the April 24 survey I used to to triangulate some of my findings, Lukas wrote the words "*laughing emoji*" surrounded by asterisks to symbolically represent the familiar face icon. He called upon our shared knowledge of this emoji, recognizing that even without the yellow face emblem present, his description would nevertheless conjure up the image in our collective imaginations. Interestingly, Lukas did not just write "laughing emoji" but combined it with asterisks, as if he needed to make it clear that it was not meant to be read as a message but rather a manifestation of the laughing smiley face.

I personally recall text chat rooms in the early aughts when users did something similar with asterisks, using them to symbolize an action that the individual was "performing" within the imaginary of the chat (e.g., *focuses on research*). Using asterisks like this was often interpreted as a discursive means of figuratively positioning the writer in the third person with an imaginary body, one which did not spatially exist in the digital dimensions of the text-based chat. Today, young people use social media platforms such as Discord, a primarily text-based app, and do much the same, usually in servers dedicated to particular anime or video games. In an unrelated Period 6 Advanced English online class session on June 15, Wesley used asterisks like this in the message "*slaps forehead*," suggesting that this was still a form of use familiar to these types of students. That Lukas had used this discursive move to "conjure" a "body" (in the form of a face) is interesting, for it suggests that he may have been perceiving the class session according to the customs of online chats and message boards where such a discursive move would be frequent and appropriate, unlike in a class setting. However, he nonetheless wrote his message on the topic of the school subject rather than, following the discursive custom of asterisk-use as representing a physical action, about anything he was "doing"—after all, in the abstract world of academia, the "I" is often obfuscated in favor of the abstract third person. Lukas wrote that the

end of the chapter was a "cliffhanger" and then used a 'disembodied' emoji—in both messages,

his syntax did not convey that *he* was the one who felt it was a cliffhanger or that *he* was

experiencing some emotion. In short, the non-standard forms fell in line with the topic and style

of academia, continuing to language school into being even in the moments it seemed to break

from school-based Discourse.

In another occurrence of non-standard forms, one student used a # (i.e., hashtag) to

express their appreciation for a character from Emilio Estevez's movie *The Way* and another

student, responding to the first, used > (i.e., greater than) signs to claim that their preferred

character, who was different from that of the first student, was the better:

[09:55] Russell: Joost is the greatest #Joostlife

...

[09:57] Dorothy: Jack from Ireland>>>

(Synchronous Class Session, Period 3, May 11, 2020, 09:55 and 09:57)

The non-standard form of the hashtag is often associated with social media, particularly Twitter.

On social media platforms, hashtagging is a way for users to group messages and posts under

common categories. If a user were to click on the hashtag, it would direct them to other posts that

were hashtagged with the same phrase. Within the chat box of the BigBlueButton interface,

though, the hashtag had no such power. There was no API that would bring a user to a collection

of other messages tagged with #Joostlife; furthermore, the hashtag of "#Joostlife" leads to no

meaningful results, even if one were to search it manually on Twitter. In short, Russell was

borrowing the social meaning of the # symbol without regard for the mechanical purpose behind

it. The hashtag became a way of expressing a certain commonly accepted cultural meaning—one

associated with but not dependent upon technology. That is, the hashtag is a way of identifying a

grouping, a way of clustering around a single premise. In writing #Joostlife, Russell may have

been trying to imply that the character Joost was so likeable that his lifestyle was the type to go

viral on social media, thus co-opting the meaning implied by the hashtag. Alternatively, he may

have also been seeking, from among his classmates, individuals who agreed with his assessment

of Joost's character and would also amass with him; by providing a hashtag, he gave them a way

to echo their agreement. That this did not happen is significant, but it does not recant the

possibility that this may have been the purpose of the discursive move. In either case, Russell

had indeed used a discursive move that was commonly associated with social media and non-

school communication, but he deployed it in a way that was adjacent to school subjects.

If even when writing with non-traditional discourse, students remained on topic, then the

use of the non-traditional discourse instead appeared to serve an attention-getting function.

During online chats, users competed with one another for attention from the other members of

that chat; in this particular case, some students—who were writing about a movie screened as a

class assignment—sought to align themselves with the personalities of different characters and

looked to have others acknowledge, or at least see, these declarations. By using non-traditional

discourse, students were doing something *different* than in their normal writings, for this was the

only occurrence of both the hashtag and the "greater than" sign (i.e., >) throughout all of the

collected class session data.

Shortly after Russell wrote #Joostlife, a classmate responded with another character's

name. When Dorothy wrote, "Jack from Ireland>>>", she aligned herself not only with the

character in the film but also with his nationality (which played an outsized role as the various

characters trudged through France and Spain on the fabled Way of Saint James). Dorothy, who

publicly identified as Irish, not only wrote a message in which she linked herself with a

particular character, but she also challenged Russell's earlier message about Joost when she used

the > sign three times in a row. The >, or "greater than" sign, is commonly used to express

inequalities in which one quantity is greater than another; students frequently encounter this

academic in mathematics when they need to evaluate two differing quantities. Outside of

mathematics, the use of the > sign has taken on a similar but distinct meaning. The symbol has

been used to represent a strong preference for something or someone. The most common form

eschews the other side of the inequality, so that whatever is paired with the > sign is implied to

be "greater than" everything else. It does not function in popular usage as a comparative (as it

does in mathematics) but instead as a superlative, a way of stating that the item adjacent to the >

sign is better than all other considerations. In this regard, Dorothy's message was not directly a

response to Russell: she was not implying that her favorite character, Jack, was *in particular*

better than Joost. Rather, her message was broader, suggesting that Jack was the best among the

characters in *The Way*—by using the > sign, she eschewed her own self, as well, suggesting that

there was an objectively correct answer rather than many subjectively valid perspectives.

Furthermore, with this discursive move, she did not directly challenge Russell's assertion. This

minimized the possibility of conflict that could arise from her attestation of Jack's superiority.

And by repeating the symbol three times, Dorothy emphasized the message, enlarging it beyond

just a single usage of the > sign. This repetition further clarifies for the reader that the omission

of a comparative individual was intentional, with multiple signs illuminating the message's

intent of superlative instead of comparative function.

The Deitic Gesture of Pointing

Conversation is not just a product of words, turn-taking, and order; it is, as most are

aware, at least a mixture of word and gesture (or, emblems and emojis). Part of communicating

in any medium is the transmission and receipt of messages according to the social customs of the

culture. Face-to-face communication, for example, occurs as it is described—one face directed

towards another. Different communities communicate more or less closely to one another, as

well. Directionality and distance are neither word nor gesture, however, so a third component of

communication is spatial awareness. In a quasi-synchronous chat, the way that new messages

appear at the bottom of a vertical stack conflates space with time: the newest messages being

those situated at the bottom. Individuals in chat rooms continually read and navigate this

chronological-spatial stream of messages (González-Lloret, 2011; Herring, 2011), what Gawne

and McCulloch (2019) call an "appreciation for the spatial arrangement of different social media

platforms" (p. 15). BigBlueButton's interface was notable for its lack of integrated multimedia

features (e.g., it lacked the ability to easily use emoji and did not support images or GIFs).

Students had also eschewed their cameras and microphones, so they were largely left with the

keyboard to express themselves. Individuals often become typographically creative when limited

by the multimedia resources they may use to express themselves (Pavalanathan & Eisenstein,

2016). Rather than losing the directional and spatial components of conversations, students not

only followed the temporal-spatial nature of a quasi-synchronous chat, but they also used the

deitic gesture of pointing to both represent their gaze and signal agreement to other individuals in

the class. Since students could not see one another, however, they could not use their bodies to

do so. Instead, they used the caret (i.e., ^ symbol) to represent the act of pointing.

