

**NETWORKING ACROSS BOUNDARIES
OF PLACE, CULTURE AND ROLE**

**A report for the Bread Load Rural Teacher Network funded by the DeWitt-Wallace
Reader's Digest Foundation**

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Introduction

In 1992 the DeWitt-Wallace Reader's Digest Foundation provided a four year grant to the Bread Loaf School of English for the purpose of bringing rural public school teachers to Bread Loaf for a Masters degree program and creating a professional education network, the Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network (BLRTN). The intent of the grant was to invigorate the teaching of English in high schools and middle schools through teachers' participation in a rigorous literature and writing program and to help sustain excellent classroom teachers in rural areas by reducing their isolation and connecting them to like-minded colleagues. The interaction between the Bread Loaf School of English and program participants, called DeWitt-Wallace "Fellows," also was intended to positively affect Bread Loaf, stimulating campus life with the sensitivities, knowledge and experiences of a diverse group of learners. Central to the grant was making computer technology accessible--on campus and back in rural classrooms--in order to explore its potential as a catalyst for writing among teachers and students.

BLRTN is a practitioners' network which offers teachers professional development and access to a supportive group of colleagues. BLRTN accomplishes this task, in part, through BreadNet, its on-line network. Over the years of the DeWitt-Wallace grant, the project has extended the usual meanings of network. As a practitioners' network BLRTN has not confined itself to being for and about teachers, but has included academics, principals and other administrators as well as students in its work of invigorating instruction. The on-line network has gone beyond the more common "informational" function to become a tool for "virtual communities" of teachers *and* students who converse across their geographical, racial, ethnic and cultural differences for the purposes of talking about the texts they are reading and writing for peer audiences. Networking across boundaries --whether it be the boundaries of geography, culture, role difference or power differential-- is at the heart of the project.

The Features of the Program and Focus of the Report

When the project started it had four main features: the summer experience Fellows had at the Bread Loaf campus in Vermont or at one its other two sites in Santa Fe, New Mexico and Oxford, England; professional development on how to set up and access BreadNet; state meetings periodically bringing Fellows face-to-face with colleagues; and site visits by the Bread Loaf "team," Jim Maddox, Dixie Goswami and Rocky Gooch. These features combined to create and sustain strong relationships across distant settings. These strong relationships are the foundation of the program, creating a small-scale network in which teachers feel supported by program planners, colleagues and Bread Loaf faculty as they try new approaches to reading and writing in middle and high schools.

As this report will illustrate, over the four years of the grant, Research for Action (RFA) was able to trace the process of engagement of Fellows with the professional network and on-line network. The report shows the dynamics among the program, individual Fellows and the conditions of their particular school settings. In particular, this report focuses on the experience of Fellows when they returned home from Bread Loaf for the school year. It looks at the dilemmas they confronted as they worked to translate their summer experiences to their school settings. The report also shows changes in the summer program and the networks as these program settings responded to the realities of the Fellows.

In order to illustrate the evolution of the program and its influences on the multiple settings in which Fellows participated we focused on the following broad themes: BLRTN and the Bread Loaf School of English, the development of telecommunications capability and its effect on classrooms; Fellows' roles within their school communities; and the context of schooling in rural communities. The study revealed major findings in each of these areas. Broadly, these findings are:

- 1. Cohorts of rural public school teachers coming to the Bread Loaf School of English and the emphasis on telecommunications in the DeWitt-Wallace grant influenced the Bread Loaf School of English itself.**
- 2. Learning to use technology in classrooms and to make telecomputing an integral part of curriculum is a developmental process which occurs over a period of years and requires intensive, direct and personalized support. Telecommunications can contribute to creating student centered classrooms that are inquiry based.**
- 3. An unanticipated outcome of the project was the influence it has had on local schools. Partnerships have formed between BLRTN and rural schools from which Fellows came.**
- 4. BLRTN is a network *for and in* rural settings. It intentionally takes on one of the major dilemmas of rural education, affirming tradition while introducing new ideas and opportunities.**

The report neither summarizes all the project's accomplishments nor does it comprehensively represent all the program did. Because the program is evolving, one of the challenges in evaluating it was to not present a "snapshot" of the program that was already a faded rendition by the time the report was published. Below is a selection of a few of the significant "adaptations" of the program over the course of the grant.

- BLRTN has created opportunities for Fellows to develop as writers. For example, when *BLRTN Magazine* was first issued, it was for the purpose of "getting the good word out--to make a place where the accomplishments [of the program] were visible" (Interview: Chris Benson, July 1997). Today the magazine is a place for the

writing of Fellows. Its purpose has been transformed to being a place where “the act of writing [helps] teachers develop their philosophies and methods in ways that wouldn’t have happened if they hadn’t been writing” (Interview: Chris Benson, July 1997). Some Fellows (sometimes with their students), have begun to systematically study the “texts” they are creating on-line to reflect on how telecommunications is influencing literacy. They are using writing courses during the summers to prepare papers, journal articles, book chapters or some like BLRTN Fellow Scott Christian, books on their evolving thinking.

- BLRTN is creating partnerships with schools for making school-wide change. To this end, an annual conference was begun in summer 1996 at Bread Loaf, Vermont, bringing together teachers and principals to talk across their roles about school reform. These conferences have also led to more administrator-to-administrator contact across rural schools. BLRTN has been able to incorporate its learning about the relationship between teachers and principals and the needs of principals for collegial communities in a new initiative with the Annenberg Challenge.
- BLRTN is extending graduate courses to being year-round professional development through a cycle of study, action and reflection. Through BreadNet, a number of Bread Loaf faculty and Fellows continue discussions started during courses in the summer through the school year. A number of Fellows use their classrooms as sites for research into themes and issues raised in their summer course. Fellows return to Bread Loaf and write about their research in writing courses.

These adaptations pose important questions, many of which were beyond the scope of this study:

- *How is the experience of being writers themselves, engaging in a process of writing drafts and working with an editor to revise, influencing how teachers understand and teach writing in their classrooms?*
- *How is the experience teachers and principals have together at Bread Loaf influencing their relationships at their school sites? across rural schools? How are these opportunities contributing to school-wide change?*
- *How is a cycle of ongoing professional development springing from a graduate education experience altering the relationship between academia and schools?*

The Study

This study was conducted in two major phases.ⁱ The first phase was broad and exploratory, addressing the range of experiences of individual Fellows previous to their acceptance in the program and during their two years with the program. During this phase, we conducted focus groups, telephone interviews and written surveys of the

participants. We were participant observers at Bread Loaf, Vermont, at several state meetings, in classrooms and at planning conferences. Through memos, annual reports and presentations at planning conferences, we shared the themes and issues we were seeing, inviting feedback to our “outsider” impressions.

The second phase of our research involved a more in-depth look at 5 out of 60 Fellows in the first two cohorts. These “case study” Fellows were selected in consultation with the BLRTN team who believed that by looking closely at the experiences of these Fellows program planners could learn more about the role of the network in helping to sustain teachers in rural classrooms.

Even though the case studies are not representative of the experience of all Fellows, they provided a full view of the experiences Fellows had when they returned from Bread Loaf to their schools. The case studies deepened our understanding of issues and themes that emerged during the first phase of research: They showed Fellows negotiating roles as leaders, obtaining resources and implementing new teaching approaches within complex environments.

We made at least one site visit to each of the case study Fellows at their schools for one-to-three days; in some cases we visited two or three times. We observed their classrooms, toured their schools and communities, interviewed their principals, colleagues, students and students’ parents. Site visits were followed up by annual and sometimes bi-annual interviews, in person or by telephone. The cases studies were shared with the program planners and with the case study Fellows, who commented on their “accuracy” and the way in which they and their local communities were represented.

During the course of the research, we realized that we needed a framework which would allow us to see the multiple worlds Fellows participated in and how Fellows imported their “home worlds” to the program and exported their “away from home” experiences as BLRTN and BreadNet participants to their “home worlds.” We rejected the idea that the research would focus on a single unit of analysis. Instead, we used the concept of learning communities to capture the many coexisting settings in which Fellows participated. This framework helped us to understand the ways in which these multiple settings intersected or collided. It also proved useful in helping us investigate the multiple layers of the program.

The Case Studies

The five case study Fellows, Mr. Bendix from Tribal Middle School in New Mexico, Ms. Billings from Watkins High School, South Carolina, Ms. Eaton from Green Hills Middle School in South Carolina, Ms. Jones from King High School in Mississippi and Ms. Reyes from Cordova High School in New Mexico were members of the first two cohorts of BLRTN Fellows. As a group they represented a range of school settings, were diverse racially and ethnically and included a male teacher as well as four female teachers.

Three of them were veteran teachers, and two were new to teaching --a second career for both. All were active participants in the network: they published in *BLRTN Magazine* or wrote chapters for books and/or journal articles about their BLRTN and BreadNet experiences; they were leaders at their schools and at district and/or state levels; they participated in BLRTN state meetings and/or on-line conferences; three of the five were state convenors; and they were presenters about BLRTN and BreadNet at state-level and/or national conferences. As of summer 1997, four of the five had graduated with a Masters degree from the Bread Loaf School of English.

The Report

The report begins with the Fellows' experience at the Bread Loaf School of English, where they were immersed in writing and literature courses and began to learn about technology and to experiment with BreadNet. This section looks at the dynamic which developed between Bread Loaf and Fellows as Fellows became an increasingly larger presence on Bread Loaf's three campuses (Vermont, New Mexico and Oxford). The next section focuses on the kinds of professional development and local supports teachers need in order to become comfortable with BreadNet as a new communication "tool" and what the process of learning how to use this computer technology looks like. Then, we explore what having telecomputing capability means for English classrooms: in particular, how it can catalyze inquiry and bring new purposes to writing. After looking at classrooms, we turn to how Fellows have introduced new ways of thinking about teaching and learning into their school communities. Here we see teacher leaders devising and revising their strategies for making change in response to their local circumstances and personal histories. We also see how BLRTN has grown in order to reach out to interested principals and school communities. In the last section, we leave the school and explore the rural communities in which Fellows are working. We examine the circumstances of rural life and the ways in which teachers and schools need to attend to the realities, hopes and dreams of those who live and work in rural America.

¹ See Appendix A for a calendar of major research activities.

Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network & the Bread Loaf Mission

The Bread Loaf School of English, one of Middlebury College's ten summer programs, attracts primarily middle and high school teachers of English. Patterns of enrollment indicate that without special funding to bring public school teachers to Bread Loaf, the population attending Bread Loaf naturally shifts toward private school teachers. During the 1980s, when public and private funding for public education shrank, this shift was particularly pronounced. The intention of the DeWitt-Wallace grant was to counter some of the constraints of national policy on the economics of the public sector. The grant offered full tuition fellowships including room, board, travel and book expenses to public school teachers from six rural states who wanted a Bread Loaf graduate education. It also provided follow-up stipends once the teachers returned to their classrooms to continue their professional development year round.

Bread Loaf Director, Jim Maddox saw the DeWitt-Wallace grant as helping Bread Loaf recommit to its mission.

I've never been in as American a place as Bread Loaf. It seems to me, at its best, really, truly representative of the country. And I've tried to make it much more representative in terms of diversity of population. And I think a lot of the people there really feel that they have their finger on the pulse of the country while they're teaching at Bread Loaf or going to school there. (Interview: May 1997)

The commitment to Bread Loaf as a diverse "American" campus, however, meant hard work and sometimes re-thinking old assumptions. The challenges facing Bread Loaf administrators extended the full range of diversity issues including those of recruiting minority teachers, meeting the variable needs of teachers who exhibit a broad range of cultural values and life choices, and encouraging Bread Loaf faculty to commit to students from a wide span of academic and experiential backgrounds. The grant's integration of technology as well as its support for year-round professional development also influenced the institution, reshaping conceptualizations of graduate education and pedagogy.

Changing Institutional Norms

After receiving the DeWitt-Wallace grant, Maddox and Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network (BLRTN) program coordinator, Dixie Goswami, vigorously recruited from the six targeted rural states: Alaska, Arizona, Mississippi, New Mexico, South Carolina and Vermont. Fifty teachers applied to Bread Loaf; 31 were accepted, and 30 attended, making BLRTN "Fellows" about 12% of the Bread Loaf student population in the grant's first year. The majority of the group taught in schools serving poor, marginalized, rural populations. Many who came had known of Bread Loaf, but few had imagined they could ever afford to attend. Most had been teachers for 15 to 25 years. One was Native American, one Native Alaskan and one Hispanic.

Within weeks of the arrival of the first group of BLRTN Fellows, BLRTN program planners discovered that the age and the experience Fellow's had in the classroom made them "slightly more serious veteran teachers" than the usual Bread Loaf students. The Fellows were both "highly invested" in the summer program and more critical as learners: "They understand the specialness of the experience and are milking it for all its worth"(Interview: July 1993). They were "different from younger, less experienced teachers in that they are filtering what happens and are not just open like younger teachers often are" (Interview: July 1993).

Despite the positive initial impression Fellows were making on Maddox and Goswami, during the first year some Bread Loaf faculty and students feared that the influx of rural public school teachers would dilute the rigor of a Bread Loaf education. In individual and small group conversations with researchers that year and the next, a number of Fellows mentioned that they were aware that both other students and some faculty questioned whether public school teachers were of the same intellectual caliber as their independent school counterparts. Fellows also mentioned that much of the work was new to them and difficult which made them feel particularly positive about their successes. As Maddox recalls,

[there was] something potentially unpleasant the first year of BLRTN in that some of the people did not welcome BLRTN students there [Vermont]. And that always seemed to me very interesting because I think the teachers who didn't welcome them would never suspect themselves of anything like class bias. But I really think it was a private/public school matter, and ultimately, a class matter. (Interview: May 1997)

The dozen or so faculty who have been interviewed over the years have commented on the public/private "divide." Several reflected that some BLRTN Fellows arrive with less academic experience than the usual Bread Loaf students but "rebound" after the first set of papers. They quickly learn expectations for high-level academic work. Others said they welcomed the advent of rural public school teachers who have refreshed their teaching by bringing a different set of critical lenses to classroom discussion than the more "traditional" Bread Loaf student. For example, one faculty member commented that she has found herself challenged to connect her curriculum to a wider range of academic and life experiences, whereas previously private school teachers arrived having come from more similar educational backgrounds, mainly that of elite colleges and universities. As one faculty member put it, "Because Christine, a member of a marginalized group teaching in a marginalized rural area, is in my course [on the literature of marginalized women] it makes conceptualization of the margin problematic" (Interview: July 1994). And another faculty member who was described as having "as critical a mind as any" found herself facing "much more nitty gritty questions" in her

course like the “problem” of teaching Romeo and Juliet to 16 year olds and risking glamorizing suicide (Interviews: June 1997).

Another faculty member saw a different kind of advantage to the growing diversity of Bread Loaf. He said that he was better able to solve some teaching and learning issues at the college level because he was learning from BLRTN teachers more about the public high school experience of many of his college students. This faculty member added that he believed that the Fellows were bringing a new perspective to a Bread Loaf graduate education.

