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# Using Book Clubs to Study the Difference in Student Discourse and Persona in Face-to-Face Versus Online Discussion of Literature

Alexandra Zornow

St. John Fisher College, arz09028@students.sjfc.edu

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## **Abstract**

The goal of this study is to examine the differences in student discourse and persona in an online book club and a face-to-face book club. Data was collected in the form of questionnaires, field notes, and transcripts of both online and face-to-face literature discussions. The study reveals that there are various differences in student discourse when using an online discussion platform. When using a virtual book club, there are obstacles that impact student participation, students' behavior and interaction changes and students utilize a form of netspeak to communicate in an online setting. The implications of this study can assist educators in implementing virtual book clubs in their own classrooms.

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Using Book Clubs to Study the Difference in Student Discourse and Persona in Face-to-Face  
Versus Online Discussion of Literature

By

Alexandra Zornow

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
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Supervised by

Dr. Joellen Maples

School of Arts and Sciences  
St. John Fisher College

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### Abstract

The goal of this study is to examine the differences in student discourse and persona in an online book club and a face-to-face book club. Data was collected in the form of questionnaires, field notes, and transcripts of both online and face-to-face literature discussions. The study reveals that there are various differences in student discourse when using an online discussion platform. When using a virtual book club, there are obstacles that impact student participation, students' behavior and interaction changes and students utilize a form of netspeak to communicate in an online setting. The implications of this study can assist educators in implementing virtual book clubs in their own classrooms.

### **Introduction**

The topic that will be explored in this study is the difference in student persona in face-to-face versus digital discourse through the use of both an online and in-person banned book club. Inner city male students will participate in reading a common banned or challenged text, discussing it during an afterschool in-person session and discussing the text on an online platform. Students will be able to choose the common text that is read from a banned or challenged book list created by the teacher, create a reading schedule, and choose how they will discuss the text. The online discussion forum allows for all students, whether or not they have other afterschool commitments, to participate in a reading club. Student persona and discourse will all be compared based on the afterschool face-to-face session and the online forum to identify how using a non-traditional online book club can change the way students view themselves as readers. Discourse can be defined as a socially accepted way of thinking, and using language that is used to identify oneself as a member of a social network (Gee, 2001). This study will look at the way in which students are communicating in the book club, and the identity or role that they are assuming during online and face-to-face discussion. In using a banned or challenged book, the students will be pushed to discuss controversial topics that might bring them out of their comfort zones. The ALA (2014) explains banned or challenged books as the following:

A challenge is an attempt to remove or restrict materials, based upon the objections of a person or group. A banning is the removal of those materials. Challenges do not simply involve a person expressing a point of view; rather, they are an attempt to remove material from the curriculum or library, thereby restricting the access of others. Due to the commitment of librarians, teachers, parents, students and other concerned citizens,

most challenges are unsuccessful and most materials are retained in the school curriculum or library collection. (ala.org)

Using this type of literature also will position students as young adults who are capable of handling topics that some parents or schools view as unfit for a school setting. Discourse analysis will be used with the transcriptions of the face-to-face discussions as well as the online discussions to identify how students' personas and voice change between the two formats. Student questionnaires will also be used as another method of data to identify if students identify a change in their own behavior during the study as well as differences in their online and in-person behavior.

Studying the difference in student discourse online versus in-person is significant because many educators are incorporating digital literacies into the classroom, and this study will identify the ways in which student's participation can change with the use of technology. According to English Language Arts College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening, by the time that students graduate they must be able to "Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally" (corestandards.org, para. #3). The Common Core State Standards require educators to incorporate digital literacies into the classroom to prepare their students for participating and understanding information in a digital format. This study will expose educators to a new format for their class discussions as well as one way to implement the use of an online platform for discussion in their classrooms. This study will also push educators to find new and inventive ways to engage students that do not position themselves as readers, or do not participate to their full potential in a classroom setting. The online portion of the book club also offers students who enjoy utilizing the internet as a tool for reading, writing and learning a way to contribute.

Students who are technologically savvy can use their skills in a place where they might have never before been valued. It also allows them an outlet for their ideas even when school or the club in general is not in session.

Book clubs are excellent ways to engage students in reading and discussing literature, and this study provides one way to improve upon the traditional book club and all students (Weih, 2008). Book clubs provide students with a safe and welcoming place to explore their interests and think critically about the texts they are reading. Bowers-Campbell (2011) found that if students trust the other students in their club, they are more likely to feel comfortable sharing their opinions. Students who feel that they are in a safe community where their opinions are valued, become more likely to participate. Lee and Gilles (2012) found that book clubs provided students with more than just literature, but a place to socialize and learn about their own lives and society. Once male students see others participating in literature discussions, they might view reading and discussing texts as a more normal activity. Scharber, Melrose and Wurl (2007) noted that in providing students with the ability to choose the books they would like to read, they will choose texts that they can relate to their own lives which will increase engagement.

Without studying this topic, teachers may be hesitant to use technology in the classroom when it comes to discussing literature. Educators will be exposed to other ways to engage their students in reading and talking about literature. In many English classrooms, students' participation could be affected by the students surrounding them. In an online setting, a student might be more likely let down their inhibitions when they are not fearing that another student or teacher could make them feel devalued. Students might be less worried about what their classmates might think about them in an online setting and be more open to expressing their feelings. If they are worried about seeming "uncool" in the classroom if they are engaged in a

discussion of the text, they are encouraged to participate in an out of school setting from their own homes. Some students are just uncomfortable sharing aloud and hearing their own voices in a larger group of students. The online format gives these students a safer arena for expressing their ideas, where they do not have to feel as though all eyes in the classroom are on them (Bowers-Campbell, 2001; Klages, Pate & Conforti, 2007; Carico & Logan, 2004). In exploring the differences in student discourse online versus in-person, much can be learned about the ways in which students position themselves in the classroom and reasons for students not contributing to their highest ability.

If this topic is not explored further, many students who seem to be uninterested in their English texts in the classroom cannot be given the chance to participate to their full potential in an online community. Although there is no anonymity, students might feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts and opinions in a space where they are behind a computer screen and not in a classroom with thirty other students. Some students feel uncomfortable sharing in a normal classroom setting, and studying the differences between online and in-person discussion will shed light on just how much students are holding back in a situation in which they feel as if their thoughts are not important. This study could provide a wealth of information for teachers that are wondering why they are struggling with unengaged students in an ELA classroom. This study could also help teachers with possible enrichment activities for students who are gifted.

The goal of this action research project was to identify the differences in student discourse and persona in an online book club versus face-to-face book club. The research question was the following: what are the differences in student discourse and persona in an online versus face-to-face book club? In order to answer this research question, I collected various forms of data such as pre and post-questionnaires, audio and online transcripts and field

notes. I analyzed my data by searching for similarities and differences between the two discussion formats. In order to find these similarities and differences, I coded my data. Many differences were found in regards to the differences of student discourse in both settings. The first major finding was that there are many obstacles that educators must expect or plan for when it comes to using online discussions such as students not having internet at home and not knowing what to post. The second major finding was that students behave and interact differently in an online setting. Students become more supportive and encouraging to their classmates; however, other students become more disrespectful. The third major finding was the use of netspeak to communicate in an online setting such as hashtags and emoticons. Ultimately, online discussions did impact student discourse and persona. I found a few implications for educators through my research. First, educators must be aware of the how the obstacles such as limited or no access to the internet at home as well as confusion about how to use an online platform for discussion can limit student access. Educators must plan for these obstacles as well as ways to combat them before introducing students to the online discussion. Secondly, educators should explicitly teach students about acceptable online netiquette in order to avoid disrespectful behavior in an online platform. The third implication is that educators should model what is expected and what is acceptable to post in an online thread to clarify what is expected of students.

### **Theoretical Framework**

There are many different ways to define literacy. Literacy is always changing and multidimensional. Freebody and Luke (1990) define literacy as, “a multifaceted set of social practices with a material technology entailing code breaking, participation with the knowledge of

the text, social uses of the text and analysis/critique of the text” (p. 19). This definition of literacy means that literacy is a social practice that it is shaped by the social forces of literate people. Gee (2001) defines literacy as, “control of secondary use of language or secondary discourses” (p. 18). What Gee means is that a person can be considered literate once they have control of the language that they use other than their primary discourse. A discourse is a socially accepted way of thinking, and using language that is used to identify oneself as a member of a social network. One’s primary discourse is used with family or friends and in the home and is acquired through socialization. One’s secondary discourse is used in places such as school or work and is learned. This difference in discourse in school and out of school could be a possible cause for the reason behind students not feeling comfortable or participating fully in the classroom.

Primary discourse is usually associated with oral or spoken English. Developing a strong oral language is imperative in literacy development (Otto, 2000). Otto states that, “oral language provides the basis on which knowledge of written language is acquired” (p.18). As children begin to speak, they do it from observing others around them. Children use inventive spelling and reproduce in writing what they think they have heard. Written language is also acquired through children talking about literacy events. Otto (2000) argues that oral language promotes written language in that “oral competency can facilitate school success” (p. 19). Students who speak out in at home or in class and ask questions for clarification are the students who get answers. These students use their oral competency to gain literacy acquisition in comparison to those students who do not verbalize their questions or thoughts in the home or classroom. Goodman (2001) argues that children use oral language about written language by “talking about literacy events in which they participate” (p. 318). Children discuss literacy experiences relating to school or literature.

One way to engage these students in the school community is through technology. The New Literacy and Technology theory promotes embracing and incorporating technology for the purpose of engaging students (Gainer & Lapp, 2010). Gainer and Lapp argue that there should be a balance between traditional and new literacies in the classroom. They believe in a remix of these two literacies to increase student engagement by bridging classwork with real world literacy. One way to do this in the classroom is to extend the boundaries of the classroom by using the internet for instruction. By giving students the opportunity to discuss texts they would not be reading inside an ELA classroom and giving them the ability to discuss these texts through an online discussion, students might become more engaged than they are in a traditional classroom setting. Bridging these literacies also helps students to recognize that reading is not just a skill they learn and use in school, but a fun way to socialize with their peers.

The following study will apply the theory of new literacy and technology in order to understand how the use of digital literacies can be used to study and understand the ways in which students position themselves in a face-to-face setting versus an online setting. This theory provide a framework for understanding the effects of the use of technology on student voice and persona.

### **Research Question**

Literacy is a field that is constantly changing with the use of technology becoming more prevalent in the classroom as teachers are learning different ways to incorporate it into their daily instruction. Therefore, technology should be used to explore the ways in which educators can reach all students' learning styles. One way that technology can be incorporated into an English classroom is through the use of online book club platforms. Given the fact that many students feel devalued and powerless in the classroom, using an online book club is one way that

educators can reach students who may not feel comfortable discussing their thoughts in the classroom. The following research question will be the basis for the following literature review: how does the use of digital platforms for discussion of literature change student personas and their discourse versus face-to-face literature discussions?

