THE SITUATED ACHIEVEMENTS OF NOVICES
LEARNING ACADEMIC WRITING
AS A
CULTURAL CURRICULUM

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
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Few studies on teaching and learning academic writing consider the unspoken, taken-for-granted assumptions and competencies that underlie academic conventions (e.g., thesis, conclusion, evidence, plagiarism) or what novices must do to learn them. The prevailing view is that these conventions can be taught explicitly; however, many are unspecified by textbooks and syllabi, and some even defy definition by practitioners. For novices, they constitute a cultural curriculum, cultural in the sense that they are indexical to social practices that only make sense to insiders. While there might be general agreement that all curricula are cultural, how they are has been largely untouched in the literature. The purpose of this study is to show how these conventions are cultural phenomena by examining the pedagogical practices and competencies that students and teachers must negotiate in order to recognize, assess, and use them.

Three conceptual questions framed the research: (1) What do students do to make sense of a curriculum that assumes resources they do not have; (2) How is the curriculum cultural, and (3) What can naturalistic inquiry offer to our understanding of learners and pedagogy that other methodologies cannot. Analysis was informed by readings in naturalistic inquiry in sociology, anthropology, ethno-methodology, and education. The
study draws on a corpus of materials from an intermediate level class in entry-level academic writing for ESL students for the duration of an academic quarter. The corpus includes videotapes of the class sessions, audiotapes of the tutorials, and students' written work. The researcher was the instructor of the class.

Findings suggest that far from being a one-way transmission of explicit knowledge, learning academic conventions involves on-going, methodic, interpretive work. Furthermore, a paradox emerges whereby learners are required to know already what they are attempting to learn how to do as a condition of making sense of their instruction in how to do it. The paradox gets worked out through the joint efforts of a formal curriculum of models and exhibits, and a learning curriculum of tutorials, which function as an apprenticeship of sorts in learning academic judgments.

Contrary to prevailing views that academic writing conventions can be taught as a set of skills, this study shows that they stand on behalf of pervasive, situated, cultural practices of the academic writing community, and thus learning them requires a curriculum of judgments rather than skills. This curriculum entails, among other things, discovering and resolving a number of paradoxes by those who would learn and teach it.
DEDICATED TO

John F. Kerry
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A mark of membership in any community of social practice is the invisibility, the taken-for-granted-ness of the knowledge systems and cultural assumptions that ground participation. These are generally tacit, routinely unspoken, and for that reason, when they involve practices that are quite distant from those with which one is familiar, they require serious interpretive work. “Cultural stranger” is Schutz’s (1976) term for anyone seeking to undertake this kind of learning. Although the term applies most vividly to those who are undertaking new languages and cultures, the circumstance is quite recognizable to anyone who places in question “nearly everything that seems to be unquestionable to the members of the approached group” (p. 96). They do so not be to quarrelsome but because they genuinely do not understand the sense of it.

This thesis examines a single undergraduate class of 19 international students and their efforts to learn the conventions of academic writing in an entry-level composition course. Their plight is not restricted to learners of English but extends to anyone seeking to become a competent practitioner of the academic community. Over the past decade, the growing population of diverse learners entering college has challenged the normative
cognitivist view that composing resides “in the head” of the writer and prompted researchers to acknowledge the social and cultural contexts within which writing occurs.

The literature on post-secondary academic writing has only recently taken up the notion of writing as social action. As well, the competencies and literacies that learners bring from diverse experiences to the university has gained acknowledgment. Academic writing, then, is meaningful social action that constitutes a cultural practice. This study concerns how the cultural practice is learned.

This chapter presents a brief overview of the concepts of the social world, by contrast to the natural world, beginning with an explication of cases, followed by those that ground the analytic program of this study. Following is a description of how culture and academic writing are understood in the purpose and the context of this study. The two paradoxes that permeate the entering undergraduate student experience – participation and cultural competence – are discussed, particularly in regard to students who are language learners. The chapter concludes with the significance and limitations of the study.

Studies that value the role of social context in the relationship between readers, writers, and texts, (c.f., Heath, 1984; Resnick & Resnick, 1988; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Street, 1984) have led to the notion of writing as situated within discourse communities and as a socio-cultural practice. These, however, have tended to focus on the broad institutional organization of discourse communities. For example, the discourse community of universities has been studied in terms of linguistic traits, genre, register,
discipline-specific conventions and their effects on learners in terms of audience awareness, writer’s purpose, identity, access or exclusion. Casanave (1995), who is critical of studies that regard such characteristics as generic and fixed, argues that the term *academic discourse community* is metaphoric as “there are no abstract academic settings” (p. 83). The metaphor breaks down, she contends, once applied to actual settings, which will always show complex, locally situated, interactions. The closer we look, she says, the more “units” of meaning come into view, each embedded within another: “We find sub-communities within communities, and multiple embeddings of micro-societies within sub-communities, and finally a great diversity of a small number of individuals in the innermost circle” (p. 86). Casanave believes this explains the recent interest in case studies in education.

### The Study of Cases

Commonly in educational research, *case study* refers to a methodological approach, a data-gathering technique by which a researcher systematically (and usually longitudinally) gathers detailed information about an individual, group, or local setting. Case studies make use of familiar research tools such as interviews, life histories, documents, and participant observation with the goal of informing our perception of an individual or local community, theory, or event. It is among the many design choices available to qualitative research. There is, however, another reading of *case study* that brings our attention not to matters of analytic techniques but rather to prior and larger
questions about the character of social worlds and how they are organized. In this view, this thesis is a case study not by virtue of its research tools but rather because all studies of the social world are unavoidably case studies (Cronbach, 1982). According to Cronbach the 1980 Census, for example, is no less a case study than a psychoanalytic profile of a patient. This is because the social world only presents itself in cases; it owes its order to meaning, and meaning is always contextually embedded (Mischler, 1979). In studying social worlds, then, we are condemned to the study of context, and thus to cases.

**Analytic Program**

Social Theorist Herbert Blumer was among the earliest to clarify the nature of social worlds. His sociology of symbolic interaction was an early post-positive initiative in social science. In his (1970) article criticizing the “scientization” of social theory, he argues that the scientific models of research designed to study the natural scientific world are inappropriate for the study of the social world. In making his case, he emphasizes the differences in the organization of each world. Whereas the natural scientific world derives its order from chemical bonds (i.e. molecular coherence), the social world is characterized by the primacy of *interpretation* for order and meaning (c.f., Blumer, 1969; Erickson, 1986; Geertz, 1973; Macbeth, 1998). As Schutz (1962) succinctly puts it, molecules have no use for meaning. The social world, however, owes its order to meaning, and consequentially, researchers encounter a world that is already meaningfully interpreted by its inhabitants. The job of social scientists, then, is to study the meaning that is already assumed and acted upon by people.
According to Blumer, the natural scientific world is organized by *definitive concepts*, that is, it rests on common distinguishing characteristics, which permit clear determination of what is and is not included in the concept. In other words, these concepts “discriminate cleanly their empirical instances” (p. 54). Definitive concepts present themselves in fixed benchmarks, which can be isolated and replicated by scientific procedures and thus owe their order to precise parameters.

The social world, deriving its essential order from *meaning*, (Schutz, 1962), cannot offer formal definitions, fixed benchmarks, or clean distinctions. Rather, according to Blumer, it offers itself in *distinctive expressions*. Returning to Cronbach’s reference to the *1980 Census*, despite its statistical precision, it is nonetheless an artifact of a profoundly social practice, done in a certain way, by certain people, at a culturally constructed time, based on a certain conceptual understanding of what counts.

Blumer calls the concepts of the social world *sensitizing concepts* because they imply rather than definitively point to instances. Instead of allowing us to cleanly specify attributes or establish stable benchmarks, sensitizing concepts give “a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances…[and] merely suggest directions along which to look” (p. 58). All classic social concepts, e.g., customs, culture, institutions, social structure, attitude, intelligence, and personality are sensitizing concepts, although they have been and continue to be treated in much educational research as definitive concepts.
Although sensitizing concepts seem to be rather vague constellations, Blumer says they can be formulated, communicated, tested, improved, and refined. He concedes that investigating variable expressions is more difficult than fixed objects that are governed by scientific laws. Such work, he says, requires “patient, careful and imaginative life study… exposition which yields a meaningful picture, abetted by apt illustrations which enable one to grasp the reference in terms of one’s own experience” (p. 60-61).

In light of Blumer, the two central conceptual formulations of this study, culture and academic conventions of writing, are sensitizing, not definitive, concepts. This study is a case built out of many cases – multiplicities of distinctive expressions – just as a house is comprised of many rooms. We cannot get a sense for the concept of house unless we have a sense for its multiple spaces and their distinctive uses. As Geertz (1973) puts it, it’s cases all the way down. Culture, then, is a gloss for deeply complex components and practices. In this study it refers to a micro-culture, the social practices of the academic writing community. It means, quite simply, how we do things here

**Culture as a Sensitizing Concept**

Culture is perhaps the greatest of all sensitizing concepts. In anthropology, the 100-year old discipline dedicated to the study of culture, there has never been a consensus on what it is (Erickson, 1986). There are, as well, differing orientations and theories about it across a range of other disciplines, e.g., sociology, psychology, linguistics, and education. According to Geertz (1973), culture tends to be either reified as a super-organic force, or reduced to a pattern of behaviors that is characteristic of an
identifiable community. He cites Goodenough’s classic definition as an example of the latter: “A society’s culture is whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members” (in Geertz, 1973, p. 11). He believes such views lead to the pursuit of systematic rules, “an ethnographic algorithm, which, if followed, would make it possible so to operate, to pass (physical appearance aside) for a native” (p. 11). Geertz proposes instead an interpretive theory in which culture is not viewed as a power—“something to which social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes can be casually attributed”—but as a context.

Geertz understands culture this way: people are “suspended in webs of significance that they themselves have spun” (p. 12). He takes culture to be the webs, and argues that it is tied to behavior: “culture is public because meaning is” (p. 12); people act in ways that demonstrate in public view what they mean, and when others respond, they in turn convey their interpretations of what has transpired. This, to him, constitutes the weaving of the webs.

Mehan (1982) uses Hymes’ (1972) focus on the functions served by speech in the social context to examine how members of a classroom produce and interpret socially appropriate ways of speaking. His constitutive approach to culture begins with a criticism of the overly cognitive and behaviorist view of culture that has dominated educational research for many years. According to him culture is not wholly a cognitive/subjective consideration (a mental state in an individual’s head), nor a purely a

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1 Judith Butler (1990) makes the same argument about gender: ‘Feminine’ and ‘masculine’ are not what we are, nor traits we have, but effects we produce by way of particular things we do…Gender has constantly to be reaffirmed and publicly displayed by repeatedly performing particular acts in accordance with the cultural norms themselves historically and socially constructed and consequently variable which define ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity.” (in Cameron, 1997, p. 49).
behavioral/objective one (patterns of behavior and cultural customs). Rather, he says, these two considerations have a dialectical relationship; neither can exist without the other: “effective participation in interaction requires that people *produce behavior* and be able to *interpret behavior* in a manner that is acceptable to others” (p. 64). He believes that treating culture as either one or the other ignores “the constructive or constitutive ‘work’ that assembles human experiences” (p. 64). In other words, behavior is constructed in social contexts through interaction, and people display their cultural knowledge in these interactions (Geertz, 1973). Mehan says an ethnography of interaction involves describing “what people *do* with their cultural knowledge, how they *use* what they know about social structure, norms, and other people…[as well as] describing the active modes or practices of human production and construction, the concrete, observable ‘work’ of people that assembles orderly entities” (p. 64). Those entities include the practical organization and the cultural forms that are taught there.

**Academic Writing as Distinctive Expression**

Both culture and academic writing conventions are practices that are revealed through meaningful social actions. Like culture, academic writing is neither monolithic nor stable. Despite numerous textbook descriptions of academic conventions, there is no definitive understanding of how they play out within the community of practitioners. Brandt (1990), Brodkey (1987), and Fox (1991) support the view that academic discourse is a set of cultural practices that can best be understood by observing how individual members “do” them in context. Definitions and surveys to elicit fixed benchmarks and precise parameters for academic discourse, as for any other cultural practice, are doomed
to be incomplete (Heap, 2000). This might explain why every convention that is outlined in writing textbooks (e.g., organizational patterns for essays, summarizing, paraphrasing, quoting, thesis statements, evidence, analysis, etc.) seems to be flouted somewhere in academic writing that is nonetheless recognizable to members as academic discourse (Brodkey, 1987). Many educators lament this lack of fixed benchmarks and definitions (e.g. Petraglia, 1995; Spack, 1998). According to Spack one of the major problems of teaching students to become better academic writers is that “we have not yet satisfactorily determined, despite numerous surveys, what academic writing is” (p. 85). According to Elbow (1998), “The fact is that we can’t teach academic discourse because there’s no such thing to teach” (p. 148).

Fox’s (1991) work on analytical writing in the academy nicely illustrates a benchmark/definite parameter problem. In investigating the problems of non-native speakers of English at the university, trying to figure out what professors mean by “analysis,” she could find no textbook that defined “analysis,” or specified what it is, although all of them liberally used the term. Furthermore, the professors she interviewed could not define “analysis,” but they could certainly do it and recognize it. Yet, there seems to be unanimous agreement in the academic community that “analysis” is a defining characteristic of academic writing. And, it seems, it is routinely taught and learned. Blumer anticipates this discontentment, yet for him, there is none – it is how social worlds of meaning work:

Careful scrutinizing of our concepts forces one to recognize that they rest on vague sense and not on precise specification of attributes. We see this in our common experience in explaining concepts to our students or outsiders. Formal definitions are of little use. Instead, if we are good teachers we seek to give the
Blumer says sensitizing concepts rest on a general sense of what is relevant, or, what
Brodkey (1987) refers to as social arrangements shared by a community of practice.
Brandt (1992) says understanding such cultural activity requires looking at how
individuals do it in real-life. Academic conventions are played out in Blumer’s
distinctive expressions. As such, studying them involves inferring them from concrete
expressions or forms of expression.

**Purpose of the Study**

Countless textbooks on composition provide explanations and examples of
academic writing conventions and their components as formal, neutral objects and thus
appear to assume a technical curriculum. Within this curriculum, there is an implicit
assumption that teachers’ pedagogical behaviors *cause* learning, that there is a one-way
transmission of knowledge from the teacher or the textbook to the student, and that
students interpret the objects and behaviors the same way if they are paying attention.
Dyson (1999) says, on the contrary, teachers and learners “interpret each others’ actions
and make, what seems to them, relevant responses” (p. 144). Yet the more prevalent
view is that struggling students simply need more guidelines and more explicit
instruction.
This study takes a contrary view by showing how academic conventions are cultural objects and by examining the infrastructure, participation, and competencies that students and teachers must negotiate in order to recognize, assess, and use them. It examines culture and context as local, practical, enactments and how learners vary in their interpretations of them. It shows academic conventions to be quite problematic and not at all “common sense” to cultural strangers.

The conventions that constitute every formal curriculum are glosses for more pervasive cultural practices that are unspecified by textbooks and syllabi. Although there is ample literature on the forms, features, and conventions of academic discourse and the processes, knowledge domains, schemata, strategies, propositional contents and developmental structures, there are few descriptions of novice writers as they encounter their work through the curriculum as a set of cultural conventions. Grabe and Kaplan (1996), for example, mention cultural differences but proceed to describe writing as “a technology, a set of skills which must be practiced and learned through experience” (p. 6). No one will dispute that learning to compose requires practice, but in the case of cultural strangers, practice what? Grabe and Kaplan imply, like many others in the field, that the affairs to be practiced are self-evident. In this respect, “practice” is a gloss for the taken-for-granted affairs of which they speak. But to practice a skill, one must be in possession of what it is one is practicing. And in the case of cultural strangers who are unfamiliar with academic conventions, we must ask what comes before practice. Said differently, what are the practices that permit one to “practice”? 
This study describes the work and enabling that are necessary to achieve an understanding of classroom activities, assignments, objects, and materials. These are practical courses of action taken by the students to find what indeed they must then practice, its evident character and recognizability. These are not matters of skills. In the first instance, they are matters of recognition. They not only require practice, they are a practice – a cultural practice that must be learned by those seeking membership into the community where such skills are valued. In terms of this study, this practice and its goals are part of the university-mandated curriculum for undergraduate students.

The Context

The Students

The study focuses on 19 students in their first quarter at a large public university in the Midwest. Most arrived from their respective countries just days before classes began. It was their first exposure to college, and for all but four, their first time away from home and parents, and first experience living in a foreign country. Few were prepared to find themselves in yet another English as a Second Language (ESL) class just when they thought acceptance into an American university and a schedule full of core courses meant they had progressed beyond the need for further language instruction (see Leki, 2001 for a discussion of this frustration). The class was comprised of students from China, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Somalia, and South Korea.
At the beginning of the quarter, I asked students to write about their expectations for the course and to describe how they understood academic writing in their countries or in this one. I asked them to tell me what they knew about using sources for their writing, reading articles for the purpose of writing, documenting source material, arranging a bibliography, or writing an essay. All of the students mentioned correct grammar as a convention. None of them offered anything that fit the objectives of the course. A few mentioned that they had written essays, but did not mention anything specific. When I asked who recognized the terms “thesis statement,” and “topic sentence,” no one indicated that they did. This does not necessarily mean that they lacked academic skills from their own cultures. It frequently happens that students do not recognize or associate such labels with their practices. Later, a diagnostic test, which sought to tap such recognition in practice, moved those who seemed familiar out of the class to the next level (108).

All of the students who remained were understood to be unfamiliar with American academic writing conventions. Furthermore, all but a few were new to American classroom life. Within the group, however, there were three students (two Ethiopians and one Somalian) who were permanent U.S. residents and had graduated from local high schools. The university’s English department writing placement test
diagnosed them as non-native speakers rather than remedial level native-speakers, and had sent them to my department. They were understandably quite unhappy about being placed in the class.²

Notwithstanding the cultural diversity of this group, students were not studied as representatives of their distinct cultures, nor in terms of cross-cultural differences. This is not to say that differences were ignored in my professional teaching. They were in fact assumed. The study of cross-cultural differences in language acquisition, including learning academic English, is well provided for in the field of contrastive rhetoric, which strives to map the interactions of cultural-rhetorical forms of broad cultural preferences. The focus of this study, however, was not on the Korean-ness or Chinese-ness of the students, for example, but rather on how, through the quarter’s 10 weeks of daily meetings, these students were taught and learned cultural forms and objects of writing they had not seen before. For them, the curriculum was one of mostly novel objects and practices, which required figuring out how such things mean here, in the particular, distinctive context of the classroom and the university. This study describes what these students actually do in the classroom in light of these differences rather than seek to confirm formal, stable, cultural characteristics.

**The Researcher/Teacher**

In this study, I examined my own class as what Erickson (1986) termed an *observant participant*. I brought to the study 23 years of experience teaching college-level ESL composition at universities in Georgia, Tennessee, Pennsylvania, and Ohio, as

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² The best way to serve such students is an on-going debate and beyond the scope of this paper. I was not implicated in their placement in the class.
well as experience abroad: I taught English in Togo, West Africa, as a Peace Corps Volunteer, and was myself once a student at a foreign university when I studied French. Furthermore, I came to the study with considerable experience teaching this intermediate level composition course (107), through which I guided these students; as a graduate teaching associate in the Department of English Composition where I conducted this study, I had previously taught the course twelve times within the last few years.

I had become attached to 107 because I was touched by the extent to which it is the site of sincere, often frantic negotiating as the students make their initial acquaintance with America academic writing conventions. Schutz (1976) points out that cultural newcomers are shocked to discover the sudden inadequacy of some of the highly developed competencies that have afforded them considerable success in their home cultures. In 107 the shock is vivid.

**The Program**

At the university where this study was conducted, entering non-native undergraduates are required to take a placement test issued by the ESL Composition Department, which is dedicated to the needs of both graduate and undergraduate non-native speakers. Here their writing is re-evaluated, and they are placed somewhere within a three-course sequence (106, 107, 108.01) as a prerequisite to first year English courses. Student who demonstrate skillful academic writing qualify out of the requirement. The department also runs a three-course sequence for graduate students
Due to a recent increase in the university’s TOEFL score requirement for admission for both graduate and undergraduate students, few students place in the lowest level (106), which now functions as an intensive grammar review for mixed groups of graduate and undergraduate students.

The 107 undergraduate course is then among the first courses an entering international student takes at the university. It is a 5-credit-hour course that meets 48 minutes a day, Monday through Friday for 10 weeks, with a mid term exam in the fifth week, and final exam in the eleventh week. Students cannot use these credits to fulfill their English requirement, but they are calculated into their cumulative grade point average.

According to the departmental program guidelines, the goal of the course is to provide an introduction to and practice of academic writing conventions related to summarizing, paraphrasing, quoting, documentation, response, and analytical writing. Of course, each of these begets others, for example, thesis statement, topic sentence, introduction, conclusion, coherence, transition, plagiarism, main idea, and so forth. The guidelines stress that the course seeks to acquaint students with American academic literacy practices, for example the “habits of mind” suggested by Kennedy and Smith (2001) by which academic community members, (differences in disciplines

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3 Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is a language fluency test administered internationally by Educational Testing Service, Princeton, New Jersey. The test typically includes a writing component.
notwithstanding), read sources and weave the author’s words and ideas into their own texts to support a point of view. The weave includes appropriate citation and documentation.

The guidelines state that the theoretical foundation of 107 is a blend of social theories of writing, (c.f., Belcher & Braine, 1995) with the language acquisition theories of Lev Vygotsky and Stephen Krashen. The course is designed to support a reading/writing connection (Carson, Carrell, Silberstein, Kroll & Kuehn, 1990) and follow a process approach to instruction. This means assignments progress through multiple drafts negotiated through student-teacher tutorials, peer review, and teacher commentary. There is an emphasis in the assignments on students’ personal responses to the readings to support the value of their personal knowledge and experiences. Students write journal entries, participate in a Web-CT forum, and have peer group and class discussions.

All instructional materials--a textbook, coursepacket, articles, exercises, and exam prompts--were chosen by a course coordinator, a member of the full-time staff. Graduate teaching associates like myself are invited to supplement instruction with their own materials, but ultimately students in all of the 107 sections (there were four this quarter) must be exposed to the same curricula. Supplementary materials and activities are shared and discussed among teachers at weekly course meetings.

Readings for the course, which are chosen by the course coordinator, are not modified for ESL students; they are authentic texts from general sources such as newspapers, the internet, magazines, fiction and non-fiction books, as well as academic
journals. The textbook assigned to the course for this particular quarter was a collection of academic argument essays entitled *Controversy* (Pula, Edwards & Dermott, 2002).