The Rural Teacher Network has changed the frame of the Bread Loaf experience from one in which individual teachers come to distinguish themselves from colleagues to one where the purpose is to bring back to teachers in their home schools what they are learning [emphasis added]. (Interview: July 1994)

This faculty member saw a new standard by which to assess a graduate education emerging: namely, the extent to which it was relevant to the context in which teachers work.

Although not all faculty may fully agree on the positive impact of the Fellows at Bread Loaf, Maddox has found that none of the initial doubt about them remains.

And it was very striking that first year. A number of the comment cards [at the end of the term] had phrases such as even though a DeWitt-Wallace Fellow, she performed among the best students in the class [emphasis his]. I think there was some, not opposition, I think there was some skepticism and some withholding of judgment at the beginning that has really completely disappeared now. (Interview: May 1997)

Recruitment

Maddox and Goswami developed numerous recruiting strategies. Primarily, they relied on past students in the six target states and their new network of DeWitt-Wallace Fellows to introduce them to potential applicants. They met with possible applicants personally during their state visits. Even though they were successful in bringing to Bread Loaf rural public school teachers working in poor, underserved areas, attracting significant numbers of minority teachers continues to be a challenge. During the years of the grant four Native American, one Native Alaskan, five African-American, and seven Hispanic teachers came to Bread Loaf (Annual Report: 1996).

Early on, Goswami and Maddox recognized that many potential minority candidates were hesitant to leave home for a remote campus in Vermont, a state with less

minority population than any other. In response to this obstacle, they began to experiment with two and three week pre-summer Institutes at local sites in order to introduce Bread Loaf to minority teachers. Over the course of the grant, they sponsored Institutes for three consecutive years in Mississippi, one in northern New Mexico, another in New Mexico adjacent to the Navajo reservation, and one in Arizona on the Navajo reservation - -cosponsored with the Northern Arizona Writing Project. The most ambitious was held in June 1997 in Juneau, Alaska, in conjunction with the University of Alaska Southeast.

Despite other positive effects of these Institutes, they did not prove to be a successful strategy for attracting minority teachers to Bread Loaf. Only one minority teacher who was introduced to Bread Loaf through an Institute has attended Bread Loaf. The Institutes also worry Maddox from another angle: They are not as intensive as the summer program, and there is little follow-up. Maddox fears that whatever positive effects they have may be ephemeral: "I think unless there can be massive follow-up, the institutes are not worth doing. I'm not a believer in one-shot, hit-and-run, in-service efforts" (Interview: May 1997).

The design of the Alaska Institute, which involved 30 Alaskan teachers, attempted to redress some of the concerns with the others. The running of the Juneau Institute was shared locally with the University of Alaska, Southeast, which has a significant stake in teacher education in Alaska. In addition, Scott Christian, a teacher from Alaska and among the first BLRTN Fellows to graduate from Bread Loaf, was central to arranging the Alaska Institute and would be on hand during the 1997-1998 school year to provide follow up support to teachers through site visits. Teachers attending the Institute could accumulate credits toward a Bread Loaf degree, but they were told that after three years, they would have to attend Bread Loaf, Vermont. Maddox is withholding judgment on whether this version of the Bread Loaf Institute will have more "staying power" than the others.

Meeting the Needs of a Diverse Population

BLRTN program planners discovered that among the greatest challenges to creating a more diverse student body was encouraging Middlebury College's graduate school culture to be responsive to people from varying backgrounds and traditions. Maddox credited his wife, Lucy Maddox, a longtime Bread Loaf faculty member, with urging him to think about the fact that "if you're recruiting teachers from very marginalized situations, you must not expect them to come to Bread Loaf ... and the marginalization of their lives not to have any effect on them [while they are here]" (Interview: May 1997).

One of the most difficult situations for many Fellows was to be so far away from their homes and communities for six weeks. After the first summer, some Fellows began

bringing with them various family members. For example, in the second summer, Ms. Epps, a Native Alaskan, came across country with her husband and three of their children. Soon after their arrival, it became obvious that the idleness of a Vermont summer “off,” while his wife attended classes and studied, was an impossible adjustment for Mr. Epps, who was accustomed to being an active participant in local village life in their Alaskan community. Looking around for solutions, Maddox discovered that Mr. Epps skills were compatible with the enormous amount of grounds upkeep necessary on the Bread Loaf Vermont campus, and he found him a job working with the grounds crew. A visitor to Bread Loaf who witnessed Maddox’s efforts to accommodate this situation drew an analogy to urban ones with which she was familiar. She has observed when staff in urban schools are serious about inclusiveness they, too, had to learn to adapt to family circumstances. Goswami, in the midst of working with Maddox to resolve this situation reflected, “She [Ms. Epps] is making us listen [to what it means to bring to Bread Loaf a diverse group]” (Interview: July 1994).

In looking back on his experience with Ms. Epps and others who have challenged his assumptions about the kinds of supports graduate students need, Maddox commented:

They [teachers from a broad range of backgrounds] bring their differences with them. It’s exceedingly naive not to realize that and be prepared for that and to know that you will have to work through their differences [and the consequences in the context of Bread Loaf] with them in order for their education to be of benefit. (Interview: May 1997)

Whatever their racial, ethnic, or socio-economic background, Fellows brought with them their own cultural and circumstantial habits to be accommodated. For her part, Ms. Epps found that becoming a student at Bread Loaf made her an “oddball” twice. It had been 15 years since “I talked books.” At Bread Loaf, she needed to reacquaint herself with the academic environment and the kind of intellectual inquiry it demanded. Back at home in her Alaskan village setting “book talk” does not happen, and there she had to find ways to bring to her students her enthusiasm for literature. (Interview: July 1994)

Learning to be flexible and responsive to different life styles and values was not only a summer issue. Goswami noted that a Native American teacher from the Southwest also was teaching her “to listen.” Ms. Brayboy refused to go on-line during the school year because conversing through BreadNet violated her belief in communication as a face-to-face interaction. Through participation in face-to-face meetings such as state gatherings, Goswami has urged Ms. Brayboy to remain in the network even though she rejects one of its main features. (Personal Communication: June 1995)

Sorting through intercultural issues like those of Ms. Epps and Ms. Brayboy foreshadowed an area to which Fellows--as well as program planners--grew increasingly sensitized. Being with colleagues from cultures and geographic areas different from one’s

own while at Bread Loaf was an aspect of the summer experience that Fellows highly valued. They looked forward to including their students in intercultural dialogue through telecommunications. As the program matured the interrelated issues of learning to listen to others and sensitivity to how one is heard by others gained prominence. Fellows began actively to think about new communicative skills necessary to prepare their students to participate in BreadNet conferences with others different from themselves. (See below: Text, Talk and Telecommunications, The Transformative Power of Telecommunications)

The Influence of Technology

Accepting the challenge of making Bread Loaf a more diverse campus was not the only way in which BLRTN was influencing Bread Loaf. Although telecommunications capacity through Bread Loaf's on-line network, BreadNet, predated BLRTN, the grant period coincided with technological advances making BreadNet much easier to access. Moreover, using on-line communication technology as a catalyst for learning was a central concept of the grant. Over time, and with the increase of BLRTN Fellows, more Bread Loaf courses from both the writing and literature strands of the program came on-line. In addition, the need for BLRTN Fellows to stay in touch with one another provided a rationale for networking Bread Loaf's three campuses as Fellows dispersed from Vermont to Bread Loaf's Santa Fe and Oxford campuses.

By summer 1995, Maddox and Goswami noted that the DeWitt-Wallace grant was changing "how we [at Bread Loaf] ... teach courses." For example, in a handful of literature courses conversation about text was continued after class through BreadNet conferences. In several writing and literature courses, collaborative journals recording reflections and questions were now on-line, with faculty responding to students on-line as well. Access to on-line communication technology was extending teaching and learning well beyond classroom boundaries. Maddox and Goswami reflected that "the classroom is now 18 hours a day" (Interview: July 1995). By summer 1995, all new Fellows were participating in an initial writing course which served as a model for integrating telecommunications into the curriculum. And what began in 1995 as on-line communication among BLRTN Fellows on the three Bread Loaf campuses expanded into new directions; in 1996 BreadNet conferences were set up at the course level to discuss common texts among students at Vermont, Santa Fe and Oxford.

On-line work was not only transforming the temporal aspects of classrooms on campus but also enabling interactions between Bread Loaf faculty and teachers during the regular school year. Several of those faculty most closely involved with the grant were on-line with Fellows year round. In many instances, they were advising Fellows on grant applications or continuing conversations and/or investigations begun during the summer. For example, one Bread Loaf instructor described how she was able to help a Fellow with a Fulbright application, and a Fellow described how she was regularly on-line with several

Bread Loaf faculty as she pursued her inquiry into teaching African American youngsters “standard” English. And extending even further, telecommunications was beginning to connect higher education more intimately to the aspirations, questions, dilemmas and learning going on in middle and high schools. One Bread Loaf faculty member used telecommunications to bring his college students and a Fellow and her students to dialogue over common text.

Among the most visible differences between Fellows and other Bread Loaf students were the sustained year-round connection between Bread Loaf faculty and Fellows through BreadNet and the site visits to Fellows’ schools by BLRTN staff. Ironically, several years into the grant Maddox believed that the initial skepticism about BLRTN had turned into “frank envy.” He, as director of Bread Loaf, was feeling compelled to try to find ways to offer similar levels of attention to all Bread Loaf students.

They [Fellows] do get site visits. They have, they are organized on BreadNet, and I get both public and private school teachers coming to me asking me, ‘Why can’t we be doing this too?’ In fact, one of the things that I’m trying to do in going after further grant money is to be fair to the rest of the population at Bread Loaf and to reach out to them and give them similar opportunities. Certainly, one of those opportunities is keeping Bread Loaf going all year round as BreadNet and the site visits do. And I think that’s what people [other students] are most jealous of. (Interview: May 1997)

In a relatively short time, BLRTN had turned from something to be “accommodated” to being a stimulant for change.

In a number of ways, the DeWitt-Wallace grant directly contributed to the Bread Loaf School of English. Its emphasis on the notion of variability as an “American” value critical to institutions of higher learning has invigorated Bread Loaf’s mission. In order to bring about greater diversity in the student body, consideration has had to be given to recruitment, life on campus and classroom discourse. The veteran public school teachers whom BLRTN has attracted have also broadened notions about the purpose of a graduate education at Bread Loaf. Simultaneously, the grant’s focus on telecommunications has altered conceptualizations of graduate education from a campus-bound pursuit to continuous, year-round, professional development. In this way, the Bread Loaf experiences continues to influence Faculty year-round. In the next section, the report follows Fellows from Bread Loaf to their schools, examining the issues which emerged as Fellows returned home and worked with BLRTN staff to translate the lessons of their summer experience to their classrooms and schools.

Text, Talk and Telecommunications

Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network (BLRTN) conceived of telecommunications serving two main purposes: to reduce the isolation of rural teachers and students and to generate a social context to stimulate and support the writing of teachers and students. To these ends BLRTN made use of BreadNet, an “interactive” technology which differs from the more conventional “informational” technology (Owen, 1996) usually found in schools. Congruent with Owens’ “informational” taxonomy, Watts and Castle (1992) identified the two primary ways in which technology was functioning in schools in the early 1990s: as “resource networks ... to provide data and information” and for “E-mail function” which provides “the capacity to send messages...eliminating the barriers of time and distance (Watts and Castle: 1992, p. 685).” They go on to say that “only a few networks were in existence which allowed a community of users to carry on a discussion or participate in a conference with other members of the community,” to “read, contribute to and follow strands of conversation on individual topics (Watts and Castle: 1992, p. 685).” It was just this previously little utilized technological capacity on which BLRTN intended to build.

In this section we interweave the experiences of case study Fellows--Ms. Jones from Mississippi, Ms. Reyes and Mr. Bendix from New Mexico and Ms. Billings from South Carolina--and their students with the observations of Rocky Gooch, BLRTN telecommunications coordinator, in order to take a close look at the *process* of teachers and students becoming competent users of BreadNet and to understand the *transformative power* of a dialogic network. We use conferences--on-line classroom exchanges across diverse geographical and cultural settings in which students and teachers share their interpretation of literature and/or their writing--to better understand what Watts and Castle identify as the “power” of such interactive networks to change not only the participants but also educational environments (Watts and Castle: 1992, p. 685).

In the first part of this section, we identify the key areas important to the process of becoming proficient on BreadNet:

- the professional opportunities needed to support the development of new conceptual models for classroom reading, writing and talk;
- the technological support needed to make teleconferencing available inside classrooms;
- the developmental path of learning to design and implement curriculum in which teleconferencing is central to literacy learning; and
- the establishment of an academic and social context for exchanges.

In the second section, we present evidence of the transformative potential of BreadNet in the following ways:

- students' exploration of their own culture while learning about those of others;
- students writing for authentic audiences;
- peer "responding"; and
- student-directed learning.

The Process of Becoming Proficient on BreadNet

THE PROFESSIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

During the first year of the DeWitt-Wallace grant, BLRTN hosted a conference at Bread Loaf, Vermont where experienced technology proponents introduced Fellows to both the possibilities for transforming classroom practice through interactive technology and the realities of it. The second summer, a smaller, but similar effort also took place. During these first two summers, Fellows worked intensively with Rocky Gooch on mastering the basics of technology; many said learning how to use computers and get on-line made them feel like they were enrolled in a "third" summer course.

By the third year, the summer experience had been altered to include telecommunications training within Fellows' normal course load. BLRTN coordinator and Bread Loaf faculty member Dixie Goswami had integrated a telecommunications component into her writing course which was required for all new Fellows. A handful of other Bread Loaf faculty--in both the writing and literature strands of the program--also were adding BreadNet components to their courses, often at the urging of BLRTN Fellows. Dialogue journals and class notebooks were on-line, and classroom discussions among faculty and students extended into after class hours through BreadNet conferences. Rocky Gooch and Caroline Eisner, technical consultant to BLRTN, were available to assist Fellows when they needed technical help.

The summer program provided Fellows with critical hands-on professional development with telecommunications, both its technical aspects and what it has to offer as a classroom tool for literacy learning. Their own experience as learners using BreadNet was fundamental to their ability to translate telecommunications to their home-school classrooms.

THE TECHNOLOGICAL SUPPORT

Even though Fellows returned to their home schools eager to have telecommunications capacity in their classrooms they often hit, in Rocky Gooch's words, a "brick wall" (Interview, June 1997). They had to convince their administrators to

designate computers for their classrooms, get phone lines installed, set up Internet accounts, purchase modems and connect to BreadNet. All of these efforts met with various obstacles and often there were unanticipated technical “glitches.”