Pointing is a deitic gesture that occurs independently from and along with verbal

communication; it is often taken for granted as a form of communication (Cooperrider, 2011),

perhaps because the form is embodied rather than abstract and emblematic. Nevertheless,

pointing is one of the first forms of communication that human beings learn as infants

(Liszkowski & Tomasello, 2011). Online, without multimedia capacities in particular and, more generally, without a shared space to point at, users have creatively integrated deitic pointing into chats in the form of the ^ sign (i.e., the caret). The caret functions in a chat as a way for one user to reference a directly adjacent message. It is quick to produce (a single key), so users can create and share a message with it usually before another message interposes between the two. The ^, then, becomes a way to gesture toward a previous message, and is usually seen as a way of highlighting that message. Like pointing, the caret is a communicative message that tells another user (or users) where they should look. Throughout the 47 class sessions, the caret was one of the emblems used the most frequently by students. Notably, however, the symbol was never used by me. Students would often use the caret to respond when I asked a question and what they had thought to write was already on-screen, as occurred during one discussion in my Period 1 class about *The Great Gatsby*:

> **[08:11] Mr. Toncic:** So what's Gatsby's next play to meet up with her again?
>
> **[08:11] Harold:** probibly
>
> **[08:11] Keira:** Maybe he'll use nick?
>
> **[08:11] Lukas:** nick??
>
> **[08:12] Frank:** ^^
>
> **[08:12] Carlos:** He takes advantage of Nick?
>
> (Synchronous Class Session, Period 1, June 8, 2020, 08:11-08:12)

After I asked a question, a few students responded over the next minute. Yet because of the nature of the chat (in which students can see others' messages) and my question (which seemingly had but one considerable answer), students saw that others had already written a response that they agreed with. While many were content to sit without responding, Frank chose

to use the caret as a way to signal to me that he agreed with the message that Lukas wrote. Since there was no disagreement regarding whether Nick was part of Gatsby's larger plan to rekindle a romance with Daisy, Frank's message served little practical purpose. Consequently, it may have been used for social means. On one hand, Frank's message could have been a way to signal to me that he was engaging in the class discussion and was actively participating. On the other hand, he may have been writing to support his close friend Lukas who had written the response adjacent to Frank's own. The caret could have been a way to show solidarity with a friend, to back up his response with minimal effort—a move that, ultimately, would also have been done with awareness that I, the teacher, was looking at the messages.

Putting It Together

During a grammar lesson in mid-April for my Period 6 Advanced English class, I was teaching students about the faulty grammatical construction of misplaced modifiers. Some students struggled with grasping the concept, and one student volunteered himself to be the topic of an example sentence. I had used the sentence I was about to share before when I helped students one-on-one with SAT and ACT preparation, so I knew that students would immediately recognize the absurd potential ambiguity of meaning. During this class period, I was teaching grammar by sharing my screen and typing in Google Docs. Since the BigBlueButton Public Chat did not offer rich text tools to highlight, color, and strikethrough text, this better suited my purposes in conducting a grammar lesson. I wrote the following sentence onto the shared Google Doc to begin a further explanation of misplaced modifier errors: *Joel, who worked at a gourmet pet shop, made the treats for the squirrels with big nuts.* The sentence should read, when corrected, as follows: *Joel, who worked at a gourmet pet shop, made the treats with big nuts for the squirrels.* Immediately, the student who had difficulty understanding the concept before

wrote that he now got it, but soon another student, Wesley, wrote an unexpected message that led

to one student using a curse word in the chat. The intersection of many forms of non-traditional

English emerged in the following excerpt of discussion:

[13:15] Joel: i understand

[13:16] Wesley: joels job sounds awesome

[13:16] Thomas: That made me giggle

[13:16] Joel: wesley wut

[13:16] Wesley: 😜

[13:16] Jim: um

[13:16] Jim: what the fuck wesley

[13:16] Lisa: JIM

[13:17] Mr. Toncic: -_-

[13:17] Joel: language

[13:17] Katie: wait what didyou just say

[13:17] Katie: oh ok

[13:17] Niall: Jim!

[13:17] Niall: Wow!

(Synchronous Class Session, Period 6, April 17, 2020, 13:12-13:19)

Throughout the conversation, various Discourses were on display, mixing and matching with one

another as students reeled over what they perceived to be a major transgression by one of their

peers.

Wesley's initial message, "joels job sounds awesome," seems to be, like many of his

statements throughout the synchronous class sessions, aimed at drawing the attention of his peers

(Silva, 2011) through a statement that transgresses the topic of discussion (misplaced modifiers) and into something tangentially related (the potential, somewhat obtusely biologically sexual misreading that could occur due to a misplaced modifier). Wesley made similar comments when we later read and discussed *The Catcher in the Rye*, and I had gotten to know Wesley over the previous eight months of in-person schooling, so I am aware that these messages were functioning for Wesley as a way to remain "on topic" in some sense yet to also push the boundaries of what students assumed to be permissible in an English Language Arts classroom. By going to the extreme limits of classroom behavior, but never quite transgressing into the explicitly obscene, Wesley inhabited a unique spot among his peers and seemingly valued the perceived social cachet he obtained by making (and perhaps getting away with) these nearly obscene statements. It was not so much that Wesley had to believe what he wrote than that he made statements that others would not and, in so doing, established himself as a different type of interlocutor than his peers. In some regards, perhaps this iconoclastic messaging served as a way for him to resist the neutralizing effects of institutional schooling, which often feels—to me as well—to skew toward the conservative and traditional, forgoing any topics that might be considered inappropriate for public discussion. Wesley's intentional usage of the emoji a few messages later (after all, emojis were difficult to use in the Public Chat and required some ingenuity to input) shows to me the lengths to which Wesley was going to go to make sure such a "risky" statement was understood as both transgression and not a serious statement. The winking, tongue-sticking-out emoji that he posted seemed to laugh about the transgression of the rules rather than assert a serious weight to his statement; in short, the emoji was used as a co-speech gesture that embodied his flaunting of the traditional strictures of a public school class (McCulloch, 2019, p. 157).

Joel's response to Wesley (i.e., "wesley wut") intentionally misspells the word "what,"

which appeared to me to be a way that Joel was recognizing the unreality of Wesley's initial

statement. Joel had already indicated that he was writing to Wesley by using his name. By

stepping away from Standard English when writing to his peer, Joel's usage of "wut" therefore

served not to identify the recipient as a fellow student but to act as a social function between

these students. In my interpretation, Joel realized that Wesley had moved into the realm of

transgression against school norms, and he was questioning the validity of the statement with an

intentional textism, the orthographic choice of "wut". Textisms, or textese as it is sometimes

called, is not indicative of lower intelligence although they may be perceived that way (Drouin &

Davis, 2009). Furthermore, teens do not even often use textese, even when texting (Thurlow,

2006; Verheijen, 2019). Considering that Joel had used the Standard English spelling in the past

and weighing the relative infrequency of the alternate form, it appears that his orthographic move

was meant to engage with Wesley in a different way. According to Silva (2017), "...deviations in

chat discourse are consciously used to form a group identity or a virtual community" (p. 267).

Joel's departure from Standard English may therefore have been intentionally purposed to form

an *ad hoc* group identity with Wesley, querying his message through a nonstandard Discourse.