**The Parameters of the Study**

The study covered the duration of the 107 course for Autumn Quarter 2002, which was ten weeks, and included the final exam in the eleventh week. The class met daily Monday through Friday from 11:30-12:18. The 19 participants in the study were consenting, officially enrolled, undergraduate students who were assigned to the course through a placement test issued by the English Composition Department.

The corpus consists of observation, conversation, and artifacts of students’ writing tensions and progress. Class sessions were videotaped daily and annotated in a field journal. All written products of the students were examined with an interest in how the content of class lessons was used/interpreted by the writer. All student-teacher tutorials about these texts were audio-taped and annotated in a field journal. Perspicuous class and tutorial sessions were chosen for transcription and analysis as topics of interest and organizational features emerged.

**Study Interests**

**The Paradox of Participation**

Figuring out how things are done locally is a practical task for every newcomer to an unfamiliar community of practice. Certainly the degree of familiarity one comes with is an important factor in how quickly or easily this will happen. In this respect, the undertaking by international students may not be too different from that of many native

Schutz (1976) tells us that cultural members act on knowledge systems that are “unquestioned and unquestionable,” and taken for granted in the absence of evidence to the contrary. He uses the term cultural pattern of group life for “all the peculiar valuations, institutions, and systems of orientation and guidance… which characterize – if not constitute – any social group at a given moment in its history” (p. 92). These, he says, are experienced by in-group members first with relevance to actions and participation in the social world, and only secondarily as objects of thinking. The stranger, however, who does not share the basic cultural assumptions, “has to place in question nearly everything that seems to be unquestionable to the members of the approached group” (p. 96).

Participation in the classroom serves as an entry ticket to the content of the course, for the classroom is the site of lessons and discussions about academic conventions. The dissemination of information and discussion of the content rely on ways of being a student, a class, and a teacher. For the students, approaching the American academic discourse community begins with public classroom behaviors like showing understanding, showing attention, and asking and answering questions, and so forth. New arrivals are generally uncertain about the customs and participation structure of American university classrooms. They all have transferable competencies (Leki, 1995) – most were very good students in their home cultures—but they must discover what will work here and what won’t. According to Schutz (1976) the cultural stranger has to
‘translate’ the terms of the approached culture into terms of home cultural patterns, provided that such patterns exist, and even when they do, he or she cannot assume that the interpretation of the new cultural pattern matches that of members of the in-group of the approached culture.

In the case of these students, many of the customs are picked up, or at least understood, quickly because the American students in their other classes model them. This is, however, their only English class, and there are no “native guide” American students to model how one does an English class here.

Lave and Wenger’s (1991) concept of legitimate peripheral participation describes apprenticeship (or co-participatory learning) whereby novices learn in the company of an expert. One learns how to participate in cultural practices by participating, even if the participation begins by watching from the periphery. From the periphery, however, one must have something to watch. The 107 class is a roomful of apprentices with no expert in the ways of being a student here. They must rely on the teacher to help guide them, but ultimately, teachers are most competent at being teachers, not students.

For cultural strangers recognizing the contexts and behaviors becomes serious anthropologic work. Furthermore, what is appropriate is not the same as being able to do it. These students come with years of school experience and while not all of their home competencies will be adequate or appropriate, many of them will be. Even when international students begin to expand their repertoires of appropriate participation, what Kramsch (1993) calls cultural competence, they may find that this competence conflicts
with their linguistic competence; they may be hindered in making appropriate responses, for example, by lexical, grammatical or pronunciation insecurities about using English. Furthermore, they may be hindered by other social and cultural factors associated with doing school (Finders, 1997). For example, a female Korean student once told me that in her discussion group, she may speak only after the Korean males have spoken. A male Korean student told me that when participating in-group projects in our class, he must defer to the eldest Korean male on the group, even if he knows the elder’s answer to be wrong. Although they may recognize cultural expectations, there are many constraints on performance. The difference between performance and competence has been an important topic in studies of cross-cultural learning (c.f., Brown, Malmkjaer & Williams, 1996; Canale, 1983; Hymes, 1972).

**The Paradox of Competence**

In “Inventing the University,” David Bartholomae (1985) describes a paradox whereby entering students must write as though they were already members of the academy as a condition of admission; they must “carry off the bluff, since speaking and writing will most certainly be required long before the skill is learned” (p. 135). He uses words such as *duplicate, imitate, or mimic*, to describe the behavior. In examining over 500 freshman entrance essays, Bartholomae offers ample evidence of bluffing, and concludes that the successful students managed to portray themselves as insiders, deficits notwithstanding. He emphasizes that their attempts to write in a way they have not mastered are not wrong or invalid, but rather a prerequisite to learning what they need to know. He appreciates the bluffers because, although they are obviously working within a
discourse they cannot completely do, they know enough to craft the bluff. The more successful mimics were ushered through the “members” door, into regular college courses to begin the process of becoming real practicing members. Writers who were not successful in approximating academic discourse were directed to basic (or remedial) English courses.

Here is the bind: central to Bartholomae’s view that students “must perform the discourse as a prerequisite to learning it” (p. 135) is the notion that one must already “know” (or possess to a certain degree) what one hopes to learn. Faking a discourse requires knowing something about it. In the case of my students, who were like Bartholomae’s unsuccessful mimics, they were required to find a way to understand what they profoundly did not know about a cultural practice that requires knowing as a condition of learning.

“Objects of Thinking”

For literate native speakers, much of our understanding of academic writing comes from many years of immersion in the cultural practice of how texts work within social communities; what we know about texts, then, is unquestioned by us. In fact, we are only beginning to realize the complexity of our understanding (Brandt, 1990). For example, in one class my students and I read an article on cloning in which the author opened with a fictitious scenario set in the future. The set-up was presumably designed to show the reader what life for a clone (Rachel) would be like in the year 2049 and to suggest that cloning does not harm anyone. He pulls away from the story and into his argument with the following:
Has she [Rachel] been harmed in some way so detrimental that it would have been better had she not been born? Daniel Callahan, director of the Hastings Center (a bioethics think tank near New York City), argues that engineering someone’s entire genetic makeup would compromise his or her right to a unique identity.” (Silver, 1998, p. 119)

The “story” part of the introduction ends and the argument essay part begins with these rhetorical questions and the mention of the Hastings Center director. To English majors we could say this is a recognizable set-up for a Rogerian style argument essay. In my class, however, we had not progressed very far into our discussion of the essay when I began to suspect that my students perceived the whole article as a short story. I seemed to be the only one who had detected the shift from fiction to exposition. When I pointed this out, one baffled student pointed to the argument section and exclaimed, “You mean this part is real?” When I said yes, one student politely asked, “But, how do you know?” Caught off guard, I looked for some point-at-able evidence, but this was not so easy. After an awkward pause, I finally pointed out that Daniel Callahan and the Hastings Center were real, but as I said this, I knew that this was not the real answer. I knew they probably were real, they sounded real, but I did not know this for a fact. I finally concluded that I was able to recognize something familiar about the text, its authority, its arrangement, that told me these things were real. This feeling, however, was nearly impossible to articulate to my students.

This was the beginning of my awareness that much of literacy is not simply learning how to read and write, but a deep, culturally ingrained understanding of how texts work. My real answer to the question was, “Because I just know;” however, to my students I said, “You’ll just have to take my word for it.”
Schutz (1976) explains this taken for granted knowledge of cultural insiders as “thinking as usual.” My students’ questions made my understanding of tone and text arrangement change from taken-for-granted cultural understanding to objects of thinking. Their questions made me realize to what extent academic writing is fraught with objects of thinking for them. This study takes great interest in the objects of thinking and how negotiation of such objects interacts with pedagogy.

All pedagogies are cultural practices, grounded in beliefs about the nature of the content and who the students and teachers are as cultural members. Teachers who believe that academic conventions are “autonomous and discrete phenomena, rather than constituting and reflecting a particular literacy practice” (cf. Lillis, 1999, p. 130) and writing as a set of skills to be taught and learned will have pedagogical practices that reflect this view. For them it is likely that teaching is a matter of delivering procedural knowledge, and learning it involves remembering the rules and applying them.

A former colleague of mine coded each grammatical or rhetorical error on her students’ papers, then attached a guide to the codes. A student, for example, who might have found an “SV” notation on his or her paper could refer to the attached guide to find the following explanation of “SV”:

**Subject-Verb Agreement**  
[For example, change “He run” to “He runs”]

A student with a strong background in syntax would be able to follow this instruction. Other codes, however, are more problematic. For instance the code “AWK” is explained this way:
Awkward logic
[Rethink the underlying message in your statement. Does it make sense?]

Another code, “WORD,” is explained by:

Rethink this part. Do you need it?
[Use no more words than you need. Be efficient.]

In my experience, students’ sentences make sense to them, and they use the words they believe they need. The “questions” posed by the guide actually mean: “This sentence does not make sense,” and, “You have used more words than are necessary.” In order to comply with the instructions, a student must be in possession of the knowledge in question. He or she must know what “sense” and “efficient word use” look like in the academy.

Fortunately, the assumptions implicit in this view have been widely questioned (e.g., Andrews, 1995; Firth & Wagoner, 1997; Hounsell, 1987; Ivanic, Clark & Rimmershaw, 2000; Lea, 1995; Prosser & Webb, 1994; Scott, 1996; Taylor, 1988; Zamel, 2000). Of particular note is Lillis’ (1999) argument against the prevailing view that the conventions surrounding academic writing are “unproblematic and simply ‘common sense’” (p. 127). She claims that such a view is ideologically inscribed in the “institutional practice of mystery,” and is ultimately designed to restrict membership (see also Lea & Street, 1998; Rose, 1985; Street, 1999).

And worse, I recently overheard the following dialogue from a teacher-student tutorial:

Teacher (exasperated): So, I’ve been talking about this for two weeks.
Student: [silence]
Teacher: (scolding) So where were you, huh? Where were you?
Student: [silence]
In my experience, the view that writing conventions are self-explanatory and “common sense” leads to frustration in the teachers who believe that their students are not paying attention or studying hard enough. Some are unkind enough to question the intelligence of their students (see further discussion of this in Shaunghessy, 1976). While the research suggests that we have departed from this view (Gass, 1987), obviously remnants of it exist in practice. Confidence in the promises of formal curricula will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Even when we make an effort to approach academic writing as a cultural practice, we will find that our instruction is nevertheless fraught with, indeed based on, assumptions of “common sense,” while to our students, these assumptions are objects of thinking.

**Significance/Limitations**

This study will not evaluate academic writing course curricula, university ESL programs, teaching practices, student behaviors or products. It will not conclude with recommendations for reform or correctives for teachers or learners. As a case study, it promises only to re-specify a very familiar task – teaching and learning academic writing – in order to illustrate a neglected perspective of how teaching and learning happens. While teachers, lessons, and students have been researched from every imaginable angle, there are few studies that acknowledge or illustrate that their work is achieved in response to and from within their participation in very local contexts as practical courses of action. Prior (1995) reminds us “academic writing tasks really make sense only in terms of “a
local history of participants’ situated action’ “(p. 54). According to Rogoff (1990),
“Individual efforts and sociocultural activity are mutually embedded, as are the forest and
the trees, and…it is essential to understand how they constitute each other…” (p. 25, in
Atkinson, 1999, p. 648)

The promise of a good description is that it can instruct us in things we thought
we knew well. It is premised on the belief that, as all case studies, it can reveal re-
occurrences that will be recognizable and instructive to others. Although case studies
yield situations, people, and practices that are distinctive to the occasion, what
Ramanathan and Atkinson (1999) refer to as particularizability, according to Blumer
(1970), “we have to accept, develop and use the distinctive expression in order to detect
and study the common” (p. 58). This recommendation followed his criticism of studies
that use “fixed and specific procedures designed to isolate a stable and definitive
empirical content” (p. 55). He believes that such attempts to separate meaning from
context result in findings that are not genuine.

According to Johns (2003) many studies of L2 academic writing still isolate
student behavior from the context that co-produced it, specific instruction from the
interaction that constituted it, and treat academic writing apart from its cultural
attachments. Furthermore, newer views of social contexts promise more ethnographic
research practices, even though such practices “have not yet made a strong impact”
(Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999). Furthermore, such research is tied to concepts of
culture, a term currently undergoing considerable re-specification and change (Atkinson,
1999).
Academic writing conventions as cultural objects, and the infrastructure, participation, and competencies one must negotiate in order to do them is an unspoken curriculum that has been largely ignored in the literature (cf. Casanave, 1995; Lillis, 1999; Lea & Street, 1998; Street, 1999). There is relatively little work in composition research on culture and context as local enactments. There is instead an overwhelming focus on how students come to grasp objects of a formal curriculum. Notable exceptions are studies by Atkinson and Ramanathan (1995), Brandt (1992), Carson and Nelson (1996), Dyson (for example 1993), Fox (1991), Heap (1992) Lillis (1999) and Prior (1995). Their work concerns the living forms of school-based literacy as it unfolds in real-time and how it is meaningful to the learners themselves as practical courses of action in the classroom.

Dyson and Heap’s ethnographic work focuses on young children. Brandt uses an ethnomethodological approach to examine the composing practices of graduate students. Fox (1991) has been helpful in bringing to light the cultural dimension of “analysis” for her graduate international students. She observed that it is routinely understood by professors as a skill or a technique that is acquired through training and discipline. She concludes that learning to analyze is culturally bound and eludes definition by the seasoned members of the academic community. Her study, however, does not focus on the work of the students to learn the convention. Similarly, Lillis (1999) illustrates the ways in which writing instruction for non-traditional students assumes a view of writing conventions as “unproblematic and simply ‘common sense’” (p. 127).
Current literature in composition is awash with the adjective cultural, yet, if every curriculum is a cultural curriculum, every practice a cultural practice, how this is so has been largely untouched. Understanding of the cultural order of the writing curriculum, and its cultural attachments, is still an unfinished task.

The following is a study of the immediate situation of language use in a classroom, and rather than taking the more common view that the contextual influence on writing comes from “up there,” the discourse community of the academy, this study proposes that undergraduate academic writing is influenced by the “immediate and local meanings of actions as defined from the actors’ point of view” (Erickson, 1986, p. 119). Relatively few second language studies of writing use participant observation in conjunction with teacher research, nor focus on the micro level of social activity. Chapter 3 will discuss why this method of research brings to light a very different portrait of learning to write than studies that assume a formal curriculum.

The first of three analytic chapters, Chapter 4, examines the interpretive work of students in following instructions that rely on cultural resources they do not have. The chapter emphasizes that explicit instructions may not be as explicit to cultural strangers as teacher might think.

Chapter 5 illustrates how the curriculum is cultural and how students come to learn what instructional objects mean in this academic context. The focus is on student reliance on temporary structures – models and exhibits – as a way into the practice of academic writing. The chapter discusses the use and usefulness of these structures.
Chapter 6 discusses a necessary departure from the formal curriculum into what we will call a *learning curriculum*, in which one-on-one teacher-student tutorials become the site of reckoning with the paradoxes of the cultural curriculum. In particular, this is where the insufficiencies of models and exhibits are revealed to students and solutions are negotiated.

The conclusion chapter, Chapter 7, discusses the findings, their significance to pedagogy and research, and limitations of the study. The chapter will also discuss the merits of descriptive studies for curricula and teachers.
CHAPTER 2
A BRIEF HISTORY OF INSTITUTIONAL WRITING

The unique contributions of literacy to human culture have been well-documented (cf. Goody & Watt, 1988; Graff, 1988; Havelock, 1988, 1963; Olson, 1977; Resnick & Resnick, 1988; Street, 1984). Instruction in reading and writing have been a part of education curricula in the West since formal schooling began around the mid-19th century, and courses dedicated to rhetoric and composition entered higher education as a requirement for first year students around 1885 (Connors, 1995). While linguists and rhetoricians have studied texts for centuries, studies on composing were slow to attract the attention of educational researchers. Just as literacy evolved out of social and cultural needs, interest in writing as a research topic parallels the social and demographic changes that have taken place in the last few decades.

The most noteworthy change has been in the population of culturally, economically, and linguistically diverse learners. Since the 1960s and 1970s, there has been a steady increase in the number of immigrants and bi/multi-lingual students entering school. These groups come with literacy skills and practices that are not always valued by schools (Delpitt, 1996; Fecho, 1998; Gilmore & Glatthorn, 1982; Heath, 1984; Lea & Street, 1999; Ogbu, 1988). As well they come with differing social interpretations of the
literacy practices that characterize the discourse of school (cf. Cazden, 1988; Clark & Florio, 1982; Dyson, 1984; Gee, 1989; Heath, 1983), and linguistic and cultural influences from first languages other than English that complicate academic success for students and present pedagogical challenges for teachers (cf. Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Trueba, Gutherie & Au 1981; Valdés, 1991). It seems that each decade of increasing diversity has raised questions about pedagogy, accountability, performance, and fairness. As these questions reached the research community, great shifts emerged in the interests in and understandings of writing as a social object and how it is learned.

Wertsch, Minick, and Arms (1999) divide theories into “individualistic,”—those which focus on how human experience and environmental forces influence an individual’s psychological development, and “social,”—those which believe that social phenomena determine psychological development, or at least develop in tandem. Over the last several decades, theories of writing have changed in focus from text (product) to learner-centered (process) to context (practice). These change reflect a shift from individualistic to social. The following chapter will trace the trajectory from the focus on text to its current exploration of contexts and co-constructed practices. Furthermore, because of the substantial influence of first language writing theories on second language writing research, first language research will be included in order to highlight this influence.
The relationship between first (L1) and second (L2) language writing research began as separate strands but for a short period intertwined before once again going their separate ways. Although L1 writing has been informed by studies of L2 acquisition, particularly for the teaching of basic English to diverse learners, second language writing theory owes a much greater debt to English composition research of native speakers. Following is a historic sketch of the shifts that have occurred in first language writing theory and practice and how these have informed second language writing theory and practice, ending with current first language research that is relevant to this study’s focus on writing as social activity.

**From Product to Process: First Language**

How researchers have understood the development of written language has traditionally been linked to a theoretical assumption that once one learned the structures of speech, one would be able to write. Early views of language acquisition, which were influenced by behaviorism, regarded learners as rule users, and instruction involved the imposition of forms such as penmanship, grammar, rhetoric, and spelling on “generic” learner to elicit generalizable recommendations and understanding. Writing research focused on text analysis, with a strong concentration on errors. This view of learners eventually gave way to one that was cognitivist in nature in large part due to the influence of linguist Noam Chomsky’s (1965) theory that language was acquired through an innate
internal mechanism, a Learning Acquisition Device (LAD). While examination of written product hoped to identify what writing was, Chomsky’s theory was used to examine how writing happened.

Researchers began to depart from text analysis to use methods such as think aloud protocols, pioneered by Janet Emig (1971), in an attempt to tap into and explain the thinking processes of students learning to write. Following Emig and Calkins (1986), Donald Graves (1983) began using an ethnographic approach to investigate the composing of young school children. Models and descriptions of writing (cf. Bereiter & Scardemalia, 1987; Flower & Hayes, 1981) attempted to identify the cognitive composing processes. The notion of instructional scaffolding (Bruner, 1966; Cadzden, 1988; Langer & Applebee, 1987) attempted to transfer cognitive theories into practice. They believed that teachers could facilitate learning by carefully structuring activities from simple to more complex, until learners had “internalized” the target concept. Hillocks (1986) used this same notion in his environmental approach to learning. He also saw the teacher as a facilitator, but his approach included interaction and planning activities in addition to guidance.

Although social context was emerging as an influential factor, Wertsch, del Rió, and Alvarez (1999) point out that theoretical interests at this time still focused on individual cognition, and context was viewed “solely from the perspective of how it influenced the individual’s development” (p. 152).
At this time, the open admissions policy in the New York university system brought a flood of diverse learners into the academy. This brought social changes for teachers, learners, and researchers, and, in fact led to the professionalization of basic composition (Harris, 1996; Perl, 1999) and its non-native equivalent, English for Specific Purposes (ESP). These changes led to a reaction against the traditional, simplistic view of writing, and researchers began to conduct empirical studies on the nature of composing. Mina Shaughnessy’s classic work, *Errors and Expectations* (1977) was the first to catalog the features of basic academic writing and the characteristics of beginning level students. She believed that learning academic writing was equivalent to learning a second language, that development progressed in an orderly fashion, and that errors could reveal the order. She was the first to encourage teachers to look for the intelligence embedded in student errors (Shaughnessy, 1976). Instruction in basic writing was designed to accommodate the recursive thinking processes described by models of composing, and the “process approach to writing” emerged. Characterized by multiple drafts of papers, revision, writing conferences, and portfolios, this approach followed a developing writer’s progress to the end product (e.g., Atwell, 1998).

**From Product to Process: Second Language**

Before the 1960s, when first language writing instruction still focused on writing as product, second language writing was virtually nonexistent, overshadowed by a hugely popular focus on spoken language. During this time writing in ESL and foreign languages was regarded as mere representation of speech and was used to facilitate the
acquisition of spoken language. Matsuda (2003) attributes this neglect to the powerful influence of applied linguists who were reacting against the previous century of the translation exercises that constituted language acquisition. In particular, the work of linguist Leonard Bloomfield and Charles Fries in the 1940s influenced the rise of the audio-lingual approach to second language acquisition (SLA).

Second language writing instruction and research was strongly influenced by the changing social and demographic changes of the 1960s and 1970s. The population of non-native speakers in the U.S. more than quadrupled in the decade following World War II (Matsuda, 2003). Among the diverse learners brought to the academy via the open door policy of universities, a great many were non-native speakers of English. After some initial years of hand ringing, English departments separated native and non-native speakers. Teachers, many of whom had no knowledge of second language acquisition, were the first to address second language writing as a serious concern, and their interest rescued it from obscurity. It was evident to these teachers that non-native speakers had needs that were not adequately addressed by current instruction or materials (see Blanton & Kroll, 2002, for compelling reflections by the teachers who faced this challenge). Second language materials, still influenced by the audio-lingual movement, offered little assistance.

The differences between native and non-native speakers’ acquisition of writing became increasingly more noticeable, and second language writing was ultimately removed from English departments and became the focus of special programs designed to prepare ESL students for the demands of university writing.
At this time research from first language composition studies was moving from product to a process approach, but second language writing studies would not embrace cognitivism for some time. Instead, studies on writing in a second language were influenced by contrastive rhetoric by those involved in English for Specific Purposes programs (the most common purpose being academic English). Studies in contrastive rhetoric, beginning with Kaplan’s (1966) seminal work, added cross-cultural linguistic structures to the study of discourse rules and functions. These studies concerned detecting patterns of use specific to certain cultures. Researchers hoped that understanding these differences could help educators predict areas of difficulty for non-native speakers (Connors, 1995). In this research climate, culture and learners were generally treated as normative, fixed entities, a view that would later be criticized (Atkinson, 1999; Atkinson & Ramanathan, 1999, Firth & Wagoner, 1997; Spack, 1997).