Initially, many Fellows were forced to set up at home, greatly extending their workday as they uploaded and downloaded exchanges before or after school. A number of them felt that their students were missing out because the technology was invisible to them. Winning the support of principals and other local administrators for telecommunications capability--in classrooms and/or the school--became a major task of the project. It was often a special challenge because BLRTN Fellows are English teachers, and technology was not commonly associated with the English classroom. Describing the experience of one teacher, Rocky Gooch said:

There was tremendous resistance from the CAD/Science faculty to share this lab with an English teacher. Had the lab already been upgraded and networked Ms. Reyes would have been locked out. Only by bringing money to the table has she gained access. (Interview: June 1994)

Neither did having telecommunications capability one year guarantee it the next. The difficulty Ms. Jones faced was typical of the kinds of difficulties a number of others confronted. After a year of free access to BreadNet through a local University connection, Ms. Jones found herself back to square one. She had to resort to paying her monthly phone line bill herself, so she had to limit students' time on-line. In addition, she faced “access” problems. She was sharing her room with a retired teacher for part of the day which restricted access to the computer; at the same time, she found it was more difficult to find time for her students in the computer lab because more students in the school were using computers for more subjects. Although she did get her school district to agree to pay to upgrade her computer which would have allowed her to get onto the Internet and cut costs, follow through was not forthcoming creating yet another frustration in the quest for reliable telecommunications capabilities.

It often takes a year or two for a teacher to begin to feel proficient. Even then, as the example of Ms. Jones illustrates, the vagaries of local circumstances can disrupt arrangements. BLRTN's ability to provide direct, personalized support--on-line, mail, telephone as well as through site visits and sometimes loans of computers and/or modems--was critical to sustaining Fellows during this initial period.

Interestingly, once Fellows made it over the initial humps and became more knowledgeable about technology *and* experienced with telecomputing, they often became, either informally or formally, technology leaders within their schools. This trajectory--from classroom English teacher to technology leader--was not among the predicted outcomes at the start of the project. Gooch points out that several BLRTN teachers who became technology leaders helped to change the path of technological development in their schools (Interview: June 1997). In contrast to the “informational” use of technology

in schools, BreadNet is a catalyst to sustained communication and collaboration across classrooms.

THE DEVELOPMENTAL PATH

The developmental path of learning how to integrate teleconferences into the curriculum followed a remarkably similar course among Fellows. As a small-scale network BLRTN nurtured the academic and social context necessary for rich exchanges. Fellows were both familiar with one another and connected through their common intellectual work.

Teleconferences typically began in face-to-face meetings during the summer, or at state meetings (gatherings once or twice a year of BLRTN Fellows in a state or region) later in the year, springing from teachers' common interests. During face-to-face encounters Fellows explored potential topics for exchanges. This first face-to-face phase was usually followed by a second phase of teacher on-line talk preparing for the conference. Teacher talk was critical to energizing teachers' interest in the proposed conference. This phase often included teachers sharing ideas, resources, teaching strategies and developing curriculum. The third phase was on-line student exchanges. Students introduced themselves and either posted samples of writing (as in a poetry exchange) or responses to on-line prompts. A cycle followed in which students responded to one another, perhaps two or three times. The following account of the 1995 *Raptors, Birds of Prey* conference, in which Mr. Bendix was a participant, aptly illustrates the features of the first two phases of a conference.

The BLRTN Four Corners state meeting (involving Fellows from New Mexico and Arizona) kicked off the exchange in January 1996 with a *Raptors, Birds of Prey* conference¹. The organizers, who included Mr. Bendix, invited Hawk Watch International to send a representative to provide background information. "We learned a lot about raptors and the plan was to take it back to the schools." Mr. Bendix saw his colleagues as "really excited" after the conference, which the following message posted by another Fellow confirmed.

Hi Everyone. this is just a big thank you from me to you. The conference was great. I went out birding this morning with my binoculars; just hiking around here at the house, and saw one kestrel and two red-tails...The Hawk Watch Group really enjoyed their visit to Tucson, and everyone's enthusiasm and cooperation. Remember, they are available to do field trips to you guys in New Mexico, right to your school. ...we had a TERRIFIC CONFERENCE. We not only heard the experts, we heard each other, and we established a network that we hope all of you will join...

In early February, Mr. Bendix offered his colleagues a copy of the 125 page, Raptor Study Guide which he described as including "lots of literature on Raptors,

primarily Native American myths, but also other stuff ... It's got both natural history and literature." Mr. Bendix also invited Hawk Watch to come to his school toward the end of February to "kick off" the project.

In mid-March, after 23 exchanges among a few Four Corners Fellows and Chris Benson [BLRTN staff] offering and responding to raptor poems by famous writers, Mr. Bendix asked of his colleagues, "Hey Y'all: I've been wondering when we might start some student dialogue on here, so I'm having my students do this writing assignment this week." Mr. Bendix simultaneously posted instructions to his students for their on-line writing.

Initial conferences, however, often fell short of expectations for a timely exchange of writing among students from different sites. In looking back on the exchange described above Mr. Bendix wryly commented, "It [the state meeting] was a gangbuster's start, but then it [the on-line conference] petered out."

One difficulty was creating wide participation. For example, after the Tucson meeting, the Raptors conference was slow to get going and did not achieve wide participation or enough coordination for real dialogue among the kids. Mr. Bendix gave his students one structured assignment intended to reach out to students in any of the Four Corners sites. He felt there was very little result for all of the effort. Of all the Fellows who had attended the state meeting, only one of them, a teacher with whom he regularly communicated, engaged her students in an exchange with his.

Another factor was the amount of teacher work necessary to create a successful conference as well as the lag time between exchanges. Because the computer in his classroom did not have a modem, Mr. Bendix took students' writing home or to the library in order to send it out on BreadNet. Indeed, it took him some time to figure out how to upload the file after they wrote their first letters. The other Fellow also had to upload students' work, and it took at least a week between exchanges.

Rocky Gooch's observation that Fellows usually started out with bigger ideas than it was possible to execute was reflective of Mr. Bendix's experience.

Hands on experience leads you to understand the logistics, structures and formats. It takes a year's work to get to the point where you have a clear notion of a project and how to implement that. It takes two to three years to see the logistics and structures of your own classroom ... and the constraints become clearer. (Interview: June 1997)

By the end of his second year, Mr. Bendix had had time to consider what he had learned his first year. He had by now mastered many of the aspects of running a conference. Most importantly, he no longer felt that exchanges were "more add ons;" they'd become integral to his curriculum.

Telecommunications is a major part of my curriculum now. I could see how it could become that in the first year, but it just happened very naturally [emphasis his]. Where before I was looking for ways to put those [telecommunications activities] in, I'm thinking about my overall picture with telecommunications in mind now. It's a major part of my curriculum. It's almost like those are the main blocks and I'm filling in the gaps between telecommunications projects with other things now....doing those projects, it's very central, it's the most important thing, it's what I like to do and what the kids like to do. We did on-line projects all year and they were very successful. I can see they will become the basis for curriculum development in the future. ...

Others were experiencing a similar developmental path to Mr. Bendix's. For example, by the end of her third year Ms. Reyes expressed a comparable level of growth in her comfort level with technology and its integration into her classroom. She reported that, for the first time, every class was involved in some kind of exchange or something "Bread Loafian." She has finally come to feel that the technology is a part of the curriculum rather than an add-on and that she can use BreadNet in whatever subject she is teaching. Ms. Reyes described it as now feeling like a "tool," as opposed to a novelty available for exploration.

Rocky Gooch confirmed that by their third year teachers usually learned how to handle a new kind of communication that is "conceptually different" than what they were accustomed to. Most classrooms are a closed loop in which teachers give writing assignments, students write, and teachers review and/or mark students' writing. In contrast, an exchange is open-ended--and therefore demands new approaches.

Some want to just transform classroom communication to electronic form. Teachers tend to want to do the same kind of work, use the same strategies and techniques that they were using in their classroom. But the same logistics don't work. You have to develop different notions about how you are going to ask students to write, how to ask them questions, how to respond to them. ... It involves communicating with people across different places, building relationships. When you are talking to others, you don't know where it will go. (Interview with Rocky Gooch: June 1997)

The trajectory of a Fellow from novice to confident manager of conferences takes several years. Teachers need not only technological proficiency, but also practice in implementing exchanges and time to alter classroom structures, logistics and discourse so that teleconferencing becomes embedded within curriculum. As Fellows embarked on this journey, BLRTN staff's direct, personalized, continuous assistance supported their learning.

Dear VT Friends,

We did a writing exercise about *Raisin in the Sun* in which we predicted what might happen in certain circumstances ("What if...?"). We thought you might enjoy these. Please let us know if you disagree with any of our predictions.

=====

What if...Beneatha marries Joseph and moves to Nigeria?

L.: If Beneatha marries Joseph and moves to Nigeria, she will have 18 kids, but she will become a doctor first. She will fulfill her dreams and live happily the rest of her life.

=====

What if...Walter Lee ever finds Willy Harris?

V.: Walter Lee will probably forgive Willy Harris and go into business with him. There also will be a lot of confusion over money and earnings in the new business.

=====

What if...Lena discovers that her new house is next door to the Linders?

J.: Lena would try to be friends to the Linders. If that doesn't work, the Youngers would just separate themselves by staying in the house and not worrying about how Linder feels.

=====

And a few samples of what the Vermont class wrote back about *Raisin in the Sun*:

Mississippi-

Thanks for the outcomes. Here are our responses.

V.- I think Walter will beat the tar out of Willy because he stole his money. Or he might introduce him to Mama. Then he'll leave and let Mama and Willy get to know each other...alone. R.

C.--Walter Lee would work with him a long while since Charlie's business is already established. Charlie might be a little hesitant about Walter because he's heard about him getting ripped off for the \$6,000.

T.-- If Walter went into business with Charlie Atkins, Walter's family would be the way Walter told his son he wished it was.
J., J. & N.

C.- If Mrs. Johnson did cry when the Youngers move out it might be out of joy. But it might also be out of sadness. She might not want them to leave her behind, she may consider them friends. J.

...

P.S. - What town is your High School in? We are trying to find it on a map.
Have you looked for Morrisville. VT?
YOUR FRIENDS IN VERMONT

In these examples and throughout the conference, youngsters can be seen probing one another's understandings of the characters, in their attempts to make sense of the play.

Sometimes conferences concluded with a longer--or more finished--piece of writing. In the *Raisin in the Sun* conference, for example, the conference ended with a piece of collaborative writing in which students worked with a partner from their "exchange" classroom to imagine and describe a scene involving two or more of the plays' characters sometime after the last scene. Other conferences concluded with a publication or with the exchange of photos or other memorabilia. A number of Fellows have concluded that bringing conferences to closure through a publication or some other "product" often helps to increase students' investment in their on-line work.

The Transformative Power of Telecommunications

At the summer 1997 conference in Vermont, Dixie Goswami bluntly stated, "If we are not changing teaching and learning for students, then the whole effort is not worth the money. The work is too hard and it costs too much." Why do teachers take the trouble to wrestle with learning a new technology and building a curriculum around telecommunications? Below we identify some of the rewards for teachers in the form of changed practice and deeper understanding of their craft.

AN APPROACH TO MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION: EXPLORING ONE'S WORLD WHILE LEARNING ABOUT THAT OF OTHERS

Although most teachers who take up multicultural education are focused on exposing their students to the culture of others, BLRTN teachers were concerned that their students learn to appreciate their own (often devalued) cultures. As conferences evolved Fellows discovered that the conversations their students were having across their different cultures often piqued interest in their own. An approach to multicultural education began to evolve in which the culture of peers became a lens through which to see one's own culture. One student from Mr. Bendix's class succinctly put it, "By learning more about what is going on in other places, it makes us want to learn more and more about ourselves." This student's sentiment was echoed by another student, who was part of a memoir exchange in Ms. Billings' class in which stories about important personal experiences were shared, giving students a chance to reflect on important experiences in their lives and that of others; this student stated: "It was an eye-opening experience. ... It made us think about ours and other students' lives [emphasis his]."

An exchange between Ms. Jones' African American students in Mississippi and an all white classroom in Vermont illustrates a conference which linked an exploration of self and others, framed by the reading of a common text--The Merchant of Venice. This conference, entitled *Multiple Identities*, led to an in-depth investigation of stereotyping. During the first part of the year students dealt with perceptions of the place where others live. Students who came from the "other place" had a chance to respond. They then investigated the question, How do students' perceptions of where others live form in the first place? During the second part of year the classes read The Merchant of Venice and examined the perceptions people in the play have of one another. Students explored the question, How do those from the community and those from outside the community see each other? Through their reading and their discussions of the play, students explored how perceptions of others are formed, particularly racial and gender stereotypes. They built on the work in the first half of the year in which they investigated stereotypes based on the place where a person is born. Students wrote to each other in the character of someone in the play in order to deepen their understanding of perspectives. The interweaving of text, "talk" (that is, on-line communication) and writing formed a recursive process which deepened students' individual and collective understanding of identity formation. It also showed them how misperceptions are bred.

The following example of a student's writing from Ms. Reyes' class poignantly illustrates students' growing sensitivities to complex cultural issues. In this example, a student responding to others' reflections on their settings, led him to consider the growing commercialization of his own setting. The student introduced his poem to an interviewer this way.

I know that it was easier to write the poem ... because it was about my culture. Culture, in general, is something that I feel very strongly about. Here, in New Mexico, I feel that culture is becoming very commercial. The increasing tourism rate is making prices skyrocket and it is making it more difficult for native New Mexicans to appreciate the things that make New Mexico home. In the poem *[see below]*, I did my best to express the way I feel about this phenomenon. It is a fairly long poem which includes many Spanish words. I have included an English translation so that all of the poem can be understood.

Para Siempre

by Timoteo Juan Diego Serna

Drums and bells in the distance
the eagles soar overhead
Native languages overheard
as oblivious people watch

Forever

Trompetas y el guitarron
this music is all our own
vihuelas y guitarras, too
Nuestra cultura, my culture

La Plaza de Santa Fe, a piece of
history, or a commercial zone?
Mariachis play, Indians dance
but are not heard over jingling money

they are not seen through the glare of
new cars glistening in the sun.
they are not as important for they cannot
be purchased. Money cannot buy

the heritage of the people,
of my people. listen to me!
see me! *orale, que tal, carnal?*
sharing a culture is like sharing a life

closeness of family, bonds of friendship
stronger than the most powerful
mechanism money can buy
no, you cannot buy me. I am

not for sale. You are welcome here.
but know respect, love, and know
the pride we feel, the feelings we have;
that the blood we bleed is of our homeland.

Como Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe
tan tranquila y llena de paz:
madre mia, hermana de todos
la tierra y el cielo son mios.

The land and the heavens are mine,
ours, to share, to see, to need
everything is shared in our hearts and minds
with respect and love for everyone

Mi cultura es mi alma,
mi mama es la tierra
mi hermano es el viento
y mi amor es mi familia.

*Trumpets and the guitarron*ⁱⁱⁱ

vihelas^{iv} and guitars, too
Our culture, my culture

see me! *Hey, what's up, brother?*

Like Our Lady of Guadalupe
so tranquil and full of peace:
my mother, sister to all
The earth and sky are mine.

My culture is my soul,
the earth is my mother
the wind is my brother
my family is my love.