### **Literature Review**

When executing action research, it is essential to review previous studies focusing on the use of technology on virtual literature discussions. In the following literature review, three themes will be discussed relating to the use of both online and face-to-face discussions of literature. The first theme that will be discussed is the use of book clubs as a means to both engage and motivate adolescent male readers. Giving boys the opportunity to choose books that they find interesting and read and discuss along with other young males can be a motivator. Students in general, regardless of sex, need motivation to be successful. The second theme will discuss the use of online literature discussions as equal opportunity. All students are given the same opportunity to share and discuss their thoughts without the time constraints of a traditional classroom. The shy student in a traditional classroom is also provided with the chance to discuss their thoughts and opinions without the fear of talking in front of large groups. All students are given a level playing field with an online setting for literature discussions. The third and final theme discussed is the use of online book clubs to create a community of learners. Reading is a social activity, and creating a safe community is key to making online book clubs a success. As students become more comfortable sharing ideas and with each other, a bond forms between group members that increases collaboration and critical thinking. The benefits of online book

clubs will be discussed as well as the possible drawbacks to the use of a virtual literature discussion.

### **The Use of Book Clubs to Motivate and Engage Adolescent Males to Read**

One suggested approach for motivating boys to read is to implement the use of book clubs both inside and outside of school. Farris, Werderick, Nelson and Fuhler (2009) argue that the use of email dialogue journals can be one way to stimulate adolescent males' reading. Giving students an opportunity to discuss their reading with another through multimedia can motivate them to read. When the internet is used for discussion it adds another element that can engage male readers. The stimulation that the virtual journals provide can be the deciding factor in whether or not young boys feel motivated to read and discuss literature. Farris et al. also found that boys enjoy discussing what they are reading when they have a relationship with the people in which they are talking with. Boys enjoy sharing what they know or have learned in a text when they trust the people in which they are sharing with. The comfort and trust in literature discussion groups provide students with the motivation to continue reading and discussing. Likewise, Weih (2008) found through the implementation of a book club that boys value having a welcoming place to discuss books with other adolescent males. During his study, the boys talked about how they could apply what they were reading to their own lives which is what engaged them in reading. Weih found that the boys in the reading club derived pleasure and gratification from reading. When the students felt as though they could relate to and understand the texts, they enjoyed reading and discussing that much more. The students had agency in the book club in that they came to meetings prepared with questions to ask the other members that genuinely interested them. One suggestion that Weih has for educators implementing book clubs is to contact authors to see if they are willing to have a conference call

so that boys can ask the authors questions about the book. In Weih's study, he found that boys thoroughly enjoyed talking to the author which prompted them to think critically about what they had read. The book club provided them with more than just literature, but a place to socialize and learn about their own lives and society. The book clubs provided boys with the engagement and motivation that they did not display in a traditional classroom setting.

In order to motivate boys to read, Taylor (2005) noticed that book clubs for boys-only gives them an opportunity to choose the books that they read, and allow them to talk about what they are interested in at a pace that is right for them. In having a book club only for males, more options for gender specific books are available. Boys can choose books that are relatable to their own lives and problems that adolescent boys deal with. Taylor proposes that in order to motivate boys to want to become avid readers, "book clubs can also include male volunteer leaders from the community in order to give boys more male readers as role models" (p. 298). Once boys see men that they look up to enjoying and discussing what they are reading, they might find reading to be a more acceptable pastime. Teachers and moderators have to find ways to break the traditional belief that book clubs and reading are not suitable activities for boys or men. Taylor also suggests using websites and the internet to conduct a book club can motivate readers, which is furthering the argument by Farris et al. (2009) that technology is an interesting and stimulating way to encourage reading. Incorporating technology into any literacy activity can help to inspire all students to read. According to Sedo (2003), 85% of the people who responded to the survey that he conducted were women. The participants in his study also concluded that book clubs are viewed as more of a woman or girl's activity rather than an activity suitable for men or young boys. It is not shocking that there is a push to include young men in the use of book clubs. The

use of book clubs with technology integrated in any way is an excellent way for educators to engage boys in reading and discussing what they are reading.

Xie (2014) found that motivation is directly related to peer feedback in online discussions. Xie noticed in his study of 57 college students that "...peers' replying posts had positive influences on all posting and non-posting behaviors, and peer rating had positive influences on the lengths of posts and number of rating given" (p. 298). Ultimately, when students' posts were acknowledged by others, in return they wrote more discussion posts as well as rated other students' posts more frequently. When students felt that their thoughts and ideas were acknowledged by other book club members, they became more motivated to start discussion threads as well as respond to other students' discussions. Similarly, Yeh (2010) identified encouragement was the third most common online discussion behavior which created a positive atmosphere for the discussion groups. If students feel as though they are encouraged by others, the atmosphere becomes more welcoming and motivational. Yeh found that the roles that students played as well as their behaviors influenced online learning communities in a positive way. When students expressed that they were grateful, gave blessings showed their attention and forgave each other, their community became stronger and the students more motivated to add to the discussions.

Shroff and Vogel (2009) found that "research has established that intrinsic motivation has a positive effect on learning and academic achievement" (p. 59) which argues that motivation is influential in learning and achievement. There are many different factors that impact a student's intrinsic motivation such as perceived competence, perceived choice, perceived challenge, and feedback. One way to ensure student motivation is through challenges. When students are stimulated they are more likely to become goal oriented in completing the task at hand. If

students are receiving positive feedback from both other group members and the moderator or teacher, they will succeed. One essential component of virtual literature circles or literature clubs is the ability to choose the text read by the group. Choice motivates students because it provides them with a sense of autonomy. Ultimately, if students feel confident in the subjects discussed, they will be more motivated. Shroff and Vogel's research found that,

The participants in online discussions seemed proficient, skillful, enthusiastic, adept at the use of technology, and interacted more in the online discussions. Conversely, the participants in the face-to-face discussions were not as eager to participate in the discussions and showed more resistance in initiating the discussions. The resistance may have been due to communication apprehension of the individual engaging the in the face-to-face discussions. The synchronous nature of the online discussions gave participants an opportunity to get their whole point across, whereas with the face-to-face discussions, they may have felt an inhibition to speak due to not being confident in expressing themselves verbally. (p.75)

In the comparison of the online group versus the face-to-face group, students participating in the online discussion were more motivated to add to the discussion, most likely because they felt more confident with their written ability than their verbal ability. The online discussion provided students with a more interactive way to talk about literature. When students are worried about talking in front of their peers, he found that they were less likely to begin the discussions whereas the online discussions flowed more freely. The online discussion allowed for students to get all of their ideas across for many different reasons. Conversely, Mason (2011) found that students who did not participate fully in online discussion in an e-forum were not motivated. He suggests many different steps that educators can take to improve both participation and

engagement in online forums or discussions. The first way to improve motivation is by introducing the use of technology in a computer lab where students can identify initial issues and overcome them. In giving students a chance to utilize the online platform before being expected to participate, they will feel more confident when they are asked to complete a task. Once students feel at ease using the online platform, the discussion will be a fun activity rather than a frustrating task where they do not feel prepared to handle the technology they are using. A second suggestion is to provide more instruction so that students are aware of what is expected of them in the discussions. If students understand what types of posts they should be creating, they are more likely to initiate and participate in discussions. Some students struggle with determining what is appropriate to post about, but this fear can be easily alleviated by the moderator. A third suggestion is to motivate students by asking them to provide a picture for their online profile as well as a short description of themselves. Students enjoy making their learning personal and adding their own flair to their profiles. The more ownership they can take of the discussion, and the more personality that they can add, the more engaged they will be. The final suggestion for increasing engagement is to increase moderation. If a moderator encourages students to respond to others, motivation will be increased. If the moderator simply lurks in the discussions, students might not take the initiative to encourage and validate others. When the moderator makes this behavior seem normal, than students will follow suit and provide the motivation for themselves and other members in the discussion group.

Similarly, Wise, Marbouti, Hsiao and Hausknecht (2012) noticed differences in motivation and provided suggestions for continuing to motivate students who are participating in online book clubs. Their study found that lengthy posts frustrate students and make them less motivated to respond. Students find these posts to be overwhelming and they are rarely read by

other group members. Wise et al. suggest that it is important for moderators or teachers to give students guidelines to avoid these longer posts so that students can continue to feel motivated and engaged in reading and responding to other's posts. Another conclusion of their study was that students were more interested in discussion threads that they had already posted to or the posts that had been popular with other group members. Their findings show that motivation and engagement is tied to the group's social dynamics. Likewise, Ikpeze (2007) found in her study on the use of peer-led electronic discourse that small group collaboration worked well when there was compatibility between the group members. When group members work well together, there is more engagement and motivation. Wise et al. (2012) as well as Ikpeze (2007) found that motivation is tied to the group's social dynamics.

Motivation and engagement is a key factor in any literacy activity. Book clubs in general provide the motivation for many students, not just adolescent males, to get involved. Curwood (2013) stated that

Steinkuehler, Compton-lily and King (2010) found that young men who struggle with reading in school and read below grade level when assessed on academic tests actually read above grade level when assessed on high-interest, video-game-related text. Notably, there was a difference of seven reading levels based on the kind of text and the reader's motivation. (p. 419)

It is safe to say that in order to engage male readers, it is crucial to choose text that will motivate students to read. If a student feels as though they are not interested in the text, they will not perform to the best of their abilities. Curwood (2013) and Steinkuehler et al. (2010) believe that to motivate young men to read, motivation is a key factor. These findings shows that motivation

plays a pivotal role in engaging students whether it is intrinsic or situation based, and book clubs are a proven way to provide the motivation needed to engage students.

### **Online Literature Discussions as Equal Opportunity**

The integration of technology can provide educators with numerous ways to reach different types of learners. Using an online platform for discussion allows students who might be more hesitant to participate in the classroom to voice their thoughts and opinions. Grisham and Wolsey (2006) conducted research using an 8<sup>th</sup> grade English class to study the impacts of technology on literature discussions. Their findings are echoed throughout much of the research on virtual book clubs. Their findings conclude that online platforms allow for authentic discussion of texts. The internet provided students with the ability to post from their homes and take more time to think about their responses before posting. Grisham and Wolsey found that with these flexibilities, “students found a voice, developed perspectives, make meaningful predictions and established the motivation to read as only peers can” (p. 654). The online aspect of the discussion gave students the ability to voice their thoughts and opinions, think for themselves and participate from anywhere that internet could be accessed. Similarly, Bowers-Campbell (2011) found that students crafted their responses before they posted to the discussion board which provided thoughtful responses. Campbell also noted that face-to-face discussions can frequently be dominated by a small group of students while as the online discussion promoted equal participation because shy students’ voices were as equally represented as vocal students. Shy students are able to contribute just as much as the more vocal students giving them an equal chance to add their thoughts and ideas to the discussion. Grisham and Wolsey (2006) and Bowers-Campbell (2011) noted that the lack of audience can give all students the same opportunities to participate.