What might happen, though, when a student writes in a way that moves beyond the

acceptable boundaries of transgression within a class and engages in what his peers see as clearly

unacceptable language use within the context of school? In response to Wesley's message, Jim

first wrote "um," separated from his next message to, perhaps, represent an audible pause. He

then sent the only message across the 47 class sessions to contain an expletive: "what the fuck

wesley". It is difficult to judge why Jim may have written this message, for while on one hand I

might posit that he was attempting to take Wesley's transgression further (as would seem

characteristic, considering the back-and-forth banter they often had), on the other hand he may

have simply slipped into an inappropriate Discourse. The only further insight I have into Jim's

message is his lone follow-up message three minutes later, at 13:19, when he wrote the word

"coward", ostensibly to Wesley. To what Jim wrote "coward" is equally inscrutable, since it does

not seem to be textually adjacent or near adjacent to anything relevant to the idea of cowardice or

bravery. One way to make sense of it might be that, if Jim were forwarding Wesley's initial

transgression, using a measured and intentional expletive, he may have been calling out Wesley

for not reciprocating in kind by not also using an expletive. However, such suppositions are

unable to be triangulated without the benefit of student interviews, so my guesses cannot be

verified.

Less ambiguous, however, were the responses that came in the wake of Jim's message.

Lisa immediately wrote "JIM", his name in all capital letters. The utilization of all capital letters

was a tactic that could "attract the attention of the reader who will then pick it out as relevant and

assign it a meaning" (M. Heath, 2018, p.2). Without any attendant explanation—just a name in

all capitals—Lisa nevertheless communicated deftly. By not including a written chastisement or

elaboration, it became clear that his name was the message—it was not "Jim's message" or

"Jim's words" that were identified, but rather his message was referenced as part and parcel of

him; the words were less the problem than the fact that an individual had transgressed beyond the

acceptable in class. He was named; in fact, he was NAMED in a way that spotlighted his

personhood (rather than his message) as being against the norm.

In truth, I do not personally see much 'wrong' with Jim's use of the expletive. To me,

there is a major difference between an expletive being used to discuss a situation (e.g., stubbing

one's toe or, in this case, surprise upon reading Wesley's insinuating statement) and a slur

directed toward someone. Jim's expletive of choice did not target Wesley for some individual characteristic nor did it carry with it a history of racist usage inextricable from the word itself. In my personal life, I distinguish between the two: the former does not carry the negative connotation of the latter to me. I bring this up since I, as the teacher, had a choice as to how I would respond to Jim's written expletive. I had already read Lisa's admonitory "JIM", so I could come to Jim's defense and clarify the nuanced distinction that I personally saw between his use of "fuck" and other slurs. Alternatively, I could also reinforce the expectations that students like Lisa seemed to have about online schooling. At this time, I was also well aware that, due to the nature of online schooling, other stakeholders would also be able to see or hear what was occurring in our online classroom—after all, students were attending classes at home where their families also lived. In response to Jim's message, I sent a kaomoji, the -_- face. As discussed previously, kaomoji are a variant of emoticon that originated in Japan, and it is used in the United States by a subsection of individuals who are familiar with the Discourse of online message boards that are often centered on video games and/or anime. Having known Jim for much of the school year up to that point, I thought that he would understand the antipathetic emotion expressed by the face. It is also noteworthy that, up until that point, I was not writing in the Public Chat. I had been speaking out loud and writing on a separate Google Document to make use of the rich text tools that would permit me to better highlight different grammatical paradigms in sentences. That I would write a message directly in the chat box, breaking from what I had previously been doing, would also imply a message that his statement transgressed beyond what was acceptable in the high school language arts classroom. It asserted the presence of institutional authority. However, I did not openly scold Jim nor did I enact any punishment at that point or later.

Some other students also found that Jim's statement was worth admonishing. Joel wrote "language," suggesting that he was criticizing Jim's language use for going beyond the school norm. Niall wrote, in two separate messages, "Jim!" and then "Wow!". Like Lisa's message a few before him, Niall's focused on Jim rather than on Jim's message (in contrast with Joel's statement of 'language'). In other words, both Lisa and Niall found that the transgressive behavior was a product of the individual and should be linked to that person; by naming Jim, they identified him as moving beyond the group; like how his name stood alone in their messages, he was alone outside of the class. Niall's usage of the exclamation points at the end of his two messages appears to offer emphasis (Waseleski, 2006), but it is worth noting that both he and Lisa wrote Jim's name with some form of intensifier. Jim used an exclamation mark to distinguish this message from others, whereas Lisa used all capitalization; while they may have chosen different methods, both techniques implied a similar expression. They signified that Jim's behavior transgressed the expectations of behaviors that *students had for one another* in the classroom and that, absent even my presence, they might continue to language school into being.

Chapter 6

DISCUSSION

As all school districts in New Jersey have now returned to in-person instruction, the months of online, distance learning seem to be fading in collective memory. Rather than asking what educators and policymakers can learn from those months of teaching online, much of the conversation in education appears to be on restoring what had been present prior to when the COVID-19 pandemic began. However, critical instance case studies such as this one can encapsulate the period of time when the pandemic closed school buildings and brought public high school classroom teaching onto the internet. Although this case study is limited in scope by its examination of three classes within one school district over 15 weeks, it nevertheless offers unique insight to how students and I, their teacher, wrote during these synchronous class sessions. What is clear from this discourse analysis is, within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, that students and teachers both languaged school into being through discursive moves made possible through the habituation of the individuals in those two educational roles.

Ultimately, what this case study has revealed is a stripped-down version of schooling that operated, primarily, through language practices. If one is to say that during the COVID-19 pandemic that schooling continued, then language played a critical role in perpetuating schooling. Having been both a participant and researcher in this context, these were my expectations prior to examining my data. What I found, though, expanded my understanding of how school operated without a physical classroom to include not only language but also the social routines that influenced behavior. It was not just the words we used, after all, but the *stuff* of school—such as the platform on which communicated as well as the schedules we continued to adhere to—that conjured school into being.

Discursive Controls of the Interface

As citizens of a networked society, Americans are not newcomers to the ideas of remote work. Sherry Turkle's research (2017) on networked individuals has revealed that individuals may be more 'connected' than ever, but that such networked connectivity may obscure a deepening alienation from our immediate surroundings. Stone Valley High School may have fared "better" in continuing schooling during the lockdown than schools from other districts with lower socioeconomic standing, but perhaps that is in part attributable to an ethos that preceded the events of the COVID-19 pandemic. As Turkle wrote a few years prior to the pandemic, "...the successful are always connected… one vacates a place, not a set of responsibilities" (Turkle, 2017, p. 165). Turkle was writing about how high-income adults could work remotely with mobile devices, perpetually connected to their business responsibilities by the internet. What she wrote has bearing for online schooling, too. The responsibilities of attending to a schedule, of completing a curriculum, and of achieving certain grades demanded of us a continued investment into the process of schooling. That said, there is also no easy method "to simply graft what people are doing online onto what they might do offline" (boyd, 2012, p. 31). Certain procedures, methods, and technologies delimited the unbound capacities of the internet and restricted its capacities to what would help to reinforce the institution of schooling.

What Stone Valley High School did in using BigBlueButton as the means for hosting synchronous classes at regularly scheduled times during the COVID-19 pandemic was to establish "spaces and times of governance" (Hartong, 2021, p. 37). To perpetuate school as an institution when its doors were closed and students and teachers were not meeting physically, the school district—like many others—determined that students and teachers should meet on a particular educational platform at specified times. The alternative to these online sessions has

been framed as leading to 'learning loss' by various groups that have stressed the importance for students—especially those considered disadvantaged—to continue traditional school learning experiences (Dorn, Hancock, Sarakatsannis, & Viruleg, 2021; Engzell, Frey, & Verhagen, 2021; Mervosh, 2021). When educational organizations and policymakers frame the lack of traditional schooling as yielding "learning loss" and resulting in quantitative declines in student knowledge and ability, they augment a public belief in schools as the only way for young people to learn and keep pace with a fictional standard as to where learners "should be" at sequential ages and grades. Philosopher Jacques Baudrillard would likely take issue with this framing, critiquing it generally for its attempts at "proving the real through the imaginary" and specifically being "the proof of pedagogy through antipedagogy" (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 19). That is, by positing imaginary "learning loss" sustained by students when school buildings were closed (which presumed that there existed quantifiable knowledge that students *should* have known, and that this understanding had, before the pandemic, been neatly gained at the same pace for all those in the same grade/age level—a specious assumption), educational constituents propped up the existing educational infrastructure as the means by which such negative results might allegedly be avoided.