I will always be a part of this, though
I will leave this place sometime, I will still be
*un Chicano para siempre. Chicano:
mi cultura, mi vida, mi solo amor.*

*a Chicano forever. Chicano:
my culture, my life, my only love.*

The poem reveals the student's comfort using the poetic genre: Its vivid imagery leaves the reader with a strong sense of the place in which it is set. It also shows this student's poignant awareness of the confounding issues facing his hometown as well as his close identification of language with culture.

Fellows also saw their students value the opportunity to broaden their perspective of their own worlds. In the following interview, students from Ms. Billings class told an interviewer how teleconferencing has connected them to others, making them see that "there is a life" outside their experience, that there are "different perspectives" and that "other kids in other places feel the same."

Q. What's it like getting a response from someone through telecommunications?

Students: It's something different, we learn there is life outside Watkins School. Someone else has the opportunity to read your work. It's almost like getting it published and then it's even better to get a response. It makes me think about what can I do to improve it. Responses can happen much later. ...

Q. How has your writing changed?

Student 1: More open minded. You see from a lot of different perspectives.

Student 2: You start questioning it more. ...

Student 3: It broadens our minds. Living in Watkins, we get more small-minded the longer we stay here. [Through the conferences] you see that other kids in other places feel the same way, they have even less in their towns. People who are narrow-minded don't want to see other view points.

Student 4: If you're going to be narrow-minded you have to have a good defense. ... We've learned to understand more viewpoints.

The complexity of their worlds, which is revealed to these students through on-line discussions, they all agree, has broadened their minds.

With telecommunications, Fellows invented a multicultural curriculum in which students are enabled to make sense of the cultures of others because they are simultaneously engaged in making sense of their own. Fellows also discovered that

conversing across geographical and cultural differences demanded higher levels of communication skills from their students. As the following example provided by Ms. Reyes illustrates, learning to hear yourself as others (outside your own community) do surfaced as an issue and reverberated back to influence classroom cultures. Ms. Reyes reported that her students think they are tolerant, but they aren't. The discussions that were generated by their participation in the *Current Events* conference, however, raised their awareness. They talked on-line about ethnic jokes and seemed to gain some sensitivity about them. She noted that she doesn't hear kids telling ethnic jokes in class anymore, or if they do, some students always speak up to voice their disapproval.

WRITING FOR AUTHENTIC AUDIENCES

Adolescence is a time when youngsters' social worlds are growing in importance. Capitalizing on this developmental stage for academic purposes is important as youngsters begin to differentiate themselves from adults and respond less and less enthusiastically to adult direction. Telecommunications has offered BLRTN teachers a strategy for affirming "student talk." In the words of BLRTN Fellow Scott Christian,

The unique quality of adolescents, the tendency to form strong bonds and to delight in connections with their peers, creates dynamic communication in the language arts classroom. ... As a friend of mine once pointed out, whom an eighth-grader sits next to in class is much more important to that student than what is going on at the front of the classroom! I think this is why the discussions in the *Anne Frank* conference have developed such momentum. ...Our students thrive on the thoughts, fears, dreams, observations, jokes and musings of their peers. (Christian: 1994, p.1)

As Christian has pointed out, teleconferencing has been successful, in part, because the students participating relate (whether consciously or not) to Anne Frank's sentiment when she reflects: "Margot and mummy's natures are completely strange to me. I can understand my friends better than my own mother--too bad!" (Anne Frank, The Diary of a Young Girl, Sunday, September 27th, 1942 as quoted in Christian: 1994, p. 1).

The *Anne Frank* conference is an exemplar of conferences where Fellows have seen their students respond to literature beyond saying, "I like it." Mr. Bendix describes this phenomenon.

Students wrote to a prompt which asked them to think about a passage in the book in which Anne wrote about her relationship with her mother and then to describe their 'ideal' mother and how their real mothers lived up to the idea. They were able to relate it to their own lives. Frankly, if it wasn't for the exchange, getting them into the book would have been quite a task. It was a different book for them. They like action, and if there is no action they don't enjoy reading the book. But they did enjoy talking to other kids about it, that made it enjoyable [emphasis added].

One of Mr. Bendix's students confirmed that youngsters find the questions they ask one another more compelling than those their teachers pose. In language arts in the past she would be asked short answer questions about the book or story they were reading or short essay questions on the characters. She said that students on-line ask "interesting questions." An interviewer asked her what difference it makes that the questions are more interesting, and she replied that she is writing more because she is asked more questions about what she knows, what she's read, and about herself. (Student Interview: March 1997) When the interviewer queried Mr. Bendix about the "interesting" on-line questions, he responded that the questions really weren't that interesting; it was *who* asked them that was important. He, like many other Fellows, has learned to turn adolescent peer culture from a social force with which he is competing for attention into a positive strategy for sustaining students' engagement.

BLRTN Fellows have come to appreciate not only the stimulation of student-to-student talk but also the power of having an authentic audience for student writing. In the following interview one of Mr. Bendix's students explained the high level of motivation that accompanies the desire to have your peers understand you.

Q. How does participating in the conferences create a community?

S. It seems like they're right next door to us. It makes us want to write the best we can so they can understand what we're trying to say. It's different than talking to friends. With conferences [because we're talking to kids who are far away] we have to translate for others, we don't have the same language. (Student Focus Group: August 1996)

Teleconferencing is a catalyst to students writing. Conferencing interrupts the traditional closed loop of classrooms where writing is a task to be performed for teachers, primarily in order to be judged. In its place, writing becomes an authentic form of communication among peers in which interested readers ask questions and in which interested writers seek to respond as clearly as they can.

The power of students writing for authentic audiences may extend well beyond schooling. Because kids are writing to and hearing from real people on-line, Ms. Billings surmises "maybe it can make a difference in their lives." She described one student for whom she thinks it has. Last year this student participated in an on-line exchange in which he got into hot conversations about race and racism with a native student in Hawaii. She feels he learned some important things about himself. This same student is a Water Ranger (i.e. participating in the state *Wetlands* project) this year and has gotten excited about the whistle blower possibilities of investigating the impact of local industry on water pollution. Now, he says he wants to be a writer. Ms. Billings attributes this declaration to all the writing he has done on-line. She said that all of the Water Rangers were excited about becoming better writers as a result of this project. She concurs that they are better

able to express their opinions and that their writing is more engaging and of a better quality. They are seeing writing as having purposes beyond “analysis” (a term one of her students coined for the traditional kind of writing students are typically asked to produce in high school English classes).

Using BreadNet, Fellows employed adolescents’ identification with peers to advance learning. Drawing on peer talk and peer audiences to stimulate students’ interest in literature and writing, Fellows were able to side-step the pitting of academics against peer culture.

PEER “RESPONDING”

In the last decade, educational reform has promoted the importance of students being active agents of their own learning. In line with this goal, more teachers are trying group processes or cooperative learning in their classrooms. English teachers who don’t want students obediently making corrections to their papers to please them but who want students to become critical readers of their own work, have frequently turned to the strategy of peer editing.

Ms. Jones, concerned that her African American students gain a command of “standard” English, believed that peer editing might be a way to reinforce her students’ knowledge of standard grammar and spelling as well as their ability to express their ideas clearly. She discovered when she tried to implement peer editing that youngsters who had grown up together since Head Start--like those in her rural classroom--found it nearly impossible to change their habitual interactions to be critical readers of one another’s work. Telecommunications, however, opened new possibilities through “virtual relationships” in which her students could try out a new way of relating without threatening their “at-home” personas. She began to experiment with on-line “collaborative writing” where students would write together on-line and in the process “teach” each other grammar, clarity of expression and spelling.

Following her initial attempt at collaborative on-line writing, Ms. Jones determined it was an approach she wanted to pursue. She had found that her students had become more enthusiastic writers and more critical readers of their own writing. She was pleased that her students were particularly excited by the taste this project gave them of collaborative writing. Although the necessity to move on in the curriculum in conjunction with the Christmas holidays had interrupted the collaborative writing, she found that just the early back and forth increased her students’ enthusiasm for working on their writing. Her students polished their final writing assignments with great energy even after they were no longer in touch with their Vermont peers and collaborators. She believed the experience of building relationships through “short messages” on a topic of high interest--race--contributed to her students’ enthusiasm for the culminating writing project and to her own goal for using on-line work to stimulate students’ shared interest in editing,

proof-reading and grammar. This first successful experience with student collaborative writing has raised questions Ms. Jones hopes to pursue in the future: Do students write differently when they write collaboratively? Do they approach writing differently?

Other Fellows also found that “virtual classrooms” opened up spaces for their students to become more critical readers of their own work and that of others. For example one Fellow told us, “I wanted my students to look more carefully at what they were writing and to examine more freely what other students had written. They loved that. ... These were real people writing [emphasis hers]” (Interview: 1995). Another said her kids love the other students’ writing, but they also loved “ripping” their poems. Since the process is anonymous, she explained, they felt free to be a little more analytical. She saw this higher level of assessment and analysis transfer to their own work. (Interview: 1995) These comments suggest that it is the combination of responding to real people and of those real people being “anonymous” that enable students to be more analytical in the peer review process.

BreadNet was a safe space in another dimension: Some youngsters, like the one Ms. Billings described below, found they could write more freely on-line about areas that troubled them.

They do a lot more risk-taking. TJ (one of the kids in the telecommunications class) he does have a lot of anger, and this does give him a safe place to talk about it and he uses it. They take criticism a lot better in a situation where they know that it is safe, from peers who really care about writing. I see a lot of openness, like L. (another student) had written a short version of the poem he wrote today in response to the picture. He made a major change and I said, ‘I’m glad you made that.’ They take pride in their work ...Even those who don’t consider themselves poets, made an attempt. It’s the thought of getting it published.

Concurrent with becoming more critical readers, students also needed to learn new communication skills for these conferences. Ms. Billings captured this discovery through her refinement of on- line peer editing to notions of “peer responding.”

In the Telecommunications class, that is where I taught them how to use telecommunications and how to write for it, how to respond to people. How to give feedback, responding to what is there, what’s being said. It’s not just peer editing, it’s peer responding.

Similarly another Fellow reported,

[Kids] are really liking the experience and I really like what I see them doing--how serious they are in measuring their responses--trying to be sensitive to the student writer on the other end of the response. They have no feeling for the long-dead poet from their anthology when they announce how stupid his poem is and that they didn’t understand it. (Interview, 1995)

With telecommunications, Fellows have found an opportunity to transform the often challenging peer review process to develop higher level communication and critical reading skills. An added plus has been that Fellows have seen the process of responding to the work of others on-line turn their students into more critical readers of their own work.

STUDENT-DIRECTED LEARNING

Many BLRTN teachers said that coming to Bread Loaf confirmed what they already believed--that classrooms should be places where teachers were not so much the purveyors of knowledge as the facilitators of learning. Many called their first summer experience “transformative” because it provided them with experiences as learners which helped them realize revised images of the teaching and learning relationship in their own classrooms. Below are some of the ways in which Fellows found themselves repositioning as a result of teleconferencing.

Ms. Billings described how the open-ended quality of teleconferencing pushed her into arenas where she and her students were learning together.

All of my 100+ students have had some experience using the network this year, but I did the Native American project with my first period sophomores. When I say ‘with’ I mean just that. As a teacher I ‘disappeared’ and became a ‘co-learner.’

Because some topics, like the Native American one described above, encouraged interdisciplinary approaches, Ms. Billings ventured not only into unfamiliar subjects but also into new settings where she found fresh opportunities for connecting with her students. She describes how the state *Wetlands* conference pushed her beyond the usual classroom boundaries. Ms. Billings considered the Water Rangers project an authentic learning experience not only for her students but also for herself. She learned new things about science and science writing which she explored by writing her own wetlands piece for *BLRTN Magazine*. Her invitation to students to explore, write on-line and go outside allowed her to connect with them differently. By getting out of the classroom and creating a new context for learning, she began to see them in a different light. She said, “This is the way teaching should be.”

In her fourth year in BLRTN, Ms. Billings’ students, who were now familiar with BreadNet, decided to create their own conference. They wanted to investigate a troubling issue--the imposition of security measures at their school. Here, Ms. Billings describes how students were beginning to use BreadNet much as BLRTN teachers used it to discuss professional issues; that is, they were using it to consult with peers about an issue in order to empower themselves. Ms. Billings recalled:

We spent time writing and getting used to each other's voices and what other people had to say. One of the burning issues was the wearing of ID badges. That is an invasion of privacy from their perspective. So that's one of the first things we did. Wrote to other schools to find out what they did. I [Ms. Billings] was following their [the students] lead. What impact did it have? They made some queries, it didn't make any changes here at the school but gave them perspectives--actually they did succeed in talking the principal into getting the Social Security numbers taken off the badges and the administration agreed with them.

Over time Ms. Billings learned that students can't just be recipients of teacher initiated and planned conferences but need to be in on directing them from the beginning.

Q: What makes a successful on-line conference?

Ms. Billings: Got to have intense teacher planning and get the students interested in the planning part of it....

Mr. Bendix, following a different path, has come to a similar conclusion. Ms. Billings suggested her students write to Mr. Bendix because she knew he liked to hunt and fish. Mr. Bendix thought, "I'm sure there are students who would want to do this but it's not going to be my whole class. How can we participate but not make it a regular assignment?" He decided that he would offer the opportunity to participate in the conference to a few students, find a place where they could work on it and allow them to work independently on the conference instead of on what the rest of the class was doing. Mr. Bendix let students know that participation meant they had to meet his expectations--to read materials and meet deadlines--but it was open for any student who wanted to volunteer.

The success of the hunting and fishing independent study conference encouraged Mr. Bendix to try and develop individual students' opportunities more. When he got an offer from an Alaskan Fellow to do a "culture exchange," he saw it as another good opportunity for independent study. In an interview, he characterized his independent study projects as "the biggest difference and the most exciting difference between last year and this." The independent study projects showed him the potential of BreadNet for opening up the classroom to students' own interests. "The whole idea of teacher as facilitator, letting students go on their own to explore topics and writing that interests them, I would like to keep moving in that direction as much as I can."

As Fellows' capacity to use teleconferencing technology increased, so did its effects on their classrooms: students used BreadNet to investigate issues they wanted to pursue; they helped plan and direct conferences; and they pursued exchanges as an "independent" study. Each of these examples mark a transformation from classrooms where students are writing for teachers into one in which students' questions have moved

to the center of the classroom, catalyzing a spiral of learning. The section which follows looks at the way Fellows have moved beyond their classrooms to develop strategies for school-wide change.

ⁱ Conference here is referring to the face-to-face state meeting. Later it will refer to on-line exchanges.

ⁱⁱ In order to preserve anonymity, students names are abbreviated with initials. Furthermore, students' entries have been quoted directly, i.e. in their unpolished state. They were not actually intended for publication.

ⁱⁱⁱ The guitarron is a bass guitar used in Mariachi.

^{iv} Vihuelas are another guitar-like instrument used in Mariachi.