When L1 writing research began to shift from product to process, researchers sought to identify the cognitive processes involved in composing, L2 writing research but still focused on surface features of text, and instruction centered on controlled writing tasks. Zamel (1976) was probably the first to introduce the process approach to second language writing classrooms, arguing that second language writers used processes very similar to those of first language writers. The 1980s were a time of cognitivist boom in L2 writing studies as researchers sought to identify the processes used by non-native speakers (Edelsky, 1982; Hillocks, 1986; Jacobs, 1982; Lay, 1982; Raimes, 1985) and
compare them to those of native speakers. Although the process, or cognitive, approach still dominates second language pedagogy, the theories and models that accompanied it were found to have limited usefulness to second language acquisition.

**From Process to Context: First Language**

In L1 views of literacy began to change as social contextual factors continued to disrupt cognitive models. Scribner and Cole’s (1981) seminal work on literacy is credited for moving literacy research away from the cognitive to a more socio-cultural perspective. Their studies in Liberia found that literacy was tied to functions, purposes and contexts. Heath’s (1983) work with literacy practices inside and outside of school raised questions about how reading and writing is understood across populations and in different contexts. It took time and inter-disciplinary conversations before context was recognized as an important influence on cognition. When it did, researchers began to investigate how context influenced learners and learning.

The cognitivist notion of scaffolding was criticized for its focus on the teacher’s role and its representation of learning as one-way transmission of knowledge from the teacher to the student, which students then magically internalize (Cazden, 1988). Researchers began to question whether or not the notion of scaffolding could adequately accommodate the complexity of interaction between learners and teachers, “the mechanisms that learners, along with teachers, employ in order for teaching and learning to take place” (Stone, 1993, p. 374). Cognitive models such as those by Flowers and Hayes (1981), and Bereiter and Scardemalia (1987) were criticized as representing the
writing process as linear instead of involving “the complex combination of content information, rhetorical demands, and reader interpretation” (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996, p. 19). Furthermore, cognitive research relied heavily on think aloud protocols, and criticism emerged regarding how much such methods can claim to find. Ultimately, an account of an event cannot be confused with the event itself (cf. Hamel, 2003).

Different research traditions and disciplines interpret context in different ways. The view that social phenomena determine cognition and are available by examining behavior in local contexts began in anthropology and sociology in the 1960’s but only reached education with any impact in the last two decades. From sociology came the development of symbolic interaction (e.g. Blumer, 1969), which stresses “the extent to which meanings and understandings emerge through processes and transactions of interaction” (p. 257), ethnomethodology, which analyzes the practical procedures people use to make sense of and participate in everyday life (Garfinkel, 1967), and conversation analysis, which seeks to document the sequential order of talk-in-interaction as densely orchestrated social activity (Macbeth, 1977; Sachs, Schegeloff & Jefferson, 1974). Other influences came from sociolinguistics and semiotics (e.g., Gee, 1996; Halliday, 1978 ; Hymes, 1972), which took an interest in the social uses of languages and competency in discourse communities. Many current socio-cultural view of writing are also informed by the language theories of Lev Vygotsky and Mikhail Bakhtin, both of whom regarded language development as inseparable from social relationships, and both of whom offered it in terms of social interaction.
Lev Vygotsky’s (1978) theory of child development is based on his belief that social interaction plays a fundamental role in cognition by way of exposure to and participation in communication with others. Learning from these contexts is then integrated into a child’s mental structure through internal discourse. In other words language develops through the mediation of others. He developed the term *zone of proximal development* to explain how individuals require help and social interaction in order to develop. For writing instruction, this suggested that developing writers needed access to an experienced mentor as well as to others.

The social interaction part of Vygotsky’s theory has only recently begun to attract attention in educational research. Moll (2001) and Wertsch, et.al. (1995) attribute the growing interest to the increasingly diverse student populations in schools. According to Moll, Vygotsky’s theory represents a departure from individual cognition and instead analyzes “the functional transformations wrought by socio-individual development processes upon complexes of activity manifested in the dynamic organization of behavior” (p. 114).

This view grounds activity theory, an increasingly important perspective in educational literacy research, which was begun by Leont’ev, and Luria, but was more thoroughly developed by Vygotsky. The theory views human activity in terms of “activity systems”, which are “goal-directed, historically situated, cooperative human interactions,” which account for all cultural and individual psychological and social processes (Russell, 1995, p. 53). Activity systems are inherently social, and proponents
believe that humanity activity cannot be removed from social relationships and social life. In terms of writing, individuals and their texts still reflect broader activity systems that “give meaning and motive to individual acts of composition” (p. 55).

Russian linguist Mikhail Bakhtin, a contemporary of Vygotsky, is another current influence on a sociocultural perspective of writing. As a linguist, Bakhtin was more concerned with communication acts than thoughts. He believed that human thought was shaped through interaction and negotiation with the thoughts and actions of others. Or, utterances are only meaningful “as a link in the chain of speech communication and with respect to other, related utterances” (1986, p. 93). Rather than a structural view of language, Bakhtin, believed that language existed only in the form of dialogue. All language, he contended, involved a speaker/writer, a recipient, and the interaction between the two. He expressed the social nature of dialogue in terms of dialogic communities, a complex unity of differences and negotiations between them. The differences within this unity he called “heteroglossia,” and the negotiations of unity involved listening to each voice as an “other,” thus “dialogized heterglossia,” whereby meaning resides “neither in the intention of the speaker nor in the text but at a point between speaker and writer, listen or reader” (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p. 284).

Context for Vygotsky and Bakhtin is jointly constructed and tied to occasions of actual use, not as a normative fixture in an individual learner. Their views have challenged the rhetorical and cognitivist positions in both L1 and L2 writing
research. Some theories in first language writing research call for a much more multifaceted view than the individualistic cognitive approach. Witte (1992), for example, calls for a theory that integrates text, cognitive processing, and social context.

The prolific contributions of Anne Haas Dyson over the past twenty years is emblematic of some of the changes that have taken place in the field of L1 writing research and the emergence of a socio-cultural perspective. Dyson (1981) undertook her doctoral work in the height of the social cognitivist influence. Her research involved a case study in which she examined the role of oral language in the writing process of kindergarten children. While observing children’s language development, she began to notice the great extent to which it was influenced by interaction and participation with others in the classroom. She began to formulate a dialogic view of language, but she wouldn’t completely depart from a predominantly cognitivist framework and embrace a more social view for a few more years.

Throughout the 1980s, Dyson continued to do ethnographic research on topics that include visible language, individual differences, and the culture of school. By 1985, however, her research shows a shift from the interwoven strands of linguistics, cognition, and context to a new concern about the peer social dynamics in the classroom. Throughout the 1990s, Dyson’s research sought to document the ways that classroom communities shaped literacy events. She became more interested in how peer culture served development and construction of meaning. In her 1993 overview, Dyson points out that there is ample research on the cognitive processes of children across cultures; what is needed is a look at how children function as members of a social community and
make sense of their worlds by drawing on their resources. The sense they make, she argues, is determined by their own interpretations of what is “situationally appropriate” (p. 4). Dyson’s strongest conclusion is that “social worlds of children are inextricably linked to their writing” (p. 227). By then, Dyson was the vanguard for socio-cultural research.

In much of her later work, Dyson draws on Bakhtin. Viewing the classroom as an environment rich in diverse human relationships, she has studied how young children learn to position themselves within the social relationships of school. For them she notes, there is no distinct line between cultural and language worlds, but a sea of social dialogues. She contends that composing written texts involves accomplishing social work “as a way of shaping the relation between me and the other…into coherent performance” (1993, p. 9), that is, a sociocultural process that involves figuring out how one fits into the social world at any one point in time (and place). For Dyson, composing a text is composing a social place.

Dyson’s (1999) study of elementary school children explores the local classroom context to illustrate the inadequacy of the traditional notion of transfer as the one-way application of skills, knowledge or resources gained from learning-targeted tasks to different but related ones. Dyson argues that this traditional notion assumes that learners are in possession of the knowledge, skills or resources, and that transfer simply involves recognizing their relevance to new situations. Her classroom vignettes and real-time dialogues of learners show that, instead, “transfer involves negotiation between and among teachers and learners…[and] frames of reference for judging ‘relevant’ material
are themselves differentiated and expanded” (p. 142). Her findings are consistent with those of Bruner and Haste (1987) and Rogoff (1990) who believe that learning involves mediation through social organization, and that learners develop frameworks for understanding by participating in the social activity of the everyday life of a classroom.

Similarly, Sunstein’s (1994) study of four teachers who were participating in a 3-week summer writing institute illustrates the joint construction of a social context for writing. Although the author’s focus appears to be on the development of case study women in terms of content knowledge and writing confidence and does not overtly emphasize the local, situational collaboration in determining what constitutes desirable writing in the context, her description of this occurrence is quite thoughtful and vivid.

Another context for interpretation is the academy, with its specialized discourse and rhetoric. Much research focuses on the language and skills necessary for students to gain membership into the community of their discipline. These are commonly known as genre studies, and they usually focus on textual analysis, interviews and surveys to identify what students need to know (e.g., Bazerman, 1999; Hunter, 1990; Landau, 1991; Myers, 1990; Williamson, 1988). Genre studies of L1 speakers have been particularly useful to EAP programs, which seek to prepare graduate non-native speakers for their specific disciplines, but only a few have interpreted context as locally socially co-constructed. One such example is that of Brandt (1992), whose socio-cultural view of literacy emphasizes that literate language is made meaningful through “local contexts of practical action,” (p. 4). According to her:
Writers and readers in action are deeply embedded in an immediate working context of aims, plans, trials, and constructions (which themselves are tied to circumstantial and cultural contexts of all sorts).

(p. 4)

In her study, Brandt examines this circumstantial and cultural context of the broader academic discourse community. Her view of this community is consistent with Brodkey’s (1987) definition of the academic discourse community as the “collective as well as individual understanding of what can and cannot be done in writing” (p. I) and the conditions of group membership which constitute the social arrangements upon which the meaning and value of written discourse depend.

From Process to Context: Second Language

The influence of social construction has begun to take hold in second language writing; however, the notion of writing as socially situated is quite new, and “social context” is open to many different interpretations. Grabe and Kaplan (1996), for example, offer a model of the parameters involved in writing, with an extensive taxonomy of skills and contexts, along with a model of writing as communicative language use. They define context in the broadest terms: “sociocultural defined universe” (p. 212), which they take to mean rules and conventions of a discourse community. Their model implies that the “sociocultural defined universe” (p. 215) governs all other factors (see also Gee, 1996 for a similar view); this view is quite different from Brandt’s view that the social world exists by virtue of such on-going constructive practices.
According to Duff and Early (1996), while the other areas of the humanities and social sciences have embraced critical and interpretive (naturalistic) paradigms, second language classroom research is a relative newcomer to exploration of the experiences of writers and of the local features of context. Many of these, however, regard context of writing in terms of the influential factors that learners bring in the form of background knowledge, identity, perception of membership, and other “outside the classroom” factors, and how these come in contact with the socio-political factors of a specific writing environment (Hyland, 2002). Little attention has been given, however, to the classroom interaction as a culture in and of itself and its role in constructing learner and institutional factors. So, while there is much talk about social and “situated” contexts, these have a wide range of interpretations among researchers and are explored with a wide range of methodologies.

In current second language writing research, the most common focus, understandably, is the product of writing—the text. Many researchers examine texts in terms of what they can reveal about writers, the learning process, and influences such as instruction, teacher or peer feedback, or even the scriptures of the academic discourse community. There is still a propensity to view texts as neutral objects apart from the individuals and social dynamics that created them. Researchers typically divide texts into “t-units” (main clause + modifying clause) and label them according to such concepts as lexical sophistication, linguistic accuracy, coherence, cohesion, content, or evidence of underlying logic and level of abstractness (e.g., Newell, Garriga & Peterson, 2001). These studies rely on analytic scales or coding systems to identify and differentiate their
data. The goal of such studies is to measure output and correlate it with, for example, quality, teacher response, instruction, peer comments, development, or cultural/linguistic comparisons (e.g., Hinkel, 1994; James, 1994). L2 genre studies, too, rely heavily on textual analysis to identify genre-specific conventions that may help learner awareness (e.g., Belcher, 1989) Most genre or academic content studies are focused on graduate students; however, there are a few that concern undergraduates (e.g., Blanton, 1994; Horowitz, 1986; Johns, 1995, 2003).

Another common research topic is the writing process. Studies of process generally focus on what a learner does in the course of writing. Such studies usually rely on “think aloud protocols,” in which a writer vocalizes his or her thoughts while composing, or “stimulated recalls,” in which the subject is videotaped while writing and later reviews the tape with the researcher to discuss the thought processes he or she had at various points on the tape. Some code the comments made by students during these sessions (e.g., Cumming & So, 1996; McGroarty & Zhu, 1997), and some code the texts that result (e.g., Hyland, 2002).

The learner is another common research interest, and these studies generally rely on surveys, questionnaires, and interviews to elicit information about background knowledge, culture, L1 proficiency levels, home or community literacy activities, attitudes (Leki & Carson, 1997; McGroarty & Zhu, 1997). A few researchers have used case study research to examine the demands of course content on individuals, (e.g., Spack, 1997) and ethnography to identify learner strategies or understand the long-term histories of non-native speakers in writing courses (e.g., Harklau, 1999; Leki, 1995).
Others have used questionnaires and surveys along with interviews to examined teachers to identify instructional practices and professional views (Cumming, 1992; Pennington, So, Shing, Hirose & Niedzielski, 1997).

While most L2 writing research portrays the academic discourse community and its genres as static, the New Rhetoric School in North America, however, is exploring genre as social practice (Bazerman, 1998; 1999; Brandt, 1992; Brodkey, 1987; Prior, 1995, 1998; Rodby, 1999). The view of the New Rhetoric School of North America is expressed as follows by Johns (2003):

Genre knowledge among experts in a discipline or profession is tacit, that even many who are full members of a discourse community and use a genre successfully cannot discuss the schematic/social knowledge they have that enables them to recognize, situate, understand, and produce a text in a genre. (p. 209)

The more common view of context, however, follows that of Duff and Early (1996), who define context as “broader socioeducational issues – culture, community, and politics (local, regional, national, and international)” (p. 4). Blanton (1994), however, defines context in the academic setting in terms of what the academic discourse community is and what students need to know in order to produce it:

If we accept the view that language is a social activity, that language is a medium and a means by which we conduct our business and our lives, then it follows that discourse, as written language, is a social activity. It is something we do with each other. (p. 14)

There is a growing number of studies in L2 research that views context as situated (e.g., Atkinson & Ramanathan, 1995; Belcher, 1998; Carson & Nelson, 1996; Casanave, 1996; Prior, 1995, 1998; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 2002; Spack, 1997).
Prior (1998) points out that while recent views of writing have turned away from the formal features of text and learning associated with cognitivist perspectives to look at context of writing in terms of social environment, there still persists a normative view of culture and social activity. He points out that in spite of the reactions against the structuralist belief in universal systems of rules and routes of learning that socio-cultural views represent, a number of structuralist ways have been left intact. Indeed, quite a bit of current research promises a privileged position for the social perspective, but in the end, it still serves an embedded individualistic perspective.

Gee (1996) promotes the view that literate activities are situated and learned within discourse communities, which show a blend of individual, local and broad institutional influences. Walvoord and McCarthy’s (1990) perspective on discourse communities is compatible with Gee’s:

Writing like speaking is a social activity that takes place within speech communities and accomplishes meaningful social functions. In their characteristic ‘ways of speaking,’ community members share accepted intellectual, linguistic and social conventions which have developed over time and govern spoken and written interaction…Newcomers to a community learn the rules for appropriate speaking and writing gradually as they interact with competent members, and as they read and write texts deemed acceptable there. (p. 21)

Prior, however, takes issue with the metaphor about newcomers entering a place, and learning the rules that govern interaction. He believes that such views “mark a reliance on structuralist approaches to language, knowledge, and society” (p. 4) and thereby imply a unified discourse community. In his study of graduate students learning the writing practices of their disciplines, Prior contends that writing as part of a discourse community
is situated, mediated activity, in other words, far more dialogic than current views acknowledge. Brandt (1992) supports Prior’s complaint, stating that the social world should not be “treated as something that is taken in as a kind of raw material, mixed with the ingredients of long-term memory and rhetorical purpose, and put through the recursive mental operations of goal setting, planning, and organizing, and so on” (p. 324). The notion of membership and its complexity has been critically examined as well by Hyland (2002).

Mischler’s (1979) view of context was among the earliest to challenge structuralist notions of general laws that “govern” discourse communities and social practices in general. According to him, “action and context are not mutually independent: they are reflexive, in that [they] are produced simultaneously by the actors in and through their interaction” (p. 108-109). Work by Mischler and, more currently Prior, contests the ideas that learners must enter a rule-governed community, or a unified practice known as academic English. Prior describes his students as socializing themselves into a discipline rather than being enculturated into one. Bazerman (1999) puts socialization of students into the academic discourse community as such: “They inscribe themselves and are inscribed as disciplined scholars and, in interaction with their professors and peers, they influence the disciplinarity of each other” (p. 69). Prior (1995) and Casanave (1995), both of whom focused on graduate students, look at writing in academic disciplines as “cued, produced, and evaluated through complex,
largely tacit, social and intellectual processes” (Prior, p. 49) that is played out in the social history of classroom interactions, student writing, and professor’s verbal, nonverbal, and written feedback.

Lillis (1999), however, is one of the few researchers of situatedness who focuses on undergraduate students. In her study of non-traditional students, she brings to light the implicit knowledge of academic “insiders,” and the difficulties of “outsiders” to learn such tacit practices and discourse. She concludes that the present arrangement constitutes unfair access issues, which should be reconsidered. Such a critical theoretical view is becoming increasing popular in examining English for Academic Purposes (e.g., Collins, 1998; Davidson & Tomic, 1999; Jones, Turner, & Street, 1999; Lea & Strierer, 2000; Rose, 1998; Zamel & Spack, 1998).

The unspoken curriculum of academic writing, the notion that conventions are tacit, cultural objects, requiring negotiation, participation, and development of cultural competencies, is a relatively new area of research for first and second language writing. This is probably due to the relatively recent adoption of ethnographic tools. There is relatively little work in composition research on culture and context as local enactments.

Although few anymore would disagree with Spack (1988) that the problems of non-native speakers of English with academic discourse “may not lie in a lack of innate ability but rather in the social and cultural factors that influence composing” (p. 86), most research views social and cultural as broad, static influences.
The following study concerns the living forms of academic literacy as it unfolds in real-time and how it is meaningful to the learners themselves as *practical courses of action* in the classroom. In this regard, my research hopes to address a neglected area in the research.

**Specific to this Study**

The practical work of my students in their writing assignments throughout the academic quarter was most vivid in three particular contexts: summarizing, following instructions, using of models as templates for their own writing, and participating in student-teacher tutorials. Following is a bit of background on how such contexts are typically regarded in the literature.

**Summarizing**

Early research on L1 summary writing was strictly in the service of tapping reading comprehension, with the belief that summaries could assist in building an understanding of the cognitive processes involved in reading. Certainly reading comprehension is the foundation of summarizing, and many studies did find that students with low reading abilities had the greatest difficulties summarizing (see Baker & Brown, 1980), but these studies did not consider the complexities of the act of writing. In L1, much of the early research owes largely to the models of Rumelhart (1981) and Kintsch & van Dijk (1978). Rumelhart’s contribution concerned *schemata*, or, the cognitive networks involved in processing information for summarizing in terms of the amount of detail or information and the ability to generalize or categorize information. Van Dijk’s
model concerned reading comprehension and mental summaries, particularly in terms of generating the “gist” or main idea of a text. He believed summarizing involved three cognitive processes: deletion, substitution, and selection. Johnson (1983), however, found that children could comprehend and recall stories very well but could not summarize them. Researchers began to explore the many factors that influenced reading and summarizing. Early models (e.g., Faigley & Miller, 1985; Faigley & Witte, 1981; Mosenthal, 1983) attempted to identify and isolate factors such as age, sex, background knowledge, IQ, reading ability, scholastic ability, situation organizer, setting, grade level, and composing processes. Reading comprehension, while still the foundation of summarizing, was demoted to just one of many related factors.

Early L1 research on summary writing was grounded on two assumptions. First, that writers can access and articulate their own mental processing (e.g., Bereiter & Scardemalia, 1987; Emig, 1971; Flower & Hayes, 1981; Langer, 1986). According to Hamel (2003), who takes issue with this method, “think-aloud methods often suffer from the naïve assumption that what individuals spontaneously say during reading is a transparent window into their real thinking” (p. 80). Hamel points out that the influence of prompt and situational biases, as well as socio-cultural factors are seldom included as factors in such research. In Polio’s (2003) review of current research trends, there is evidence that this method is still widely used in research.

Another assumption is that explicit instruction can assist in manipulating cognitive processes. Brown, Collins, and Duguid (1989), for example, studied intertextual processing (transforming source material into synthesis) and concluded that
subjects benefited most when metacognitive strategies were explicitly taught. They recommend that teachers “promote learning, first by making explicit their tacit knowledge or by modeling their strategies for students” (p. 13). Research by Segev Miller (2004) suggests that this is still a venerable pedagogical assumption.

These two assumptions have greatly influenced L2 research. Compose-aloud protocols have been used extensively (e.g., Jones & Tetro, 1987; Lay, 1982; Pfingstag, 1984; Raimes, 1985), although researchers acknowledge the additional burden of using a second language (Kirkland & Saunders, 1991). It is by now a commonplace for studies to conclude with calls for explicit instruction. For example, Kirkland & Saunders (1991) investigated external factor constraints (i.e., purpose, audience, features of assignment, discourse conventions, nature of material to be summarized, time constraints, and environment), and internal constraints (i.e., L2 proficiency, content schemata, affect, formal schemata, cognitive skills, and meta-cognitive skills). They define formal schemata as “abstract knowledge structure that represent conventional organization of a text” (p. 111), and content schemata as background knowledge and reading comprehension of content. They conclude: “At the university level, teaching summarizing skills may be the most appropriate context for training students both to superordinate and to adopt top-down processing” (p. 111). To do this, they recommend training in study skills (i.e., underlining, color coding of main ideas, mapping, or diagramming). Their instructions in their handout, “Introduction to Informative Summaries,” (p. 120) asks students to consider such questions as: Who is the author? What is the author saying? How do the points fit together? Have you clarified what the
author says about each point? and so forth. Their recommendation to teachers is “modeling thought processes aloud, providing specific training in both areas and providing sample written summaries of familiar material” (p. 111). Their recommendations have been heeded in the course I teach, and I have not seen a textbook that did not include very similar explicit instruction.

Johns (1985), too, offers what is now very typical explicit instruction on summarizing. She suggests that teachers “point out signals which indicate main idea locations, such as summary conjuncts (e.g., in conclusion)” (p. 150), have student do more sentence combining activities, and work more on helping students achieve independence in locating the main idea or gist (macro-proposition) of the text.