Learning management systems such as Schoology and the video conferencing freeware BigBlueButton were some of the critical components for school districts in combating the fabulated nightmarish spector of 'learning loss.' According to Van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal (2018), an online platform is "a programmable digital architecture designed to organize interactions between users" (p.4). Taken this way, there was a continually organizing force that determined how users (students and I) interacted with one another *through* the online platform's "rules and codes of conduct" (Decuypere, Grimaldi, & Landri, 2021, p. 5). For example, students

were not able to see one another on camera—they could only see me, and I could see them—so their ability to communicate with one another in a quasi face-to-face manner was constrained by the structure of the interface. These are not value neutral decisions. As David Noble (1978) stated, "Technology is not an autonomous force impinging upon human affairs from the 'outside,' but the product of a social process" (p. 374). These programmed limitations imply that certain types of interactions are 'good' in an educational context while others are 'bad.' Not only do they thus circumscribe the interactions between users, but they also imply "particular imaginaries regarding what education is and should be like" (Decuypere, Grimaldi, & Landri, 2021, p. 5). Students and I may not have explicitly referenced the online platform often, but it was continually there mediating the ways in which we could communicate. As some examples, students and I were linked to our full, legal names, and we were also not able to easily embed multimedia components, such as gifs or videos. Borrowing from Guy Debord's epistemological notion of the spectacle (2014), the online interface functioned like a pair of glasses (i.e., the spectacle) by focusing the attention of users while remaining nearly invisible. Thus, while individuals might have engaged in dialogue on the online platform, they did not engage with the platform itself, which, eluding the attention of the individual users, mediated behavior in a way that "is the opposite of dialogue" (Debord, 2014, p. 6). In other words, since the discourse that occurred in the Public Chat was carried out in a way that did not plainly reference the medium by which it was shared but was, nevertheless, deeply influenced by it, it is worth discussing further how interfaces subtly affect discursive practices. This all said, no online platform is enacted in exactly the same way in any class or school (Decuypere, Grimaldi, & Landri, 2021), so these observations are specifically in reference to my own experiences and the data collected from March to June 2020.

Privacy? The Affordances of Online Class Sessions

When students attended class sessions through BigBlueButton, they were effectively participating simultaneously in two distinct worlds. On one hand, they were students in an English Language Arts class; on the other hand, they were members of families who were often in near proximity to them, sometimes in the same home if not the same room. Consequently, my students were being called upon to enact (at least) two identities that were not necessarily compatible. For example, students may have been concerned about how their family members might perceive them if they were to witness how they answered questions or participated in class; contrariwise, they might have feared their peers' or teacher's judgement if members of their families were to behave inappropriately while they were attending class. As many students shared in their answers to the questionnaire that I had assigned on April 24, one of the main motivations for turning off microphones and cameras was to avoid any unwanted moments of embarrassment that might unwittingly occur at home. Consequently, by using the Public Chat space to share their thoughts and participate in class—and by shutting off the multimedia capacities of their cameras and microphones—students participating in live class sessions were able to establish a layer of privacy separating the classroom from the homes and assert some control over what they were sharing. After all, "The best communication programs shield the writer from the view of the reader" (Turkle, 2017, p. 187). They offer a way to vanish the self from the view of the other, to obscure one's identity and protect personal information. Additionally, the act of shutting down other methods of communication suggests that students believed typing alone to be sufficient for the purposes of 'schooling,' indicating that they perceived their role in class as comprising moments of time in which they could compose messages rather than respond extemporaneously.

In an anecdotal but related situation, during the subsequent school year (2020-2021), I taught remote and hybrid ELA classes in a different school district in North-Central New Jersey. The students at this high school were required by the school administration to have their cameras on during all synchronous Zoom-based class sessions, unlike those who attended my classes at Stone Valley High School the year prior. During one class within which I was teaching students about George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty Four*, I asked them to ponder the theoretical apparatus of the panopticon vis-a-vis the surveillance systems of Oceania, the fascist state the hero struggles against. Students were quick to understand the premise of constant surveillance and monitoring. To help them reflect, though, I instructed them to turn their gazes to their own Zoom interfaces and take inventory of what they were showing me. What I saw as a teacher was, I conjecture, much the same as what other teachers had witnessed during the pandemic. Some cameras were positioned squarely on the students' faces; others were pointed to show the smallest sliver of their foreheads; yet others displayed uninhabited walls or ceiling; and the remainder were turned off. Each of these camera positions indicated something about how that student was interacting with the rules enacted by the school system, one that sought during the lockdown to stretch its reach into the homes of students through the lens of the camera. Some students had positioned themselves in the center of the frame like I was, seeming to adopt a mien that presented a "good" student who was abiding to the rules of school. Those who had a sliver of their foreheads in the frame seemed to be indicating that they were abiding by the rules of school and were present and should be accounted for, but they were resisting the school's overreach into their homes and personal space. Others who faced their cameras upward at blank ceilings or toward empty walls might be read as to ostensibly be following school rules, but doing so in a way that undermined what the school demanded insofar as panoptic surveillance in

their homes. Those who kept their cameras off may have been present and attentive, or they may have absented themselves from the place, but in either case, they were directly disobeying the rules of the school, denying the administration's asserted privilege to peer into their private homes.

I bring up this anecdotal case because I think it may offer a visible point of reference that demonstrates that students are not monolithic: they, in fact, respond to the institution of schooling in different ways. Throughout my **Findings** section, I made conclusions regarding what students had written in the Public Chat. Yet just as for every student who sat visibly in front of their cameras during the 2020-2021 school year, there were others who were off-camera; likewise, students who wrote in the chat were only those who tacitly agreed to participate in a conversation within the boundaries of school rules. Those who remained—or mostly remained— silent may not have contributed many observable data points, but maintaining silence, just like writing a message, is a choice. In an online classroom space where the primary way in which students showed their participation was by writing a message, silence may have been a means of retaining privacy, but it was also a means of resisting classroom conduct; more so than anything that students could write in the chat box, not writing anything whatsoever could have been the larger opposition to institutional school norms. Still, some students may have maintained silence as a way of vanishing into obscurity, as a way to avoid scrutiny (Hartman, 2006). Since it is unclear whether students who remained silent were those resisting school norms or others who wanted to vanish into the ambiguity of silence, teachers may inadvertently make assumptions about whether students who do not participate in expected ways are behaving in what may be assumed to be an insubordinate way. Thus, on one hand, the Public Chat may offer a way for students to maintain a modicum of privacy in the face of school encroaching on their home lives.

On the other hand, however, participants in the Public Chat had few options for privately communicating with classmates or me. BigBlueButton offered no means for private chat between users.