Building Powerful Educational Change Networks

Nationally, the value of teacher networks was gaining prominence just as the Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network (BLRTN) was being formed. Along with a number of other networks, BLRTN was a university connected professional development program that was intensive, multi-year and focused, yet highly personalized, flexible and responsive (Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992). BLRTN formed a “learning community” (Lieberman, 1996) within which teachers could share among trusted colleagues for the purpose of reflecting on what was happening in their classrooms. Paradoxically, participation in the network also provided participants with the sense of being connected beyond their own worlds. With the support of like-minded colleagues, BLRTN Fellows began to see a greater number of roles for themselves across the different layers of policy and practice, from classroom to national levels. One Fellow aptly describes the evolution of the network.

What kept us going much of the time [that first year] was the exceptional personal support from Bread Loaf administrators and from other DeWitt Wallace Fellows... [During the second year] we branched out in new ways, making ourselves visible at numerous conferences and publishing our classroom stories in professional teachers’ journals. It felt good to be a part of such a powerful group of teachers. ...On-line friendships had become personal ones; personal relationships were deepened by professional collaborative ventures... This past school year [the third year]... every one of my classes has been involved with BreadNet exchanges, and I can’t imagine teaching without the aid of all those people and the network that I’ve become close to (*BLRTN Magazine*, Spring/Summer 1996, p.12-13).

In fact, BLRTN program planners had hoped from its inception that BLRTN would amplify the “voices” of rural public school teachers. With Bread Loaf institutionally anchoring the network, BLRTN was well situated to this task. Dixie Goswami, BLRTN program coordinator, articulated her hopes for the project:

I had been involved in Bread Loaf for at least a decade in various funded programs that focused on rural teachers: teacher research, Bread Loaf Writing Grants program, tuition grants for first-year rural teachers. I hoped that bringing successful rural teachers to Bread Loaf for up to three years would have a powerful impact on Bread Loaf itself: that Bread Loaf would be identified by teachers (and policy-makers) as a place that really took seriously the special strengths and needs of rural teachers and that brought a lot of attention TO rural education [emphasis hers]. I dreamed of a kind of think-tank evolving over three years, with Fellows being called upon to serve on boards, as consultants (in and out) of their own states. (Personal Communication, 1996)

Initially BLRTN's activities focused, on the one hand, on Fellows pioneering new classroom practices and, on the other, on Fellows being spokespersons for rural teachers at state and national levels. In these first years, BLRTN program planners were cautious of the often "chilly reception" (Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992) BLRTN teachers might encounter in their schools. BLRTN was vulnerable to the criticism that it was another professional development network for teachers in settings removed from the schools in which they work, thus, limiting the impact on school change (Useem et al., 1995). Many BLRTN Fellows, however, did not return to their schools to shut the classroom door. They had been, and continued to be active in their school settings. One of the unanticipated outcomes of the project was the connection BLRTN began to forge with rural public schools.

In this section, we will follow three strongly reform-minded Fellows as they negotiated their roles and relationships at their school sites. Their stories illustrate the influence of local realities on their capacity to bring back new ideas about technology and teaching and learning to their schools. The stories show teachers altering their strategies as "leaders" in response to changing local circumstances. Mr. Bendix evolved from being a model for other teachers in how to use technology in the classroom to being a key decision-maker about technology in the school. Ms. Reyes, an activist in school-wide reform efforts, retreated to her classroom after a principal was assigned to her school who did not share her vision of education. She returned to her school-wide activism when he left and a new principal who was open to the kinds of initiatives she was forwarding arrived. Ms. Eaton, whose principal hoped she would "spearhead" *his* reform plan, found herself out front and alone. She eventually reconsidered her role and started over from scratch focusing on building up relationships with colleagues one-by-one. These Fellows' stories reveal the extent to which schools are varied, complex and changing places, a reality which greatly complicates traditional notions of what leadership looks like.

The situations of the three in this section also highlight the critical role administrators and school communities play in creating (or failing to create) a context for school change. This section shows BLRTN program planners beginning to build connections with administrators and others from the local schools, leading to what might be unprecedented school/university partnerships for many isolated rural schools.

Mr. Bendix: "Embedded Leadership"

A Native American tribe established Tribal Middle School (TMS) in 1992 because it wanted to enhance tribal self-determination through the education of its children. TMS is run by a Tribal Council appointed Education Department, also established in 1992. Parents of youngsters from the tribe have the choice of whether to send their children to TMS--a "charter" within the federal system--or to one of the county, public or Bureau of Indian Affairs schools in the area. TMS principal, Mr. Paul Lightfoot, who is also a

member of the tribe, upholds the charter mandate for community involvement through inclusion of all the school's stakeholders in community-based school governance. Mr. Bendix, a teacher at TMS since its doors opened and chair of its Restructuring Subcommittee, explained how this inclusive decision-making process works.

At TMS, we're cautious about jumping on passing educational bandwagons, no matter how strong the pressure to reform and restructure is. We're forming our school at a deliberately slow and cautious pace, allowing all stakeholders a voice in the process, and encouraging the community, parents, students, and staff to participate in the process. Few major decisions are made behind closed doors; everyone has a chance to help define the school's mission and to discuss how it will be carried out.

From the start, the principal, Mr. Lightfoot, had a commitment to technology, evidenced by his having the school wired, ensuring its inclusion in a federally funded Culture and Technology Project and designating space and staff for a computer lab. The Tribal School Board also wants TMS to lead in technology use. Members believe technology is important in order for Tribal youngsters to be prepared for society at large, or as Mr. Bendix characterized their view, technology is a "bridge to other worlds."

Previous to Mr. Bendix's participation in BLRTN, two initiatives were in place at TMS to further the use of technology in education. There was an interdisciplinary "tech team" concerned with bringing technology to the school and involving all TMS teachers in its application. There was also the previously mentioned Culture and Technology Project with a joint team of two community representatives and two educators in charge of incorporating tribal culture and tradition into the everyday curriculum using technology. Even though TMS was emphasizing technology, TMS teachers were at all different levels of technological know-how, and the administration did not have the resources to do extensive staff development and training.

When Mr. Bendix first returned to TMS from Bread Loaf, Vermont, he was chagrined to discover that "people here at school could care less about it." Neither Mr. Lightfoot nor his fellow teachers had any idea what Bread Loaf was, what Mr. Bendix had experienced there or what the potential of his being a BLRTN Fellow had for his teaching and for the school. That began to turn around, however, after program planners Jim Maddox, Dixie Goswami and Rocky Gooch made a site visit to Mr. Bendix in October 1994. As they were accustomed to doing when they made their first visit to a Fellow, the BLRTN team requested to meet with the principal. Speaking with them, Mr. Lightfoot said he began to see how Mr. Bendix's being a BLRTN Fellow might bring focus and purpose to the use of technology at TMS. Goswami and Gooch offered to return to TMS to do a staff inservice training on BreadNet. They did, and several teachers signed up for BreadNet accounts. Over the years, other BLRTN faculty have led workshops at TMS,

including one by Dr. Jacqueline Royster in which she worked with TMS staff on implementing writing across the curriculum.

Mr. Bendix's leadership at TMS has evolved from the more traditional role of "model" for other teachers to a key decision-maker role about technology in the school. Initially, Mr. Bendix's classroom was a model in the use of technology. As the principal put it, "Mr. Bendix's walls are spongy, and it leaks out." By "leaking out" the principal believed that over the past several years Mr. Bendix has been able to pass on his knowledge and practice through individual conferencing with teachers who were interested in trying telecommunications as a result of seeing what his students were doing. Mr. Lightfoot believed that the publications of students' writing generated by on-line exchanges, such as the poetry from *The Raptors Conference*, made a strong impact on teachers. He commented that parents also responded positively to such visible products and wanted more of the same from other teachers. Mr. Bendix, with support from Dixie Goswami, conducted several inservice trainings on telecommunications and literacy learning. As Mr. Bendix's BLRTN work became more and more visible, he was able to take greater risks. In 1996 before a whole school assembly he brought to life his summer study of Shakespeare: Mr. Bendix transformed himself from middle school teacher to Shakespearean actor, dramatizing each of the "seven ages" from youth to doddering old man in a speech from *As You Like It*. Afterwards, despite his fear that Shakespeare's language was off-putting, students clamored to read a Shakespeare play.

As Mr. Lightfoot has become familiar with BLRTN and what BLRTN's approach to technology could offer his school, he has positioned Mr. Bendix to be more central to decision-making about technology in the school. As mentioned, Mr. Bendix was already head of the School Restructuring Committee (SRC) which had a focus on bringing technology to TMS. After a School Support Team (which was charged with the task of formulating a Consolidated Reform Plan) was mandated, Mr. Lightfoot created the position of "liaison" for Mr. Bendix in order to ensure continuity between the work of the two committees. In the spring of 1997, Mr. Bendix left his classroom teaching position to become the technology lab teacher. In his position as technology lab teacher, which Mr. Bendix described as "quasi-teacher, quasi-administrative," his emphasis will be on facilitating teachers' integration of technology into the curriculum. Only weeks after taking the new position, Mr. Bendix was writing a major federal grant for a Technology and Literacy program. Indicative of his growing decision-making role at TMS, in September 1997 he will also become the Title I coordinator which will give him discretion over how Title I funds are spent--funds which TMS has designated for the acquisition of technology, teacher training in telecommunications and conference participation. Mr. Bendix believed that by keeping his focus on students, other teachers were able to accept his changing role in the school: "Education is so difficult that any good teacher is looking for ways to improve."

Maddox and Goswami, impressed with the possibilities they saw for a relationship with Mr. Lightfoot and TMS, invited him to visit the Bread Loaf, Vermont campus. There, in summer 1996, he participated in a conference on rural education. Maddox believed that opportunities such as the 1996 conference (and one the following summer) where teachers and administrators could talk about the education of youngsters, away from hierarchical school settings, would engender school-based change. It also gave administrators a chance to experience for themselves what BLRTN was offering their staff. Mr. Lightfoot, for example, after his first visit described himself as “infected” by the “interaction between teachers and students ... People have a unique sense of ownership in their studies--they're not just 'taking classes'; they seem to be really involved in them.” Maddox commented:

Even those principals with whom we had already worked--and who presumably knew our work very well--had sudden enlightenment when they came to the June conference in 1996 and actually *saw* what was going on among the teachers in the six states [emphasis his]. ... we relearned that old lesson that it's important to get people to Bread Loaf if you want to get them involved with you. ... So these conferences offered us the chance to cement partnerships and made partnerships tight that were loose before. (Personal Communication, 1997)

Tribal Middle School and BLRTN are poised to take their partnership a step further as they embark together on joint work through the BLRTN Annenberg Challenge.

Ms. Reyes: “Activist Leadership”

Cordova High School has experienced multiple transitions over the past several years, including three changes in administration, a change to block scheduling stimulated by participation in Re-Learning New Mexico and a subsequent reversal to partial block scheduling as well as development of its technological capacity. The administrative changes, in particular, have led Ms. Reyes to adopt alternate strategies for being a change agent at her school.

When we first visited Ms. Reyes in Spring 1994, her principal arranged a luncheon where he and other faculty members shared with us their appreciation for her BLRTN connection. The librarian, in particular, was aware of the work Ms. Reyes' students were doing on-line, and other teachers were beginning to inquire into her use of BreadNet in her English classroom. There was generally a positive attitude toward technology, and the home economics teacher was planning to get rid of sewing machines and replace them with computers. At the luncheon, the principal proudly talked about a recent well-attended Saturday meeting of parents, other community members and teachers where they had discussed what they believed a graduate of Cordova High School should be able to do. Through her activities with the school Change Team, Ms. Reyes had been engaged

with these activities. By the end of the school year, the Team had laid the groundwork for shifting to block scheduling--altering the day from a traditional seven period day to four extended time blocks. They also decided to float a bond issue to finance the installation of a computer lab.

The principal described Ms. Reyes as "instrumental" in school change efforts. He described her style as modeling rather than preaching to her colleagues. By example, Ms. Reyes introduced telecommunications to other teachers. She was able to sell technology because other teachers were able to see the connection she made between her academic discipline and computers. The school librarian explained that Ms. Reyes' participation in a number of national conferences and a teleconference indicated to the staff that she is respected "out there." The librarian saw Ms. Reyes as "a thinker, doer, and a strong person who has high expectations for her students and colleagues. In exchange, she gets a lot back from people. She is an integral part of the school."

Out in front in her school as an innovator, teacher leader and resource to her peers, Ms. Reyes was also an activist within a community of activists. She was a part of what she called a "core" of hard working innovators with whom she could share her frustrations, ideas and concerns. The English Department provided a solid setting for her activist stance; as department chair, Ms. Reyes said, "We are able to have conversations-- I don't have to dictate. People don't always agree, but they can voice it." She described the English department as a "real working" department that is quite cohesive. Emblematic of the way in which the department cohered around her leadership was the fact that all but one member attended the 1996 Bread Loaf New Mexico Writing Institute.

Ms. Reyes utilized her BLRTN colleagues as a resource to her school community. She explained how when the school was planning for block scheduling, she was able to draw on the experience of other BLRTN Fellows.

[W]e needed ideas ...that had worked. Jane Harvey in Vermont had just gone through the whole process last year. She was the perfect person to tap into. ... The other person that was a resource was Anne Eilert because they are looking at going to blocks at Los Alamos. They went out of state to Colorado schools, while Cordova visited schools in New Mexico. We exchanged all the information we both gathered.

An administrative change, however, at the end of the 1994-95 school year left Ms. Reyes feeling discouraged about the future. Believing the new administration lacked a vision, she curtailed her activism at the end of the first year of the new administration. She resigned from the Change Team, retreating to her classroom.

In comparison with her previous school-wide activism, Ms. Reyes characterized the 1995-96 school year as one during which she and others "hid out" in their classrooms.

Although reforms already in motion such as block scheduling and the institution of a computer lab went forward, Ms. Reyes described the year as one in which the school "fell apart." For her own part, Ms. Reyes focused on implementing on-line work into all her classes, including starting up a telecommunications class which showcased BLRTN publications. By the end of the year yet another principal and vice principal were appointed, and with this transition Ms. Reyes looked forward once again to a strong and supportive administration. She again readjusted, rejoining the Change Committee and taking on her activist role school-wide.

When the 1996-97 year ended, Ms. Reyes was looking toward an unprecedented period of Cordova/Bread Loaf cooperation. Cordova hosted the BLRTN state meeting, and a member of the local school board and the assistant superintendent (her principal in 1994-95) attended. Ms. Reyes was actively seeking funding for a new networked computer lab, and a colleague in the English department had decided to attend Bread Loaf. Cordova was embarking on a new initiative with BLRTN through its participation in the BLRTN Annenberg Challenge. Ms. Reyes believed the environment was once again one in which her work was supported and that the newly-appointed principal, a "real advocate for teacher research and educational reform," would support her efforts to make change. Although Ms. Reyes looked ahead a few years to retiring, she believed that she would be able to leave behind a strong BLRTN/Cordova partnership.

Ms. Eaton: "Spearheading" Reform

Green Hills Middle School is situated in an area poised for dramatic economic and cultural change. With the opening of a Hitachi and BMW plant in the area, many new residents have arrived to a region where the bonds of family and connections to the land are deep. Predominately a white community (about 7% African American), Green Hills is increasingly divided by class and educational level. Oftentimes, it is the newer families in the area that have more money and education than the long-time natives. Green Hills Middle School reflects the stress industrialization can bring to such a rural community. The principal, although committed to reform, explained that change is often in conflict with local values inside and outside of the school: the status quo, which may be just "okay," is far more acceptable to most parents than change. Many teachers also cling to traditional ways of doing things.