Along the same line of reasoning, Klages, Pate and Conforti (2007) indicated that participation can be affected by “the ability to reflect before responding over e-mail, and a higher level of confidence that comes with writing rather than public speaking” (p. 295). Without the social constraints of a traditional classroom, students can interact freely. In the study they conducted, they concluded that e-mail motivates those students who are hesitant to contribute to traditional in-person discussions. In addition, English (2007) found that “the online responses asks students to reflect a little more and not just give a spur of the moment response” (p. 59). This quote supports the notion that students are able to spend more time formulating their responses alleviating the fear that shy students might have when contributing. When students feel less pressure to say the right thing as they do in the classroom, they feel more confidence in expressing their opinions. The quality of student responses also increases when students have more time to think about their posts and develop them without any time constraints or an audience waiting for a response.

English (2007) identified that many parents worry that their children will meet predators with the use of an online community. Although the fear of the dangers of the internet is a valid concern, the book club can actually be seen as a safe zone for students. According to Sedo (2003), “virtual members see the virtual environment as unthreatening, and a safe space in which to increase their knowledge” (p. 74). At any age, cyberspace is a much more inviting and safe place to voice thoughts and opinions, because members do not have to fear that their ideas will be critiqued in an in-person setting so they feel more comfortable and less restricted with their viewpoints. When the intimidation of an in-person setting is eliminated, students feel safer and more encouraged to participate in the discussions. Similarly, Scharber, Melrose and Wurl (2007) found that, “online book clubs also provide safe, guided social experiences for preteens

and teens who are learning to navigate the internet on their own” (p. 188). In reality, adolescents will explore the internet independently, and a much safer way to introduce them to the world-wide-web and technology is through the use of social interaction with literature discussions. Parents can feel more comfortable knowing that their students are using a social website that’s sole purpose is for discussion of literature. Many virtual book clubs can be set to a private setting in which only known members can be added. In particular, students with special needs can safely participate without restrictions that can hinder their success and participation in the traditional literature discussion in the classroom.

In addition to safety, time and flexibility are factors that can provide all students with equal opportunity to participate in online discussions. Sedo (2003) found that in a survey, students stated that they enjoyed the flexibility of the online discussions. In his study, he indicated that,

Flexible scheduling is a perceived benefit of the virtual book club across all respondents.

To illustrate, when all readers were asked what role they think the internet plays in book clubs, the more frequent responses included overcoming geographical barriers (35 percent), access to like people (25 percent), and time flexibility (21 percent). (p. 80)

Participants enjoyed the fact that they had ways to socialize, without worrying about travel barriers and the time of day that they were participating. In eliminating these restrictions, it becomes easier to participate and less of a chore. Similarly, Yu (2009) found that, “online discussion alleviates the problems associated with time-limited discussion (logistics, role identities, and cognitive challenged); furthermore, it increases literacy and critical thinking skills” (p. 8). Not having a time limit on how long discussions can take place can allow students to expand on their ideas while promoting critical thinking. An online component to a book club

or literature circle allows for flexibility which in-turn provides more time for reflection and response.

Day and Kroon (2010) realized that even when their middle school students were absent from school, they wanted to participate in an online discussion. Students did not let geographical barriers because of sickness stand in the way of their participation in online discussions. Some of their students e-mailed their teachers to find out the specific times of the online discussions so that they would not miss out and be able to participate. Similarly, Beeghly (2005) found that,

Most students reported that they read what their classmates wrote and then spent however much time they needed to think about and formulate their responses. However, several students printed the postings, read them, spent time thinking and then formulated their responses. One student printed the postings, read them, highlighted what she found interesting, reread the highlighted parts, brainstormed responses, and then responded. (p. 18)

This finding indicates that time of day in which participants can post as well as the time reading and formulating responses to discussion are flexible in an online setting. Students are able to process their classmates' posts and reflect before formulating their own responses. The unlimited time for reflection can improve the discussion and lead to more thoughtful and meaningful discussions of literature.

The ability to revisit discussion threads is another way in which online discussions promote equal opportunity. According to Day and Kroon (2010), once their students understood the ways in which the discussion threads worked, they could revisit past discussions or earlier threads to contribute their thoughts. In being able to return to past discussions, students found that they could talk about more ideas than they would be able to in a face-to-face setting.

Bowers-Campbell (2011) noticed similar results in her study. She states that, “Yet unlike face-to-face discussions where absent students have few means for catching up, online discussions provide an archive for students to reengage with the conversation” (p. 562). The study found that students felt a responsibility to respond to each other’s posts, and frequently would return to older posts and contribute. The archives give students the ability to catch up if they have been absent unlike a face-to-face setting where once the discussion is missed, it cannot be replicated for the students who were not in class. Day and Kroon (2010) and Bowers-Campbell (2011) highlight the benefits for all students to participate in online discussion through the use of archives which provides equal access for all students to every discussion thread.

The online format is an excellent way for students and teachers to take risks in their teaching and learning. Groenke and Maples (2008) conducted a study in which preservice teachers attempted critical talk through the use of online discussion. Teachers can find it difficult to promote critical talk in their classrooms, but through online discussion, a safe place was provided to discuss the four dimensions of critical literacy: disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, sociopolitical issues and taking action to promote social justice. Groenke and Maples found that “the development of critical talk may depend on a collaborative exchange, then, where teachers act as co-participants-sharing their own opinions, “thinking out loud” with students about issues-rather than as sole facilitators or discussion managers” (p. 12). Therefore, the online platform is an excellent way for students and teachers to take risks because it is an ideal location for collaborative exchange that is not completely led and directed by the teachers or moderators. English (2007) had similar findings in that students take more risks in an online setting rather than face-to-face. One student chose to respond to a complex writing prompt dealing with two difficult philosophies. English believes that this

student would not have risked such a difficult topic in a small group face-to-face discussion and would not have received responses from classmates either. These students felt that they could take more risks when they had time to think and write out their ideas. They felt more confident in their responses in a virtual setting. The use of online forums allowed various students' voices to arise that would not have occurred in a classroom. According to Yu (2009), "Talking aloud in class discussion may extend beyond the 3:00 pm bell as the student takes away the social implications of identity and labeling made during the discussion" (p. 8). Students do not have to fear being ridiculed or labeled for their thoughts and ideas in a class discussion when they are participating online. Yu also found that, "no threat of grades or prospect of knowledge will persuade a fearful students to speak up and risk his status in the social pecking order" (p. 8) meaning that students are not always willing to take risks in face-to-face discussions because they may fear the reactions of their peers and the social implications of their contribution. For these students, it is beneficial to allow them a different space to participate where they do not fear instant responses from classmates. Yu's (2009) findings support Groenke and Maples (2008) and English (2007) in that students are more willing to take risks when they are in an online setting because they are less hesitant to share their thoughts and opinions.

The use of a virtual book club provides an equal opportunity for all students to participate and succeed. It appears that many of the drawbacks that can be found with face-to-face discussions are remediated with the online platform. Grisham and Wolsey (2006) and Bowers-Campbell (2011) noticed that students who are less likely to speak up in the classroom are more likely to be vocal in an online setting. Students feel much more comfortable sharing their thoughts when they are not in a face-to-face setting. The online setting allows for all students to participate to their full potential. According to Klages et al. (2007) and English (2007) online

discussions are much more fruitful than in-person discussions as students have more time to think about and develop their responses to literature when they are written in an online response. They both agree that the online setting allows for much deeper reflection as students can spend more time reflecting and crafting their responses. Sedo (2003) and Scharber Melrose and Wurl (2007) indicated that although parents fear for their child's safety in an online setting, online book clubs are an excellent way to introduce students to social networking in a safe setting. Not only can parents relax about their child's internet use, but children can feel safe in responding to literature in a supportive community. Yu (2009), Day and Kroon (2010), Bowers-Campbell (2011) and Beeghly (2005) all found that the flexibility of an online setting provides many advantages over a face-to-face setting. Students can participate from anywhere, despite geographical barriers, sickness or time. Yu (2009), Groenke and Maples (2008) and English (2007) all agree that virtual book clubs allow for risk taking. Whether it be teachers or students that are taking risks, the online setting allows for them to push the limits and take risks to expand their learning. For these various reasons, the use of cyberspace to house an online literature discussion provides equal access and opportunity for all people. Any barriers to participation that a face-to-face discussion can pose are solved with an online platform.

### **Online Book Clubs Create a Community of Learners**

Foasberg (2012) states that, "reading has always been a social activity, but online social networks make the social aspect of reading more visible" (p. 31). Reading is not an isolated activity, because it is natural for people to talk about what they are reading. The new surge in online book clubs makes this connection between society and books much clearer. It is not shocking that book clubs provide a sense of community for its members. Sedo (2011) clarifies Foasberg's (2012) point when he explains that

Using the term “community” gets to the heart of the notion that social formations can shape themselves around a text. It helps us recognize the factors at play as community members search for meaning within a text, sort out power structures, and ultimately, gain the knowledge that comes from exposure to, and discussion of, new and unfamiliar concepts. (p. 11)

Sedo argues that community is formed around literature. Meaning derived from a text is socially constructed, and discussion of literature is how a community comes together. Moreillon (2009) state that, “the heart of the concept, though, is not about the tools, but rather the communities and the conversations that they make possible” (p. 27). It is not that the online format of the book club is what makes the communities possible, it is the conversations that the members have that make the community possible. Ultimately, the use of the online platform is what allows these communities to flourish into functioning and encouraging communities.

One aspect of online book clubs that make them different from face-to-face book clubs is the encouragement provided by members. Foasberg (2012) noticed that

The atmosphere is supportive; when one reader noted that she had only read ten pages of *Anna Karenina* during a reading sprint, others were quick to point out that it is a dense text and her reading speed should not be compared to that of those reading lighter fare.