Students frequently showed a sensitivity to and proclivity for monitoring each other's social behavior within the chat space. When Lisa wrote "JIM," for example, after he had written an expletive, she exhibited behavior that was meant to modify and curtail future transgressions with explicit language. Other students chidingly repaired one another's misspelled words by typing the dictionary spelling with an asterisk. These types of behaviors served as social reinforcements of certain types of behavior and particular ways with words. They implied that a certain lexicon needed to be used within the classroom and that formal spelling mattered, even in online sessions during which students' participatory messages were not being graded. In these ways, some students patrolled one another's behaviors more frequently than even I actively did, becoming complicit within the framework of the institution. The students who most strongly enforced the institutional norms were normally those who served to benefit the most from them, for they had the most social capital insofar as "school" behavior were concerned. After all, the students who responded were those who were already using the chat space the most; I believe they would most benefit by reinforcing the rules of the classroom. Students who sent direct email or private messages to me during class were certainly aware of these arbiters of classroom behavior and knowledge, and they managed their reputation by determining what would be put into the Public Chat and what would be sent privately. Yet by sending these messages furtively, students also avoided any conversations about what classroom discourse, knowledge, and expectations should be; they perceived that their messages would weaken their acceptance to the social group as a whole, and thus skated around the entire issue. Without direct challenge to the

system, one is left to wonder whether there is any potential for change or if these always-on

alternate routes to contact one's teacher, such as through email, may in fact perpetuate certain

kinds of discourse by relegating messages oppositional to ideal school discourse to sub-channels

that remained in the shadows. If this is the case, then perhaps the teacher—as the sole witness to

students' intersectional messaging—becomes the fulcrum upon which a resistance to traditional

notions in the classroom might fall, a heavy onus to bear.

As aforementioned, some students who messaged me directly may have been motivated

to do so because of a desire to manage their reputation within the context of the English

Language Arts classes and as "good" students within this particular high school. During in-

person classes, students usually lacked a means for communicating with their teachers *during*

class without exposing their identities; they had to raise their hands, speak aloud, etc. Online,

however, those identifying factors did not necessarily *need* to be readily apparent. Internet-based

message boards, forums, and chatrooms frequently allow users to adopt aliases or nicknames that

mask an interlocutor's true identity. For example, one could use the nickname of

EnglishLitLover2020 to participate in an online discussion about Ernest Hemingway's novels.

These spaces where individuals gather on their own volition to join or participate in communities

around common interests are often identified as affinity spaces (Brown & Adler, 2008; Gee,

2018). Some have suggested that affinity spaces, which offer users personal anonymity (although

some nicknames may gradually develop more social capital than others), are viable alternatives

to traditional classroom schooling, for affinity spaces flatten the traditional hierarchical model of

the classroom (i.e., there is no visible distinction between ages or levels or mastery, such as is

inherent in adult 'teachers' and children 'students') and unite individuals with common interests

rather than a subset of categorically alike people (e.g., of similar age) within a particular

geographic area and/or demographic population (Black, 2005, 2006; Curwood, Magnifico, & Lammers, 2013; Gee, 2004; Knobel & Lankshear, 2006; Knobel, 2007a; Marsh, 2018; McKenna, Conradi, Lawrence, Jang, & Meyer, 2012; Padgett & Curwood, 2016; Toncic, 2020b). Although Turkle (2017) has suggested that "communities are constituted by physical proximity, shared concerns, real consequences, and common responsibilities" (p. 239), affinity spaces seem to offer a differing sense of community, one that is not tethered by geographic proximity. Perhaps what Turkle was implying is a community based on individual accountability, since neighborhood physical proximity begets, like in-person classroom learning, an automatic assertion of one's identity.

When students enter a classroom for the first time during a school year, they have already lost control of their own identities. Teachers, equipped with rosters, know their students' names; students', likewise, already know their teachers' names—at least their surnames. This procedure of prenaming appears to me to be an institutional process, for when individuals meet outside of institutional settings, different social rites around naming are enacted. Notably, it also appears the act of prenaming is directly correlated with institutional power positions, for students do not have rosters with their classmates' names on them. According to danah boyd, writing about social media platforms that require individuals to use their real names, "When people are expected to lead with their names, their power to control a social situation is undermined" (boyd, 2012, p. 31). In short, the act of prenaming relocates power from the individual to the institution, for the individual, thus named, is then expected to conform to the practices of the institution. If they do not adhere to the tenets and behaviors expected within the institution, then, since they have already been named, they can therefore be either chastised or ostracized.

Despite the affordances of online chat capabilities, students in the Stone Valley School District nevertheless had to keep their identities visible at all times, even when their cameras were off. These identities were digitized through the students' legal names, which had been codified into individual login accounts that students were mandated to use to participate in synchronous class sessions. By leading with their names, students were, in my view, reduced from individuals in control of their respective identities (and how they might wish to manifest them on any given day) and to, instead, institutional beings whose main purpose was to enact the practices expected of them; even those who rebelled against the normative behavior of the school institution, like Jim who had written an obscenity, were scolded by others who *named* him immediately. The name signified a misalignment with the expectations of the system, and by thus naming him within the context of that transgression, other students reinforced their own roles as those operating within the behavioral parameters of what they perceived as being a "good" student in a high school ELA class.

Although students were named in the Public Chat with their *first* and last names, I was not. Instead, my username was always "Mr. Toncic". This, like other facets of the interface, functioned as a way of separating me from the students, by creating a nuanced but important difference between students and myself. The title of Mr. works similarly to many other titles, it offers a sense of distinction, prestige, and expertise to the individual. Thomas Paine (1791), critically opining on the British system of titles (e.g., duke, duchess, prince, queen) shortly after the American Revolution, searingly remarked, "Titles are like circles drawn by the magician's wand, to contract the sphere of man's felicity. He lives immured within the Bastile of a word, and surveys at a distance the envied life of man." Paine's commentary suggests that titles are inherently disconnective; they remove the individual from everyday interaction by means of a

magical power. Bourdieu (2011) similarly argued that social obligations can be institutionalized through titles of nobility, which both indicate and perpetuate hierarchical relationships in societies. In the context of teachers' titles in schools, the titles of Mr., Ms., Mrs., Miss, etc. serve a similar purpose: they indicate to whom the institutional obligations are owed. These are titles given to adults solely because of their organizational affiliation, not for any external reason, and thus are inextricably entangled in what the institution means itself. Students know to whom they should be respectful by dint of these titles; they recognize the individuals who are given these titles as arbiters of the institution. Furthermore, these titles indicate that, within the context of the classroom, the person with the title is the 'expert' whose responsibility is to disseminate knowledge. This is quite different from the non-hierarchical structure of affinity spaces in which all users have equal claim to being knowledgeable. Institutionally, power and control are exercised through the licensure of 'experts' and specialists who are given the ability to name, classify, organize, and categorize things and people (Foucault, 1972). With a title in front of their names, teachers are positioned as authorities and are also usually those who are most deeply embedded within the Discourse, practices, and social routines of schooling (Thompson, 2014). Consequently, teachers are often looking for classroom behavior, discourse, and practices that are most similar to their own (cf. Schleppegrell, 2001).

When I was writing class grammar notes on a Google Doc on April 23 and 24, a student or students sought to emulate my practices by writing the same notes in the Shared Notes space; in contrast, the student who deleted the notes and wrote "potato" seemed at first to be a 'bad' student rebelling against the institution of schooling and rejecting learning. However, upon reflection, perhaps what really occurred in that exchange was a student's rejection of *a certain type of learning*, a traditional form that relied on teacher lecture and student note taking. Rather

than a complete abnegation of learning, it may have been a way of protesting the expectations

inherent in my own teaching that day, but I, functioning as the 'authority' in the classroom,

initially perceived the action as that of a 'bad' student because I was in the position to determine

what was good or bad in the classroom, and my ideologies likely closely resembled traditional

notions of school learning behavior. I was functioning not as the teacher whom I wanted to be,

but as the one I was cued to perform.

Metonymy, Social Routines, and the Technologies of School

In previous sections, I have explained how I taught grammar during synchronous online

classes. Sharing my screen with students so they could see what was visible on my end, I opened

a Google Doc and wrote examples and grammar paradigms onto a white page. A few months

earlier, I might have taught the same lesson but done so using the classroom's board at the front

of the room, positioned by building planners nearly 70 years prior so that all students could see

written examples clearly. A lot of changes had occurred from when I was teaching in a

classroom with my students present, writing directly onto the whiteboard at the front of the

room; I was at home and using a Google Doc, which was transmitted through broadband to

students' computer monitors at their respective homes. Superficially, much was different; still,

though, my teaching was comparable to how it had been.