Despite this resistance to change, Ms. Eaton's principal introduced a number of reform measures from the top. He instituted team teaching and made two educational innovations a priority: a meaningful writing program and technology. He considered Ms. Eaton's participation in BLRTN as strengthening her ability to "spearhead" his reform program. He explained, however, that she had her work cut out for her, especially in the area of writing. At Green Hill many English teachers teach grammar as a subskill disconnected from writing. For example, when he issued a memo about his expectations

of what should go in a writing portfolio--which included a first draft, a next draft that showed actual revision, not just recopying with corrections--he said "the traditionalists cried."

Forays into technology have been somewhat easier. The principal believes this is in part due to the fact that many parents are in workplaces where computers and other technology are present, and therefore they value their importance. Like many other rural educators, the principal supports telecommunications because he sees that technology can provide access to very current information to youngsters that don't easily have other resources available to them. In his opinion, "If we don't do it [advance technologically], the kids will be so behind." He also sees computers as an important tool for editing writing, and he believes technology engages youngsters in learning in ways that other methods don't. In order to foster technological growth the principal has constantly looked for grant opportunities which he "shoved" at teachers.

Ms. Eaton was a willing innovator in both areas the principal had set as priorities: writing and technology. Not only did she have one of the few computer set-ups in her classroom, but hers was also one of the most sophisticated. The principal frequently drew on her computer skills when he needed someone to do desk top publishing in order to produce school brochures and calendars. She also brought considerable grant money into the school in support of technology in her classroom.

Being positioned as a "spearhead" of the principal's reform agenda, conjoined with Ms. Eaton's vigorously independent personal style, often left her out front and alone. Much as others portrayed her, she portrayed herself as autonomous to the point of isolating herself from others. This was not mitigated by team teaching, which she disliked and felt had been imposed on her as well as on the rest of the staff. In fact, she found that being assigned to a team lessened her contact with other like-minded colleagues on other teams because they no longer had opportunities during the day to get together.

Although Ms. Eaton's principal believed her colleagues viewed her as a resource, he also knew that some were suspicious of her because they thought she got whatever she wanted from him. And he confirmed that she did get extras because she performed "extras" for the school. Ms. Eaton believed that, in particular, it was her progressive agenda for English education that isolated her from her peers. She noted that her sense of aloneness had grown following her experiences at Bread Loaf: "One of the reasons I feel lonely this year at my school is that my thinking has changed."

For several years, and with the principal's encouragement, Ms. Eaton had tried to "spearhead" change through her position as head of the Language Arts Department. After being chair for three years, however, at the end of 1995 she resigned, feeling that the other teachers would prefer to have someone who doesn't ask "so many uncomfortable questions."

Despite her isolation, by the end of the 1994-1995 year Ms. Eaton also saw that a few school colleagues--outside the English Department--were spontaneously coming to her with an interest in her telecommunications activities. The librarian had become enthusiastic about communicating on-line, and Ms. Eaton and an art and science teacher were using AOL to experiment with the Internet. They were "feeling out" the possibilities of the technology while creating stronger personal links with one another. The science teacher, in particular, discovered a compatibility with Ms. Eaton's approach to technology in the classroom, and he found his interactions with her helped his "ideas to bloom." Ms. Eaton and a colleague were planning to present at a state technology-in-education conference. Ms. Eaton felt that she was coming to understand the rich possibilities for professional partnerships and networks through her participation in BLRTN--particularly at the state level in the *Wetlands* project--but that her first priority had to be to improve her links with teachers at her own school, not necessarily through a formal leadership role but instead through building collegial relationships.

During the following year Ms. Eaton's relationships at her school inched forward. By the end of the 1995-1996 year, she believed that the teachers at Green Hills had awakened to the possibilities of technology in the classroom. The school library now held 30 portable word processing keyboards which could be checked out overnight by students. When the school staff had to vote to decide how to use some extra funds, Ms. Eaton and a colleague were able to sell the idea of networking the whole school.

In reflecting on the last couple of years, Ms. Eaton said she has learned that the most effective strategy for pulling in colleagues has been to find ways that initially do not require too much of a commitment but draw on their interests. She also reflected on her own autonomous style and lack of skills in working collegially: She suggested that to support teachers like herself in their efforts to be leaders in their schools, BLRTN might provide professional development around building skills and other strategies for encouraging Fellows to successfully engage in participatory and collaborative school change.

Discussion of Major Points

These stories reveal some of the ways in which teachers position themselves, and/or get positioned, as leaders within their schools. They problematize the idea of leadership in that they illustrate the influence of context on the ways in which teachers shape themselves, and/or are shaped, as leaders. In the case of Mr. Bendix, we see his leadership embedded within an ongoing and inclusive process for determining the direction of Tribal Middle School. Within this context Mr. Bendix's principal is able to position him, and he is willing to be positioned, as a key decision-maker about technology in the school. Ms. Reyes, on the other hand, illustrates how an activist teacher can catalyze change within a school when the administration is supportive. Her story, however, also

shows how an activist might “retreat” when the administrative climate is not propitious. Finally, Ms. Eaton offers a cautionary tale of the danger of becoming a “loner” rather than a leader. Her independent personal style and her position as “spearhead” of a top-down reform confounded her ability to make change at her school. With time, she regrouped and began to work from the ground up with a new focus on relationship building in order to create a context for bringing new ideas to Green Hills.

Ms. Eaton’s “cautionary” tale is an important one. It points out the contradiction between the kind of strong individual drive that often leads a teacher to pursue a rigorous masters program such as that offered at Bread Loaf and a new kind of leadership which is based on collaboration. This new conceptualization of leadership is in sharp contrast to more traditional notions of leaders --“leaders” being those willing to conquer new frontiers alone. Through her work with BLRTN, Ms. Eaton is beginning to see the potential of collegiality. As she reconfigures her leadership role in her school, she articulates the need for training in how to work effectively in collaboration with peers.

Interestingly, these stories also illustrate how technology has assisted many rural teachers in becoming change agents at their local schools. In the 1990s, even in rural areas, workplaces have begun to use technology. Many teachers and parents believe technology is critical to their children’s future participation in the economy. It is also a way in which students can become more aware of the wider world. Mr. Bendix, Ms. Reyes and Ms. Eaton were able to utilize receptivity to technology to leverage broader and deeper changes in teaching and learning within their own classrooms and beyond.

These stories also show how BLRTN is evolving in its support to Fellows beyond their classrooms. This support often begins with the site visits BLRTN staff pays to Fellows, a time when they can meet school administrators and other school staff. In some instances, one or more activities follow in which BLRTN program planners reach out to local staff: inservice trainings, summer institutes, on-line accounts, invitations to Bread Loaf. Through a steady, varied and personalized program of outreach, the BLRTN team, Fellows and a handful of school administrators have identified common ground for long-range “partnerships.”

Each of these stories shows the critical role administrators play in establishing a context for Fellows and school reform. In recognition of the pivotal position of administrators, the BLRTN team has taken the unusual step of inviting principals to Bread Loaf. These are opportunities for administrators to learn first hand about the network. It is also an occasion for principals and teachers to talk across their roles about school change. In a setting remote from workday lives, Fellows, administrators, Bread Loaf faculty and BLRTN program planners envision a new synergy in support of school reform--BLRTN/school partnerships.

In this section we've seen how in the complex world of schools, leadership can take many forms. The section also reveals one of BLRTN's unanticipated outcomes-- how work with a relatively small cohort of teachers can be scaled up through "partnerships" between a powerful educational change network and local schools. Finally, the section shows how rural communities' receptivity to technology has enabled teachers to leverage change in their classrooms and schools. The next section turns from classrooms and schools to rural communities. It explores how Fellows were able to successfully use telecomputing to create bridges between their isolated areas and the wider world.

Meeting the Challenges of Making Change in Rural Schools

Rural educators criticize past school reform initiatives for being predicated on urban and industrial models and thus insensitive to the unique characteristics of rural settings. Such reforms may bring no benefits or even unexpected negative consequences to rural communities (Sher, 1995; DeYoung and Lawrence, 1995; Herzog and Pittman, 1995). As a program in and for rural settings, the Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network (BLRTN) deliberately addresses the dilemmas of rural education reform--finding a way to respect and value rural communities at the same time as providing and easing the transition to new opportunities.

Myth, stereotypes and nostalgia often result in definitions of rural life that are one-sided and false. Toni Haas and others point out that there is much diversity in and among rural settings that often is not recognized. Even efforts to define what constitutes rural diverge. Some definitions turn on the feature of size. Haas, however, suggests including as rural not only a place with under 2,500 population but also a non-metropolitan area, "a county, not place" with a larger population and a more imprecise definition (Haas, 1990). Paul Nachtigal offers a taxonomy with three kinds of rural communities. In "rural poor" communities, economic and political power is concentrated or lies outside the local community (Haas: 1990, p. 10). In "traditional Middle America," there is a brighter economic picture, strong democracy, stable families, and high achievement in school and workplace (Haas: 1990, p. 10). In "communities in transition," there is an in-migration of new residents as a result of expanding ex-urban areas, recreation or energy developments and changing social and political structures (Haas: 1990, p. 10). These are only two attempts among many at defining "rural." Most rural educators agree that each rural setting is highly individual in its particular connection to place, economy, social structure and local values.

Despite diversity, there are some characteristics shared by rural settings which present a common set of challenges for rural education (DeYoung and Lawrence, 1995; Herzog and Pittman, 1995; Haas, 1990). Rural settings generally have declining or changing economic fortunes. There are fewer jobs in the local community, or else the new jobs that appear require skills for which training is not locally available. Also, land and resources are moving from control by local residents to external ownership and control, which affects community pride and contributes to mistrust of outsiders.

Related to these economic changes, population in rural settings is declining, and the loss is disproportionately of the younger members. As young adults migrate out of rural settings, the result is not only an aging population but one that is increasingly poor. Some of the strengths of rural communities--strong family ties and interdependent communities--are threatened by these trends. Haas points out that communities suffer additional stresses as families are "torn apart as young people leave in search of economic opportunities elsewhere, unemployed men leave ...[in] search for jobs or ... young males despair of finding work and supporting wives and children" (Haas: 1990, p. 20).

What are the implications of these characteristics for education and education reform? Population and economic decline along with inequity in rural school finance has drained rural schools of funding and left them with fewer resources than metropolitan schools. Rural school consolidation, a major response to these trends, mimics what has happened in rural economies, in general, as control and representation in schools is taken away from local community residents. Ironically, consolidation devalues family, home and community, which some researchers have pointed to as the “strengths that should be part of the prescription for remedying problems and directing changes in rural education” (Herzog and Pittman: 1995, p.114). Rural school reformers also criticize consolidation as inappropriate because it contradicts the value of small size--a notion now embraced by many urban school reformers in their “small schools” movement. Moreover, the promises of consolidation--more resources and a wider array of course offerings--are often unrealized because of over-riding economic and political pressures.

The school in rural communities is the symbol of the community’s identity (DeYoung and Lawrence: 1995, p. 107). Schools reflect the shape of the local economy and its social stratification. They serve as the cultural and social center of small towns and rural life and the expression of pride in values, discipline and hard work. Schools as the vehicle to inculcate a common set of values are particularly important to rural community members who, because of their isolation and circumstances, are bound together. Not that everyone agrees on everything, but education for the community is concerned with how to remain together despite differences (Howley and Howley, 1995). As economic circumstances change in these settings, new tensions arise between this traditional community building function of schooling and the new paradigm in which the function of schooling is to prepare students for jobs which increasingly are outside the local setting. As much as they value local tradition, parents also want schools to offer a future to their children. They are torn between their children staying or leaving home, between their schools teaching tradition or new skills.

These tensions play out in several ways in rural settings and schools. For one, despite their isolation and need to connect to the world, school staff, parents and community often have a strong distrust of outsiders, are concerned about loss of local control and, consequently, reject formulaic reforms (Seal and Harmon, 1995). For another, parents may value the academic content of schools less than their role in transmitting local values and tradition. Teachers are under pressure to conform to community expectations. Further, rural places suffer negative stereotypes, in part, because of economic trends and loss of population, which shape self-image (Herzog and Pittman, 1995). Students may internalize negative self-images as a result of their sense of being misunderstood in the wider world. In fact, students from rural settings are less likely to go to college or less likely to complete post-secondary training. Counteracting negative stereotypes and honoring local tradition and community are challenges to schools which are also trying to help youth “leave home” for post-secondary education or in search of job opportunities.

In the final section of this report, we present the case studies of two Fellows over three years of their involvement with BLRTN in order to illustrate how these Fellows met many of the documented challenges of teaching in rural settings. First, their stories illustrate how rural settings can differ. Second, these cases show how two Fellows negotiated the social and ideological complexities of local rural settings to establish the value of new teaching approaches, and, in this way, served as “bridges” to a wider world for their schools and communities. Third, the cases illustrate how the “pedagogy of place,” defined by the Annenberg Rural Challenge as “orienting the curriculum and teaching practice around the local environment...based on valuing what exists locally,” became a strategy for ameliorating the tensions for schools as the agents for leaving home (Goswami, 1997 and Sher, 1995).

The Fellows in the cases that follow represent two different positions in the school community. Ms. Billings from Watkins, South Carolina, an insider in her rural setting, dealt with the constraints of familiarity and local expectations. Ms. Jones, the Fellow from Southland, Mississippi, was a newcomer who had to learn the local rural culture. Regardless of whether they had lived in the communities all their lives or had come more recently, both of these Fellows “left home” to attend Bread Loaf in Vermont and returned with ideas for teaching literature and writing that were “new” to their local settings. Both had to find ways to translate the perceived novelty of their classroom practices. Ms. Billings had to learn how to maintain relationships with colleagues and community members who had known her all her life while bringing students non-traditional approaches to literature through the use of telecommunications. Through her church and other community activities, Ms. Jones built multidimensional relationships with her students in order to gain the community’s confidence. Eventually, the principals, students and parents in both of these settings came to value the Fellows for the resources and teaching approaches they imported. One of the chief ways in which they were able to emphasize academics without offending tradition was by focusing on their local communities for writing and discussions of literature. Ms. Billings tapped into the importance of “place” by engaging her students in nature writing as they studied the local ecology; in this way, she was able to foster respect for the rural setting and its traditions as well as respect for the health and preservation of the environment. In Ms. Jones’ class, students gained heightened awareness of their racial and social identity through their exchanges with Vermont students about the play, *A Raisin in the Sun*. Both cases show how on-line discussions which cross geographical and cultural boundaries address the issues of isolation and low self-image.