(p. 43)

The members in the club made sure to make the member struggling with a difficult text realizes that she should be proud of her accomplishments. In an online setting is it common for people to provide support and encouragement. Larson (2008) had similar results in her study of 5<sup>th</sup> graders and the use of online literature discussions. Larson noticed that students supported each other through their questioning and discussion. Larson’s students encouraged and thanked each other

as well as answered clarifying questions. Beeghly (2005) found that this encouragement that Larson (2008) and Foasberg (2012) also found in their studies, prompted her students to produce thoughtful discussion posts. In her study she notes that, “It was interesting that during the in-class debriefing, a number of students teased fellow group members good-naturedly about how “certain people’s responses had raised the bar” for everyone else’s responses” (p. 16). It is the community encouragement that pushes students to think critically about the text and spend time developing their responses. Students commented that some students’ responses were so meaningful that they were nervous to begin posting. Reading other students’ work set expectations that exceeded the expectations of the teacher. It is interesting to note that although students felt that they had to develop their responses more in-depth after seeing their peers’ work, no one felt as though they were embarrassed to have their classmates read their responses. The students surpassed the teacher’s expectations with the standards that they set for discussion posts and responses. The community that students created helped to increase the quality of their discussions. At the end of the study, Beeghly’s (2005) students stated that they found the online literature discussion to be more rewarding than the face-to-face literature discussions. The students found that discussions were more meaningful and promoted a deeper understanding of the texts they were reading. Bowers-Campbell (2011) had similar findings in that she noticed her students made a clear effort to authenticate their group members’ responses. Students looked to find ways to make their classmates feel as though their opinions and ideas were confirmed and worthwhile. Students encouraged each other to continue posting and fleshing out their ideas and this encouragement helped to develop the sense of community that is prevalent in online book discussions.

Ling, Cheung and Hew (2009) found similar results in their study in that the students peer facilitation techniques were very important in building community. In the study they conducted they noticed that, “the peer facilitation techniques that influences participants to participate in asynchronous online discussion included techniques such as “thanking others” and “encouraging contribution” (p. 507). It was students’ kind words of support and encouragement that influences students the most to participate in online discussion. In a traditional classroom setting, the encourager would be the teacher’s role. Rarely in a face-to-face setting do students thank each other for their contributions to the class discussion; however, in an online setting these kind words are a normal occurrence. These findings suggest that online platforms for discussion also lend themselves to more student-led learning. The teacher is not the only person in the discussion who validates students and makes them feel as though their contributions are welcomed and correct. Along the same line of reasoning, Moreland, North and Hazari (2009) noticed that the online format promoted student-led discussion. In their study of students discussions through the use of wiki technology they found that, “There needs to be a shift from instructor-delivered teaching, to student-facilitated learning where peer groups play as important a role as a teacher in a traditional (face-to-face) classroom environment” (p. 195). The online classroom allows for the shift from teacher-led to student-led discussions to occur. It is clear that literature discussions in cyberspace are ideal for creating a community where students take the lead and provide their peers with encouragement.

Thomas and Hofmeister (2001) found that,

If the students are isolated in their work, this impacts on how learning occurs. If the students work together with others, the collective frames of reference brought by each

participant allow for scaffolding of individual and group thought processes so that learning is increased. (p. 234)

According to Thomas and Hofmeister, students learn more through working with others. Learning happens when students are able to support each other and process the literature they are discussing with others. However, in the study they conducted, they found that students' responses did not increase in complexity with the use of virtual literature circles, but that working together and creating a sense of community was beneficial to student learning. Similarly, Larson (2008) found that "while working collaboratively in response to literature, students established a community of inquiry" (p. 646). She found that online leaning promoted socially constructed learning, because students created meaning from the text as a group through in-depth responses to literature, sharing ideas and looking at multiple viewpoints. Larson found that students' responses fell into 5 different categories: experiential, aesthetic, cognitive, interpretive and clarification. In the experiential prompts, students attempted to learn about their classmates through the use of literature while as in the aesthetic prompts, students responded in heartfelt ways and sometimes looked to their classmates for comfort. The aesthetic prompts elicited emotional interactions between group members. The cognitive prompts motivated students to ask prediction questions and make inferences with the group as a whole. The interpretive prompts encouraged students to deal with morals and values and identify themes in the texts. The clarification prompts gave students the ability to work together to answer questions about the texts. All of these responses required students to work together to make meaning from the text. Not one of these prompts required individuals to construct meaning independently. These types of responses helped students to build that sense of community that Thomas and Hofmeister (2001) found to be unique to online literature discussions.

One benefit that adds to the development of a community of learners is the elimination of interruptions when using an online platform to host a book club or literature discussion. Carico and Logan (2004), English (2007), and Day and Kroon (2010) all found that not having interruptions as discussion would in a traditional classroom setting enhanced both teaching and learning. Interruptions are a side effect to traditional classrooms settings that are difficult to eliminate, but an online setting it becomes obsolete. According to Day and Kroon (2010), students felt that the absence of interruptions allowed them to get more of their thoughts and ideas typed and entered into the discussion than they would in a face-to-face setting with time constraints. The online setting also helped to keep students on task. The participants commented on the fact that there are no distractions when they are on their computers and this environment keeps students' interests. Ultimately, online discussions provide more time to respond to literature which allows more topics and ideas to be discussed and developed upon. English (2007) experienced similar findings in her study. Students took turns responding which allowed all students the chance to participate without pausing. Day and Kroon (2010) and English (2007) agree that the absence of interruptions allows students to contribute all of their thoughts, eliminate distractions, provides more time to respond and provides less down time. When all students feel equally as important in the classroom discussions, they feel as though they are part of the learning community. Therefore, the elimination of interruptions creates a more positive atmosphere.

Lee and Gilles (2012) conducted a study in which American fifth graders and Taiwanese 10<sup>th</sup> graders used blogging as a means to discuss culturally relevant children's literature. For two years, these students shared their responses to picture books while learning about each other's cultures. Lee and Gilles found that, "communication via the internet provided a strong forum for

students to genuinely connect with people from another culture and learn about each other's cultural beliefs and ways of life" (p. 168). The use of the online discussions allowed students to build a community where they could learn about other ways of life while learning more about their own through the use of picture books. The discussions also lead to more than just learning about other cultures. Lee and Gilles noticed that "they also cultivated more confidence about their own cultural heritages, and therefore were capable of making thoughtful critiques of the texts as well as of the world" (p. 172). These discussions even lead to feeling empathetic towards cultures who have struggled. Students being able to understand other perspectives is what created the sense of community that allowed the groups to succeed and promoted critical thinking. Ikpeze (2007) found that groups that were successful such as the blogging literature discussions that Lee and Gilles (2012) based on the dynamics of their group. Ultimately, it is the dynamics of a group that determines its achievement. Ikpeze (2007) found common characteristics and qualities that made discussion groups successful. Ikpeze also found that "...group members were adventurous; dynamic, and innovative and group maintained both autonomy and interdependence. The success of the group was attributed to group cohesion, affection, motivation, commitment, a sense of shared identity, and positive interpersonal relationship" (p. 393). The ways in which group members can work together to create meaning is what creates the community feeling. Ultimately, the relationships and the sense of community developed within literature discussions are what determines the success of the group and what students will take away from the experience.

Another benefit of the development of a community of learners when using an online book club is the comfort that students feel when asking questions. Bowers-Campbell (2011) found that in a positive atmosphere which online discussions create, students feel more

comfortable sharing their thoughts and asking questions. She noticed that her students worked together to clarify and make meaning from the text. Bowers-Campbell stated that, “human beings depend on social interactions with others to learn” (p. 560). When students had a group that they felt comfortable asking questions and sharing personal thoughts with, they learned more about themselves through literature. According to Bowers-Campbell, “This shift in how responses are composed and pronouns are used reflects a growing sense of membership and belonging. Participants are moving beyond “This is my idea” to a negotiated sense of “Here’s what we think, but we’re still working on it” (p. 561). As the discussions continued, students felt as though they were working cohesively and collaboratively to negotiate the texts rather than as individual units. Likewise, Day and Kroon (2010) found that their students felt more comfortable asking questions because they were more confident in an online setting. The students noted that they never had to deal with the dead silence that occurs in a classroom face-to-face setting when questions were being asked. Bowers-Campbell (2011) and Day and Kroon (2010) realized that their students felt that the online setting made it much easier to ask questions which helped with their understanding of the books that they were reading.

In conclusion, Foasberg (2012) and Sedo (2011) found that reading is considered a social activity. Students learn better when they have social interaction with other students. Therefore, the use of a book club in general is a great way to allow students that necessary social interaction to construct the meaning of a text. Beeghly (2005), Larson (2008) and Foasberg (2012) noticed that the online book club provides students with this environment and encourages collaboration. In an online setting students are more likely to support each other than in a face-to-face setting. Ling, Chung and Hew (2009) and Moreland et al. (2009) found that the online platform for discussions support student centered learning. When students have more control over their

learning, it becomes more meaningful. Carico and Logan (2004), English (2007), and Day and Kroon (2010) all found that the lack of interruptions in online discussion also builds a community of learners. When students do not have to deal with interruptions they have more time to flesh out their ideas as well as less frustration with other members in the group. Lee and Gilles (2012) and Ikpeze (2007) noticed that there are specific characteristics that make positive group dynamics. These dynamics allow for collaboration and group constructed meaning of a text. Bowers-Campbell (2011) and Day and Kroon (2010) found that their students were more comfortable asking clarification questions in an online setting which lead to a deeper understanding of the texts they were discussing. Using cyberspace to house literature discussions creates an environment that is conducive to student participation and learning. Benefits of the virtual clubs range from increased student encouragement, no interruptions, more comfort when it comes to sharing with others and asking questions and support from members. The group culture that is created is unique to the virtual discussions and provide an argument for the use of online literature discussions in the classroom in any content area.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the research in this literature review states that there are numerous benefits of the use of virtual literature discussions. The three overarching benefits to using online book clubs are increased student engagement and motivation, providing equal opportunity to all students, and the creation of a positive atmosphere through the development of discussion communities. However, there are a few drawbacks or roadblocks that teachers or moderators might encounter with the implementation of their virtual book clubs.

A few problems that educators or moderators might encounter when creating and maintaining an online discussion group are confusion with the online platform, lack of

keyboarding skills, the loss of a password or username, the loss of personal interaction, and loss of openness and energy (Day and Kroon, 2007; Grisham and Wolsey, 2006; Klages et al., 2007; Yu, 2009). Although these are valid concerns, these drawbacks do not compare to the many benefits of the use of an online platform. Day and Kroon (2007) noticed that some students did not feel confident in their use of the online discussion threads. One student stated that, “It’s a little tricky at first trying to understand what messages connect and which ones don’t” and “I was confused at first, because not everyone is on the same topic and people are jumping from subject to subject” (p. 23). Students did not understand how to interpret which messages connected to which comments. However, once students began to understand the ways in which the threading worked, the conversation became much easier. Day and Kroon also found that students became better typists as a result. Similarly, Grisham and Wolsey (2006) noticed that the students who did not seem motivated by the online platform were having trouble typing. However, the use of the online book clubs can increase students typing skills which will alleviate this problem and lead to better online discussions. Grisham and Wolsey also noticed that younger students struggled with remembering their passwords and/or usernames. This problem can be solved if teachers prepare for these roadblocks along the way.