My study’s findings do not take issue with the value or place of explicit instructions in classroom pedagogy; however, they do call into question the assumption that explicit assumptions are self-evident, or that cultural strangers who do not understand them as explicit simply need instructions that are even more explicit.

Until recently research on summarizing tended to have a heavy comparative focus. In L1 and L2 studies under-prepared writers were compared to competent writers, and student writers were compared to adult “expert” writers (e.g., Dorbin, 1986; Fitzgerald, 1987; Johns, 1985; Sommers, 1980). Differences in text genre were also examined (Durst, 1989). Second language research compared native speakers and non-native speakers (Carson, Carrell, Silberstein, Kroll & Kuehn, 1990; Carrell, 1981; Connor, 1984; Strotsky, 1983;) and how their performance reflected broad cultural
tendencies. Transfer, the influence of first language on second language acquisition, was also investigated (e.g., Edelsky, 1982; Lay, 1982; Johns & Davies, 1983; Mohan & Lo, 1985).

With increasing sensitivity to context and social influences in both L1 and L2, new factors and theories are being explored. Durst (1990) for example, found that his 11th grade subjects spend a considerable amount of time figuring out what they were expected to do. This is important to my study, too. Stahl, Hynd, Britton, McNish, and Bosuquet (1996) investigated the effects of task representation on performance. Yagelsky, (1995) has studied the role of classroom context, and time in terms of longitudinal development. As noted earlier in this chapter, the role of socio-cultural influences on the writer, the task, and the context have become a serious focus in the literature.

Currently, summarizing as a research topic tends to be subsumed under larger topics such as writing from source texts (e.g., Bloch, 2001; Currie, 1998 Deckert, 1993; Pennycook, 1996; Shi, 2004), academic literacies (e.g., Johns, 1995), writing for academic/specific purposes (e.g., Swales & Feak, 2000) and membership in discourse communities (e.g., Berkenjotter & Huckin, 1995). According to Shi (2004) much of the research defines summarizing in terms of “ability to delete unimportant information, generalize or combine ideas, and invent topic sentences expressing the essential gist of the source text” (p. 173). In this respect, there are similarities between first and second language students. Both have shown a reliance on language ability, one in terms of reading comprehension, the other in terms of proficiency in the language. Both groups relied on copying strategies, and a heavy reliance on using quotations as a substitute for
synthesis (Brown & Day, 1983). A cross-cultural comparison study by Moore (1997) revealed cultural differences in author attribution phrases, with English-speakers including far more than non-native speakers. Moore attributes the difference to how the respective cultures regard the function of the texts, as source of information for non-native speakers and personal opinion for native speakers. The personal opinion view has ties to intellectual property, and Moore suggests that cultures differ in how this is treated or regarded. This view, however, has been challenged by Block (2001).

Campbell’s (1990) finding differ, however. She found that copying source texts was used extensively by native and non-native. Farr (1993) urges teachers to reconsider their expectations of non-native students: “a text might appear logical through the lens of the ‘essayist literacy’ that dominates the U.S. academy may be illogical from the perspective of a different culture.” quoted in Spack, page 52). Her notion is supported by Fox (1990) and Lillis (1999).

In light of the research on summarizing, Prior (1995) reminds us that “academic writing tasks really make sense only in terms of “a local history of participants’ situated action” “(p. 54). Although most researchers agree that writing from text sources takes practice and develops over time, there are relatively few studies that examine this process longitudinally. Bosher (2004), Spack (1997) and Casanave (1998) are notable exceptions. Spack studied the strategies used by one non-native speaker as she navigated three years of college writing assignments. She found that educational background decreased in importance over time, as did meta-cognitive awareness.
Models

Authentic texts written by experts have traditionally been used in the writing classroom to illustrate genre and organizational structures. Generally, students begin their study of a particular rhetorical style by reading a text that is an example of it. They then analyze its components and discuss the author’s intention, moves, and style. Occasionally particular grammar points or writing devises, such as transition words, coherence markers, and so forth, are pointed out. This reading and analysis of the model text is followed by an assignment in which students write their own essay. In the past, students were encouraged to write sentences that closely followed the sentence structure, vocabulary, or style of parts of the model, but this seems to have fallen out of vogue.

Eschholz (1980) says that when students read texts that model the structure and style that they are attempting to learn, “they develop an eye—and an ear—for language, the shape and order of sentences, and the texture of paragraphs” (p. 21). He provides an overview of beliefs about the use of expert texts to model good writing:

Students learn the various rhetorical modes; students become better readers; students also learn what good writing is and, with varying degrees of success, apply this knowledge in their own writing. Finally, students may work through the difficult process of choosing a subject by using models as ‘theme-starters.

(p. 23)

However, he also discusses the criticism of such methods, which he says concerns the way teachers use them rather than the model texts themselves. Some, he says, feel that models intimidate students by setting a standard they do not have the experience or practice to emulate. Not only does this discourage students but as well hides the work and processes that the writer used in crafting the model text. Flower and Hayes (1977)
are among those who offered early criticism for an excessive focus on form that seemed to accompany writing instruction using models: “Teaching writers to analyze the product often fails to intervene at a meaningful stage in the writer’s performance. It fails to teach because it has nothing to say about the actual process and techniques of writing as a student (or anyone else) experiences them” (quoted in Eschholz, 1980, p. 25). Others feel that models are used with too great an emphasis on form at the expense of content, and Murray (1968) questioned the appropriateness of using classic styles for modern compositions, whose styles, vocabulary, and turns of phrases have changed considerably over the years (in Eschholz, 1980).

The biggest critics are against the directive element of using models (e.g. Smagorinsky, 2003). They feel that models represent genres and writing styles too narrowly, and as a result stifle student voice and potential by imposing style and form and predisposing students to particular ideas about content and style (Elbow, 1994; 1998; 1999; Moffett, 1982; Murray, 1985; Perl, 1999; Swales, 1997).

Most of these critics advocate the use of models after students have had a chance to write drafts of assignments with their own ideas and structures. Eschholz (1980) recommends that they be used on a case-by-case basis in tutorials to illustrate solutions to problems a student might have in his/her own writing. The main criticism of models appears to be that teachers tend to present them too early in the writing process, before students have had a chance to develop their own ideas. Eschholz (1980) suggests that
students be allowed to “discover their own writing problems” (p. 36) before being exposed to models. In this respect, models can serve the writer, rather than the writer trying to accommodate the model.

Ryan (1985) questions the assumption behind the centuries-old method of model imitation by pointing out, “while students may have a tacit understanding of principles of composition for different genres in their role as readers, these principles do not necessarily translate into effective writing strategies” (p. 287). She concludes: “Instead of putting absolute faith in models, perhaps the best method is to provide students with the purpose and let them develop genre-specific principles in the context of writing to communicate effectively” (p. 288). She raised questions about the over-use of narrative conclude that while reading texts of various genres does not ensure a transfer to writing, this may be due to lack of practice.

Task Representation

Studies like those of Ryan (1985) and Eschholz (1980) were primarily based on text analysis of product to determine whether or how students had imitated the model in own writing. Much later, the transfer of whatever lessons the model was imitating were examined in terms of how students perceived what they were supposed to imitate. The topic of task representation became particularly relevant to non-native speakers of English who may have found genres in the English writing class culturally inaccessible, or may have had ways of representing them that were unrecognizable to teachers.
Not surprisingly, experienced and inexperienced writers differ in how they understand the task they are asked to perform, and by extension, teachers often perceive tasks differently than their students (Flower, 1990; Fox, 1991; Lillis, 1999). Language proficiency and genre familiarity were targeted as the explanation for this. Johns (1991) found that ESL students often used strategies that did not benefit them:

ESL students read in very short phrases and tend to remember bits and pieces of what they read rather than obtaining a more global view of the text. They stop at the most inappropriate moments to look up words, many of which are unimportant to the essence of the text. Their reading patterns are often inefficient and self-defeating, as we can discover if we ask them to summarize paragraphs or sections of text. (p. 169-170)

Background knowledge, experience, and culture are just a few of the many factors that influence a learner’s perception of task. For example, Johns (1990) reported that her case study subject had more success when writing from readings in his major subject area because he had disciplinary foundational knowledge. She found that “faculty ask students to perform tasks that they cannot conceptualize well because they have never performed them before” (1993, p. 280). In such situations, Johns recommends meta-cognitive instruction: “providing students with an organizational scaffolding, based upon text type, that establishes the basis for their selection and arrangement of content” (p. 281). Johns found that text book rules about summarizing, for example, were too obtuse for students, so she devised a problem-solution approach:

I ask students to first discover and list the problem identified in the text. Then I ask them to situate the problem within the context described. This is followed by the listing of the author’s stated or implied evaluation of these solutions. (282)

Flower (1990) says of task representation and cognitive processes:
Learning to write in college appears to be a mixture of questioning assumptions and building new task representations; of applying to school writing certain broad cognitive and rhetorical capabilities already possessed, and finally learning certain new conventions, strategies, and habits of mind. The teaching problem in helping students through this transition is inferring the appropriate balance—knowing when one needs to challenge the student with a classroom context that calls for those broad capabilities, when one needs to challenge the assumptions and prior images of the task that may confound a student’s effort, and when one needs to teach new strategies for thinking, and writing. (p. 22)

As Johns (1993) points out, ESL/EAP classes are designed to assist non-native speakers in the skills they will need in subsequent university courses (see also, Spack, 1997). Swales (1990) refers to this as transfer, and suggests that students be exposed to models of the type of writing tasks they will encounter. Such exposure involved, in Johns’ (1993) case, of analyzing the models with the students in terms of the author’s moves: justification, purpose, analysis and conclusion. Then, the language of each move was studied. The class then established criteria for their own work. Gross (1991), however, pointed out that styles varied across disciplines.

Hyland (2004), Johns (1997), Johns and Swales (2002), Paltridge, (1997) and Starkey (2001) are among the many who advocate the explicit study of text types, or, genre studies. Hyland refers to this as a “visible pedagogy” (p. 8) because students participate in cycles that begin with modeling, then move toward independent construction. During the process, the teacher assists students in the joint construction of a genre-based text, then gradually decreased the amount of support. Freedman and Medway (1994) warn against a “recipe theory of genre” (p. 46) that risks presenting model texts as “how-to-do lists.” Hyland (2003) points out that some, (e.g., Dixon, 1987; Raimes, 1991) argue that “the explicit teaching of genres imposes restrictive formulae
which can straightjacket creativity through conformity and prescriptivism; that genres might be taught as moulds into which content is poured rather than as ways of making meanings” (p. 8). He argues that students need to be aware of “what the target discourse looks like” (p. 8). This seems to be particularly true for graduate students who are learning disciplinary-specific rhetoric and conventions. Starkey (2001) supports Hyland’s argument, and proposes that teachers model their own writing of texts so that students can see that genres are first and foremost ways of making meaning. Sima (1999) found that students’ reading comprehension improved when they were sensitized to genre characteristics.

How tasks are interpreted by students has been investigated in terms of “discourse mode or type of writing, rhetorical specifications of prompts, wording and structure of prompts, textual features of essays” (Connor & Carrell, 1993, p. 142), as well as the teacher, or raters in the case of large-scale assessment tests like the TOEFL, and the student writer in terms of motivation, prior knowledge, and culture. Connor & Carrell (1993) describe task representation as “a complex communicative/cognitive activity” (p. 143). The point out that despite the volume of research on the topic, there are no conclusive findings.

Culturally influenced expectations and experiences with texts are believed to exert the most influence on task representation in L2 student writers. Early studies attempted to identify cross-cultural differences in terms of cognition and thought patterns (e.g., Kaplan, 1966), but these studies were abandoned in favor of more sociological views of

One aspect of [academic tasks] is the relationship of the student writer to the reading passage and hence to its author. When that author comes from a very different cultural background and perhaps presents a viewpoint that is in conflict with that of the reader, the task of re-presenting the text (summarizing) becomes more difficult. A second sociocultural factor is the relationship of the student writer to the reader (in most cases, a teacher). For students who have been socialized to demonstrate to a parent or teacher what they know, regardless of how well they know it, the task of writing about reading will no doubt be seen in light of those expectations. (p. 312)

Although these studies have been useful in identifying broad cultural traits, they have been criticized for operating on a static understanding of culture (cf., Atkinson, 1999).

In my study, I am assuming that the home cultures of my students influence their expectations and orientations toward tasks and topics in my course. I am assuming as well that a fire hose of other influences permeate their identities and meaningful actions. I do not believe these can be teased apart and used to explain why a student makes the decisions she or he makes. In light of the complexities and inaccessibility of macro-order influences, I describe instead what they do to produce their assignments, (regardless of what influenced them) and what they do to learn new cultural ways of doing things. This view is in keeping with an ethnomethodological position.

Furthermore, it is unclear how such findings about cultural traits and tendencies of learners inform pedagogy. While I agree that an understanding of, say, Chinese students’ cultural predisposition toward copying (Scollon & Scollon, 1991) or Latino students tendency to “orient more toward topic” (Bashim, Ray & Whalley, 1993, p. 311),
may give an instructor more patience or sympathy, pedagogical recommendations have been scarce, and attempts by instructors to sensitize students to differences runs into the problems of “explicit” pedagogy that are discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

**Conferencing: Teacher-Student Tutorials**

Responding to students and their writing is the most significant component of writing instruction, and the one-to-one conference (or student-teacher tutorial) is one of the biggest changes in instruction brought about by the process approach. Few would argue that conferences provide a unique learning situation. Newman, Griffin, and Cole (1989) and Rogoff (1990) believe that such occasions give apprentice writers opportunities to learn to write in ways that they can only learn from experts. Furthermore, Wasik and Slavin, (1993) argue that conferences promoted complex higher-order skills. It is often the case that in conferences, students who are reluctant to speak out in class or ask questions feel more comfortable in this environment.

Most second language writing instructors now require students to write multiple drafts of their assignments, to which they respond with written comments and/or conferences. The focus of this feedback can include grammar, mechanics, organization, vocabulary, as well as rhetorical structure, style, and ideas or content. Some teachers vary their focus at different stages or drafts, beginning with content suggestions, and saving surface feature commentary for the final draft (cf. Zamel, 1985). Feedback today is much more likely to have a formative rather than summative goal. Grabe & Kaplan (1996) advocate evaluative and non-evaluative comments as well as students playing an
active role in assessment by participating in the content and criteria. Frank (1979) suggests exposing students to writing criticism and revision in class, using outside sample texts.

Teacher responses to student writing in tutorials has been studied over the past few decades, and the research interests have changed as drastically as the contents of the sessions. Early studies tended to decontextualize the interaction by examining comments without looking farther than their content. The particulars of the assignment, classroom instruction, and student teacher relationships were neglected (cf. Leki, 1990; Ferris, 2003), as well as cross-cultural factors. For L2 students, the event is a cultural one, and may be influenced by a great many factors. One is unfamiliarity with the drafting process or meeting with teachers. Another is the students’ own expectations and preferences. Leki (1986) found that the L2 students she surveyed preferred to have every error indicated and teacher comments that helped them correct their own grammar mistakes. At the same time, they were not so much concerned with teacher commentary on their work, which they believed did not really help them improve.

Nevertheless, Johns (1990) points out that the focus of feedback today is more likely to be on ideas, audience, and voice as on surface level features such as grammar and mechanics. This is probably related to the general agreement in both L1 and L2 that teachers should be careful not to appropriate student text. According to Ferris (2003), “When teachers cross out portions of student texts and substitute other words or ideas, make directive suggestions, or use the imperative mood, these behaviors communicate to student writers that the teacher’s priorities are more important than what the writer wants
to say” (p. 124). Grabe & Kaplan (1996), too, believe “the teacher needs to know how to share the power relation in the conference and not be overly directive” (p. 361). Teachers have been encouraged to use more subtle and diplomatic language, to soften criticism, and to offer suggestions as optional rather than absolute. Reid (1994) however, questions the appropriateness of such indirection for second language learners, and raised questions about L2 students getting necessary help, particularly when cultural differences could hinder their interpretation of subtle criticism or suggestions (see also Leki, 1990; Ferris, 1997).

While there is ample research on inappropriate student-teacher interaction (e.g. Ferris, Pezone, Tade, & Tinti, 1997), it is unlikely that research studies will be able to prescribe what is appropriate given the complexity and abundance of contextual factors. In light of this, Leki (1992) and Reid (1998) suggest that teachers find out as much information as they can about their students’ backgrounds, prior experiences, and motivation before conferences. There are affective factors as well. According to Ferris (2003):

Some students may have aural comprehension problems that may limit the effectiveness of conferences; others may feel inhibited from questioning or arguing with a teacher under any circumstances and may thus not understand teachers’ attempt to ‘empower’ them, instead incorporating instructors’ suggestions verbatim into their papers because of teachers’ perceived superior knowledge. (p. 129)

To have a conference work well, the teacher should discuss conference methods with students, describe expectations and goals for conferencing, explain why it will improve students’ writing, and provide a set of written guidelines for what should happen in conference. (p. 361)

Such recommendations could be problematic in cases where students vary considerably in culture and writing abilities. Each conference may be quite different depending on individual student needs. Personally, I would find it impossible to write guidelines about what should happen in conferences; mine tend to construct themselves as we go along. Grabe & Kaplan do emphasize that students should be aware that they share the responsibility for the interaction. They suggest making the conference a conversation as a good way to emphasize this.

In summary, teachers have been advised to be clear and concrete, rather than use jargon or indirect methods in their comments, to explain the conference goals and functions to students and specify how they are accountable for implementing (or not) teacher feedback. Ferris (2003) calls for more research in this area to augment these suggestions.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

All research programs in the social sciences share a same quest in one form or another, and that is finding out how social worlds are organized. There are, however, very different ways of pursuing this topic. This section will describe the methodological and procedural concerns of the study, and in doing so, will represent a particular understanding of the ways in which human affairs are organized. Methodologies have within them implicit theories of language, learning, instruction, and how social worlds are organized (Sparkes, 1989; Harste, 1992). Although many educational researchers regard methods as neutral tools that come with a variety of options to facilitate a research question, in this study methods are not content-free tools; they are attached to paradigmatic principles and findings in fact depend on them. It is customary to begin such chapters with the researcher’s theoretical orientation, but in this view, the

5 The interpretive program referred to by Erickson (1986) as ‘naturalistic’ is based on an anti-foundational worldview that understands meaningful worlds as multiple, socially constructed, and holistic, and already in place before any professional methodology steps onto the scene.
methodology already contains a theoretical stance. Following an explicit discussion of those contents, the procedural section will then describe the research site, the participants, and the collection and analysis of materials.

**Methodological Considerations**

From the array of research designs that fall within the domain of naturalistic inquiry, this study can be fairly described as a kind of teacher research. Research by teachers has been seriously under-represented in classroom research of second language writing, which continues to rely on “fine-tuned linguistic measures of input, output, and meaning negotiation… using well controlled, frequently small-scale data collection procedures and quantifiable measures putatively linked to successful L2 acquisition” (Duff & Early, 1996, p. 4).

Nearly twenty years ago, Erickson (1986) criticized classroom research for treating social activity as a “one-way causal influence rather than reciprocal exchange of phenomenologically meaningful action” (p. 133) and thus yielding a one-dimensional view of classroom life, its students, schooling, and tasks of teaching and learning. A survey of current mainstream L2 research suggests that to date this criticism has barely been acknowledged, much less taken up. This study attempts to do so by examining L2 writing as a social activity and cultural practice, and L2 writing instruction as a dense organization of meaningful actions.

This study falls between two types of classroom inquiry described by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993): *teacher research* and *research on teaching*. It fits their definition of teacher research in that it is systematic, intentional inquiry by a practitioner
who is “a native inhabitant of the research site – not a participant observer over a bounded period of time but a permanent and observant participant, who knows the research context in its richest sense (p. 59).

It joins teacher research in its goal of representing the work of teaching and learning from the perspective of teachers and learners. Unlike teacher research, however, this study brings a conceptual interest in the organization of L2 writing instruction, rather than the instrumental or professional goals that commonly characterize teacher research. It can also be described as research on teaching, which Cochran-Smith and Lytle characterize as university-based inquiry that is methodologically rigorous and driven by formal theory; this study affiliates with the goals of university-based inquiry in that it intends to have purchase beyond the immediate setting under investigation. It is working toward a reconceptualization of the tasks of L2 writing instruction for students and teachers alike and poses an alternative to the more familiar conceptualization of that work as skill sets or schemata, treating it instead as work that involves negotiation and participation as all participants co-construct the practice.

The move to research activity by teachers has emerged from the growth of qualitative research for education studies that has marked the 1980s and 1990s. Generally, it expressed intent to rescue the representation of classroom life from the exclusive hands of outsiders. Classroom research had been the domain of “expert” analysts whose nonpartisan stance and years of training in data collection procedures allegedly guaranteed an objective, rigorous, scientific account of students, teachers, and learning. The idea that a teacher, or any other native, might usefully research his or her
own environment – an act that is flagrantly partisan by some accounts – was facilitated by the much discussed paradigm shift in the larger discourse of educational research (cf. Blumer, 1970; Erickson, 1986; Schutz, 1973; Sparkes, 1989). Departures from the positivist paradigm brought various critiques of, among others, objectivity and “authorized knowledge,” (philosophical, analytical, feminist, political) recognition of the primacy of context in the organization of meaningful worlds, and a view of the world as constructed rather than found. In the context of this new thinking, the development of teacher research expressed a move toward the democratization of research, and an alternative to the domination of representations of their professional practice by outsiders.

More generally, the post-positivist movement in research replaced the positivist attachments to psychology, particularly behaviorism, with the more qualitative, interpretive methodologies of other disciplines, i.e., anthropology, sociology, and linguistics. Arguably, the resulting research was an improvement over prior views of teachers as technicians or students as passive recipients in that it recognized teaching as complex, interactive, context-dependent activity. While researchers focused on the richness of classroom life, however, they were sometimes criticized for marginalizing the role of teachers. According to Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993), many studies constructed or pre-determined the roles of the teacher and students, thereby framing the perspectives of the classroom members through the researchers’ own.

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The phrase ‘positivist paradigm’ has become a catch-all for research principles that were developed in the natural sciences and adopted by the social sciences in an effort to secure the achievements of the former. The effort ‘assumes that its domain consists of naturally occurring, well-bounded objects, having universal, mathematical structures’ (Heap, 1992, p. 37). The critique of the positivist science model for the study of social words began with a multi-faceted critique of those assumptions (cf., Blumer, 1970; Schutz, 1976; Goffman, 1966; Erickson, 1986 Mehan, 1982; Mishler, 1979).
Knowing a context seemed to require more than just observing it from the back of a classroom. The most evident strength of teacher research is that of vantage point. Whereas the classic ethnographer was a cultural stranger, the teacher researcher is very much a member of the life of the room. Teachers are uniquely situated to observe context over a long period of time, and with a more thorough understanding of the practical tasks and actual organizations of the setting that contextualize the teaching and learning that go on there. According to Erickson (1993), teachers as participants and agents in the life of the classroom are able to portray their vantage point “in a way that cannot be portrayed in research conducted by intermittent visitors to the classroom, however sensitive they may be as observers and reporters” (p. ix). Despite this strength, however, Erickson (1993) reminds us, “neither the outsider nor the insider is granted immaculate perception” (p. ix). Teacher researchers, then, have no special authorization for claims of “truth” or “the real story.” Their unique access and often high stakes investment in the affairs of the classroom afford them a distinctive view that, although not the only view, is certainly one that has been long absent from the literature on classroom.