When school buildings closed for lockdown, I gradually began to wonder about what my

students and I were doing and whether it was still, functionally, 'school.' It was a question that

did not seem to plague others, for many saw the shift to be a stopgap measure and did not

belabor the point. Teaching remotely was not ideal, many of my colleagues said, but it was better

in their view than not having school at all. I agreed with them to an extent, but I was also

fascinated by the fact that school could exist without schools. The loss of the physical location—

along with its accompanying desks, hallways, bells, etc.—signified to me that school was not a

place after all: it was a process. In regards to a different state institution, Foucault (1975)

ruminated on the prison system, suggesting that contemporary prisons operated on surveillance

yielding prisoners' conformity to proper behavior; at pains of overly summarizing, the ideal

might be if prisoners were surveilled and punished for infractions, which enabled the future use

of the technique of only needing to suggest surveillance to compel the imprisoned to police

themselves. Yet prisons still required the apparatus of the prison; they needed some place within

which to house the carceral. Schools, on the other hand, did not appear to need a physical

location. This suggested to me, first and foremost, that not all institutions operate similarly.

Despite their similarities, as many (including myself) are wont to make parallels, schools and

prisons have inherent differences. If it were surveillance that primarily defined prisons for

Foucault, what was it that would define schools based on this critical instance of the COVID-19

pandemic?

   I have heretofore contended that certain school-based Discourse patterns language school

into being, but language, to me, is largely a manifestation of certain behavioral patterns enacted

over time. Certain places often conjure up different behavioral patterns, but the place is not a

prerequisite for these behavioral patterns to occur, as evidenced by my ability to continue

teaching 'school' despite the lack of a school building. Likewise, the empty school building,

bereft of people, would still be called a school. The distinction between the two "schools"

seemed to extend beyond semantics. I was not just playing with word denotations. There was

something deeply shared between the school that we were enacting online and the empty school

building itself. I came to recognize that location names—e.g., school, hospital, or even jail—are

metonymic. Institutional names, likewise, are metonymic. In this context, metonymic means a

collection of tools and technologies (i.e., the things that constitute 'schooling') that is represented

by the name of something related (i.e., 'school'). In short, if I were to identify the constituent

components that comprise that metonymy, then I would be able to ascertain what it is, exactly,

that we mean when we talk about school.

In a forthcoming paper, I have proposed a critical theory of artificial intelligence, which

posits that technologies offer lenses for critically analyzing the social structures that comprise

schools (Toncic, in press). This paper also explores how new technologies often are perceived as

"artificial intelligence" at the outset but are soon relegated to the background, as part of the

everyday and commonplace. What I suggest here is that these technologies, which have faded

from recognition as technologies and into mundane tools, furniture, or architectural structures,

are the essence of school—it is these technologies that determine what schools are, and therefore,

the Discourse that emerges when they are enacted. One of the reasons that this is hard to

conceive of is the connotation of "technology" as suggesting something new and electronic. Yet

technology is an old word, owing its etymology to the Greek "teche" (meaning skill or art) and

"logos" (i.e., word or language). Technologies are not things, they are *ways with things*; they are

the *Discourse surrounding things*. Schools are, I argue, neither place nor person, but rather the

'technologies' and routines around the stuff that we associate with the process of schooling.

Students may have had moments of authentic discussion within the context of the chat sessions,

but these seemed to exist outside of schooling, for once one of the social routines around school

was asserted, these alternative discussions quickly vanished.

School buildings are not inherently schools, after all. They are buildings. It is the stuff

inside of them that, in combination, yields the haecceity of schoolness. For example, a desk

within a classroom elicits certain types of behavioral practices. If it is a desk that looks much like

others in the room, then it is often arranged in a uniform way aligned with the other desks that

center the front of the classroom (and the teacher) as the focal point. The desks are

ergonomically designed for a certain type of person—insofar as average heights and weights of

particular ages are concerned—and their flat surfaces beget the process of writing. A desk that

looks dissimilar to others in the classroom is often the teacher's desk; its position within the

classroom and its relative build and stature suggest a permanence that contrasts the transience of

students. It does not need to be this way: individuals could race in carts down the long tubes of

hallways, students' desks could face the walls and decenter the teacher, the writing surface could

be replaced by standing easels, and the teacher's desk could be exchanged for one identical to the

students and treated similarly. In other words, the objects and tools of schools are not inherently

'for' any particular thing: they are different items or design features that are in close proximity.

Rather, it is the social routines done with and through these objects that, suddenly, enact school,

springing it into being. Schools are collections of these technologies (i.e., ways of interacting

with tools, not just the items themselves) that can hop the medium from the collected assortment

of items within school buildings to their functional equivalents online. School can exist in both

because school does not exist in either of them *until it is enacted by people's routine interactions*

with the tools, technologies, and architectures that made them, whether physical or digital in

nature.

      Such an understanding works seamlessly with social constructivist approaches to learning

theory, for it suggests that what we learn from others are ways of interacting with the stuff that

comprises school in the first place. Perhaps this framing helps to explain Lortie's findings (2020)

found in 1975 that new teachers most commonly taught in ways that they had learned as

students, regardless of the types of institutional teacher preparation that they picked up from

colleges and universities. Academic institutions were not focused on the deeply held social

routines that were ritualistically enacted in school buildings. Some of these routines are glaringly

obvious to us. For example, we readily associate teachers making corrections with red pens and

calculators to performing calculations in mathematics classes. Others, however, are built into the

very schools themselves: whiteboards at the front of the classroom are there to be written on,

such as has been routinized. Students and teachers are not told this explicitly, it would be

unnecessary, for anyone who attends a school with a whiteboard has learned how to interact with

it. They have learned the *technology*, the institutionally relevant actions associated with the

object. But what they have also learned is an educational ideology built into that object.

Individuals "are thrust into history" (Debord, 2014, p. 32) and then learn the social routines to

interact with that extant history. The whiteboard is the terrain of the teacher, situated behind

them in the classroom, often accessible to students only once they have received permission.

Classrooms are situated so that the whiteboard becomes centered, thus making learning

something that is done by listening to a central figure in the room. It also simultaneously

prioritizes writing (and often copying) as the means by which learning is done. Students in

classrooms operating along these technologies learn in ways that minimize student-to-student

interaction and downplay independent student discovery: the classrooms themselves beget

behaviors that promote a particular kind of learning.

When I started teaching online during the COVID-19 pandemic and began to use Google

Docs to teach my students, what I did was bring to a new teaching tool the same routines as a

traditional one. This has happened many times before: whiteboards once replaced chalkboards,

after all. As new technologies enter schools, individuals do not suddenly glom to the features that

can revolutionize their ways of doing things. Rather, they bring the routines associated with other

technologies of school and reenact them, using this new thing as the medium of instruction. In

schools, the *medium* is not the message: *routines* are both medium and message.

After analyzing the data from this case study, I have come to understand that schools are

indeed languaged into being, but these language patterns come into practice as manifestations of

the social routines of "technologies," the tools with which we were doing school. The first that

may come to mind may be computers, although there are far more technologies involved than

that. Written language, for example, is a technology (McCulloch, 2019). As Vilém Flusser

(2012) has noted, "To write, we need several things that are supplied by our culture" (p. 27).