Klages et al. (2007) as well as Yu (2009) found that the lack of personal connection to be a possible negative result of online book clubs. Without the face-to-face interaction, educators worry that a part of the discussion will be lost. Yu (2009) conducted a study researched the impact of online and face-to-face discussion and found that some students preferred to see their classmates’ faces when they were discussing. They believed that it was difficult to understand their classmates’ emotions without seeing facial expressions. The students expressed that there was an energy that is apparent in a face-to-face discussion that was missing in an online

discussion. However, Klages et al. (2007) and Yu (2009) found that the majority of students preferred online discussion.

Based on the research conducted in this literature review, the benefits of online discussion greatly outweigh the drawbacks. The first major benefit discussed is the increased motivation and engagement for all readers with a virtual platform for discussion. Farris et al. (2009) indicate that adding the internet to any reading activity is one way to engage boys to read. Boys enjoy the extra stimulation of an online discussion that motivates them to continue reading and participating. Weih (2008) and Taylor (2005) had similar findings in that boys will be more motivated to read if they enjoy what they are reading. Choice is a key factor in motivating boys to read, and book clubs almost always allow for choice. The social aspect of book clubs are also key factors in engaging males.

Xie (2013) and Yeh (2010) discussed the impact of encouragement on motivation in online book clubs. The more encouragement and support that classmates provided for each other, the most motivated they were to participate. The students provided the motivation that led to the reasons for students participating and contributing. On the other hand, Shroff and Vogel (2009) determined that intrinsic motivation is a key factor in students' participation in an online book club. The more motivation that students bring to the table, the more they participate in online discussion. This motivation may come from already being competent with technology or class literature discussions in general. Wise, Marbouti, Hsiao and Hausknecht (2012) and Ikpeze (2007) argue that motivation is tied to the group's social dynamics. If students have a functioning group, they will be more motivated to contribute and add to the literature discussions.

The second theme discussed in this literature review focuses on the equality presented through the use of an online book club. Students who are disadvantaged in a face-to-face classroom setting can benefit from a virtual classroom setting. Grisham and Wolsey (2006) and Bowers-Campbell (2011) found that students who are naturally shy in a traditional classroom setting are more apt to participate in an online environment. These students let down their inhibitions when there is no audience for them to fear. Yu (2009) realized that students are more likely to contribute because they do not worry about how their participation will affect their social standing. Ultimately, when discussing literature in an online setting, students can let down their inhibitions and participate to their fullest potential.

Online discussions leave room for more reflection and development of responses (Klages et al., 2007; English, 2007). Students have more time to read other posts and write out their responses. When there is less of a rush and a time constraint as there is in a classroom, students' discussions become more meaningful. Not only do time constraints become eliminated with a virtual discussion, but geographical barriers do as well (Sedo, 2003). The flexibility found in an online setting cannot be replicated in the classroom or during a traditional face-to-face setting. Students can also benefit from the use of archives where they can revisit past discussions (Day and Kroon, 2010; Bowers-Campbell, 2011). Students can return to discussions to contribute later or to reference past talks. The archives also alleviate the problems that arise when students are absent from class.

The third and final theme discussed in this literature review is the creation of the feeling of community that is developed with a virtual book club. Learning takes place when students can socially construct meaning. The development of a community comes along with the encouragement provided by members of the book clubs (Beeghly, 2005; Larson, 2008; Foasberg,

2012). Students feel more comfortable and a positive atmosphere is fostered when students thank and encourage other students. In response to the student feedback that is freely given in an online setting, students create an atmosphere that is conducive to student centered and student led learning (Ling, Cheung and Hew, 2009; Moreland et al., 2009).

In conclusion, there are numerous benefits to utilizing an online book club with students. Despite the few drawbacks, these benefits help students to succeed in any setting. Teachers must be prepared to deal with all problems that may arise as well as expect a large amount of preparation to implement an online book club. With the use of a virtual literature discussion teachers can engage students and provide equal opportunity for them to read and succeed inside and outside of the classroom.

### **Context**

The research for this study took place in an urban middle and high school in upstate, NY. According to the New York State district report card, during the 2011-2012 school year, 230 students were enrolled in grades seven- nine. The ethnic makeup of this school is 77% black or African American, 10% Hispanic or Latino, 3% Asian and 10% White. Eighty-six percent of these students are eligible for free lunches while 13% are eligible for reduced priced lunches. The seven students participating in the study are all male students ranging from grades eight through 12.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study are all male students. Four of the students are in ninth grade, one is in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, one is in 11<sup>th</sup> grade and one is in 12<sup>th</sup> grade. One out of the seven students has an IEP, but the five other students are general education students. All students

receive free lunches and are from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Six of the seven participants are African American while one student is white. All names are pseudonyms.

One participant named Andy is a white male in grade 11. He has Asperger's disease and an IEP. He is very shy in class, and participates only when he feels strongly about the topic being discussed in class. He does not converse much with other students in the class and is very focused on his classwork. He enjoys reading young adult literature and writing.

Another participant named Tim is an African American student in the ninth grade. Tim has a very confident attitude. He is very talkative in class but is serious about his studies and grades. He is an athlete and plays for the school's JV football team.

The third participant named James is an African American student in the ninth grade. He is very serious about school and well-liked by his teachers and peers. He is a high-honor-roll student every year. James is very comfortable asking questions and talking about what he is reading.

The fourth participant named Thomas is an African American student in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. He is a very vocal student and never hesitates to state his opinions, which frequently gets him into trouble with both teachers and other students. He does very well in all of his classes, and really enjoys activities that are hands-on. He is involved in many clubs at the school.

The fifth participant named D'Andre is an African American student in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. He is a very shy student in a classroom setting. D'Andre does not speak in class unless he is called upon by his teachers. However, he participates silently in class and always exceeds expectations on assignments. He is not involved in other clubs in the school but works after school and on the weekends at a local grocery store.

The sixth participant named Shawn is an African American ninth grade student. He is a popular student with his peers and well-liked by his teachers. He is also on the JV football team for the school. Although he does well in his classes, he is sometimes considered to be the class clown. He likes to make other students laugh.

The seventh participant named Zeke is an African American ninth grade student. He is very serious about his grades and is well-spoken in many of his classes. He is frequently the student who begins discussions as he is comfortable sharing his own thoughts and opinions. Zeke is a very thoughtful and caring young man.

### **Researcher Stance**

I am currently in the last semester of graduate school at Saint John Fisher College where I am working towards a Master's degree in Literacy Education grades five through 12. My Bachelor's degree was also earned at Saint John Fisher College in English Literature and Adolescent Education. My role as a researcher in this study was as an active observer. Mills (2014) explains that, "teachers, by virtue of teaching are active participant observers of their teaching practice. When they are actively engaged in teaching, teachers observe the outcomes of their teaching" (p. 85). Based on Mills' explanation, I was present at all sessions taking field notes and recording discussions. I only participated in discussion when a question was directed at me. In the online sessions, I acted as a moderator. I did not post new discussion questions, but I responded to the students' responses occasionally. I observed the discussion prompts students asked or shared, the roles that they took in an online session and a face-to-face session as well as the amount of times students contributed to discussion.

### **Method**

For this study, I conducted qualitative research to identify the difference in students' discourse and persona in a face-to-face book club versus an online book club. I observed three face-to-face sessions after school for 30 minutes each during a three week period where all seven students discussed the section of the banned book that was read that week. I also observed students online contributions to discussion for a three week period.

The banned book that we read for the club was *Looking for Alaska* by John Green. The novel takes place in Alabama, where the protagonist, Pudge, chooses to leave his family and attend a boarding school. He makes many new friends who introduce him to smoking, drinking and an interesting girl named Alaska. Pudge begins to fall in love with Alaska, when Alaska drives drunk and dies instantly. Pudge and his friends are left to deal with blaming themselves for letting her go and wondering whether it was an accident or Alaska committed suicide. The book deals with many serious themes and topics that lend itself to discussion as well as challenging by parents and schools.

For my first method of data, I observed and audio recorded each face-to-face session which allowed me to transcribe each for analysis purposes. The online transcripts were printed and used for analysis. I observed the discussion prompts that students contributed to both online and face-to-face sessions, the amount of contributions each student gave in both settings, and the ways in which students positioned themselves in these discussions. For my second method of data, field notes were taken during all sessions.

Before the sessions began, students were given a questionnaire (Appendix A) about their internet usage as well as their participation in literature discussions in class. At the end of the three week data collection period, I gave students a final questionnaire (Appendix B) which

asked about their experiences in an online book club and face-to-face book club in order to understand how the students viewed each experience.

### **Quality and Credibility of Research**

Mills (2014) and Guba (1981) identify four criteria to ensure validity of qualitative research. These four criteria are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. To ensure that my research is both trustworthy and valid, I have addressed all four characteristics in my study.

Mills (2014) defines credibility as, “the researchers’ ability to take into account the complexities that present themselves in a study and to deal with patterns that are not easily explained” (p. 175). In order to ensure credibility I practiced triangulation by comparing three different methods of data. For example, not only I had audio recordings and transcripts, but I also had students complete a questionnaire at the end of the study to understand their thoughts and opinions about the use of an online platform for book discussions. Field notes were used to compare my observations with students’ thoughts and opinions about their experiences. In producing three methods of data, I was able to cross check all of my data.

Transferability is defined by Mills (2014) as, “qualitative researchers’ beliefs that everything they study is context bound and that the goal of their work is not to develop “truth” statements that can be generalized to larger groups of people” (p. 176). My data did not produce findings that can be applied to all contexts. I ensured that my context was described and that those reading my study will understand that my results cannot be transferred to any classroom setting.

Mills (2014) defines dependability as, “the stability of the data” (p. 175). To ensure dependability I overlapped my methods of data. As I discussed the use of three methods of data

to ensure credibility, having three methods also ensured that if one of my methods is weaker than another, it was compensated by the strength of a different method. I also documented and saved all of my field notes, audio recordings, transcripts and questionnaires establishing an audit trail.

Confirmability is defined by Mills (2014) as, “the neutrality or objectivity of the data that has been collected” (p. 176). In order to ensure confirmability, I practiced triangulation. All three methods of data were compared and analyzed to identify commonalities or irregularities.