Both teacher research and research on teaching are open to a wide array of research designs. While these are commonly spoken of in terms of research tools (e.g., interviews, surveys, statistical analysis, coding, observation), which tend to fall into the categories of quantitative or qualitative, research designs are not simply different ways of collecting and analyzing material. Rather, they are implicit declarations about how a
researcher believes the social world is organized, and it is this view of methodology that organizes this study. Thus, its discussion of methodology does not begin with methods, but with a first consideration of what kinds of worlds we find in classrooms.

**The Pre-interpreted World**

The paradigm debates in social sciences began with a critique of the aptness of the natural science model for the description and understanding of social worlds (c.f. Blumer, 1970; Erickson, 1986; Schutz, 1973; Sparkes, 1989). Heap (1992) offers a useful way of thinking about the differences between the natural and the social sciences. By his account, all sciences assume a domain of empirically observable events and phenomena, but in the natural sciences, these objects show stable, naturally occurring, well-bounded properties, possessing universal, mathematical, and/or chemical structures. The events are measurable and recurrent, irrespective of context and occasion. Heap’s account follows Schutz’s (1962) prior observation that meaning and relevance are not preconditions for the organization of the natural world; meaning and relevance are wholly a product of the interpretive activity of social worlds: “[T]he facts, data, and events with which the natural scientist has to deal are just facts, data, and events within his observational field but this field does not ‘mean’ anything to the molecules, atoms, and electrons therein” (p. 5).

Whereas the natural world achieves its order and structure through chemical bonds, the social world shows an incommensurate organization of meaning, and always possesses “a particular meaning and relevance structure for the human beings living, thinking, and acting therein” (Schutz, 1962, p. 6). Through daily life, humans select and
pre-interpret the world through meaningful actions and thus social science always encounters a world already meaningful, already interpreted. Thus, a social science account will always take the form of a “second order” rendering, or “constructs of the second degree” (p. 6). They are constructs of the constructs made by the participants of social activities we would study. Teachers and students, for example, daily negotiate what counts as knowledge in the classroom, how the curriculum will be enacted, what counts as learning, how it will be negotiated, challenged, assessed, and so forth. Their interpretive work, as they construct their learning and instruction, is on-going, irrespective of the analysis or interventions of an expert, and this study takes interest therefore in how indeed they do.

The following study concerns multiple levels of interpretation. It includes the interpretive perspective of my experience as an observant participant in a class of learners who are themselves interpreting cultural behaviors and conventions. Although I kept detailed fieldnotes of every class session during the academic quarter that we were a class, and my voice dominates the video and audio recordings that accompanied every class or tutorial, my focus is not on my personal reflections or professional development, as is usually the case in teacher research. My focus is rather on what the students do and say in their efforts to make sense of the curriculum, and the role that I play in this endeavor. It is a task for close description and analysis. Fieldnotes provided immediate, first-hand descriptions of class sessions and tutorials. Videotapes and audiotapes provided a different account, and the corpus of written work provided yet another, each calling for its own kind of analysis. These records and accounts were pieced together,
overlapped, or teased apart in an effort to build a thoroughly detailed portrait of their (and perforce, my) interpretive work. Such an account will always be hopelessly incomplete; as Geertz (1983) reminds us, every ethnographic account is “essentially contestable… and essentially incomplete” (p. 29). However, Erickson (1993) reminds us of what can be instructive about interpretations that are based on access to one’s own intentionality and an insider’s knowledge of the close workings of teaching and learning. My access to this “local knowledge” as an insider as well as insight gained from several years of teaching the course informed my understanding of what these students were doing in taking up a strange curriculum and finding the sense of it.

Second, teaching and learning academic writing is itself a process of induction over time into membership in the academic discourse community. While academic discourse may be whatever its members take it to mean (Brandt, 1990, 1992; Brodkey, 1987), it also stands on behalf of a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and learning it entails discovering, recognizing, practicing, and reproducing its evidences. Learning academic writing as a cultural outsider involves interpreting an indefinite collection of distinctions, shapes and forms that organize its competent practice. When these practices are in constant, subtle flux as members create and re-create them, the task can be—and is for these students—baffling.

**Culturally Oriented Research**

Heap (1992) describes two distinct views of research on the social world. The first he calls simply social. Socially oriented research takes interest in “the normative grounds of persons’ actions, beliefs, norms, rules, goals, values” (p. 37). In the social
view, social actions are examined as prevailing patterns of social structure. Heaps’ second category is for research that views the social world from a cultural perspective. This cultural view takes interest in the local, constitutive properties of social activity. In this view, meaning takes shape in social action, as actors interpret the sense of their affairs from within social situations.

This study affiliates to Heap’s cultural orientation. It concerns the interpretive work of non-native English speakers as they negotiate the terrain of academic writing in order to gain entrance into the university discourse community. It focuses on the meanings of the curricular objects of the course as they interpret them, objects such as what constitutes a thesis statement, a main idea, or summary, or how one recognizes the difference between ‘fact’ and ‘opinion’ in one’s writing. As academic writing conventions, these objects and distinctions are cultural objects, not definite, material, or fixed entities. These students are cultural strangers (Schutz, 1976) to the practices of an American university, and most of them to the country and the language as well. Their immersion in a sea of unfamiliar objects renders much of their daily classroom encounters with the curriculum a course of inquiries, analyses and assessments, sometimes showing success and recognitions, and at other times confusion and misrecognitions. While I assume that these students come with literacy competencies, part of their quest is to discover which of those will be relevant and useful here. Their actions and cultural encounters are the focus of our interest in teaching and learning of academic writing as a cultural curriculum.
Meaning-in-Context

One of the first principles of naturalistic inquiry is context. Elliot Mischler’s (1979) seminal article, “Meaning in Context: Is There Any Other Kind?” launched one of the most influential attacks on what he calls the context-stripping methods of positivism. Drawing on phenomenology, conversational analysis, and ethnomethodology, he made a convincing case for the necessity of context in social sciences. He states, “We rely on context to understand the behavior and speech of others and to ensure that our own behavior is understood, implicitly grounding our interpretation of motives and intentions in context” (p. 98). Context, he claims, is an essential factor of “our everyday consciousness and awareness” (p. 98). Yet, he points out, context stripping is a requirement of experimental design, measurement, and statistical analysis in order to control for bias and ensure generalizability. Such experimental research designs owe obvious allegiance to the physical sciences and thus assume, “the unity of scientific method despite the diversity of subject matters, the ideal of explanation consisting in the subsumption of individual cases under general laws, and the formal structure of mathematical physics as a methodological idea” (p. 101).

A famous example of context stripping is Flanders’ (1970) system for analyzing teacher behavior for the purpose of teacher training. This system was warmly embraced by education and used for several generations of student teachers. His system, which is comprised of coding classroom talk into seven categories of teacher talk and two (!)
categories of student talk, is criticized by Mischler for its assumption that classroom talk is a “straightforward, transparent, unambiguous, and almost mechanical process” (p. 4) and thus misrepresents classrooms.

Mischler contends that human action can be understood “only within its own context of socially grounded rules for defining, categorizing, and interpreting the meaning of our conduct” (p. 105). Mischler’s argument is that context stripping is meaning stripping, and how a researcher looks for meaning in a given context is a key to paradigm affiliation. According to Schegloff (1994), “Demonstrable relevance to the participants continues to seem the most compelling warrant for claims on behalf of context” (p. 215). Following Mischler, Schegloff argues that context can be found “in the conduct itself [because] it is in a sense the conduct itself” (p. 215). He criticizes classroom research that analyzes student-teacher interaction, for example, by coding it into predefined categories.

Whereas in the positivist tradition, context was regarded as an obstacle to generalizability, in studies of situated meaning and phenomenological actions, it is an achievement. Mischler recommends Carini’s (1975) description of documentation, “a process of selecting and juxtaposing recorded observations and other records of phenomenal meaning in order to reveal reciprocities and therefore, to approach the integrity of a phenomenon” (p. 29). In his view, the study of context is a quest to reveal the multiple meanings inherent in a single phenomenological event and to observe and document them in a way that reflects these multiplicities of meaning: “Since it is through
the observer’s encounter with the event that meanings emerge, no standard format for collecting observations would be appropriate for different settings and purposes” (p. 106).

Similarly, Geertz (1973) brings our attention to the primacy of contexts of action for the construction of meaning. The fundamental field of inquiry into the social world is not abstract, but rather the ordinary, everyday, lived experiences of its inhabitants. Culture, then, is understood as co-constructed in social contexts through interaction, as we display and recognize our cultural knowledge. Meaning (and thus culture) takes shape interactionally, and interaction is shaped by – and shapes – its contexts. Geertz’s argument was in response to the positivist understanding that culture consists of “mental phenomena, which can be analyzed by formal methods similar to those of mathematics and logic” (p. 12). This view suggests that fieldwork is merely a matter of observation – of recording as much data, as precisely and full of detail as possible. Geertz objects and stresses that observation is deeply interpretive activity. In other words, meaning, albeit public, is not transparent. As symbolic public actions, an observer must be familiar with the “imaginative universe within which [the actions] are signs” (p. 13). Analysis of observations, to Geertz, involves “sorting out the structure of signification…and determining their social ground and import” (p. 9).

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7 Gilbert Ryle’s term “thick description,” popularized by Geertz, is often misused in discussions of methodology to mean providing exhausting surface detail, or what Erickson (1986) critically refers to as “writing like crazy” (p. 133). Geertz’s and Ryle’s use of the term, however, stresses the density, and intrinsic incompleteness, of socially established codes that exist in phenomenological actions. Geertz gives as an example, which he borrows from Ryle, the difference between a person winking (the observation or description) and what the person is doing with the wink (the meaning of the wink, e.g., twitching, flirting, faking). No amount of descriptive adjectives will reveal what the winker is doing. Geertz’s point is that observation is not merely recording detail but is deeply interpretive work.
Similarly for Blumer (1969), the social, cultural world finds its order from meaning, and shows this meaningful order contextually and situationally. By Blumer’s account, the social world presents itself as a stream of “distinctive expressions: they provide the user with “a general sense of reference and guidance…and rest on a general sense of what is relevant” (p. 58) rather than precise reference or benchmarks, which would allow clean identification. His argument for distinctive expressions is an argument for the study of cases, as it is there, in the distinctive expressions of cases that we will find the meanings and orientations that are common to them. Blumer criticizes empirical research that avoids ambiguity by focusing only on what an instance has in common for the sake of generalizability. He says that only by studying distinctive expressions and working through and accepting what is distinctive, unique, or ambiguous, can we, in fact, “detect and study the common” (p. 58).

This study examined a collection of cases from a single class in academic writing to examine how the cultural work of teaching and learning academic writing presented themselves. Although quite distinctive to this teacher and these students, it is not unreasonable to suggest that through the details and idiosyncrasies, other teachers and students may find familiarity.

**A Situated Perspective**

Heap makes a distinction between an objectivist and a situated methodological perspective, the former being the more familiar in natural and social science research. He uses Sinclair and Coulthard’s (1975) term “end-coding” to describe objectivism: “the meaning/identity of objects/actions is decided by examining what those objects came to
‘in the end’” (in Heap, p. 50), as though what we find in the end, e.g. the recognizability of a topic sentence, were a stable, ‘objective’ object, waiting to be found all along. In these accounts, the understanding of an action or activity is based on a reconstruction of what the actor must have known or intended in order to produce it. Researchers code and analyze data in terms of these intentions and interpret them to reconstruct and identify the action or event as thought they were stable features indifferent to the contexts that produced them. The situated perspective, on the contrary, is concerned with the “relatively context-dependent constitution, or socio-cultural organization, of objects/actions as a normatively and morally accountable matter” (p. 50). The situated perspective does not focus on the definitive identity of an action; rather, it concerns possibilities realized in interaction: “It is concerned with the possible identity insofar as members themselves could determine that identity, because all that members themselves have to go on in their interactions is what the actions of others look like, what they likely mean” (p. 50).

The participants to an activity or interaction are regarded as witnesses or hearers, as are the researchers, who discuss their reasons for their claims. For this perspective, Heap offers Sinclair and Coulthard’s term, “now-coding,” because “we ask what some action or event ‘’means,’ what its functions appear to be for witnesses ‘now’ as it unfolds” (p. 51).

Erickson (1986) suggests these critical questions for naturalistic inquiry: “What is happening here, specifically?” and, “What do these happenings mean to the people engaged in them?” (p. 124). The study of local meaning involves looking closely at what
members do and say, and trying to determine what is significant to them by focusing on the naturally occurring words, phrases, and behaviors they use in their everyday tasks and encounters (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995). How members themselves characterize and describe their enterprise is central to an understanding of meaning-in-context. This sense-making is methodic, not random; how we do it has its methodic bases, in the practical actions, interpretations, displays and recognitions we bring to our tasks. Here the relevant methodology is not a professional one, but the “members’ methods” used to make sense of everyday life (Garfinkel, 1967).

A central problematic for this study is my (as any teacher’s) task of making certain curricular objects (academic conventions) visible to those who profoundly do not know them, and in a relatively short period of time. What students then do with their instruction in these curricular objects is the main focus of the study. Students must turn in assignments in a timely manner, so they must find ways to turn their instruction into objects they can find, produce, and use, and teachers have the task of showing them how to do so. In this process we reveal to one another the sense we make of it. This interpretive work is on-going, methodic and central to the work of the room. Following is a description of the materials and methods used to explore this work.
Procedural Considerations

Context

This study focused on the intermediate course in Advanced English as a Second Language at Ohio State University. All of the participants were first quarter non-native undergraduates whose writing scores on a placement exam required their enrollment in the course, the mid-level course in a three-part sequence. The course was an introduction to academic writing and generally structured as a preparatory course to the next level, 108, which is dedicated to writing documented arguments. The goal of this level is to provide an introduction to academic writing and the conventions and practices related to summarizing, paraphrasing, quoting, documentation, response, and analytical writing. The stated course objectives are: to enable students to read a variety of texts effectively and write essays that enable them to successfully summarize and respond to those texts; create and sustain a clear, workable thesis statement; write summaries and syntheses of source texts so as to give readers a clear sense of the purpose(s) of those texts and the most important information contained in them; use writing as a device to read more effectively and reading as a device to write more effectively; develop personal responses to texts; integrate relevant quotations and details from source texts into papers; and develop more effective clause control and editing skills.

The department chair approved my use of my classroom as a research site. The study covered the duration of the 10-week course during Autumn Quarter 2002. It was a five credit hour course that met five days a week (11:30-12:18), for which grades were
given. During the course students had several writing assignments, each based on assigned readings, and these assignments involved multiple drafts and twenty-minute individual tutorials with the instructor.

There was a 2-hour midterm exam in which students wrote a comparison/contrast essay, and a 2-hour final exam in which they wrote a synthesis/response essay. The exams were also based on assigned readings, and were closely aligned with the common lesson–plan sequence assigned to all TAs teaching a same course. The department provided all exam prompts.

Participants

The 19 freshman students were enrolled in their first quarter of study at the university. They included students from China, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Somalia, and South Korea. I was the instructor. Participation in the study was voluntary and followed the procedures of the University’s Human Subjects Protocol. All nineteen students agreed to participate in the study. One requested not to be seen on camera but did not object to audio recordings.

Footnote:
8 Consent for this study was approved by the Behavioral and Social Science Institutional Review Board of the Ohio State University under protocol number 02B0159.
Collection of Materials

The corpus of materials collected over the 10 week period was varied and included: textbook units, lesson plans, homework assignments, assigned reading texts, copies of multiple drafts of writing exercises and exams, videotaped records of class sessions and discussions, audio taped records of tutorials, conversations after class, e-mail messages, and daily fieldnotes.

Thirty-eight class sessions were videotaped. Three sessions were not taped at the beginning of the quarter to accommodate diagnostic testing, the human subject voluntary participation procedures, and computer lab orientation. The camera was mounted on a tripod in a front corner of the room, facing the class, with a microphone mounted on the camera and a second microphone placed on the instructor’s desk. There was no manipulation of the camera during the session and the recording relied on available light. The equipment was set up and turned on before students arrived for class, and dissembled after they left.

Tutorials (writing conferences approximately 20 minutes long) with students about their work were audio-recorded. There was a total of 62 tutorial sessions, each conducted in my office. Every student participated in three tutorials, and several students had more upon request. Tutorials were scheduled following their first draft of the first major assignment, included the second major assignment, the mid-term exam, and in a few cases, preparation for the final exam. A flat PZM microphone, placed on my desk amid stacks of papers and general clutter permitted me to record tutorials unobtrusively.
All written work was collected and photocopied and returned to the students. This included multiple drafts of essays and summaries, other homework assignments, notes, handouts, and examinations.

I was able to study the class in a way that is not usually feasible for teachers who must teach all day and wait until late afternoon to make their fieldnotes, or teach very large classes. My class was small by comparison, and it was my only focus for the quarter, thanks to the thoughtful support of my department. I was able to have frequent and longer than usual tutorials with students, and having only one class permitted me some time to hang around after class to chat or answer questions. I was also able to write my fieldnotes immediately after every class, when my impressions were still vivid. These notes contained my impressions about each class session and pertinent things I noticed. It also included “outside” influences, such as course meetings, messages, or spontaneous visits from students.

**Analysis**

I will speak of the recursive process of analysis in ‘stages’, though the process shows itself that way only in hindsight. At the conclusion of the 10 -week course the first practical task was to examine, order and collate the collected materials. For the first stage of analysis, I viewed all videotapes in chronological order, stopping only occasionally, taking notes while the tape ran. These first notes were practical descriptions of the topics and events of each class as it unfolded. I then typed these
notes, including the tape counter numbers to facilitate later location of specific events.

This served as a log (or index) of major events. Generally, the log reflected the daily progress through major assignments, exercises and discussions.

I examined the tapes and logs a second time to look for and note perspicuous “noticings.” It is difficult to provide a formal account of what constituted “perspicuous.” My analytic interests, first developed in the proposal, were still developing and in fact the process of viewing and re-viewing the materials was a central exercise in developing them. Generally, I was alert to problematic topics or explanations (e.g., how students revealed confusion or misunderstanding or requested clarification), classroom participation structures (teacher/student and student/student), uses of humor, hyperbole, and examples, my work in trying to make a concept or instruction ‘visible,’ and student responses to various activities or information (asking questions, ‘doing’ discussion, being called on, volunteering, and group work). In subsequent viewings, the tapes and first logs were organized not by daily lesson sequences but were grouped topically and thematically, with some topics spanning several sessions. The sequenced curriculum was itself a central rubric (e.g., lesson on identifying ‘main idea’, or writing ‘summaries’).

Following these annotations, each class session was indexed to its corresponding fieldnote entries and the records and artifacts that affiliated to them.

After developing a familiarity with the contents of the tapes, I turned to the writing assignments, particularly the first drafts that were required by the lessons and activities portrayed on the tapes. In this way, lessons were “batched” according to the relevant assignments, and re-examined. The class lessons served as the anchor, and the
written work displayed the sense students made of the lessons. As with the tapes, perspicuous examples of written work—generally work that displayed how students were making sense of the writing tasks—were separated out and annotated.

For the second stage of analysis, the written work was then indexed to the corresponding tutorial audiotapes. Neither the videotapes nor the audiotapes were transcribed throughout. Rather, using the logs and how certain sequences were closely aligned with other aspects of the corpus of materials, selected sequences were transcribed over a period of months, especially those where the written work was ‘on the table’ during the tutorial session.

In the next stage, I examined the final graded versions of assignments and exam essays to see how students resolved problems that were discussed in tutorials, class discussions, or in some cases, to note how a student “ended up” at the end of the quarter. These stages were not so discrete or formal. Tapes and records were viewed recursively as new and different interest presented themselves across the materials collected, e. g., an interest in classroom participation structures and how they changed, developed, or did not change over the course of the quarter. A given writing assignment could lead to a search of the tape logs, or a passage from the tutorial logs could lead to a search of written materials. More generally, video tapes and written work were examined for how potential cultural assumptions implicit in my lessons became explicit in the corpus of materials, or otherwise unfolded in the class and how they were then negotiated in class discussion, the writing, and the tutorials.
The recursive research process was informed by Erickson and Schultz (1981). Furthermore, my account of the classroom lived experiences of my students and me is simply an account, and as such, is a product of the constraints and distortions of written text, and well as many other institutional exigencies as well.
Following instructions is among the most taken-for-granted tasks of doing school as well as one of the most critical. Most of us have forgotten our efforts as young children to develop the competencies necessary to understand instructions and translate them into courses of action. Occasionally, when we attempt to assemble a piece of furniture or cook something without an image, we are reminded of how problematic following instructions can be. Instructions are doomed to be incomplete; every specification begs another, and this fundamental incompleteness of any and every set of instructions owes to the fundamentally indexical character of language use. We generally do not, for example, rely on the instructions for a True/False test to tell us how to take it but simply to identify what kind of test it is, yet somewhere in our schooling, we learned to use the blanks. These skills developed tacitly as do most of our cultural competencies. For cultural strangers, those who do not share the same cultural curriculum, following instructions can become a baffling study of words, each standing on behalf of an indefinite horizon or meanings, usage, and common practices, all of which, paradoxically, are at the same time what the instructions promise to teach and what we must know, in some way, in order to follow them.
Lillis (1999) studied non-traditional students at a British university and their struggles to interpret writing instructions for various university assignments. She finds that the instructions the students must follow for their writing tasks are not “discrete lists of actions” (p. 128). Rather, she, and others (e.g., Andrews, 1995; Flower, 1994; Fox, 1991; Lea, 1995; Prosser & Webb, 1994; Scott 1996), observe that conventions of writing are implicit rather than explicit, from which follows the futility of the study skills approach to writing. Such “explicit” approaches portray academic writing conventions as “autonomous and discrete phenomena, rather than constituting and reflecting a particular literacy practice” (p. 130). Lillis’ purpose is to highlight the difficulties of students who are not well versed in the writing culture of the university:

Whilst the view prevails that essays/student academic texts are unproblematic forms, the construction of which should be part of students’ “common sense” knowledge, experience from this and other studies indicates that this is not the case. Tutors may know such conventions implicitly, having been socialized into them through years of formal schooling (and in many cases through sociodiscursive practices in their home and communities), but the student, particularly the student-outsider, does not. (p. 144)

Lillis advocates a “talking relationship” between students and instructors, more face-to-face contact, and the opportunity to negotiate the demands of the task, the expectations of the instructions, and the exploration of conventions. To develop this last suggestion, she draws on Bakhtin’s notion of addressivity (1986, in Lillis, 1999), whereby meaning is co-constructed by participants rather than merely transmitted from one to the other. She feels that the student-tutor relationship is central to the meaning making venture because ideally “the real or potential addressee contributes to what can be meant as much as does the addresor” (p. 143). Critical of what she perceives as a monologic relationship
between students and tutors, Lillis believes that the students in her study might have experienced more success if their “particular understandings and interests” had been explored. She claims this would have enabled them to negotiate some understanding of what was being demanded [and] enabled a range of other meanings to be made” (p. 143).