These include two contrasting materials such as ink and paper, a system of letters, conventions

and syntax of writing, a standard order to words, etc. Standard English is not, after all, a natural

occurrence but rather a "collective agreement" (McCulloch, 2019, p. 46). When the technology

of writing is enacted within these parameters, people can understand one another. Further

restrictions, though, can delimit the ways in which individuals use writing. For example, writing

on a computer predicates the creation of horizontal sentences and precludes creative effects such

as doodling or drawing to accompany writing—computer discourse thus becomes abstracted and

text heavy. Writing in a Public Chat further circumscribes how individuals can write, for they

have to first compose messages and then press 'Enter,' joining a vertically adjacent scrolling

thread. In addition, users' names are automatically attached to their messages, which for schools

attests to certain hierarchical positions and enforces institutional norms. Writing on a computer

also differs from writing with a mobile device, for computer-based writing, which is usually

preferred in schools as a means of input, does not have the same easy access to emojis that

mobile phones do. My findings suggested that students were primarily using computers to

participate in the online synchronous chats, a conclusion that I triangulated using survey

information from an April 24 class assignment, which correlated with the relative dearth of emoji

usage that one might see if students were using the emoji-ready keyboards of mobile devices.

That students chose to use school-issued computers rather than mobile devices suggests to me

that they were in accord, at least in practice, with at least some of the district's notions of the

tools associated with schooling. Furthermore, the use of a laptop instead of a mobile device does

also indicate that students attended schooling in a stationary way: one does not carry a laptop

around as they travel from place to place. As such, although individuals had the opportunity to

move during these class sessions, many of them nevertheless seemingly perpetuated the same at-

desk behavior as they had in school. This is yet another social routine—lack of mobility—that

students seemingly performed within the context of this study because of the behaviors mediated

around the tools and technologies of schools.

Throughout my dissertation study, my research question has been the following: **In what**

ways did high school students and a teacher write during synchronous online English

classes within the context of COVID-19 pandemic? When I first wrote this question, I had

been expecting to answer it summarily by conducting my discourse analysis, but I did not

anticipate that the findings from my discourse analysis would prompt me to reinterpret the

question somewhat differently. By focusing on the "what ways" that students and I wrote during

the online class sessions (that is, the technologies by which we created discourse rather than the

discourse in and of itself), I came to recognize that my discourse analysis findings pointed

toward deep structures of school institutions. Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* (1977) conveys that

people in communal groups begin acting similarly, suggesting that shared routines provide

benefits to some groups in institutions more than others. Similarly, the concept of 'peer

homophily,' the likely development of similar habits in peer groups, has been limited in

application to particular outcomes, such as obesity (Shalizi & Thomas, 2011). My analysis of

discursive social routines suggests that peers may internalize *what institutions are perceived to*

*be through habitual actions with and around objects associated with the social institutio*n. This

understanding offers a possible explanation as to why certain groups of people may have

inherent advantages in institutions like school, for their familiarity with the routines around the

technologies of school better matches teachers' expectations. Thus, rather than an abstract

answer or overgeneralized description of what school is, my theory of social routinization around

institutional objects suggests that to understand how an individual (or social group) understands

school, one can examine the social routines enacted vis-a-vis the technologies of schooling.

Since my research question asks both about students and me, the teacher, it was critical

for me to reflect on my role as teacher-researcher within the context of this study. While

reflecting on the 47 online class sessions that comprise the data collected for this study, I had

often wondered why my lessons seemed to be so traditional and teacher-centric despite the fact

that I was thoroughly familiar with the research around new literacies and considered myself to

be a creative educator. Some of my initial answers centered around the difficulty that I had, like

others, in pivoting to online-only teaching without ample opportunity to prepare. Yet I think such

an explanation is somewhat simplistic after reviewing my findings. The fact is, when I was faced

with a crisis, I retreated back to the social routines around teaching technologies that were deeply

ingrained in my foundational understanding of education. Habit, as Wendy Chun (2016) argues,

is "evidence of culture in the strongest sense of the word" (p. 6). By reverting to habitual

practices associated with traditional teaching, I revealed to myself the deep structures of what

'school' was in my own conception; the 'creative' teaching I had done before the pandemic

seems to have been accomplished by performing the negative of these intrinsic habitual actions

and beliefs about schooling. During the pandemic, I returned to traditional practices such as using the quasi-whiteboard of Google Docs and lecturing, *expecting* students to take notes on what I said; I centered myself as the source of knowledge for my students. The social routines for teaching tools that I was accustomed to matched up with those offered within the BigBlueButton interface. With this in mind, it may be worthwhile for educational researchers to think about the structural analogies between the tools of online learning platforms and their physical equivalents (for those that have comparable technologies) in school classrooms.

Novel Time

Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, an unexpected phenomenon unfolded for over 80% of people across the globe: perceptions of the amount of time passing began to change, some people reporting that time seemed to have slowed while others feeling as though it had sped up (Martinelli et al., 2020; Ogden, 2020; Wittmann, 2020; Yoveva, 2021). Although individuals may have reliable biological circadian clocks (Roenneberg et al., 2007), individual calendrical perceptions of time are far less reliable (Siffre, 1964). That is, individual bodies may be able to remain regular insofar as sleep, wake, and other bodily functions are concerned, but people have difficulty in quantifying how much time has passed through subjective experience alone. Beyond the diurnal pattern of night and day, time is a social construct made by people. Timekeeping is a technology for reifying time and making it routinizable. Just as spatial dimensions have been arbitrarily subdivided into constituent parts (e.g., centimeter, inch, mile), so too has time been quantized and codified according to social norms (e.g., second, minute, hour). Like other technologies, time is implicit in the social routines of school institutions.

Of the themes that ultimately emerged from my iterative discourse analysis, time was by far the most prevalent. Across the 47 class sessions, students and I discussed schedules,

deadlines, test dates, lockdown periods, summer vacation, and other time-related categories the

most. That is, our classroom discourse was shaped by the ways in which we understood school to

be a process of time. Time, though, is a social construct, one perpetuated by the global

imposition of the Gregorian calendar and its neat pocketing of Earth's revolution into uniform

days spread out over weeks and months (Stiegler, 2019). Calendrical systems are then

extrapolated to additional 'meaning' in light of the context of institutional schooling. Schools

operate under the imagined premise of a workweek and a weekend. Long stretches of school

days yield to periods of vacation both during the 'school year' and in the interstice between two

'school years' (Debord, 2014). Vacations are positioned as "moments of real life whose

spectacular return we are supposed to look forward to" (Debord, 2014, p. 84), but they are also

socially constructed segmentations that make artificial organizations possible within school

systems. For example, summer vacation becomes the liminal period when groups of students of a

certain age move to the next grade level.

Considering the manifold ways that school and time intersect, such an exploration would

require a dissertation unto itself. Thus, I focus in this section on one I find to be the most telling,

the novel, for it represents the coalescence of both the technology of time and social routines that

appear due to habitualized behaviors regarding an object found primarily in English Language

Arts classes in schools. The unity between a technology and time is not surprising, for "*things*

[emphasis added] are not simply objects that exist outside the human mind, but are rather tied to

events, to the timing of events" (Chun, 2011, p. 51). That is, if we are to consider school as a set

of social routines enacted around and with objects, then those routines—a series of steps or

processes—must be done *over* time, therefore suggesting that school requires the plane of time

(more specifically, the socially constructed notion of time) more so than that of space.