### **Informed Consent and Protecting the Rights of the Participants`**

Before I began my study, students were given assent forms which explained the purpose of the study, that pseudonyms were used, and that they could drop out of the study at any time. Parents of each participants also received a similar permission forms which informed them of the same information. Both parents and students were required to sign their forms to indicate that they would participate in the study. These are the measures that were taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

### **Data Collection**

I used three different types of data in my study to ensure triangulation and validity of my research. The first type of data that I collected is field notes. I took field notes during all three face-to-face sessions. I took notes regarding the type of prompts students asked, the roles that they took in discussion, and the amount of contributions that each student made. I observed the differences in the prompts, roles and contributions in an online and in-person setting.

The second type of data that I collected were pre and post questionnaires. Before the students participated in the study they took a questionnaire to identify the students comfort and confidence with face-to-face discussions and their internet usage. This questionnaire consisted of students rating their comfort level, engagement and behavior in face-to-face discussions as

well as short response questions about their online usage. This pre questionnaire allowed me to see how students viewed themselves in face-to-face discussion and how often they used the internet to interact with others as well as if they had ever used the internet to discuss literature. The post questionnaire asked students about their experience with both the face-to-face sessions as well as the online discussions. This data informed me of their thoughts on using both types of discussions, and which format they enjoyed the most. I also was able to understand if students felt more comfortable discussing their thoughts and opinions or asking questions in-person or online.

The third and final piece of data that I collected represented student work. The data consisted of audio recordings and transcripts of the face-to-face session as well as transcripts from the online sessions. This data allowed me to analyze the differences in student's persona and discourse in both settings.

### **Data Analysis**

Various types of data were collected for this research study. I analyzed my field notes, audio transcriptions of face-to-face discussion, transcripts of the online discussion, pre-questionnaires and post questionnaires. With my research question in mind, I read through all data numerous times and then began to code each student response. Next, I read through my data again and I paid attention to the differences that I noticed in the face-to-face data because these differences related directly to my research question.

The first step that I took was coding my transcripts. I read through each transcript numerous times before beginning to code. I noted the amount of time students were

participating, as well as the types of prompts or responses that they were giving. I looked specifically for differences in the online and face-to-face transcripts.

After studying and coding my transcripts, I did the same with my field notes to identify the ways in which I had interpreted these discussions while listening. I found that many of the codes that I used in my transcripts were identical or similar to the codes I noted in my field notes. I looked specifically at the ways in which my field notes supported the discussion transcripts.

The last set of data that I read through and coded were the student's questionnaires. I read through the responses that my students wrote to the prompts that I had given them. I noted similarities to the findings in both the transcripts as well as my field notes.

I used my coding and notes to identify the differences in online and face-to-face discussion to understand how all of my data was related. In all types of data I looked for topics that were reoccurring. I tallied up the amount of times students posted in the online discussion as well as the amount of times students spoke in the face-to-face discussions. Through this process, three themes emerged in my data which will be discussed further in findings and discussion.

### **Findings and Discussion**

Each face to face discussion was different in that I had a different number of students participating. The first session had three students, the second had two and the third had six students. The discrepancy in the amount of students participating during each session was due to after school extracurricular activities. For the online discussion, students posted at their leisure from their home computers or cell phones during the three week period. After noticing that my students were not posting regularly in our asynchronous online discussion, I required my students to utilize the online platform for discussion during our final meeting. During our synchronous online meeting, four students attended.

The following data suggests that there are various differences in face-to-face versus online literature discussions. The three major differences in relation to my research question found were that there are many obstacles to online discussion, students' behavior and interaction changes with online discussion, and language changes with the use of online discussion.

### **Obstacles to Online Discussion**

When the online discussion was asynchronous, students posted a total of three times in three weeks. The online option was created to allow students who could not make it to the face-to-face discussion because of other extracurricular activities such as sports, staying after with teachers or other clubs. Table 1 displays the discussion as it developed when students were asked to post at their leisure. The table shows only the students online threads and replies before students were asked to post synchronously. These posts were created on students' own time outside of our book club meetings.

Table 1

#### *Student Discussion using Asynchronous Online Discussion*

Thread	Post	Speaker	Turn
Suggestion	1	James	I was thinking that maybe we could have a club where it wasn't just banned books, but also recreational books. I was thinking that we could mention our favorite genres and pick one based on that, so that we can get a general taste of what everyone likes. I for one like horror, fiction, fantasy, and mystery.
Suggestion	2	Tim	I would have to say my genre is fictional, sports, mystery, sorry to answer so late
Suggestion	3	Zeke	my favorite genres are drama,

			mystery, fiction , and fantasy . not so much the horror unless its a Stephen king book
Reading	1	Shawn	Hey, I actually found an app for Goodreads. The good thing is that I am traveling to Canada this weekend by car so I will read on the road.

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*Note.* This discussion was taken from a larger discussion student led discussion. A total of 4 students participated in this discussion.

As this discussion shows, the participation in the online discussion when it was asynchronous was minimal. Students made suggestions for the genres of texts that they enjoy reading. James began the discussion with the following thread post, “I was thinking that maybe we could have a club where it wasn't just banned books, but also recreational books. I was thinking that we could mention our favorite genres and pick one based on that, so that we can get a general taste of what everyone likes. I for one like horror, fiction, fantasy, and mystery” (Post 1). He was the first student to utilize the online discussion, and he set the tone for the types of posts that students contributed. The student who posted set the tone for the discussion in that it was a place for students to pose questions that were not directly related to the text. James’ post created an obstacle in that students believed that the online discussion should be used to post questions or prompts that may not be related to the text. This tone made students more hesitant to post about the novel that we were reading. This type of discussion was not evident in the face-to-face discussion because there was more of a focus placed on discussing the novel currently being read (Field Notes, 2014). In face-to-face discussion, students stayed more on task and discussed the text only. One student informed other students of another way to access the online platform as well as sharing his plans for reading. Students did not use the online platform often, nor did they use it to discuss the text (Field Notes, 2014). The obstacle to posting was created by

the teacher in that online discussion threads were not modeled. Day and Kroon (2010) noted that it is important for educators to model how to post threads in order to teach students how to use the online platform. If educators take the time to initiate discussions online at the beginning, then students will be more aware of what is acceptable, and they will be less hesitant to post.

As part of the pre-questionnaire, students were asked a variety of questions about their internet usage. Table 2 displays student responses specific questions asked about internet usage. Not all students had internet at home, which posed an obstacle for some students to post in an asynchronous discussion.

Table 2

*Student Responses to Pre-Questionnaire on Internet Usage*

Question	Yes	No
Do you have internet at home?	71	29

*Note.* Yes= Percentage of yes responses. No= Percentage of no responses. A total of 7 students took the questionnaire.

Table 2 shows that 71% of students had access to the internet from their home, which shows that the obstacle of not having internet at home was applicable to 29% of the students. This poses an obstacle because 29% of the students participating in the book club were not able to post at home or even at school unless access to a computer was given. Students could not be expected to post in the online platform without being given time during our book clubs after school to participate. In his post-questionnaire, Andy stated, “I did not participate because I don’t have a computer at home” (Post-Questionnaire, 2014). Andy’s comments show that having internet access in the home can be a hindrance to participating in online discussion.

When students were asked to explain the reasons why they did not originally utilize the online platform, responses varied. All four students agreed that the most difficult part of posting that created an obstacle to their participation was being apprehensive in creating a new discussion thread. Zeke stated that, “The obstacles are creating a new thread because you have to think about what you want to discuss about, then put it into a thread” (Post-Questionnaire, 2014). This shows that students put more thought into creating new topics for discussion when it came to the online platform, which posed an obstacle to the asynchronous online discussion. Yu (2009) found results in her study of online literature circles that contradicts my findings. Yu noticed her students had much more time to think about their responses which led to more reflective and higher-level thinking posts. However, in this study, it seemed that the benefit of having more time to develop topics and ideas was an obstacle that students needed to overcome. Students felt that it was difficult to decide on a topic to post, which created a hurdle to posting. In addition to not being sure about a new topic, D’Andre found that using the platform itself was an obstacle. He stated that, “once I got the hang of it, it was much easier” (Post-Questionnaire, 2014). It was difficult for students to understand how the online discussion worked. When the synchronous discussion began, all students asked to be reminded of how to create a topic and how to navigate the platform. Students were confused as to how to post a new thread as well as how to reply to other students. D’Andre’s frustration but ultimate overcoming of that frustration shows that students are naturally digital natives when it comes to using technology in the classroom. It highlights the importance of introducing students to new online platforms, but that their experience with using the internet will help them to master the skills needed. Day and Kroon (2010) had similar findings in that they noticed their students also struggled with understanding the online platform. The confusion with the website was one obstacle they

noticed in their own study of online literature discussions. Once students realized they could refresh the webpage to see new posts, it became much easier (Field Notes, 2014). It was important for students to feel comfortable with the online platform before they could navigate the page. Thomas noted another obstacle to posting as “being busy with other things with school or home” (Post-Questionnaire, 2014). The obstacle that Thomas explained highlights the importance of giving students time in the classroom to participate in online discussion. This was an obstacle because when the discussion was not a requirement, students found other tasks and duties to occupy their time.

### **Student Behavior and Interactions in Online Discussion**

In the online discussion versus the face-to-face discussion, students behaved and interacted with each other in a different manner. In the face-to-face sessions, students frequently interrupted each other while they were speaking (Field Notes, 2014). At times it was difficult to hear all voices, as some students could not be heard over others.

Table 3

#### *Student Interruption in Face-to-Face Discussion Transcript*

Line	Speaker	Turn
246	Shawn	Why did he kill himself then?
247	Mr. Smith	huh?
248	Shawn	why did he kill himself then?
249	James	cuz um, scientifically he didn't look like...he started doing that...he was also...
250	Shawn	why did he kill himself?
251	James	wasn't his girlfriend dead when he started doing that? Cuz...

252	Mr. Smith	I don't know if she was dead or not, but he was disowned by his family at a very young age. Any-who.
253	Shawn	Wait...I think that...it has the right to be spoken...and then... (inaudible)

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*Note.* This discussion was taken from a larger discussion student led discussion. A total of 6 students participated in this discussion.

As shown in Table 3, students' voices were not always heard because of interruptions. It was difficult to hear all voices as students were talking over each other. Shawn had to ask his question three times before he finally had to defend the importance of his question when he said, "Wait...I think that...it has the right to be spoken...and then... (inaudible)" (Line 253). Even when Mr. Smith or James spoke while Shawn was repeating the question, no one was responding to the question Shawn deemed as important, and no one ever did. D'Andre stated that "the benefits of the online discussion were being able to tune in at any time and everyone's point of view about the book" (Post-Questionnaire, 2014). What D'andre meant by this comment was that everyone got to state their thoughts and ideas in the online session whereas this was not always possible in face-to-face discussions. In an online discussion, all questions can be accessed at any time. In face-to-face discussion, a moment can easily be lost and never returned to if a student is interrupted. Day and Kroon (2010) found that the online discussion had less of these interruptions so students had the ability to share all of their thoughts and questions. In the online discussion, there was no way to interrupt as posts were archived as students wrote them. Never did a student struggle to be heard. Carico and Logan (2004) noted that the lack of interruptions led to an equal opportunity environment. In the online discussion, all students have the chance to have their voices heard which cannot be said for the face-to-face discussions.