Ms. Billings: Rediscovering Home

Ms. Billings is a long-term resident of the community of Watkins, South Carolina. She grew up there, went to the high school in which she teaches, was a student of the woman who is the current English department head and knows many of the students’ families. Her husband teaches in the middle school, and her children attend the local schools. The community of Watkins fits Haas’ definition of a “county, not a place.” Watkins High School draws its diverse population of 800 students from all over Watkins

county. Students represent a cross-section of the population in terms of race (approximate, 60% Black and 40% White) and class. The principal believes “it’s a good community” even though there are high rates of poverty, illiteracy, teen pregnancy and single parent families. Because of consolidation, Watkins students have a range of opportunities and activities; still, resources are relatively scarce, and according to Ms. Billings there is a lot of disparity in quality among the teachers, and for students, learning can be “hit or miss.”

Through Ms. Billings’ BLRTN participation and connections to other Fellows, she has acted like a bridge to the world outside Watkins, bringing in new resources and ideas about teaching. Her principal has appreciated these new resources, the attention Ms. Billings brings to the school and her students’ obvious engagement: “It’s brought a lot of things into the school. Kids are excited about corresponding with other kids...” He also recognizes the value of Ms. Billings’ growing expertise and her access to external experts and resources: “Ms. Billings has brought back a lot of expertise which has also flowed into the other departments.”

Ms. Billings’ BLRTN involvement also has enabled her to become a bridge for students to learn about other perspectives than those of their local community. She used teleconferencing for projects in which students communicated with other schools in South Carolina as well as with schools in Alaska and New Mexico, among others. As the students described it, their work with teleconferencing made them “open-minded...when we found out that kids in Alaska play football, it turns over our stereotypes.” During the fall of 1996, her students, upset by the new security measures taken as a result of an incident in a neighboring school, began investigating and raising questions about these measures by writing to other schools to find out what level of security they used and what prompted their security measures. The students were surprised by their findings. Other schools had a much higher tolerance for safety threats and used fewer security measures than Watkins. On the basis of their research, they successfully lobbied the principal to eliminate some of the restrictions that had been introduced.

Ms. Billings’ principal also appreciates her introduction of computers as a tool for writing and has noted the value of students’ gaining outside perspectives. He has described her class as one that teaches kids about technology and gives them access to other students. He believes the writing exchanges have helped students understand that they are like other kids and yet have much to learn from their differences. “A lot of students have not ventured very far beyond Watkins, but on BreadNet, they can.”

Ms. Billings’ principal echoed points made in the literature on rural education when he commented that the commitment to education within the community is varied and that some parents do not value their children’s school achievements: “Some parents don’t want their kids to graduate because they recognize that kids leave the community then.” Parents’ ambivalence about school success may also account for what Ms. Billings views as their lack of involvement and attention to the school. Ms. Billings sees parents as

generally uninterested in what is going on in the building, having a “laissez faire” attitude towards school: “Many want to send their kids to school and forget about it.”

Ms. Billings has carried out several projects using BreadNet that exemplify the “pedagogy of place,” and her work illustrates how such a pedagogy ameliorated the tensions in this community between the local and the external, the traditional and the new. In her first year as a BLRTN Fellow, for example, the South Carolina Fellows focused on “a sense of place,” and this became the impetus for Ms. Billings to develop her *Water Rangers* project which engaged students in exploring and writing about local wetlands and doing nature reading and writing. Three field trips inspired poetry, descriptive narrative and field notes that were put on-line for response from students in classrooms of other South Carolina Fellows. Ms. Billings collaborated with a science teacher at Watkins to make the project interdisciplinary. The *Water Rangers* project brought her and her students to see their home “place” in new ways while simultaneously exposing them to places away from home through BreadNet. Students said finding ways to describe their own setting to students elsewhere connected them more intimately with their own area and led to its rediscovery.

Ms. Billings believed that kids writing to and hearing from “real people” on-line might make a difference in their lives as well. One of the parents commented that the project enhanced her daughter’s experience when she accompanied her father on hunting trips, which she often did, since she had become more aware of what she was seeing. Students also took on the responsibility of preservation of place through this and other place-focused projects. For example, one student got very excited about investigating the impact of local industry on water pollution. And this past year, students engaged in a nuclear sites conference in which, once again, they took a critical look at a local industry from an environmental perspective. In her second year, Ms. Billings extended the use of on-line technology as a tool for valuing local places and worked with one of her groups to do “writing for the community projects,” producing newsletters for local community organizations.

Ms. Jones: Building Trust in an Unfamiliar Setting

Ms. Jones left a journalism career to study for her education degree after she and her minister husband moved to Southland, Mississippi where he was born. Despite the fact that she and her students are African-American, Ms. Jones believes her experiences living in the North has made her an outsider in the small tightly knit Southern community of 15,000. Her husband has had to play the role of “cultural translator,” instructing her on local rules and expectations. She and her husband are both very involved in the community, and especially in working with youth, so over time she has gained her own identity and connections.

Southland is a small town in Mississippi, which falls into Paul Nachtigal’s definition of a “rural poor” community in that economic and political power is

concentrated and lies, at least in part, outside the local community. The small town of Southland is in an area that is still largely agricultural with pecan and cotton land mostly owned by old white families who either live in the area or maintain parts of their family residences there. There has been little industry and only limited service employment in the local hospital, college and in city government. However, the traditional power base is slowly shrinking as newer high-tech industry and mega-farming move in. Although both Watkins County and Southland are racially and socio-economically heterogeneous, King High School, where Ms. Jones teaches, is all African-American--the successor to the pre-desegregation Consolidated Colored High School. De facto segregation continues as parents exercise their right to choose either King or Southland High School, which they do predominately along racial lines. Despite fighting negative stereotypes and the lack of resources, King High School has strong roots in the community and a proud tradition of athletics, much of it achieved when the current principal was the football coach.

Along with its many strengths, King High School struggles with problems stemming from historical, deeply entrenched community schisms along racial lines. Racial tension among faculty is recurrent, and parents and students feel that the community's racial "lens" often leads to adverse judgments on King High School. Even though desegregation was meant to bring about a measure of equity, it has brought neither resources nor diversity to King. Students experience a homogenous racial setting, and parents worry about their youngster's preparation for the "real world" of mixed races when they graduate. Ms. Jones faces the practical difficulty of finding resources to pay for her students to be on-line.

One way in which Ms. Jones has overcome her "outsider" status has been by involving herself in the community and with students outside school. She characterizes her relationship with students as "multi-dimensional" since she sees them in church, extracurricular activities, in the local community and in her youth ministry activities. At the end of the 1996, Ms. Jones was exploring how she might integrate her out-of-school youth ministry with her school activity by creating an after-school homework support group at the school site. She also was doing research with parents and students to learn about their views toward writing in order to inform her own planning.

Passionate about engaging her students deeply with literature, Ms. Jones has served as a bridge for them to new ideas and resources. Ms. Jones has gained great skill, through her involvement in BLRTN and in other professional development, at teaching literature and relating it to her students' lived experiences. She links the language of the text to language and concepts familiar to the students. For instance, she did an exercise to prepare the class for Romeo and Juliet in which the students listened to the rap song, "Gangsta' Paradise," giving them a chance to talk about contemporary gang involvement, feuds and feelings of being trapped. In this and many other ways, Ms. Jones has helped to make "distant" texts familiar and set the stage for herself and her students as a community of readers. She also encourages student critique; as when responding to a student's question about why the class is assigned Shakespeare, she encouraged an analysis of power relations and racism, focusing on who makes decisions about the school curricula.

Ms. Jones struggles to justify her attention to student writing to parents whom Ms. Jones says “could care less about their children being little authors.” The principal believes that the parents of his students have “high expectations” which focus largely on skill development because they believe this is critical to functioning in the “outside” world (beyond Southland) which is important to them given the current limits of the local economy and its lack of employment prospects. Ms. Jones has used various strategies to negotiate with parents and the community around images of teaching, school reform and education. Ms. Jones’ deep involvement in the community has earned her enough trust to allow her to both engage students in meaningful discussion and writing about classic literature and, at the same time, satisfy parents’ sense of urgency around grammar and traditional measures of school achievement. The principal has made special note of his appreciation for what he describes as the “extra steps” she has taken to share what she has been trying to do in her classroom with parents and the community. On Back to School Night, for example, she had students continually demonstrating how BreadNet works so parents could become familiar with the new technology in the English classroom. Responding to parents’ concern about grammar instruction, Ms. Jones researched issues connected to teaching African-American students standard grammar. She has also become interested by a nearby all African-American community where, she hypothesizes, the tight school-community relationship is responsible for the school’s ability to turn out students fluent in standard English.

Ms. Jones also has engaged her students in a pedagogy of place that has helped to fight the lack of resources and negative stereotypes of King in its segregated community. Through various on-line exchanges, Ms. Jones’ students have learned about other places and how others see them. Like Ms. Billings’ South Carolina students, these Mississippi students have gained an appreciation for what they know and a sense of pride in it. For example, in the *Raisin in the Sun* exchange, students said that “it was very important that the exchange gave them a chance to share with the white Vermonters ‘black reality’” since “all they know are stereotypes.” They wondered how the Vermont students could understand the play with so little knowledge of black family life. Interestingly, the exchange with Vermont caused this group of students to reflect on their own culture. They identified themselves as “rural” but not “farm” or “back country,” which they saw as terms of derision. The principal also sees BreadNet providing students with the kind of opportunity their parents want them to have through exposure to students from other areas and a chance to see what they value. He has pointed to ways that the BreadNet experience has made Ms. Jones’ students more self-confident, noting that they are always inviting him into the classroom to see what they are doing and that they “express their views, ask more whys and why nots, but not disrespectfully.”

Discussion of Major Points

The metaphor of “leaving home” reverberates throughout these stories. Participation in BLRTN for teachers meant leaving “home” to spend the summer at Bread

Loaf in Vermont. Fellows left home not only literally but in a psychological and symbolic sense as well. Their journeys to Vermont engaged them in new ways of thinking about literature, language and literacy, and in new ways to organize their classrooms and work with students. When they returned “home,” they were no longer the same, and they saw “home” in a different way.

The metaphor of leaving home also captures a sense of how telecommunications changed the experience of teachers and students in school settings. BreadNet provided opportunities for teachers and students to break out of their isolation by communicating with colleagues and peers in far flung places. This tool led them to see “home” differently. Also, as the authors of an article on technology in rural communities commented, the “allure” of technology in rural places “lies in the promise of innovation without sacrifice. Indeed, the interactive quality of the new technologies seems to offer a way for rural citizens to participate in the mainstream of American life without sacrificing traditional virtues” (Howley and Howley, 1995).

Declining and changing economies of rural settings demand that schools fulfill their roles, enabling students to “leave home to find employment,” but they must do so in a way that simultaneously values “home.” Fellows negotiated their roles within the local setting so that they could more effectively serve as bridges to the external world without devaluing tradition and place. BLRTN offers a model for professional development and reform that both changes what goes on in classrooms and preserves rural values -- forwarding the communities’ interests.

These cases show the importance of teachers making connections with students, colleagues and parents both inside and outside of school. Such connections provide leverage in negotiating roles as “brokers” for new ideas and scarce resources. It is necessary for these teachers to demonstrate commitment and respect for the locality in order to be taken as serious and trustworthy. Regardless of whether they are insiders or outsiders in rural communities, negotiating the “broker” role can present challenges. Although as an insider, Ms. Billings did not have to learn the culture of the setting, she had to figure out how to “translate” what she was learning through her BLRTN participation to colleagues not used to new ways. Ms. Jones, as an outsider, deliberately involved herself in many aspects of the community in order to learn the rules for behavior and communication, but by establishing herself as a committed member of the community, she was able to “sell” her teaching practices to students and parents.

These cases illustrate the degree to which BLRTN teachers served as bridges to new resources and ideas for strapped and isolated rural schools. Declining local economies and under-funding of rural school has been used as an argument for consolidation. These examples, however, illustrate that consolidation, desegregation or charter schools do not necessarily redress pervasive economic realities. In addition to lacking material resources, the isolation of rural schools also means that they lack access or exposure to new programs and ideas. BLRTN Fellows were recognized and appreciated for the resources, expertise and attention they brought to their schools.

BLRTN teachers also have served as bridges for students to outside settings, enabling them to gain new perspectives and to learn how they are similar to and different from others. In both of the cases detailed above, students' discoveries as a result of interaction with students in distant settings deepened their experience of the literature. Both sets of students were empowered by their discoveries. Learning what other schools did about security led Ms. Billings' students to take action that improved their own school experience. Ms. Jones' students felt positively about changing Vermonters' stereotypes of Black families, and the experience, simultaneously, enriched their own self-images.

BLRTN Fellows' use of the "pedagogy of place" has served many purposes. Through telecommunications and learning activities in and with the community, Ms. Billings' and Ms. Jones' students discovered the importance and value of tradition. For example, producing community newsletters and writing about the community connected Ms. Billings' students to their parents and friends and led them to appreciate the place where they live, their relatives, history and traditions in new ways. This reconnection to "place" reduced tension in the communities between the desire to expose youngsters to the "outside world" and the concern about their leaving home. In both classes, the projects engaged students in strongly academic pursuits at the same time as they deepened their connection to and sense of pride in their local communities. As illustrated by the Watkins students' work on watersheds, gaining pride in one's place generated a concern for preservation of the environment.

Finally, the isolation of rural students means they not only lack knowledge of other places, but they themselves are subject to stereotyping and negative self-images. The teleconferencing projects in Ms. Billings' and Ms. Jones' classrooms directly addressed this issue. In communicating with students in distant places, they portrayed themselves in their depth and variation. In this way, they challenged stereotypes -- both others' stereotypes of them and their own stereotypes of others. Finally, as Ms. Jones' students showed, they came to value what they knew.

Major Findings

In order to understand the experience of Bread Loaf Rural Teachers Network Fellows and the influence of a program that extends across boundaries and settings, this report looked at BLRTN from four vantage points, that of the Bread Loaf School of English and that of Fellows' classrooms, schools and local communities. Below we summarize our findings from each of these contexts.

1. Cohorts of rural public school teachers coming to the Bread Loaf School of English and the emphasis on telecommunications in the DeWitt-Wallace grant influenced the Bread Loaf School of English itself.

- Program planners learned the importance of being flexible to a wider range of life styles and cultural expectations, which often meant altering norms for life on the Bread Loaf campuses. This lesson extended year round to expectations for participation in the professional network: varying cultural backgrounds created different expectations for the ways in which members would be participants in BLRTN.
- Bread Loaf faculty made changes in their courses and classrooms as a result of BLRTN. Some faculty learned to connect to teachers with a wider range of experiential and academic backgrounds than traditional Bread Loaf students. Others discovered that the greater range of experiences BLRTN teachers brought to their reading of texts and writing deepened discussion of ethnic and gender issues. Fellows extended the meaning of a graduate education from one of individual achievement to its value for their home schools. The integration of technology into the grant altered classroom boundaries: Discussion which started in class often continued on-line after class. The expanding boundaries of classrooms carried over beyond the summer as small numbers of faculty continued discussions with teachers during the school year. In this way, graduate education changed from a campus-bound, time-limited experience to an ongoing, continuous intellectual endeavor.
- The BLRTN team used their extensive networks and experimented with running local institutes in order to introduce a diverse population of teachers from rural areas to Bread Loaf. They succeeded in bringing many teachers, who otherwise would not have attended the school, to these local institutes. Recruiting for racial and ethnic diversity, however, remained a challenge and is an area demanding continuous attention.
- Initial skepticism about BLRTN Fellows at Bread Loaf gave way to an appreciation for the Fellows' experience, especially their strong sense of community created through their extensive use of BreadNet and site visits by

program planners and some Bread Loaf faculty during the school year. BLRTN demonstrated an enhanced model of the Bread Loaf graduate education for the institution to consider.