The 'technology' of the novel elicited particular social routines on the behalf of students and myself. Some of these assumptions may at first seem like the only way or the right way of doing things, but I contend that much of what is assumed about school and what it is comes from educators' own time in school systems during which they became habituated to certain social routines around the objects, tools, and technologies of schools. For instance, novels in schools are read from cover-to-cover, starting with the beginning of the book and working sequentially to the end. Except in rare circumstances, the entirety of a novel is read (i.e., chapters or parts of chapters are usually not skipped over). The reading of the novel is required either as an in-class activity or as homework as a means of participating in a future class. Therefore, everyone in the class is mandated to be 'on the same page,' so to speak. According to Chun (2016), "Novels create an imagined community by intertwining the interior time of the novel's characters with the exterior time of the reader" (p. 26; see also Anderson, 2006). As students experience the novel's *syuzhet* (its discursive treatment of narrative events not necessarily arranged chronologically, cf. Todorov, 1980), they do so in parallel with their peers, moving spatially across the pages, but also chronologically through time both insofar as the plot of the novel as well as through the days of the school year, moving toward an inexorable end date, whether that be of a marking period, semester, or school year. School-based social routines around novels also locate major assessments at the end of the book, often implying that students should be tested on the *content* of the novel rather than something else, such as skills. Many novel-end assessments, which I have seen as a high school English Language Arts teacher, ask for students to identify points of the plot or correctly match characters to descriptors: what is being tested in these instances is not a student's ability to comprehend text or write about complex issues but rather rote memorization

of plot points that, ultimately, prove of little value beyond the period of time dedicated to that particular novel.

The novelization of the English Language Arts curriculum could, of course, look much different, but the social routines that surround the teaching of these books in schools predicate certain kinds of class assignments, schedules, and deadlines; they also may preclude others, such as unrelated topics about social justice in the world today, for when students and teachers read novels that are, by their nature, set in the past, then the class discussions happening in the present will be nevertheless tethered to a (likely) unrelated space and time. That some teachers may make relevant connections to contemporary issues does not undermine the point; it reinforces the fact that teachers must actively contend against the inherent social routines that structure the teaching of a novel in high school English Language Arts classes. For all its potential good, novel-based teaching nonetheless engenders a predetermined linear approach to English Language Arts teaching that can straitjacket students and teachers into sequentially progressing—from front cover to back cover—through a book calcified in time.

Conclusions

Initially, I had thought that language would be all that remained when school buildings closed during the lockdown, which initially inspired me to wonder whether teachers and students somehow languaged school into being. As such, I asked the research question: In what ways did high school students and a teacher write during synchronous online English classes within the context of COVID-19 pandemic? While many social routines and phatic gestures emerged from the data, it also became clear through discourse analysis that language was but one mode that manifested school into being. School institutions, I ultimately concluded, transcend physical space because they exist instead of shared routines and collective rituals, which in turn center

around different tools, technologies, and architectures (both physical structures and digital interfaces). School did not stop for me and my students in Stone Valley High School during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown because it was already with us; we enacted it through social routines around novels, grades, and class schedules.

It is the default state for history to be lost, to forget where things have come from, for those objects to become routinized in the now. Language alone sought to capture history; without language, history does not exist. With language, we created the history of things—where they came from, what their past was, what their predecessors were—yet the normal state, still, is for objects' histories to be forgotten. Language must be used intentionally to record and relay the history of a thing. Institutions emerge among the palimpsests of countless forgotten histories, silently demanding obeisance to historyless normative practices.

Each new generation intrudes into the schools, piecing together the social routines that define 'schooling' through their own rites of passage. Along the way, they see others interact and then interact themselves with tools, technologies, objects, schedules, architectures, floors, desks, whiteboards, calculators, and novels. They internalize certain ways of engaging; the collective set of routines, taken together, are the institution. School is a habit, not a place.

The implications of this are profound, for habits are not inflexible. They bend, reshape, and can be broken. This critical instance case study provided an opportunity to perceive the 'thingness' of schools, a realization about human constructs that is theorized to emerge only when a thing breaks (Brown, 2001). The exceptional state of lockdown inspired in me an awareness of the habits around schools, a cognizance that often occurs when what was formerly a habit no longer matches one's objectives and environment (Wood, Quinn, & Kashy, 2002). Taken together, what was clear to me from this critical instance case study was that schools are

both things and habits. They are collective habits around things. Schools are institutional collectives of the social routines done with and around items, tools, and technologies.

Language was critical for me to discursively analyze as a means of identifying and manifesting the social routines, indeed. But, ultimately, it alone was not substantial enough to just language school into being. After all, even in a completely silent in-person classroom, there are social routines: for example, the direction that students face from their chairs (which are pre-positioned before students enter the classroom to have an unimpeded view of the front) centers the teacher and whiteboard—that teachers arrange, students consent, and then school proceeds along these parameters is just one social routine. Online, as well, the silence of the class session implied a routine: the initial quiet of the Public Chat could be broken by my message alone, indicating an intentional deference in the students' silence. Furthermore, if language by itself were to bring school into being, then I might unwittingly leave out the many students who did not communicate during our class sessions but were nonetheless there. No, language alone did not make school. Instead, my discourse analysis pointed to a new theoretical understanding of schools as collective heuristic actions, ways of interacting with man made things that have been socially constructed and reconstructed enough times to render them and our internalized routines around them invisible. I believe that if we are to address any of the problems with teaching, schooling, and learning, then it may be of benefit to reconceive of "school" along these lines.

Certainly, not all schools comprise the same practices, not all cultures have the same tools, technologies, or social routines around them. These manifest differences have left many scholars plumbing language for an understanding of what schools are and how to improve them. These approaches have significant merit, for they can lead to a deeper understanding of social routines of schools. However, research approaches that center language may be unable to capture

the entire story. Future research on schools should first seek to redefine them. We need a better

understanding of the collective reproduction of social routines around tools, technologies, and

architectures. Once we codify these, then we can better understand why school institutions may

work in some places but fail in others; we may find social routines that are expected but unable

to be performed.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Questionnaire Regarding Online Learning

Please write your answers to the following inquiries directly in the space below each question.

Answers do not have a minimum or maximum length requirement. They will help me as your teacher to better understand what you're experiencing and to both accommodate your experiences and share them with other teachers.

Be honest, accurate, and explanatory in your answers—they won't be held against you in any way.

1. **What does "distance learning" look like from your eyes for my class?**

A:

2. **During live conferences, I've noticed that students use neither their video or microphones. In your own words and experience, why have you kept these off? Elaborate.**

A:

3. **How do you "write" during live conferences for my class? Are you using a laptop keyboard, voice-to-text, smartphone keyboard (touch or swipe input), some combination, or something else? [If it changes at different times, feel free to clarify.]**

A:

4. **How do you "write" for assignments in my class? Are you using a laptop keyboard, voice-to-text, smartphone keyboard (touch or swipe input), some combination, or something else? [If it changes at different times, feel free to clarify.]**

A:

5. **How does your written work during/for class compare to your written work during/for class when we met in-person?**

A:

6. **When you're writing during/for class, do you use spell check? If so, when do you or don't you use it?**

A:

7. **If you use Grammar Editing software, which do you use (Grammarly, Microsoft Word's native editor, Google Doc's native editor, or something else)? When do you use it?**

A:

8. **In regards to spell and grammar checkers, how do you decide what to do with the suggestions that the programs make?**

A:

9. **How and in what format do you keep your personal notes (that you don't hand in) from our classes? [Include a picture/screenshot if you'd like.]**

A:

10. **Describe the process of answering these questions as it related to your real world Where were you when writing? When were you writing? What were you writing on? How long did it take you? Were your sessions interrupted? Did you use spell checking or grammar checking? Etc.**

A:

Appendix B

The following scheduling information may help to better understand when and why synchronous classes were held on particular days. From March 17 to May 22, Stone Valley High School used a full-day rotating drop schedule (7:50 a.m. to 2:54 p.m.), during which courses would meet three out of every four days in the rotation. Wednesdays were, from March 23 to May 22, days in which no classes met synchronously across the entire school. However, the schedule changed on May 26 to shortened school days but occurring all five days each week. On "A" days, only Period 1 met; on "B" days, Period 3 and 6 met. Spring break was from April 4 to 12.