A second behavior that emerged in the online discussion was the support and encouragement that students provided each other. In the face-to-face session, students never praised other students for their contributions, they just responded to them. This praise could be a result of students feeling more comfortable encouraging others when they are not face-to-face. In classroom settings, it is not common for students to exchange praise, which might be the reason why students felt less confident doing this in a face-to-face setting. As Ling, Cheung and Hew (2009) found, students provided encouragement for their peers which led to building a community of supportive learners when using an online platform for literature discussion.

Table 4

*Student Support in Online Discussion*

Thread	Post	Speaker	Turn
Theme of Redemption	30	Zeke	I would like to see a movie , but from previous books that I have read , they will never live up to the content. Only a couple movies , i feel that lived up to its content is LOTR , Harry potter ,The Shining , and that's about it. ROTHMC was awful
Theme of Redemption	31	D'Andre	thaaank you!! you are right on the money
Characteristic	1	D'Andre	Do you all believe it is important to understand a characters characteristics in order to understand they're role in a book?
Characteristic	2	Mr. Smith	IDK. I think sometimes we try to rationalize characters actions in the book even when they dont make sense

Characteristic	9	Zeke	Preach.
Before and After	4	Zeke	I think that the author split it up to make different timelines show different perspectives.
Before and After	6	Thomas	#I AGREE ON ALL LEVELS #KEEP IT UP OK
Before and After	9	Zeke	thanks.
Before and After	11	Mr. Smith	I'm growing kind of tired of Alaska's character actually. The aloof and untouchable attitude is annoying
Before and After	20	D'Andre	<i>I feel you all she is so ratchet lol</i>

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*Note.* This discussion was taken from a larger discussion student led discussion. A total of 4 students participated in this discussion.

As seen in table four, students utilized language that showed support of each other when they agreed with another student's thoughts or opinions. For example, as Zeke discussed the books made into movies that he actually enjoyed, D'Andre responded to him with, "thaaank you!! you are right on the Money" (Post 31). D'Andre thanked his classmate for his contribution as he felt that his opinion was correct. As Mr. Smith discussed the fact that sometimes we dig too deep to understand characters, Zeke replied with, "Preach" (Post 9). One more example from the online discussion of student support and encouragement was went Thomas agreed with Zeke's post and responded with, "#I AGREE ON ALL LEVELS #KEEP IT UP OK" (Post 6). Thomas supported Zeke by encouraging him to continue with his analysis and posting because Thomas felt that he was on point with his analysis. Students took the time to show their classmates that their thoughts were valid and welcomed (Field Notes, 2014). This behavior is only seen in the online discussion. As discussed previously, this could be a direct result of

students feeling more comfortable congratulating each other when they are not looking directly at each other. The encouragement found in an online setting might also be due to the lack of time constraints in an online setting. It is possible that students feel as though they won't be interrupting other students if they dedicate a post to making their classmates feel validated.

When students were asked if they noticed any difference in student behavior online, they all agreed that students' language was more supportive at times. Zeke stated that in the online discussion, "students are supporting each other with their ideas" (Post-Questionnaire, 2014). He noticed that during online discussion, students praised others ideas more often. Students were aware that their behavior was changing during online discussion, but they could not explain why they thought this was. Students felt more comfortable supporting each other while they were not facing each other. Their behavior changed with the setting and as students built an environment where there was a sense of community. These findings are similar to Bowers-Campbell (2011) as the environment created in an online setting was much more encouraging which allowed students to feel more comfortable sharing their own opinions.

Although the online discussion was overall more supportive and encouraging, the freedom allowed one student to become disrespectful towards his classmates. Instead of providing encouraging talk, Thomas became rude to the group members as he became comfortable using the online platform.

Table 5

*Disrespectful Talk in Online Discussion*

Thread	Post	Speaker	Turn
Before and After	11	Mr. Smith	I'm growing kind of tired of Alaska's character actually. The aloof and untouchable attitude is annoying

Before and After	14	Thomas	#JUST LIKE SOME OF THESE STUDENTS IN THE SCHOOL
Before and After	23	Thomas	ALASKA B/C SHE REMINDS ME OF JACK (pseudonym) B/C THEY BOTH ARE SENSITIVE TO EVERYTHING
Theme of Redemption	35	Thomas	MR BENSON (pseudonym) WITH HIS OLD ASS REMINDS ME OF EAGLE B/C HE STAYS BEING THE PUPPETMASTER OF THE WHOLE 9 YARDS OK BUT I CAN'T COMPLAIN #MR.POTATO HEAD
Theme of Redemption	36	Zeke	oh snap
Theme of Redemption	15	Mr. Smith	Do you have to relate to a character to like them?
Theme of Redemption	16	Ms. Zornow	I think that is important to me. Even if I can only relate in the slightest way.
Theme of Redemption	39	Thomas	#EEEEEEEEEEEEEEWW REALLY #SUCH A BLANK ANSWER

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*Note.* This discussion was taken from a larger discussion student led discussion. A total of 4 students participated in this discussion.

Not all students contributed to the disrespectful behavior, and most of the students did not respond to the rude posts. Thomas used the online platform to discuss his thoughts freely, despite who they might have hurt (Field Notes, 2014). When he was not facing a student that he was talking to, he used his posts to talk down to other students. The ability to discuss more freely in an online discussed led to Thomas not caring about how his posts might be interpreted

by the students he was talking to. The online discussion gave Thomas more confidence to speak openly despite who he might have hurt. He related unlikeable characters to other students in the school as well as disapproving of another member's post. This supports what Klages, Pate and Conforti (2007) found in that in an online setting students posted without constraint. When Mr. Smith discussed his dislike of the main character, Alaska, Thomas took the opportunity to relate what he disliked about her to another student in the school. Thomas stated, "ALASKA B/C SHE REMINDS ME OF JACK (pseudonym) B/C THEY BOTH ARE SENSITIVE TO EVERYTHING" (Post 23). Not only did Thomas talk badly about another student, his used all uppercase letters to show the hostility in his post. When Thomas did not have to worry about looking a student in the eye while putting them down, it became easier for him to do this in an online setting. In order to communicate his hostility, Thomas did this with all capital letters. In an online setting, Thomas could not use the tone or increased volume that he might have in a face-to-face setting to show his intensity. Thomas again related a character that he did not like to a teacher at school. Thomas posted, "MR BENSON (pseudonym) WITH HIS OLD ASS REMINDS ME OF EAGLE B/C HE STAYS BEING THE PUPPETMASTER OF THE WHOLE 9 YARDS OK BUT I CAN'T COMPLAIN #MR.POTATO HEAD" (Post 35). He not only called this teacher old, but also referred to him as looking like Mr. Potato Head. This was the only time that students responded to one of Thomas's rude posts. Zeke replied with, "oh snap" (36). Zeke's response showed that he was shocked by Thomas's post, but did not laugh or agree. The last example where Thomas was disrespectful online was when he responded to one of my posts. Thomas posted, "#EEEEEEEEEEEEWW REALLY #SUCH A BLANK ANSWER" (Post 39). This post shows Thomas showing his disapproval of my post while acting in a condescending manner towards me. When Thomas was asked if he noticed any change in

behavior online, he stated that he did. Thomas wrote, “I grew disrespectful towards my adults and peers” (Post-Assessment, 2014). Thomas was aware of his behavior, but it was the online discussion that made it seem acceptable to post in a rude manner.

### **The Use of Netspeak and Online Slang**

In both the online and face-to-face discussion, students utilized different forms of slang. However, in the online discussion, students used both netspeak such as hashtags (#), text language, and emoticons (Field Notes, 2014). In order to make up for the lack of non-verbal communication techniques utilized in face-to-face discussion, students found new ways to communicate their emotions. Groenke (2008) found similar results in her study. She noted that students could not rely simply on visual cues when discussing online.

Table 6

#### *Use of Netspeak in Online Discussion*

Thread	Post	Speaker	Turn
Theme of Redemption	14	Thomas	so do you all think this should be made into a movie because over here it should
Theme of Redemption	17	D’Andre	I think it definetly should lol
Theme of Redemption	18	Thomas	OK so i’am a bit confused is this book autobiographical because this has important dates that are essential to finding Alaska? #HELP ME OUT ;(
Theme of Redemption	40	Thomas	YOU KNOW WHT #REALLY GRINDS MY GEARS #THE COMPLAINING OF ALL THE CHARACTERS #SUCK IT UP

#AND SHUT THE HELL UP #OK ;)

Theme of Redemption	41	D'Andre	AGREED =)
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*Note.* This discussion was taken from a larger discussion student led discussion. A total of 4 students participated in this discussion.

As seen in table six, students are using both emoticons, hashtags and text slang. In agreeing with Thomas's post about making the book into a movie, D'Andre responded with text slang. D'Andre stated, "I think it definitely should lol" (Post 17). Students were not able to use their non-verbal communication skills, so they utilized words such as "lol" to indicate that they found other's posts to be humorous. Larson (2008) noticed in her study that students used emoticons to show their voices in online discussion. Emoticons were used to show students that they were smiling at each other to show either humor, support or simply agreement. In agreeing with one of Thomas's posts, D'Andre used a smiley emoticon to show his facial expression. Thomas used a sad smiley face emoticon to show his confusion when he asked for help from his peers to clarify a question that he had about the book. In another post, Thomas used a smiley emoticon to indicate his post was meant to be humorous and not rude. Thomas stated, "YOU KNOW WHT #REALLY GRINDS MY GEARS #THE COMPLAINING OF ALL THE CHARACTERS #SUCK IT UP #AND SHUT THE HELL UP #OK ;)" (Post 40). In order for his post not to be misconstrued, Thomas showed his humorous side with a winking smiley face emoticon. Thomas frequently communicated with his peers using hashtags (#) as he might if he was using twitter. For instance, in the above post number 40, Thomas simplified his thoughts into hashtag phrases such as "#REALLY GRINDS MY GEERS" (Post 40) or "#SUCK IT UP" (Post 40). Rather than spending the time writing out all of his thoughts into complete sentences, he shortened them into these phrases in order to get across all of his ideas about the characters.