2. Learning to use technology in classrooms and to make telecomputing an integral part of curriculum is a developmental process which occurs over a period of years and requires intensive, direct and personalized support. Telecommunications can contribute to creating student centered classrooms that are inquiry based.

- The combination of hands-on experience with technology during the summer and ongoing, personalized technical support from BLRTN staff year-round provided classroom teachers with the kind of professional development necessary to become proficient. Just getting set up and becoming familiar with the technology often took at least a year.
- The support of local administrators, principals and school district personnel is often critical to getting technology inside classrooms. When this kind of support is forthcoming, Fellows often were repositioned in their schools, either formally or informally, to become leaders in using technology. As “technology leaders,” Fellows could often guide their schools in implementing strategies for telecommunications where content was central to the activity and teachers were at the heart of the design for its use.
- On-line conferences have a number of interrelated phases. Learning to manage all the aspects of these phases is a developmental process which takes time, often two to three years. On-line conferences usually start with face-to-face interaction and teacher talk on-line. It then moves to teachers initiating student-to-student exchanges and ends with reflection on the process and revision of conferencing strategies. Often there is also a final product such as a publication. Through experience Fellows learned the importance of student participation in generating topics for on-line conferences, embedding telecommunications in the curriculum, ensuring sufficient planning and structure, and building and maintaining relationships across settings.
- Reading and writing on-line demands new teaching strategies; in particular, it demands a shift from classrooms where students’ reading and writing is assigned by the teacher for evaluative purposes, to classrooms where reading and writing originates with students for communicative purposes with audiences outside the classroom.
- Teachers of middle and early high school students have described how telecommunications has helped them address the learning needs of young adolescents. In particular, telecommunications has helped teachers utilize peer

interaction and peer audiences for academic purposes. This has shifted the importance adolescents place in peer relations from being an obstacle to learning to being central to the learning process.

- Telecommunications has taken both teachers and students into previously unexplored subject areas through interdisciplinary projects. In these circumstances, the questions of both teachers and students become the basis for exploration and learning, making inquiry a more central feature of classroom pedagogy.

3. An unanticipated outcome of the project was the influence it has had on local schools. Partnerships have formed between BLRTN and the rural schools from which Fellows came.

- Fellows employed a variety of strategies for bringing new ideas to their local schools, exemplifying multiple conceptions of leadership. Teacher leaders used strategies congruent with circumstances in their local schools which they adapted from year to year with changes such as a new administration at the school, district or state levels. Fellows exhibited leadership in terms of modeling new techniques, team building, participation in school-wide committees, and taking on decision-making roles with implications for whole schools.
- Although BLRTN's primary identity is as a professional network for Fellows and their students, it has begun to include principals, superintendents and other teachers. Through the inclusion of other members of local school communities BLRTN is creating a web of support for Fellows and facilitating school-wide change.
- Participation in BLRTN is bringing Fellows into new collegial relationships at their local schools. Some feel ill-equipped for the kinds of leadership such relationships demand. BLRTN needs to continue to consider how its professional development can support teachers who are trying on new roles and ways of sharing with colleagues.

4. BLRTN is a network *for and in* rural settings. It intentionally takes on one of the major dilemmas of rural education, affirming tradition while introducing new ideas and opportunities.

- BLRTN has reduced the professional isolation of many rural teachers through their participation in the summer program and their on-line communication with other professionals. In a parallel fashion, telecommunications has reduced the isolation of rural students, providing a window to peers from different geographical and cultural backgrounds.

- Fellows are often a bridge for rural communities to the wider world. They often serve as cultural brokers for new ideas and scarce resources.
- Key to the success of Fellows' ability to bridge between their local community and the wider world is their relationship with students, colleagues and parents both inside and outside of school. Such connections enable their role as "brokers" for new ideas and scarce resources.
- Telecommunications use in BLRTN sites supports a "pedagogy of place" curriculum which brings teachers and students simultaneously into an appreciative yet critical stance toward their own community. It has reconnected the schooling process to the local community and thereby helped gain local support for academic work.
- Through on-line communication across geographical and cultural differences, rural students have gained opportunities to portray themselves in their depth and variation. This has contributed to their sense of value of their own traditions and culture and has helped to challenge stereotypes of themselves as well as of others.

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APPENDIX A: Calendar of Major Research Activities

Calendar of Major Research Activities

Summer 1993

Site Visit, Bread Loaf School of English, Vermont

- Focus Group: 8 Cohort I Fellows
- Interviews: Jacqueline Royster, Rocky Gooch, Dixie Goswami and Jim Maddox
- Classroom Observations

Fall 1993 - Winter 1994

Telephone Interviews

- All Cohort I Fellows

Winter 1994

Site Visit, Mississippi

- Classroom Observations: Ms. Reyes and others
- Participant Observation: Mississippi State Meeting

Spring 1994

Site Visit, New Mexico

- Classroom Observations
- Participant Observation: Taos Planning Conference
- Interviews: Rocky Gooch, Dixie Goswami and Jim Maddox

Summer 1994

Site Visit, Bread Loaf School of English, Vermont

- Focus Groups: 8 Cohort I Fellows & 8 Cohort II Fellows
- Interviews: Bread Loaf faculty --group & individual

Fall 1994 - Winter 1995

Survey

- All Cohorts I & II Fellows

Spring 1995

Site Visit, South Carolina

- Participant Observation: South Carolina State Meeting
- Case Study Research: Ms. Billings and Ms. Eaton

Site Visit, New Mexico

- Participant Observation: Taos Planning Conference
- Case Study Research: Ms. Reyes
- Interviews: Rocky Gooch, Dixie Goswami and Jim Maddox

Summer 1995

Site Visit, Bread Loaf School of English, Vermont

- Interviews: Bread Loaf faculty
- Case Study Interviews: Ms. Jones and Mr. Bendix

Fall 1995

Site Visit, Mississippi

- Case Study Research: Ms. Jones

Site Visit, New Mexico

- Case Study Research: Mr. Bendix
- Student Focus Group

Summer 1996

Site Visit, Bread Loaf School of English, Vermont

- Case Study Interviews: Ms. Billings, Mr. Bendix and Ms. Jones

Summer - Fall 1996

Telephone Interviews

- Ms. Reyes and Ms. Eaton

Spring 1997

Ethnography Forum, University of Pennsylvania

Site Visit, New Mexico

- Case Study Research: Mr. Bendix
- Participant Observation: Southwest State Meeting
- Student Interviews

Site Visit, South Carolina

- Case Study Research: Ms. Billings
- Participant Observation: South Carolina State Meeting
- Student Focus Group

Interviews

- Jim Maddox
- Case Study Interviews: Ms. Jones and Ms. Reyes
- On-line Interviews: Students

Summer 1997

Site Visit, Bread Loaf School of English, Vermont

- Participant Observation: BLRTN Conference
- Interviews: Bread Loaf faculty, Dixie Goswami, Rocky Gooch and Chris Benson

APPENDIX B: Sampling of Fieldwork & Interview Protocols



Research for Action

Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network Focus Group Questions

INTRODUCTIONS AND SCHOOL CONTENT

1. As a way to get started, let's go around the room and each of you can introduce yourself, tell us where you are from, and little bit about yourself and your school. In talking about yourself you might want to include how long you have been teaching, what you teach, and anything particularly exciting that has been happening in your classroom. In talking about your school, you might want to tell us about the kind of community your school is in, the size of your school, important issues within your school, and things your school has gotten involved in that seem exciting.

PROGRAM GOALS

2. What do you perceive as the goals of the Rural Teacher Network? What do you think it is trying to accomplish? How have you gotten the message that these are the goals?

RECRUITMENT

3. How did you hear about Bread Loaf and the Rural Teacher Network? With whom did you have contact? What made you want to apply? Did you have any concerns or worries about participating? Do you know teachers who considered applying, but didn't? Why do you think that they didn't?

EXPERIENCE AND EXPECTATIONS

4. Please jot down a little bit about your experience with teaching writing and using computers. We will take a few minutes so you can share some of what you have recorded.

What has been your approach to writing in your classroom?

What have been important influences on your teaching of writing?

What has been your experience using computers?

How do you expect that your participation in the Rural Teacher Network will support and strengthen your work in your classroom?

SUMMER AT BREADLOAF

5. If you were writing a letter to a friend, what would you say about your experience here so far? What would you include? How would you describe your experience? Have there been any surprises?

THE COMING YEAR

6. What is your understanding of what will happen in terms of the Rural Teacher Network during the coming school year? Please describe what you anticipate in terms of your classroom, your state, or other activities connected to the Rural Teachers Network.

Research for Action

Bread Loaf
Rural Teacher Network
Interview Protocol
Fall 1993

Professional

1. Bread Loaf has supplied us with information about where and what you teach. Have there been any significant changes since you completed your application?

Looking back

Think back to why you decided to apply to come to Bread Loaf and the expectations you had for your summer experience.

2. What are some of the important ways in which Bread Loaf met your expectations?
3. What are some of the ways that the experience diverged from those expectations (what surprised you, what disappointed you)?
4. What was most memorable about the summer?

School year

4. What was it like to go back to your school after the summer?
5. What impact do you think your summer at Bread Loaf has had on you in terms of:
 - a. changing or modifying your perceptions of your student and their school experience?
 - b. changing or modifying your perceptions of your school/school community?
 - c. influencing your classroom practice?

Looking ahead

6. What is your understanding of what the RTN will do during this year?
7. What do you anticipate your own RTN activities will be in your classroom, your state, or other contexts?
8. What kinds of support would be helpful at this point as you
 - a. get on line with BreadNet?
 - b. implement any changes you have planned for your classroom?
 - c. implement your state project?
9. Where do you see yourself in your professional development over the next couple of years.

Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network
Research Guide for Fieldwork
Spring 1995

Overarching Guiding Questions:

What is the relationship of learning communities on the network to other learning communities in which RTN teachers participate? What is about the RTN that supports participation in the network and the particular kind of learning community that the network represents?

How do the characteristics of the summer experience influence the ways in which teachers define learning community in their local settings? How does the summer prepare or set up fellows for year-long participation in the network. How does BreadNet shape or define learning communities in the local RTN settings?

Data Collection Methods-Research Activities

Fieldwork activities will be collaboratively designed by RFA staff, case study teachers and RTN staff (when possible). Suggested activities include:

- Interviews
 - Case study teacher
 - Other teachers who are using or are interested in using BreadNet
 - Administrator
 - Students involved in BreadNet activities (focus group?)
 - Parents
- Observations
 - Classes that are involved in BreadNet activities
 - Kids/Teachers using BreadNet
 - School staff activities involving group planning (faculty meeting, team common prep periods, department meetings, etc)
 - Surrounding community
- Document review
 - Selections from BreadNet conferences in which case study teacher is involved

Topic and Interview Guide (for case study teacher)

Getting the lay of the land (Context)

Topics

School structures and governance

Current school initiatives

Community (who are the kids, what is the relationship of the school and community, what values does the community have around education)

School community challenges/supports

Questions

Please describe your school.

Please describe your students and the community from which they come.

What is your school like as a place to learn for kids?

What is your school like as a place to learn/work for adults?

What's going on in the building that is really exciting to you?

What's going on in the building that is really discouraging to you?

What is the relationship like between the school and the surrounding community?

Involvements in RTN Learning Communities

Topics

Use/Involvement in BreadNet

State team activities

Cross-team conferences

Personal/Professional Communication

Non-BreadNet Involvement in RTN Community

State-team meetings

Other face-to-face contact

Other contact

Questions

What are your main activities related to RTN?

Take a couple of those activities and help me to really understand what's going on in them.

E.g. Who is participating?

What roles do different participants have? What is your role?

What are the tasks? What are the goals? How were these shaped?

What made you want to participate and what helps you stay involved?

What are the challenges of participating in this activity (locally and across distances)? How are you dealing with them?

What do you get out of participating? What do your students get?

If I wanted to get a flavor for what is happening in this group, what would you suggest I download?

Involvements in non-RTN Learning Communities

Topics

Involvement in local communities (professional development, teacher networks, special local initiatives, classroom, etc)

Involvement in district, regional, state or national communities (professional organizations, teacher networks, national leadership).

Questions

What other professional activities/learning opportunities are you involved in (school, district, regional/state, national)?

Relationships between RTN communities and other communities

Topics

Important differences and similarities

Transfer of learnings from one setting to another

Impact of challenges in one community on another

Impact of support from one community in another

Questions

Where is your RTN work situated in relationship to all these other activities

In what ways does your RTN involvement contribute to/shape/change your other involvements?

In what ways do your other involvements contribute to/shape/change your RTN involvements?

How have colleagues/students/ parents/other community members responded to the introduction BreadNet ?

How has your participation in RTN influenced you in relation to other teachers, administrators, students, other professionals?

In what ways does your local situation shape (positively or negatively) your participation in RTN?

Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network
Research Guide for Fieldwork
Spring 1995

Student Focus Group
Interview Protocol

1. Describe how you/your class uses BreadNet. (For what? How? How often? etc)
2. How are your activities on BreadNet alike/different from what you usually do in your class with Mrs./Mr _____?
3. What are you learning from using BreadNet that you might not have gotten to otherwise? How are you learning these things?
4. What's the best thing about BreadNet? What's the worst thing about BreadNet?

Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network
Research Guide for Fieldwork
Spring 1995
RTN Staff Interview Questions

When RTN was first funded, what was your hope/dream of what it would look like after three years? How has that vision shifted and changed? Why?

What criteria would you use to judge the success of RTN? What counts as success?

What have been (will be) significant supports and obstacles for achieving that success?

From concept, to implementation, to completion, what makes for a successful BreadNet conference?

What do you think of as appropriate topics/tasks?

What are the elements that make a conference run well?

What are the elements that can create a lot of obstacles for a conference?

What makes you feel a conference was a success?

On what basis were the Fellows for the case study chosen?

What made them interesting to you?

What were you hoping to learn by our learning in great detail about them?

What makes them standouts?

What do you value most about what they are doing on/off life? What are you less satisfied with?

Update of Case Studies, 6/96
Interview Protocols

General Questions

1. What stands out for you about this year in terms of things happening in your classroom, school, involvement with BLRTN? How does this contrast with what was happening last year? (Please include the conferences and exchanges your class participated in)
2. What was your BLRTN state involvement this year? How did that contrast with last year?
3. What were your other BLRTN activities this year? How did they compare/contrast with last year?
4. How did your year at school influence your participation in BLRTN? How is BLRTN influencing your classroom, school, professional life?
5. Did having the case study written about you make any difference to you? Did you use it in anyway?