Her conclusions about alternative pedagogies for academic writing are more than agreeable. At the same time, the interests of this study depart from those of Lillis in at least a few ways. For one, I am less sanguine about the metaphor of “negotiation.” It has great currency in common parlance, and part of that currency is the premise that the parties to a negotiation possess comparably endowed negotiation “positions.” Negotiation premises something like “equity,” and equitable relations are a central organizing value in the contemporary discourse on classroom pedagogy as a transformative pedagogy. But on consideration we can notice that negotiating understanding in such instances relies on something like expert diagnosis, not just from the instructors, who must guess what students do not know, but from the students, who must know, in some sense, what they do not know. Sooner or later, the premise of negotiation runs up against what indeed teachers and students know of their curriculum, where the very premise of their instruction is that this knowledge is differentially distributed. My observations with my 107 group suggests that this is so, and the resources whereby one might “negotiate” or argue on behalf of a syntax, formulation, inference or structure is usually only available post facto, or in virtue of their instruction. Routinely, only then can a student articulate a concern or question or pose a counter
interpretation of the sense of an instruction, what it calls for, and how what they have produced is responsive to it.

But more central to the departure is how Lillis’ analysis criticizes instructions, which she sees as part of an “institutional practice of mystery” (p. 127) that induces marginalization and exclusion; she does not however examine the work by the students in following instructions. The culprit for the trials of her student outsiders is the insensitivity of the instructors and the instructions they write. Her students are portrayed as victims of an unjust system. The criticism sets aside an interest in how indeed students make sense of their curriculum, regardless of whether or not we would prefer that curriculum or another. Yet it would seem that every curriculum for academic writing (and every curriculum more generally) will confront its students with the task of making sense of their instruction, and in teaching the non-native speaking international student the writing conventions of an American university, those tasks loom large.

In the case of cultural outsiders, the trials of following instructions and translating them into courses of action is a process that only gradually if at all reveals its problematics; frequently it does not. Students generally ask no questions in advance of the assignment. They also generally turn in their assignments in good faith that they have followed the instructions. What transpires between those occasions is the interest of this section. It takes up a particular study and analytic program for taking interest in the work of following instructions and illustrates its relevance for a particular and commonplace instruction in the curriculum of the 107 class. The interest is in building an
understanding of what cultural newcomers do when faced with turning a set of instructions in writing conventions that are riddled with tacit assumptions and cultural understandings into a practical course of action. The first section of this chapter focuses on this work; the second section examines how the contingencies of such learners and tasks implicate pedagogy.

**Following Instructions and Practical Action**

Following an ethnomethodological program, sociologists Amerine and Bilmes (1988) explore the nature of following instructions, per se, focusing on the implicit tasks and competencies that underlie the work of doing so. They studied the ways in which 3rd grade students grappled with instructions for their science experiments. The children, of course, had not yet learned the scientific concepts that the experiments were designed to illustrate, and in fact, might not be expected to fully grasp those concepts for several more years. But in a useful way, the concepts of their science lesson were quite apart from the task of enacting their instructions. One needn’t have science to do them, and the task of *doing* them, as a practical, even vernacular sequence of action is the focus of their study. Among Amerine and Bilmes’ observations about the nature of following instructions, four are central to this study’s interests and will be taken up in more detail later.
The Unavoidable Incompleteness of Instructions

The first observation concerns the relentless, irreparable indefiniteness of instructions. Every set of instructions is incomplete in the sense that it relies on a horizon of common meanings and/or practices that one must have to execute them. These tacit meanings and practices are tied to the indexical character of language, or how we mean. Each meaning and practice, each utterance, is attached to a seemingly endless array of specifications that would be impossible to articulate. By Bown, Collins, and DuGuid’s (1989) account, our understanding of any given word or expression is developed through complex social negotiations that are tied to distinctive contexts and developed through “continued situated use” (p. 33). This indexical property of language and communication is the province of ethnomethodology, which takes interest in indexical expressions and actions as the contingent, ongoing, “managed accomplishment of organized settings of practical actions” (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 32). How we mean, then, is tied to the social context in which we find ourselves (see Blumer, 1970), and for which we reference a vague repertoire of possibilities accumulated through the sheer experience of other unique occasions that may or may not be similar. In a given situation, meaning and sense are developed, refined, expanded as we assess the particulars of the context. It is the profoundly indexical nature of language that assures the incompleteness of instructions and the resources for putting them to use.

For novices, particularly language students, who do not share the host culture’s tacit meanings and practices, instructions become “objects of thinking” (Schutz, 1976).
They “place in question nearly everything that seems to be unquestionable to the members of the approached group” (p. 96), and tend to interpret instructions quite literally when they do not perceive the gaps or do not have access to the tacit assumptions that are part of the unavoidably incompleteness of instructions.

**Turning Instructions into Courses of Action**

Amerine and Bilmes (1988) also observe that following instructions requires turning them into courses of action, and this in turn requires a decision-making process that concerns assessments of adequacy. A follower must find a way to enact each instruction and recognize the adequate completion of one step in order to proceed with the next. To do so entails some recognition in advance of the projected outcome. Competent judgments rest on an understanding of the relationship between the instructions and the outcome, despite the fact that instructions are designed to instruct the projected outcome. In other words, although outcomes are envisioned as a consequence of having followed the instructions, understanding the relationship between the instruction and the outcome is in fact a condition for doing so.

In light of this paradox, Amerine and Bilmes discuss some of the skills that ground competence in translating instructions into courses of action. One is the ability to infer meaning despite the “necessarily incomplete” instructions. To illustrate this point, they describe a science experiment, “Keeping Dry Under Water,” whereby 3rd graders...
were to place a wadded napkin into the bottom of a glass, then plunge the glass, upside
down, into a basin of water. The glass is held underwater for a few seconds, then lifted
out to reveal, ideally, a dry napkin. However, the students did not always plunge or lift
the glass “straight” as per the instructions. Amerine and Bilmes point out that an adult’s
understanding of “straight” in this context is indexed to experiential knowledge of not
only what will happen if the glass is tipped under water and how the concept operates but
also to competencies in “reading” instructions. An adult is able to make judgments that
are unavailable to the third graders. They point out that one must know how “straight” is
meant here, for this particular experiment, as well as what the word does not mean
relative to this context. In the case of the tipped glasses in the experiment:

There is nothing in the instruction sheet that tells (or allows one to deduce) what
will happen if the tumbler is tipped while under water. Yet it is precisely this
knowledge that is required to correctly understand the meaning of the word
“straight” in this context.” (p. 332)

The frame of reference defined by instructions not only assumes knowledge of an
appropriate range of reference, but as well the ability to recognize an inappropriate one.

Another skill involves resolving contingencies appropriately. The young students
had trouble inverting their tumblers quickly, so frequently the wadded napkin fell out.
They chose to resolve this problem by tipping the glass at an angle as they plunged it into
the water so that the napkin would not fall out; the results were wet napkins, which defied
the promised outcome of “Keeping Dry Under Water.” The students did not possess the
familiar competencies taken for granted by the instructions to link their resolution to the
outcome in advance of doing it. Some students resolved the problem by using tape to
secure the napkin into the glass, but this was viewed as cheating by the others and a
competitive game ensued whereby students who were able to keep their napkins dry without the use of tape were rewarded with cheers. Amerine and Bilmes observe that both resolutions, tipping and taping, transformed the experiment into something quite different from what the instructions intended.

A third skill observed by the authors is the ability to distinguish between essential/nonessential, relevant/irrelevant specifications and contingencies. The field of possible relevancies is vastly larger for novices than for those who already know the outcome. Part of following instructions depends on the extent to which one knows what to look for and what to ignore. “Such channeling of perceptions is necessary not only in order to regulate the practical course of action but to determine if the projected outcome is in fact achieved” (p. 333). For example, in an experiment called “Making Water Wetter,” designed to illustrate surface tension, students were instructed to dip a soap-covered finger into a glass of water on the surface of which was sprinkled black pepper. The soap was to repel the pepper to the edge of the glass. Some students made waves by moving their finger so that the waves pushed the pepper away. When a few pepper flakes sunk, the students declared the experiment a failure until the teacher amended their assessment by declaring that the projected outcome had in fact occurred. Later, in a similar demonstration using pieces of paper instead of pepper, however, when the same outcome occurred (some sank), the students did not recognize the projected outcome, and they declared this experiment a failure.

In cases where the results of the experiment were ambiguous to students, Amerine and Bilmes (1988) explored the “frames of reference,” which guided the
students’ understanding of the tasks. In “Keeping Dry Under Water,” the students were using two basins of water to plunge their glasses, but because of the tendency for some napkins to fall out, the students concluded that one basin was lucky and the other unlucky. In another experiment involving blowing across a sheet of paper to cause it to rise (the relationship of velocity to air pressure), an unsuccessful student was told by a classmate that she was holding her paper with the wrong hand. The authors point out that neither of these frames is illogical in the students’ perception of the world. For example, they mention that changing from left to right hand is an appropriate action when a child is having trouble, say, learning to bat a ball at an age when handedness has not been definitively determined; and we frequently take into account the good or bad luck experienced by owners of a make of car that we are considering buying. The factors of luck and handedness, however, fall outside the range of reference for science experiments, and this range is a tacit assumption in the instructions.

The fourth skill, related to the prior, is the ability to decide “whether any particular action among the virtual infinitude not specified by the instructions might facilitate, interfere with, or prove totally unrelated to the outcome” (331). In another example, the authors describe an experiment, “Invisible Writing,” whereby the students were to dip a toothpick into salty water and write on a paper. When it was dry, they were to rub carbon paper across the writing to produce images from the residual salt crystals. Several students, however, licked the salt off of their toothpicks before writing on the paper. The instructions had not specified not to lick the toothpicks, and students were unable to see the relationship between that action and the projected outcome.
"Quaint Difficulties" and Occult Objects

Amerine and Bilmes (1988) argue that relationships between judgments of what is relevant/irrelevant or essential/nonessential and what to do with unspecified contingencies form the crux of the task of turning instructions into courses of action. They appreciate the good sense the third graders showed in their decisions regarding instructions that “presuppos[ed] a range of competencies and conventional understandings, without which even the most detailed instructions are meaningless for organizing practical activities” (p. 330).

That these students did not possess the practical knowledge and familiarity to make their instructions work is not a criticism. Rather, their case is meant to illustrate how, for novices “the translation from instructions to performance is particularly hazardous, engendering diverse, unforeseen, and quaint difficulties” (p. 328). Every teacher has experienced diverse and charming instruction-following by students, and they are diverse and charming for the ways in which they were unforeseen by those who know the instructed matters already. They are an unavoidable part of having to act upon the tacit practical and cultural assumptions that lie beneath the surface of every set of instructions. These quaint difficulties expose what I will call occult objects of instruction, occult⁹ for how they are problematic objects for novice judgments. These are

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⁹ By occult, I mean hidden or secret, available only to those with special knowledge.
the objects that highlight the student novitiate’s outsider status and reveal the extent to which they make sense of their instructions and the puzzle of sense, reference, judgment, and enactment they present.

**The Cases**

Amerine and Bilmes (1988) demonstrate how the indexical, incomplete, and ambiguous nature of instructions is “necessary and essential rather than incidental or remediable” (p. 328). Though their students were 3rd graders in science, the undergraduates in this study share a similar relationship to their curriculum in academic writing. Whereas the 3rd graders lacked the practical knowledge and competencies of their curriculum, the undergraduate students lack the cultural knowledge and competencies that are tied to instructions. Without sufficient knowledge of the projected outcomes, both groups are confronting instructions as objects of thinking. Following are cases from the 107 class that suggest how this is so, in the particulars of composition instruction.

**How to Write a Summary**

The first curricular object and writing task required of the students in 107 was to write a short (approximately 150 word) summary of an article on Henry Louis Gates, the article does not cover the entire text of the paragraph. However, it seems to discuss the challenges students face when interpreting and acting upon instructions, and the role of academic writing in this process. The summary is intended to capture the main points of the article's argument and is a practice that helps students develop their analytical and writing skills. The authors mention the importance of instructions being seen as “accounts” after they have been followed, which can then be discussed and negotiated to assess their adequacy. This perspective on instructions is particularly relevant in academic contexts, where students are expected to engage with complex and sometimes ambiguous information.
Jr., which consisted of his response to a question about becoming a “master.” The article was one of a collection of responses from famous people on the same topic, gathered by journalist Joan Ames for a book entitled, *Mastery* (1994). Notice the dense cultural assumptions tied to our contemporary use of the term “master”, and how we would assemble a collection of persons who in some way demonstrate what we mean by the term. In the particulars of the interview, it is not at all clear what it is that Professor Gates is a master of. Rather, it is taken for granted by the authors that he is one such person.

In writing their first summary, within the first two weeks of the quarter, my 107 students were asked to do something they did not know how to do as a prerequisite to learning how to do it. The first summary requires that students use immediately the very skills that they will spend the quarter learning: quoting, paraphrasing, documenting, using reporting verbs, and condensing information into complex sentences, for example. While this may seem unfortunate or unfair, a case will be made that there is very likely no other way to learn cultural practices than through practical actions, and if so, then we are well advised to look more closely at how, from such a pedagogy, they do indeed learn them, which they do.

The instructions in the course packet provide eight steps under a heading, which asks, “How do we write a summary?” The first three steps concern strategies and note-taking for reading the article *before* summarizing it, and the last two steps concern writer. There are many different kinds of summaries (e.g., descriptive, informative, evaluative), and length and conventions vary according to disciplinary practices. In the 107 class, the particular conventions include supplying the author and source information in the text rather than a bibliography. Also, the author’s last name is used as a tag after the first mention, and the historical present tense is used when attributing information to the author.
proofreading and editing after the summary has been written. This leaves three steps, numbers four, five, and six, to instruct in the actual writing of the summary. The critical steps are as follows:

4. For each section or group of ideas [in the article to be summarized] write a one-sentence summary.

5. Using these one-sentence summaries as a guide, write a one-sentence summary of the entire article.

6. Draft your summary by combining the individual sentences [from step 4] and the one-sentence summary of the entire article [from step 5].

That these instructions are written by someone who already knows how to follow them and can see the specific outcome they point to, features of following instructions also discussed by Amerine and Bilmes, is quite vivid in these steps. It appears that the answer to the question, “How do we write a summary?” is: “We write a summary by writing a series of lesser summaries, each attached to a “section” or “group of ideas,” and then summarize them.” Ironically, the instructions are a faithful account of what is for the course a standard procedure, from which, we might say somehow, summaries are produced. Just how is the focus of interest.

These particular summary instructions have been gleaned from countless sources and thus are not significantly unique. Virtually all academic writing textbooks include a chapter or section on writing a summary. I have not found one that provides instruction on summaries that is any more detailed or elaborate probably because the act of summarizing entails more than any set of instructions can say. One summarizes by making judgments, and learning to summarize involves learning to make judgments. This ability takes exposure and practice. Since students need something to practice, we
begin with exposure, which comes with its own paradoxes. Textbooks, including our
course packet, provide examples that are meant to illustrate the judgments a writer made.
But judgments, of course, have their objects, and a first task implicit to the instructions is
one of finding in what is for them an unmarked flow of words those objects for which
judgments are appropriately relevant. These judgments, I discovered, are often not
visible to the students, and this is especially so for those who are least familiar with
American academic writing. Students must be able to find the objects of their
judgments, and it is my job to render them visible.

**Responding to the Instructions**

In the particulars of writing their first summary, their first direct, practical
encounter with an *occult object*, whereby I could see what their seeing looked like, was in
the first sentences of their summaries. Students were to include in the first sentence the
author, title, source, and main idea of the entire article. All of these elements had been
discussed explicitly and repeatedly in class, nevertheless they showed up with
surprisingly varied interpretations.

The first summary is an exercise in “seeing” as well as an exercise in
deciphering instructions. The seeing comes first, if students are to make sense of their
instructions, and the instructions themselves are offering “instructed seeings.” In the case
of the specifications for the first sentence of the summary – to include author, title,
source, and main idea of the entire article – students had to infer what each of these
words meant. The word *author* was open to two interpretations, both of them quite
thoughtful: Joan Ames, author of the book and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., author of the
words and ideas in the article. The students thus had to figure out how to negotiate two
authors. It was a case not accommodated by the rules for writing a summary, so students
were faced with flexing the rules, which is to say, making a judgment.

The title also turned out to be problematic. The heading for the Gates’ interview
was a marker rather than a title: HENRY LOUIS GATES, JR. In class we discussed
how the heading was not a bona fide title, that it would make more sense to use the
occasion – an interview – in place of the title, and in this case the traditional quotation
marks usually reserved for titles could be omitted. We discussed the similar case where
chapters are used instead of titles. This point appeared to be accessible for most students
at the time, but when they were faced with writing the summary a majority of them
nevertheless struggled for a title. The instructions for the assignment are generic. They
do not change from quarter to quarter, but the articles we use do change frequently, so
occasionally there is an awkward fit. These contingencies are discussed in class, of
course, but my guess is that before having to actually apply a rule, students do not quite
grasp the relevancy of the information I am giving them. It could be that students
decided to trust their eyes rather than their ears, (a wise decision considering that their
reading comprehension is frequently higher than their aural comprehension). Since the
instructions demanded a title, yet the article did not have a title, following are some of the
ways they chose to handle this.

One student created a title for the article:

In the article “What is Mastery, “ (Rudra Press, Portland Oregon 1997),
Henry Louis Gates Jr., claimed…
Considering that students are frequently asked to write titles for their own essays, this is not unreasonable. There is no reason to expect that this student would know that in the academy one cannot invent titles for the articles one reads. Such knowledge could rely on an understanding of the way in which precise documentation figures into scholarship.

Ten students used the title of the book as the article title and supplied the obligatory quotation marks:

In the article, “Mastery” the author Joan Ames…

Two students covered their bases by giving the book title double duty as source (underlined) and article title (quotation marks).

In the article “Mastery”…

Four additional students chose to use neither quotation marks nor underlining:

In Mastery…

The word source in the instructions was soon added to author and title in terms of interpretative work to be done. Although in class we had many times referred to the source as the book Mastery, several used the publisher as the source, and doing as instructed, they underlined the source:

In the article “Mastery” (Rudra Press Portland Oregon 1997)…

These are thoughtful resolutions, especially considering that the book title had already been usurped for the article title, leaving the student searching for something that would fill the space for source. Naming the publisher as the source is not inaccurate, as it is a source of information.
These interpretation dilemmas were easily solved by the second draft of their assignment because they were attached to fairly non-negotiable conventions. Students were simply advised about each of these during tutorials. However, these objects had point-at-able referents (i.e., here is the source, use this as the title, do not use her as the author). This was not true for the final requirement of the first sentence, the main idea. It turned out to be the most occult of these objects. The students wrote the first draft of their summaries after two weeks of instruction. They had three days to write them. But only four of the 19 students had an acceptable main idea.  

Supplying the main idea of the entire article is the crux of summarizing, and it is one of the several objects and processes that is both “instructed” in the instructions and unspecified. From the discussion thus far, it should be understood that the “missing specification” cannot be a complaint, nor can it be remedied. From their instructions, however, specific or not, the students were nonetheless obliged to come up with a course of action; something had to be written, and they found a way to do that. How they did is the question and interest.

The Location Resolution

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12 The idea of 'an acceptable main idea' returns us directly to the question of pedagogy and what its work—and relations—consists of. One can imagine different contexts and occasions of teaching, e.g., a course in artistic or clinical self-expression, where the very idea of 'an acceptable expression' would be misplaced. But as undergraduates preparing for their various departmental curricula, “acceptable expressions” are quite real. They remind us that in the instruction of novices, there is an unavoidable normative basis of instruction. Teachers are charged with the exercise, and we will find it wherever the identity of “novice” has its place [e.g., cooking, origami, neuro-surgery, etc.]

13 This isn’t to suggest that there are more and less useful, “follow-able” or instructive instructions. Surely there are. But what stands as the differences between better and worse instructions cannot be a matter of specifications for the reasons developed earlier. The question of what “better” instruction might be is a topic for a subsequent section, where I turn to how indeed, in the absence of specifications, we nonetheless, and often enough, successfully proceeded.
Nine students supplied a main idea that pertained only to the first paragraph of the article, in most cases lifted verbatim from the first sentence, rather than the entire article. When asked if they could say how they had gotten the main idea, four students told me that they had consulted the textbook and followed the formatted instructions, which provided the following response to the book’s question, “Where in the essay is the main idea found?”

The main idea is usually found near the beginning of the essay, generally at the end of the last paragraph of the introduction. If not there, it probably is in the conclusion. Sometimes it is in both places. Occasionally, though, the main point, or thesis, appears in the center after the writer has spent much effort building up to it. (Pula, Edwards and Dermott, 2002, p. 5) (emphasis mine).

The students were thus confronted with a series of hedges, likelihoods, and counters to them, the sum of which is that the main idea could be anywhere. As any competent reader of Western essays in professional journals knows, the task of saying just where main ideas are to be found is a thankless one. But it is not as though the instructions offer nothing more. To each hedge and likelihood a location is attached. These instructions imply that finding the main idea entails a search of certain locations, and the authors suggest what such places look like: near the beginning, at the end, in both places, in the center. This advice is not unsound; it offers learners a starting place, and the central “place” is to understand the essay as a map of regular shape and proportions (e.g., the last paragraph of the introduction, in the conclusion). Thus, to make sense of a first instruction, for which there is an actual account offered, one must see a next set of
instructions, instructions for seeing locations across the essay, for which there is no instruction other than the recurrence of locationals in the first instruction.

For these students, in the particulars of their technical instruction in composition, they encounter a curriculum requiring judgments, reckonings, first readings and interpretations without end, not as matters of mastering the curriculum, but of being able to follow their instructions so that they might learn it.