Zeke stated, “I prefer the online discussion because even though there is no speaking, you can express ideas more online” (Post-Questionnaire, 2014). Zeke noticed that with the online format, students had more time to develop their thoughts and opinions. With the ability to shorten their responses using netspeak, students were better able to get their ideas across in the discussion.

Although the slang was different in the face-to-face discussion, it was still apparent in that discussion format. Students used slang to make sense of the text, and place ideas into sayings or phrases that they understood (Field Notes, 2014). The following table shows the use of slang in face-to-face discussion.

Table 7

*Use of Slang in Face-to-Face Discussion*

Line	Speaker	Turn
99	James	We talked about this um, we talked about this last last two meetings ago but since there's more people what do you think about the don't snitch rule of the...
100	Andy	I think the worst thing you can do... like that's I think that's... you can Throw someone duct taped into a river and they might die but that's not worth snitching.
101	Thomas	to me, if you snitch you a rat like, snitches get stiches

*Note.* This discussion was taken from a larger discussion student led discussion. A total of 6 students participated in this discussion.

As seen in table 7, students did not utilize netspeak, but they did use some slang to help them comprehend the text. When discussing the rules of the boarding school that the narrator attends, students referred to this rule using a slang term. Thomas stated, “to me, if you snitch

you a rat, like, snitches get stiches” (Line 101). These colloquialisms are used in students’ primary discourse, and were used to comprehend the text. The term “rat” was used to refer to someone who might tell an authority figure about something another person had done to get them into trouble. The term “snitches get stiches” was used to explain that those people who tell on others deserve to be beaten up or hurt for being a rat. Students utilized language that they understood to make sense of the text and the characters motives. D’Andre stated, “I still prefer the face-to-face discussion only because I like the way everyone can come together as a whole and communicate about the book” (Post-Questionnaire, 2014). D’Andre enjoyed making sense of the text as a whole group rather than in a less personal setting online.

Multiple types of data were used to identify the differences in online versus face-to-face discussion. Overall, there were numerous obstacles to using the online discussion, students behaved and interacted differently, and students utilized netspeak in the online discussion. These findings can inform teaching, and the implications of this study will be discussed further.

### **Implications**

Many implications can be made through analysis of discussion transcripts, field notes and student questionnaires. The data revealed that although students enjoy using online platforms for discussion, there are many obstacles to using online literature discussions. In addition, student discourse and persona changes in an online setting. Student talk changes in an online setting as they become more supportive and encouraging of their peers. However, student talk can also become rude or disrespectful online. Lastly, in an online setting, students utilize netspeak in order to allow their peers to understand their emotions in a setting where non-verbal communication becomes limited.

The first implication for educators is that obstacles such as limited or no access to the internet at home as well as confusion about how to use an online platform for discussion can limit student access. Educators must teach students how to use the online platform before they can be expected to use it for discussion. If students are unaware of how to create new threads or respond to other students' posts, they might not use the online discussion at all. Giving students the confidence to use the online setting will improve online literature discussions. Educators must also assign specific times for students to use the online discussion where all students are provided with internet access. Without providing computers and internet access, all students do not have equal opportunity to participate in discussion. Grisham and Wolsey (2006) had similar findings in that they noted that teachers need to plan for these hurdles that might set back discussion.

The second implication for educators is to explicitly teach students acceptable online netiquette. In teaching appropriate online behavior, teachers can avoid the rude or disrespectful comments that students might make to each other when there is a computer in front of them rather than a person. Students tend to become more bold in an online setting, and explaining to students beforehand that this behavior is not acceptable might curb the behavior altogether. For example, an educator might explain to students before beginning online discussion that using all capital letters might be perceived as hostile. Moreillon (2009) found in their study that appropriate netiquette needed to be modeled by educators in order for students to understand how to be respectful in an online setting. Ultimately, using an online discussion requires teachers to plan extensively in order to create a safe and comfortable learning community as well as helping students to feel confident in using the platform.

A third and final implication for educators is to model acceptable online discussion threads for students. Day and Kroon (2010) also found that in order to avoid confusion, educators need to teach students how to discuss literature online as it is a new skill for them. Many students stated that one reason that they did not post a new thread before our synchronous meeting was because they struggled with determining what to write about. If the teacher provides a model for the students to follow, they might become more comfortable with posting their own thoughts and ideas. The use of an online discussion is new to many students, so it is important not to assume that students are aware and prepared to use the platform. The students and teacher will benefit from the teacher beginning the online discussion threads to show students what is acceptable to post as a new discussion thread. Once students become more comfortable with the online setting, the educator can take a step back and become more of a moderator rather than a participant in the discussion.

### **Conclusion**

The goal of this action research project was to identify the differences in student discourse and persona in an online book club versus face-to-face book club. The research question was the following: what are the differences in student discourse and persona in an online versus face-to-face book club? In order to answer this research question, I collected various forms of data such as pre and post-questionnaires, audio and online transcripts and field notes. I analyzed my data by searching for similarities and differences between the two discussion formats. In order to find these similarities and differences, I coded my data. Many differences were found in regards to the differences of discussion in both settings. The first major finding was that there are many obstacles that educators must expect or plan for when it comes to using online discussions such as students not having internet at home and not knowing what to post. The second major finding

was that students behave and interact differently in an online setting. Students become more supportive and encouraging to their classmates; however, other students become more disrespectful. The third major finding was the use of netspeak to communicate in an online setting such as hashtags and emoticons. Ultimately, online discussions did impact student discourse and persona. I found a few implications for educators through my research. First, educators must be aware of the how the obstacles such as limited or no access to the internet at home as well as confusion about how to use an online platform for discussion can limit student access. Educators must plan for these obstacles as well as ways to combat them before introducing students to the online discussion. Secondly, educators should explicitly teach students about acceptable online netiquette in order to avoid disrespectful behavior in an online platform. The third implication is that educators should model what is expected and what is acceptable to post in an online thread to clarify what is expected of students.

The goal of this action research study was to identify the differences in student discourse and persona in an online literature discussion as compared to a face-to-face literature discussion. As the field of literacy is ever-changing, it is important for educators to study new ways to incorporate technology into the classroom to better understand how it can affect student learning outcomes. Based on the New Literacies and Technology theory, it is important to bridge in and out of school literacies to engage students (Gainer & Lapp, 2010). A balance between traditional and new literacies can help to increase student engagement as well as give students new opportunities to learn about the world around them. In this study, traditional literature discussion in the form of a book club was used along with an online platform for literature discussion. Bridging both traditional and new literacies allowed all students to participate in various ways to discuss a common text and socialize with their peers.

Literature shows that using an online platform for literature discussion can be used to engage and motivate male readers, provide equal opportunity for all students to participate in discussion, and create a community of learners. Carico and Logan (2004) found that this community of learners enriches both teaching and learning. The sense of community is beneficial to both educators and students. The online setting can be a new and exciting way to engage students in reading and discussing literature with their peers. The flexibility of online discussion allows for all students to participate at any time as well as from any location. Sedo (2003) noted that this flexibility was a positive aspect of the online discussion. Lastly, the collaborative nature of an online discussion creates a sense of community where students feel safe discussing their thoughts as well as supporting each other. Curwood (2013) found in her study that the online platform lends itself well to collaboration as students are encouraged to work together in order to make sense of the text that they are discussing.

This action research study had several limitations. The first major limitation was time. Only a three week period was used for data collection. This time constraint limited the amount of data collected. If I could have been given more time, I would have held more online and face-to-face book discussions in order to gain more insight into the differences in student discourse and persona. A second limitation was attendance of the participants in the study. During our three week period, a few of my students were absent from school and unable to participate in face-to-face discussion because of truancy or suspension. All students could not participate at each meeting. A third and final limitation was the students' motivation to read the text independently. Although students were able to choose the text that we read and the club is voluntary, many of my students were not sticking to our reading schedule which negatively affected our discussions as they were sometimes superficial or repetitive.

In addition to spending more time collecting data, I would have given my students more guidance with using the online platform. If my students were more comfortable using the online platform ahead of time, they would have been more likely to participate in asynchronous discussion. Preparation for the use of online discussion is the key to a successful discussion.

This action research project leaves educators with a few questions remaining. Educators still have much to learn about incorporating new literacies and technology into their classroom. One question that this study left me with was how teachers can motivate their students to read independently at home. A major limitation was that many of my students were not reading the text, and this is a reoccurring issue in education. A second question that this study has left me with is the reasons behind the development of a supportive and encouraging community in an online setting. Why do students become more supportive when discussing literature online, and how can teachers create this same sense of community and collaboration in their classroom with face-to-face discussion? These questions are relevant for educators today as technology becomes more prevalent in our lives and our classrooms.

In many English classrooms, educators are looking for innovative ways to improve their students' discussions. Using the internet to engage students is one of many ways to increase student collaboration and critical thinking. In giving students different platforms to express their thoughts and ideas, all students can have the opportunity to participate in literature discussions.

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**Appendix A**

## Questionnaire about face-to-face discussion participation

On a scale from 1-5, circle where you believe you fall

1= strongly disagree   2=disagree   3= neutral   4=agree   5=strongly agree

1. I feel nervous about talking during face-to-face discussions

1                    2                    3                    4                    5

2. I never know what to say in a face-to-face discussion

1                    2                    3                    4                    5

3. I worry that other students will judge what I have to say

1                    2                    3                    4                    5

4. I can't put my ideas into words quick enough

1                    2                    3                    4                    5

5. I feel like the same students are always dominating face-to-face discussions

1                    2                    3                    4                    5

6. I take a leadership role in face-to-face discussions

1                    2                    3                    4                    5

7. I do not like when the whole class is listening to me

1                    2                    3                    4                    5

8. I feel like I run out of time to express my thoughts during face-to-face discussions

1                    2                    3                    4                    5

Questionnaire on Internet Use

1. How often do you use a computer or the internet (inside and outside of school?)

Once a day

Once a week

More than once a day

Other:

2. Do you have internet at home? YES/NO

3. What do you use the internet for? List as many things as you can think of

4. On average how much time do you spend on the internet daily?

5. Have you ever posted anything online? YES/NO

If yes, on what websites (facebook/Instagram/twitter) and how many times?

6. I feel confident about using the internet YES/NO

Modified from: Yu, Serena W. The Impact of Online Discussion on Face-to-face Discussion and Academic Achievement. *American Secondary Education*; Spring 2009; 37, 2; ProQuest Education Journals pg. 4

**Appendix B**

Post-Questionnaire

1. Now that you have experienced the online discussion, which format do you prefer and why?
2. What were the obstacles to posting in the online discussion
3. What were the benefits of the online discussion?
4. Did you notice a change in you or your classmates' behavior online? Explain.