Four additional students appear to have taken the location advice; however, they included a point from the beginning and the end of the article, neither of which separately or combined represented the main idea of the entire article, yet all of which were practical efforts to come to terms with how they were being instructed to read and then write. Note further that the textbook’s instructions refer to essays, not to interviews, which the Gates piece was. Interviews tend to follow a question-answer format rather than an essay’s introduction-body-conclusion structure. There were no instructions in the textbook on finding the main idea in a text that is not an essay (see Scollon & Scollon, 1991, for a discussion on the pervasiveness of the essayist tradition). And on consideration, there is no reason to expect that these novices would know the distinction between an essay, interview, text, etc. Aside from what they may know of popular culture, these distinctions are professional ones, and may not be immediately available to even a native writer. Yet, faced with their actual materials – the Gates interview – these students “made do” with a search for and identification of likely locations as one could find them in the interview. Most of them appeared to have looked in the recommended location and decided that whatever was there must be the main idea.
The “Obvious” Resolution

Two students proceeded in a very different way. Rather than following the trail of location, they set out to say, in a direct and synoptic manner, what the piece was about. They both said the main idea was an interview. One wrote:


The other student wrote:

In this article, Joan Ames tells people who are interesting to become mastery by interviewing Henry Louis Gates.

These answers have their sense too, and can be seen as responsive to the class discussion that prepared them for the task. Their candidate main ideas conveyed the author’s (Ames’) purpose. They also fit my request that the main idea be a statement that “is true for the entire article.” And they suggest that these students know that statements about “main ideas” tend to be concise and direct, and that the purpose of the interview seemed to figure into their interpretation of what a “main idea” could mean. It cannot be said what these students “knew already,” or how they made sense of the class discussions, but I can see both proposals are considered replies, even making use of something like inference.

One of these students told me she figured that her main idea (“an interview”) answered the part of the instructions that specified that the first sentence of the summary include “…the main idea the author is trying to make” (emphasis mine, p. 21). In both cases the students interpreted the author to mean Joan Ames, the author of the book. Ames’ role is much like that of an editor. The words and ideas that the students were to
summarize all belong to Gates, and this had been pointed out several times in class discussion and review: Since Joan Ames owned none of the words or ideas that were to be summarized, it would be unhelpful and misleading to present the main idea as being about her conducting an interview. Her role in the first sentence was to be quite minor. To make such a judgment, however, requires an understanding of how readers make use of documented summaries in the academy. Determining what is helpful to a reader of a summary is a judgment that relies on experience as that type of reader.

This situation is a commonplace in my experience: Students can be told repeatedly, and with great care, cheer, and earnestness to do or not to do something, and yet they don’t comply. One guess is that in confronting a barrage of “directions,” and in pursuing one, they forgot another. It has occurred to me, however, that in the case of the students who named Ames as the author, this could be a locational matter. Like the students who used “location,” in the previous discussion, these students may have been working from a locational understanding of *author*, and where one might find it. When they went looking in the expected places, they found Ames. This, of course, is only a conjecture, but possibly a more productive one than more familiar accounts of “lack of attention,” productive because it further opens the door into recovering what could be methodic and even disciplined about the work of these students in transforming their formal instructions into what they must be pointing to.
The Essayist Resolution

One student, not among the most successful, began her essay with a mysterious line:

As society is divided, many people want to be professional in one part.

By the terms of the task, the first sentence was to include specific pieces of information – author, title, source, and main idea of the entire article. But they can’t be found here. In tutorial, she told me that this was a general statement because “all the writing begin with general statement.” When I showed her (again) the specifications in the guidelines for the first sentence of the summary, she was nonplussed. For her, writing in English seemed to fall into one genre: essays. That is, she was not only reading an essay but being asked to write one, too. Thus she began her summary in an essay-like fashion, beginning with a general statement, the kind recommended for introductions, and ending her summary with some very thoughtful concluding remarks (despite being told repeatedly not to include opinion in this summary):

My opinion is unlike Henry’s. I think that all people can be a master only if they endeavor and when someone is a master is only different every ones.

I believe she may have thought the words text and essay were synonyms, so use of one conjured an image of the other. She did not see her actual task of summarizing an essay as different from writing one, so she used her knowledge and former success in essay writing here: She would not only describe a main idea, she herself would have one, too.

I am inclined to think that hers was the most sophisticated of the unsuccessful main ideas.
She had dismissed the rules in favor of what she knew to be the right answer. She was corroborating Amerine and Bilmes’ notion about the knowledge of the projected outcome as a competency necessary to comply with tacit assumptions in instructions. She was interpreting what she believed the assignment called for rather than quibbling with exact meaning of the words in the instructions.

Lillis (1999) shows examples of students who are estranged from academic culture and thus are heavily bound to the wording of the instructions to specify what they must do. It is the most common course of action for those who profoundly do not know the expected outcome of an assignment. But this student seemed to recognize how her instructions could only be indefinite, and she read into relevance what she “already knew” about normal, competent, recognizable writing.

**Unforeseen Difficulties**

In all of these cases, the students showed good sense in their decisions, meaning that it was a thoughtful sense, made as they wrestled with what their instructions were calling for them to do. In my experience, these first sentences, especially the quaint ones, are frequently made out as problems of reading comprehension, for which the typical remedy is a lengthy reiteration of what the article was about. But I’m quite certain that reading comprehension was not a problem for most of these students.¹⁴

One student in particular was an exception. He wrote that the main idea was “the double consciousness of Michael Jordan.” Jordan was an example used by Gates in the

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¹⁴ The reading-writing relationship is a topic of extensive study in second language composition. While writing was initially valued as a reading comprehension measure, researchers now believe that the relationship is far more complex, involving cultural factors, expectations, tasks, and prior experience, as well as local/situational factors.
second section of the article. As the statement was in virtually every way a far cry from what the task was calling for, we discussed it in tutorial. The student wanted to know why this was not the main idea of the article and pointed to Michael Jordan’s name in the article. In this case, my best understanding is that the student had very little comprehension of the article, but he recognized not simply a familiar name, but a name of great significance to him personally, and he hitched his main idea to that star. More interesting, he implied that he believed the main idea could be an opinion, and again offered proof: “You said write what you think is the main idea,” and indeed the class discussion had included plenty of occasions where students were asked for their opinions on various topics in the article, such as “Do you agree with Gates?” or, “Have you every experienced this?” or, “What do you think…?” We could say his argument was a “situated one” about how I was speaking in class, and how the task was speaking now. By this line, he could reasonably uncouple the task from the text: there would be no particular need to be “faithful” to the text; it was all a matter of opinion, anyway.

Though appreciative, initially I thought his proposal was more tactical than substantive. He was a “Generation 1.5” student who was not literate in his native language and has had little more than survival-level instruction in English up to now. Having immigrated as a pre-teen, he had graduated from a local high school and had native fluency in spoken English and listening comprehension. He was well versed in American classroom culture in that he was outspoken in class, quickly caught my humor,

15 Generation 1.5” is the debated term for immigrant students who are not literate in their native tongue and whose parents may not speak English. In many cases, by virtue of their illiteracy and distance from their native country, they are estranged from their native culture. Their basic level English skills, however, place them at odds with their new culture.
and knew how to distract me. He was quick to ask questions. His acculturation placed the others in sharp contrast. He frequently relied on class discussions to supply information about the texts rather than attempting to read them, and as a result, his summaries frequently included topics that were not part of the articles he was summarizing. It was not clear to him when material could come out of his head and when it had to be faithful to the text. In time, I discovered that his reading was perhaps at 6th grade level, and for him, the problems of summarizing began with problems of reading comprehension. How he worked with the task was then a collection of strategies for finding a way to speak of it.

**The Successful Resolutions**

As the instructor, and it’s a familiar experience, one of the most mysterious parts of the main idea challenge – in addition to the indefinite work of turning indefinite instructions into a written reply to them – was the fact that before students wrote their summaries, they were in possession of the teacher-sanctioned main idea, but few used it. I had told them what I thought the main idea of the Gates interview was. Shortly after we had read the article, one of their reading comprehension homework questions asked for the main idea of the article. This was in preparation for the writing task to come.

Most took the main idea to be some point of information in the article. In some cases, I suspect that some relied on the parts they were most confident they understood. I responded to each of these answers and either supplied the main idea to those too far afield, or gave advice to those who were close, for example, “Yes, but this statement only covers one part of the article. You need to include the other topics that Gates discussed.”
I was surprised, then, that only four students used the work they had already crafted—and I had already read and commented on, and in many cases revised—as a resource for writing their summaries. From years of conversations with my colleagues, I find that this is not an unfamiliar experience for instructors of these classes: having “corrected” answers in hand, the students don’t use them. Having seen it over many iterations, it’s still puzzling. An explanation given by several students this time was that they feared that using the corrected versions would be plagiarism since they contained my words. One student was so concerned about using his revised homework answer that he used quotation marks around it in his summary even though it was his own words.

In light of their sensitivity to plagiarism, some students felt obliged, in full observance of the tasks’ requirements, to write their main idea as though they had never written it before. If they had found, through our collaboration, a “right” answer before, they’d have to find another one now. It seems that in giving them the answer, I had deprived them of using it. They now had the self-imposed burden of paraphrasing my paraphrase of the main idea. However, paraphrasing a main idea is a lesser task than coming up with one. These students were among the successful ones.

Two of them seemed to understand that the main idea had to reflect the entire article but seemed at a loss of how to express this. One wrote for her main idea, “…there are several connected things to define mastery.” And indeed there were. How those things would be collected and formulated seemed beyond her grasp, but what she did see clearly is that main ideas, like definitions, are ensembles. The student was able to convey that main ideas are likely to be more than what can be found in a first or last
section of the article. Although she was not able to be more specific, she managed to convey a good deal of understanding in the few words she chose.

Another student wrote as a main idea:

…Henry Louis Gates defines, explains and advises about mastery…

This also managed to convey an understanding of a complex main idea. Gates is doing no single thing, but each thing – defining, explaining, and advising – is thematically connected to the topic of mastery.

In writing the summary, the first serious challenge, then, was for students to “make out” an object they had never seen: a main idea. A majority of the students looked for a point-at-able line or word in the article. In ways discussed, their formal instructions encouraged them to do so. They followed the textbook’s advice that finding the main idea is a matter of looking in the right place. They then went looking for it and in those places. Basic level learners usually deal with overt thesis statements in the texts they read and write. The notion of looking for something that isn’t there (i.e. inferring) is new. This is not to say that students do not know how to infer; on the contrary, their

16 This is a delicate point. Insofar as most of these students are quite literate in their home countries and their literatures, it’s difficult to imagine that, say, a Korean political essay or traditional story would not have a “main idea.” Of course they do. The point is to remind us that “main ideas” aren’t objective objects available for inventory wherever we find a text. It is rather that “formulating the main idea” is a certain exercise – a certain thing that we might do with a text – that is, as a recognizable, familiar activity, not nearly so “universal” as the textual organization it points to. There are endless ways of having conversations and notwithstanding what may be “obvious” about it for one who converses with texts that way, “saying for the record what the main idea is” is itself a cultural, (and for these students, culturally distant) practice.
inference capabilities have been running on full power since their first day at the university, and for most, their first day in this country. To follow instructions is to make inferences.

**Discussion**

My colleagues and I spend a good deal of class time explaining the instructions for the summary assignment on “main ideas,” pointing out “sections” and “groups of ideas” in an article, trying to show how it can be parsed into a sequence of ideas that can be collected and examined for their relationship to a main idea. But our efforts inevitably result in “quaint difficulties.” It could very well be that in advance of doing the assignment, students do not sense the incompleteness and indefiniteness of the instructions. That is, they cannot see the gaps in these instructions and thus cannot see our efforts to fill them in. Our job is to make certain objects visible, but the vision needed here is deeply cultural and rests on having eyes for the objects. The first pedagogical step is illustrating, and the first challenge is addressing what students did not have eyes to see.

All writing assignments in the course begin with a reading that serves as the reference material for the summaries and essays. They vary in genre (e.g., news articles, short stories, features, essays), length, topic, and level of difficulty, but their main function is to provide content rather than a genre to imitate.
Reading comprehension was the first stage of the summary assignment. I began the lesson by reading the text aloud, an old habit that is based on the belief that intonation and expression assist comprehension. Next we had a discussion, which was initiated by me because none of the students posed any questions about the reading. I use such discussions to gage reading comprehension, preferring this method to the more traditional reading comprehension questions in the coursepacket. I do this because I do not want to suggest that reading comprehension is all about getting a right answer. For this particular topic—mastery—we discussed the experts we knew in our lives, what we thought were the requirements of expertise, and whether or not we agreed with Gates’ definition of mastery.

I began the lesson with a focus on content because I believe it is helpful for students to have a foundation of ideas with which to approach the assignment. We briefly discussed the assignment requirements before reading the Gates text, and we returned to them after we had read it. I had distributed a short simple news articles about an avalanche, and I used this article to demonstrate the assignment requirements. Together we divided the article into informational sections and labeled each section. We then examined each sentence of the article and categorized it as important, possibly important, or not important for a summary. We followed the right steps to writing a summary, putting our work on the chalkboard. We spent a lot of time crafting the first sentence of the class-generated summary of the avalanche article. Our focus, however, had been on grammar, syntax, and structure. This specific focus had not been my
intention. I had assumed that reading comprehension and gist were assured, and I cannot say that they were not. In retrospect, I see that I had supplied the main idea without realizing that how I derived it was not evident to many of the students. I had assumed that my inference of the main idea was visible, but when students turned to their own summaries, when faced with determining the main idea of the Gates piece, most floundered.

The four most successful students were able to fold together a couple of descriptive dimensions in writing their replies. They were able to both address the main idea of Gates’ remarks and frame the occasion of his giving them (i.e., in an interview by Joan Ames). One offered:

In an interview with Joan Ames of *Mastery* (1991) Henry Louis Gates tells about his definition of mastery, and gives examples and advise about the pitfalls of it.

Not only is the student covering his bases – whomever the author is, s/he has surely been mentioned—but we can also say the sentence is written for a third person to hear, telling them of both the occasion and the content of the piece; that it was an interview, conducted by these people, for whom Gates is the respondent, and as such, the source of the ideas to be summarized as a main idea. The student has read the reader of his formulation into relevance. We could say that the student knows something about the social context of such an expression, and has written it in a recognizable voice.
However, to write such a sentence with these considerations requires competencies that are well beyond students at this level. This sentence possesses insider traits, and the only insider in the room is me. And, in fact, I am the source of this sentence. It was a product of my comments and corrections on this student’s homework assignment. Seen in this light, the sentence might lose prestige, but it needn’t. There are more competencies involved here than merely copying. The student was able to recognize the relevance of the homework assignment to his summary and use it.

One would think that pedagogy can’t get more visible—or simple—than giving students the answer, but in this context the undertaking is more complex. Students are just beginning to figure out how this class and this teacher operate. If it is not standard practice to have the teacher provide the answer, when she does, one might understandably not recognize it. There was a heavy emphasis on the first sentence of the summary because it is the most scripted; it must contain the author, title, source, and main idea, so it is typically the most grammatically challenging. We spent several days on exercises designed to show students grammatical formulas to facilitate the first sentence of the summary. For example, they were given nine different ways to combine the author, title, source, and main idea into one grammatically correct sentence.

Students were given pieces of information to arrange according to the

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17 For example, one formula reads: In + “article title” + (source, date) + author + verb + main idea. The formula is followed by a sentence that demonstrates this order: In “The Consequences of Failure,” (Chronicle of Higher Education, May 30, 1997), Aaron Sorkin tells how failing a freshman course had a positive effect on his future.
formulae. The pieces were quite similar to those offered by the article they were to summarize, yet, despite the amount of time that we spent going over these sentences, very few students appeared to have used the formulas in their summaries. The usefulness of these “answers” was not evident perhaps.

We spent several days on exercises that focused on using reporting verbs, quoting, and paraphrasing. These activities, of course, presume that students have something to report, quote, or paraphrase. The value of these lessons usually becomes visible only when students do. My biggest complaint with textbooks is that they use as a resource for understanding their instructions the very constructs they are attempting to instruct: To write a summary, begin by summarizing. However, I had done the same thing with the main idea: To find the main idea, begin by inferring the main idea of each section. Since each text will come with it own main idea challenges, there doesn’t seem to be a better way to learn this than by diving in. The second pedagogical challenge is what to do next.

I wanted the students to infer the main idea from the contents of the entire article, but I did not know at the time that this –inferring—was what they needed to know how to do, not inferring generally or “logically,” but inferring to achieve what this task, for this text, was asking for. After reading their first drafts, I assumed they had misunderstood the instructions, so I revisited steps 4, 5 and 6 of the “8 Steps” in class:

K: OK, so we’ve divided the article into three sections, right? Now, what is the main idea of the first section? What is he talking about? Here. Just in this first section?

S1: (Reading from the first sentence of article): “The capacity to understand a process at its most ideal”

S2: Michael Jordan [This is the topic of the second section]
S3: A true master [These are the first three words of the third section]

K: Well…. [nods approval to S1] He’s telling us….with Michael Jordan later as an example….uhm, what he means by mastery. His own meaning. His definition. [I write “definition of mastery” on the board]

For the students, the location strategy seemed very much still in play, as was the expectation that to say these things is to find them just as the author had said them. We proceeded to label each of the three sections, which were “definition,” “example,” and “advice.” The labels of course are characterizations, or formulations, or ways of speaking about what was going on in each section. Although we had been through this scenario before they wrote their summaries, now that they had, perhaps they would have a better idea of the exercise and what it is asking them to do. Students had not seen from previous discussions that they could—and should—formulate the main idea of each section and string them together to get the main idea of the whole article. With our labels of each section, we proceeded to the stringing together. Yet although the labels had just been identified and were written on the board, students still did not connect them to the task of saying a main idea, and I was unaware of this until the answers I anticipated were not forthcoming.

K: OK. So. Your first sentence of your summary must have the main idea, the general idea, of the whole article. For this article, what’s the very big general global idea of the whole article?

S1: Mastery

S2: Definition of master

K: Definition of mastery, OK, now, does that cover absolutely everything he does in the whole article?
K: In the last paragraph, is he talking about the definition? The whole article is just about him giving his definition? Only that?

S3: No

K: No. So what else does he talk about?

S3: Expression of the meaning of the word, ah, example he used of the meaning of the word.

K: OK! Example of the word. He gave examples of what he meant, right? Michael Jordan...his friend playing marbles...watching his friends watching TV...those are all examples. OK. Are definition and examples all he talks about? What else does he talk about?

S4: Balance

K: Balance. Nice word. He didn’t use the word balance, but he implied it in his advice, so, he gives us advice. So we can say advice is another general area of information, along with definition and example...advice.

On the revised drafts of their summaries, following this review exercise, all of the students appeared to have grasped the notion that the main idea was to be organized as a string of labels. The main idea is no single thing or location, but is a composite, which entails characterizing the ideas across the text and hooking them together. However, another quaint difficulty arose. Of those who revised their main ideas, only one student included all three labels:

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18 This is not always the case. In fact, most of the sample summaries we studied had one main idea. This particular article, however, and because it was an interview, was not a cohesive piece of writing. It has three main ideas, none of which could stand alone and represent the text. It was my judgment call as to what I would require of this particular situation.
Henry Louis Gates, in an interview with Joan Ames, *Mastery* (1997), talks about his point of view in mastery and also several examples about it and advice about dangers of it.

Ten students mentioned “definition” and “advice,” but there appeared to be an odd refusal to include the second label (examples). One student wrote:

…Gates explained about a definition of mastery and advice about the obstacles that prevent mastery.

One student explained this by reminding me that I had told them not to use examples when we had done the avalanche summary. We had discussed avoiding details in an effort to select essential information for our collaborative summary. In that particular exercise, we had read and discussed an article on an avalanche. We had agreed that “examples” were nonessential details for a summary. In this case, however, our use of the term “examples” referred to a section label not the things themselves. The student saw the word “example,” and assigned it to the nonessential pile. I was charmed by this quaint difficulty; I sighed and said, “Fair enough.” Some things are not worth amending.

In his work on the instruction of novices in the early grades, Macbeth (2000) illustrates how the production of “knowledge” begins as a constructive exercise involving practical work and local achievements. In everything from spelling to science, students begin with a curriculum of recitation and recognition long before the conceptual knowledge is available, and as a prerequisite to it. He refers to Meno’s paradox for Socrates (in Plato, 1981) whereby Meno asks how it is possible to seek the object of his instruction—something he profoundly does not know—since in his ignorance precludes organizing a search for it as well as recognizing it should he stumble upon it. Though the paradox is a mainstay of foundational philosophy, Macbeth points out that it has practical
relevance to instructional settings. The quests for the objects that a lesson is pointing to, objects that one must indeed know in order to recognize, begin with questions that students can answer. Lessons in early grades proceed with interventions and reformulations designed to accommodate this, and even wrong answers are used as a resource for the cohort. The production of these answers hinges on recognition of the “practical intelligibilities” (p. 58) that organize the lesson. According to Macbeth, “though lessons stand on behalf of knowledge, they first stand on behalf of practical tasks and orientations” (p. 59), and this draws our attention to the praxiological work of “materializing the curriculum” (p. 59) for our students.

It appears that the pedagogy of materializing the curriculum, or, rendering occult objects visible entails a *circling back*, an exercise not recommended for impatient teachers or students. It works like this: Instructions don’t mean much when explained without a referent, yet a referent cannot be produced without them. Once this first wobbly attempt is in place, the instructions have a surface to cling to, a context that gives them significance. But as it turns out, it’s no single context, and more than what we teachers have in mind may “stick.”

The first assignment of the quarter is about much more than how to write a summary. It is the first exercise in how to read instructions in this class, and what certain ways of using words mean in the context of this class and this assignment. It breaks ground in more ways than locating a main idea, ground that for the remainder of the quarter will never again be quite so hard, but will continue to show surprises in how the lines of fracture run and circle back as we collaboratively try to teach and tame novel
tasks (and texts) and what we are required to do with them. We will return to a discussion of this pedagogy in subsequent sections. But a last general remark may be useful here.

In looking at the “main idea” exercise using the interview with Gates, a competent reader/writer might ask: “’What’s wrong, incomplete or deficient about saying that Gates’ main idea is mastery, and just that?’”19 The answer, of course, is “nothing.” But the question is one that can only be posed by one who already possesses —we can say thoughtlessly possesses— the very competencies that are being worked out here. We can, if we like, leverage our competence and then recite what we now know about the indeterminancies of texts, how they afford indefinite readings, how “best” readings are elusive, even mistaken things, etc. We could further object that this lesson plan is merely ‘enforcing’ one version of ‘good writing’, or that I’m enforcing one version of both reading and writing (i.e., that a text has sections, that each section has a main idea, that these are the main ideas of these sections, etc.). The objections are all quite familiar to me.

My response is to point out that the task for this class and these students is to provide a normative, presenting competence at academic writing. Moreover, it is extremely difficult to imagine a pedagogy for novices that does not have a normative basis. Competence may well permit its own deconstruction, but the first task for these students is something quite different, namely, to produce, recognize, and render as

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19 In fact, this question was asked by a student. She was told that because the title of the source for the Gates’ interview is Mastery, it is likely that the reader assumes that the article concerns mastery. The work of the summary then is to differentiate the Gates piece from others in the book. The objective here is to lay the groundwork for an eventual understanding of the work summaries do in academic writing.
familiar objects some of the familiar [and normative] objects, structures, relations,
“strings,” habits, judgments, risks, and tasks that constitute the curriculum of the course.
So, yes, years later they might look back and say, “I didn’t need those other two sections
to write a fair accounts of Gates’ main idea.” It would then be a competent, knowing
assessment, made possible by how they came to know writing in ways that they do not
know now.

It appears that by following instructions (as best they could), students construct
their best reckoning (for now) of what a summary could be. Their attempts began the
process of learning what a summary (in this class, for this teacher) would be. If this is
the case, it seems likely that many did not have a task in mind when they began the
assignment. They were writing their way into seeing the task.
CHAPTER 5
THE USE AND USEFULNESS OF MODELS

During preparation for the first essay, some of my students were working together in a group to determine how the authors of two articles differed. They summoned me over when they could not find the thesis statement of one of the articles. They became even more frustrated when I showed them that it was in the conclusion. At the time I made a mental note that we teachers should select texts with an easy to spot thesis statement at the end of the introductory paragraph, just like the formulations in the textbook and coursepacket. I began searching for such articles and was surprised to discover how hard they were to find. Apparently in actual practice there is an overwhelming preference for implicit thesis statements, and what few authors offer overt theses tend to put them anywhere but at the end of the introductory paragraph. In the two articles my students were reading, one author, Macklin (2002) had placed hers in her conclusion, and the other, Annas (2002) had begun his first sentence with his. Neither of these matched the model and examples that were designed to illustrate such conventions.

20 In this study the term “model” refers to talk about a particular object or practice. Models as I refer to them here are most commonly collections of formulations, for example, a description, definition, or words of wisdom in, say, how to write a summary, or what an essay is by definition in a textbook. A model of a summary thus is not a summary but rather a characterization or a recipe for writing one.
Instruction in essays in my class begins with a model, a “five-paragraph essay.” In the textbook’s chapter, “What is an Essay?” readers are told that they can expect an essay to have three parts: an introduction, a body, and a conclusion, and furthermore, “Each paragraph in the body will have a topic idea and will expand upon the essay’s main idea (called the thesis) using appropriate supporting materials: examples and details, illustration, facts, statistics, or description” (O’Donnell & Paiva, 1993, p. 28)

Following this model, one can conclude that an essay is a collection of stable parts in a fixed structure. This notion is supported in the coursepacket by way of a specially annotated sample essay, contrived for instructional purposes, which I will call an “exhibit essay.” There is one for each type of essay they will write during the quarter. These “exhibit essays” were written by teachers, former students, and professional writers and generally consist of five paragraphs: an introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion.

Although the exhibit essay concerns different articles and topics than those students will be using for their own essays, there are many points of structure and content that are usefully exhibited. They tend to sacrifice detail for explicitness of the first order lessons; they avoid complex topic treatment so that content doesn’t distract the reader from structure. The central task of the exhibit is to demonstrate the cogency of the

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21 Watson-Reekie (1984) makes a distinction between authentic and composed (or specially written) pieces of writing. Authentic texts are used in the course I teach, but their effectiveness in illustrating “writing” is frequently a matter of debate.
model. It does so by pointing out the objects of instruction—thesis statement, topic sentence, transition words, quotations, support, and so forth—with arrows, underlining, and glosses:

Aaron Sorkin's essay, "The Consequences of Failure," from The Chronicle of Higher Education (1997) and Caroline Bird's essay, "The Liberal Arts Religion," from her 1975 book, The Case Against College, both express the authors' opinion about college education, particularly the liberal arts; however, they have different views about it and different styles in presenting them. (Coursepacket, p. 45)

Both texts’ titles, authors, sources, are given

Part 1 of thesis: Similarity

Part 2 of thesis: Differences

The belief that one can learn composition through a reduced, logical, sequenced arrangement of parts harks back to Bruner’s (1966) theory of instruction, which argued that any curriculum could be ordered via the simplification and generalizability of a formal structure and thus could be ordered and designed as an optimal sequence of presentation: “[A]ny set of statements about any subject can be reduced to a simpler set
that is more economical and generative” (p. 201). Yet, in the case of academic writing, we are teaching (and perhaps more commonly than we allow) social practices that are not rule-governed by any means. Academic writing is comprised of social arrangements of cultural objects shared by a community of practice. It is filled with cultural reckonings, judgments of goodness of fit, and figure-ground relations. These arrangements are tied to contexts, tasks, and purposes that are neither fixed nor stable, yet regular and recognizable. It is ironic then that teachers are condemned to teach these arrangements as though they were regular and recognizable because they are stable objects organized in a homogenous field.

Models are time-honored, familiar representational devices. Students recognize them. The educational literature is filled with them, and perhaps for this reason, they are also the objects of endless critique. In the writing literature, there are many who have called into question modeled curricula for controlling or limiting student writing, and for misrepresenting writing in actual practices (e.g., Leki, 1995; Spack, 1988; Shih 1986; Connors, 1981; Silva, 1999 and Johns 1995). The last complaint is of course assured. Models (as I use the term here) are by definition not the “things” themselves. They knowingly, unavoidably, misrepresent, and yet it may be their failure as representations that recommends their pedagogic usefulness. At best, teachers are ambivalent about using them; Hirvela (2004) states:

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22 Certainly to practitioners they appear to be quite rule-governed, but here I mean that they are governed by practice rather than a formal set of rules.
My training and my beliefs about L2 writing told me not to use them because they would so much limit students’ notions of what writing is, and they would write to the model in the same way that teachers teach to the test… but in the end I always felt they’d give the students more concrete notions of what we are teaching. (A. Hirvela, personal communication, July 2, 2004)

Allied further concerns are for the imposition of what could be taken as a curricular “right answer,” not only by students but also by instructors who seek standardized assessment criteria. Hirvela adds that such models and exhibits are familiar to students who come from educational systems that rely on drill and practice instructional methods.

As instructional devises, models are primordial. Long before they were awarded the status of knowledge structured into economical bites, they were mainstays of all manner of formal pedagogies. In fact, it is hard to imagine a dental school without its big plastic tooth, health class without a CPR dummy, anatomy without the Invisible Man/Woman, or today’s higher tech computer simulations. This ubiquity says something about their useful and unavoidable contributions to learning. They have been the constant companion of formal pedagogy, and the reason is linked to how they are organized and how they are used.

Models are charged with teaching recognizability of practical objects. Schutz (1976) serves as a first resource for understanding the features of their organization through his discussion of cultural systems of knowledge that afford such recognizability in everyday life. This knowledge is expressed in the form of cultural schemes for

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23 Excluded, of course, are the many practical pedagogies that are not "formal," for example apprenticeships.
participation in the social world and is handed down through generations. Schutz refers to these cultural schemes as *recipes*, which work:

[O]n the one hand, as a precept for actions and thus serves as a scheme of expression: whoever wants to obtain a certain result has to proceed as indicated by the recipe provided for this purpose. On the other hand, the recipe serves as a scheme of interpretation: whoever proceeds as indicated by a specific recipe is supposed to intend the correlated result. (p. 95)

He says these recipes offer “ready-made directions for use, to replace truth hard to attain by comfortable truisms, and to substitute the self-explanatory for the questionable” (p. 95). They are arranged to assure ideal outcomes or avoid undesirable ones in the most efficient way. They are unquestioned guides for virtually all social situations, and constitute for a social group, “thinking as usual,” which is based on a number of shared assumptions having to do with the stability of social situations and the continued relevance of traditional solutions. If the assumptions are questioned, the recipe loses its authority. They remain true until there is evidence to the contrary. When any one of these assumptions becomes “untrue,” the relevance of the recipe is overthrown, and the recipe “reveals that its applicability is restricted to a specific historical situation” (p. 96).

Schutz describes the social knowledge contained in recipes as “incoherent, inconsistent, and only partially clear,” at least by formal-logical criteria, but nonetheless of “sufficient coherence, clarity, and consistency to give anybody a reasonable chance of understanding and of being understood” (p. 95). Garfinkel and Sacks (1970) explain how such contradictions are necessary and useful. In their discussion of *mock-ups*, (i.e., models designed to represent a real object), they make the case that the insufficiencies of
a model—the very distortions of reality that make them models instead of the real thing—are precisely what make them pedagogically significant. Garfinkel and Sacks make the following important observations about mock-ups. First, they are designed with “deliberate false provisions” (p. 95). They are not meant to be exact replicas because if they were, their pedagogical value would be severely limited. They use the example of a plastic auto engine, which looks very much like an actual engine, but of course it isn’t. It is plastic and uses no fuel, exhibits no combustion, is devoid of physics altogether. Its parts are visible in ways they would not be in an actual engine, and because of this, it is able to instruct in the skeletal structure of an engine. The instructional benefits are a tradeoff with insufficiencies; one can learn how pistons work, but one has to turn the flywheel by hand. This, they explain, is the goodness of the model in this case. It renders visible the invisible.

Garfinkel and Sacks (1970) stress that the usefulness of a model owes to its insufficiencies. There must be certain shared understandings, however. A user must know the limits of the model. He or she must know that the model has intentional insufficiencies, so it has limited applicability to the actual object that it is mocking-up. In other words, it must be understood as a guide for coming to terms with the actual affairs and not be confused with the actual affairs. This is not to say that nothing about the mock-up will be consistent with the actual affairs; however, learners are required to make judgments about what is and what is not relevant to actual situations. A final condition
for a mock-up is that its insufficiencies cannot be cause for complaint, and when they are discovered, as surely they will be, these insufficiencies should not be viewed as something to go back and correct in the mock-up.

Models in academic writing instruction must misrepresent objects in order to be pedagogically instructive. Like the auto engine, a model of an essay is designed to reveal its parts: thesis statement, topic sentence, introduction, body, and so forth. These objects are misrepresented as formal, neutral objects that can be cut and pasted, stacked, or listed. In fact, these objects stand on behalf of cultural practices. Rather than formal objects that can be plucked like cherries off a tree, they are gestalt objects, figure-ground exercises. While the promise of a model essay is to make visible, say, a thesis statement, one can’t really see the thesis statement if one can’t see what the author is doing with it, its actual function in the arrangement and its reflexive relationship with the rest of an essay. After all, one can’t understand how to make bread by simply examining a loaf of it. Yet the model begins with a lesson in recognizability as a tradeoff for loftier lessons that will come later with exposure and practice. In this respect, the recipe for, say, writing an essay is not in fact how essays are produced, but in the absence of being able to say how they are produced—a “truth hard to attain”—we supply models.
Novices, until they learn otherwise, approach instructions and models in good faith that if they follow them, they will achieve the desired outcome. In fact, this is the promise of the instructions and models. For some, the modeled essay may be the only fathomable projected outcome, so despite their insufficiency, they do offer a caricature of the real thing, which is better than no projection at all.

The contrived exhibit is intentionally, as is the model it illustrates, parodic. It was designed that way, and its pedagogical efficiency depends upon it. It is hyper-real and generally sacrifices fidelity in favor of delineating nominal objects. It attaches a name, or label, onto the parts, and thus unavoidably corrupts the model by providing false assurances that such things as a thesis statement own material locations, can be located, contained, and bracketed much like a place in a board game. Some learners see and begin to use the writing conventions as nominal objects, list-able things. For students who are unfamiliar with academic essays, the learning of these objects as nominals may be the only way they can start. And this is how such students begin to use them; it is a first form of use. It organizes tasks they can do.

While some students are studying the model and its manifestations in the exhibit, they begin to notice that the lines of coherence break down when applied to other instances (i.e., the “missing” thesis statement of the Macklin article mentioned earlier). They are reading texts, which look quite different from the exhibit, and they begin to see
that the model and its contrived exhibit are false promises. Their first task, however, is using the model. The second task is discovering its insufficiencies. This system turns out to be a one of “embrace and reject,” but both tasks have their usefulnesses.

When students are given an exhibit, in the absence of an accurate projected outcome, they have no choice but to take these instructions at face value. The model gives them something to do, and without this doing, there can be no progress toward discovering the insufficiency of the model and eventually learning writing as a practice. When they undertake the task of doing, they tumble headlong into what is unavoidably, ineffably, insufficient about the model.

**Exhibiting Understanding**

Exhibiting understanding applies to both tasks: following the model and discovering its insufficiencies. Students assumed that copying the model as precisely as possible would produce an acceptable essay. In fact, that was the very promise of the model essay. They soon realized that the model did not work that way.

The course I teach is replete with models, but because of the reservations I had about imposing them on students, and because I often spot problems that hinder their effectiveness as mock-ups, I downplayed the exhibit for the first essay assignment in the class. While I had my own version of discussing essays and their parts, I only mentioned

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24 This is not to say that none of these students has ever written an essay in their native language or in any other language. Most students by this point in the course know that they are charged with figuring out how things mean here, in this class, for this assignment, at the university.
the existence of the exhibit in the coursepacket and left students to decide whether or not to consult it. It was only in the close analysis of this research that I noticed with surprise and interest to what extent the students had used the exhibit, my lack of emphasis notwithstanding. A majority of the students appear to have found the unbidden exhibit quite useful. They followed lockstep the location of the exhibit’s elements. They appear to have placed great faith in it. While initially I found this dependency lamentable, I soon realized that for those who were uncertain about what the assignment required, the exhibit offered recipes that gave them something to do, somewhere to begin. It turned out to be the first step of a very interesting journey.

One difficult topic for discussion in class had been the opening statements of an essay, the “general statements” that begin the inverted pyramid that guides the reader from general to specific information, like the old library card catalogues. The textbook warns that the introduction “can either attract attention so that the reader continues to read or cause the reader to lose interest and stop, so it requires care and attention” (Pula, Edwards, and Dermott, 2002, p. 39). In class we looked at the suggested ways to begin: anecdotes, definitions, quotations, historical background, description, narration of a personal incident or shared experience, or a series of questions. Although there were examples of each of these, 15 of the 19 students followed the exhibit’s introduction with formulaic precision, even keeping the same number, type, and order as the exhibit’s sentences. Apparently the students reduced the introduction to a 4-sentence formula:
In many cases, their wording stayed so remarkably close to that of the exhibit, they appeared to be filling in a cloze exercise, keeping the same verbs and adjectives, and the phrase, “all the people in the world.”

For example, the exhibit’s first sentence was:

Many people around the world believe that education is vital for their future success.

A majority of the students adapted the exhibit’s sentence, changing the topic, education, to their own topic, human cloning: (Reproductions from the exhibit are underlined)

Many people around the world have been heard about human cloning.

Many countries around the world are interesting in new high technologies to develop their countries.

Many people think human cloning is the vital issue in the world.

The second sentence of the exhibit introduced the comparison/contrast element as follows:

In the United States some Americans think a liberal arts education is a popular choice, but others do not find a liberal arts education particularly useful.
Many students borrowed the model for constructing the second sentence of their essay:

In the United States, some people agree with human cloning, but others do not.

Some American people may agree with cloning for some reasons; otherwise, they may disagree with cloning for some reasons also.

Some people think that human cloning should be banned, but others think that human cloning should be admitted.

The grammatical structure and vocabulary of the sample essay appears to figure strongly into the perceived usefulness of the exhibit. This is one of the ways students demonstrated an understanding of the model.

The third sentence of the exhibit provided the authors’ names and article titles, and this, too, was closely reproduced by the students. Unfortunately, punctuation such as quotation marks, underlining, and commas, which are among the very few things in the exhibit that can be copied and successfully transferred, did not receive the same careful consideration as other elements.

Next, came the exhibit’s thesis statement, which had been labeled as such:

[both authors] express their opinion about college education, particularly the liberal arts. However, they have different views about it and different styles in presenting them.

Again, in their own essays, many students supplied virtually identical order (similarity + difference + difference) and the same points of comparison/contrast, which were (in order) topic, view, and style. They appear to have taken these terms as a literal template
of key words. In this, they were showing an understanding of the exhibit in the form of an unintended structure. For example: (Reproductions from exhibit are underlined)

[both authors] express their opinion about human cloning. However, they have different views and styles.

[both authors] recount their opinion about the human clone. However, they have different viewpoint about it, different styles.

[both authors] express their opinion about human cloning. But, they have different views about human cloning and different style.

These students detected a specific order and followed it. They may have perceived this as a safe route. (How could there be red marks or points taken off a statement that so clearly resembled the exhibit?) Some may have perceived the exhibit as a sort of “right answer,” like the kind one finds in the back of a math book. For others it could have been simply a recognizable task from their previous experiences. The exhibit did permit initial success and survival; whether intentional or not, it showed them a “way in” (Lave, 1990). But students soon discovered the first false promise: the exhibit itself was open to critique. The general statements that began the exhibit were inadequate.

The textbook and I had implored them to attract the reader’s attention. The exhibit’s opening sentences, however, were not interesting; in fact, they were dry and simplistic in my judgment. And my judgment stands on behalf of the recognizability of such things by members of the academy as well as that of the exam graders for the course. But the more important point was: what is permissible for the exhibit is not
permissible for them. Yet had the exhibit’s introduction been elaborate or interesting, it might have distracted students from its structural purpose, and in order to show this structure, perhaps it could not afford to be too interesting.

The second false provision of the exhibit was its thesis statement. Students took it as a model rather than a “case,” and of course the model invites this reading. Students who mimicked it without taking stock of what is was saying, however, found themselves locked into defending similarities and differences that were not necessarily applicable to their own articles. For instance, the exhibit’s thesis statement focused on the differences in style of the articles by Sorkin and Bird. For their own articles by Mackin and Annas, students had identified only similarities in style. Those who imitated the exhibit’s model thesis came to the body paragraph for differences and discovered they did not have much to say. Some skipped this body paragraph altogether. One student kept the thesis focus on “differences” but had a body paragraph that discussed the similarities. Some students were able to find some differences, but they were weak (e.g., length and place of publication). Indeed, in class discussion, the one similarity they had agreed on was that both articles were difficult (for them) to read, and this difficulty tended to obscure finer distinctions that could have made a case for rhetorical differences.

Their difficulties became a major topic for tutorials, when it was pointed out that a thesis statement owns a relationship to the essay. The thesis and body paragraph, for example, must show an alignment or symmetry, each constituting a context for the other. For many students this was a novel way to understand the model.
Diagrammatic Vision

The textbook’s presentation of “the essay” as an assembly of parts, like Lego blocks, and the exhibit’s vivid display of how these parts could be assembled in a linear structure, together implied that writing an essay is a task involving concrete objects and locationals: *These parts go here*. Students took the advice seriously. Some of the students with the strongest grammatical skills were among those who most confidently saw in the model a diagram. It would appear then, that grammatical insecurity may not have been the reason some students adhered so closely to the exhibit. In many cases students could not see the substance of the exhibit—what the piece was talking about—but they could see its organization. They could see diagrammatically. This enabled them to cobble together a very essay-looking object, but without benefit of judgment about the goodness of the fit.

The exhibit itself invites this reading. Labels are attached to the first sentence of each body paragraph, for example: “topic sentence for first point of contrast…topic sentence for second point of contrast” and so forth. As objective and “clear” as the graphic is, what lies at the other end of the point is, for these students, another occult object. Several students did not make the connection between the thesis points and the body paragraphs. They proposed topics (called “criterion points”) in thesis statements that were never again mentioned in their essays and proceeded instead to discuss completely different points in their body paragraphs. For example, one student proposed in his thesis statement to discuss differences of opinion, and similarities of style and
topic. His body paragraphs, however, focused on audience, author’s purpose, and the organizational structure of the articles. He explained to me in tutorial that he felt it would be repetitive to discuss the same information in the paper as mentioned in the thesis statement. For the sake of his audience, he wanted to offer them something more. In isolation, his observations were thoughtful. On the paper, they were unrecognizable as an essay. I appreciated, however, that he had made a decision to disattend the model. To make the judgment of repetitiveness, he obviously caught the thesis-topic sentence connection, but he decided against writing his essay that way. I did not want to discourage him because ultimately he was acting on the assumption that models are only models and thus are not to be used literally. Unfortunately, this particular convention—thesis/topic sentence connection—was not quite so optional. This student stands in contrast to the student mentioned in the previous chapter who was so deeply attached to her understanding of “essay,” that she wrote her summary as an essay. This student for whatever reason, had his own ideas of sensible delivery of information.

On the other hand, one student followed her topic sentences with lengthy lists of quotations that were meant to support the topic. She knew that the criterion points had to be “supported.” From the exhibit, she concluded that support meant quotations. This is a reasonable assumption given that in the exhibit, there are strong black arrows pointing out the quotations and labeling them as “support:”
Sorkin thinks this way because when his liberal arts teacher at Syracuse University made him repeat the course, he says, "It was the single most significant event that has occurred in my evolution as a playwright" (B9).

Paraphrases are also labeled as “support,” but my guess is that they are less visible because they do not come with the signature punctuation and parenthetical documentation of quotations. In fact, it is possible to scan the sample essay and quickly spot the quotations, each of which can be found in a similarly labeled body paragraph. The student apparently took instruction from this. While her list of quotes lacked cohesion, her quotations were well chosen. What constitutes support is terrain to be further explored, but she was on the right track.

A few students seem to have disattended the sample essay entirely. The successful ones appear to have had previous essay writing experience, for their work greatly departed from the model in both form and content, but it nevertheless stayed within the bounds of appropriateness. Other students, however, were not successful. It is quite possible that these students, regardless of their competence in English, simply could not see the order and structure of the sample essay or bring a reading to it. They may not have followed the exhibit because they could not. These students did not offer any sort of introduction, nor, in two cases, a thesis statement. Others who were not
successful may have known that the exhibit was best used as a springboard, and they tested possibilities of where to spring. Departures, critical for learning the curriculum, require taking such risks, and often these risks are misunderstood as failure to see the instruction’s objects. One must figure out how far one may stray from the exhibit while still producing something recognizably like it. This is, in fact, the singular most important lesson of the course.

Bartholomae (1985) found that students begin the route to membership in the academic discourse community “with a moment of appropriation, a moment when they can offer up a sentence that is not theirs as though it were their own” (p. 145). He calls this kind of writing “approximate:”

What our beginning students need to learn is to extend themselves, by successive approximations, into the commonplaces, set phrases, rituals and gestures, habits of mind, tricks of persuasion, obligatory conclusions and necessary connections that determine ‘what might be said’ and constitute knowledge within the various branches of our academic community. (p. 146)

He believes the process of approximating requires a period of “crude mimicry” (p. 162) before students are able to operate legitimately within the discourse. The contrived exhibit appears to have served for many the first order of this approximation exercise. From his experience with his own students’ writing, Bartholomae found “a general pattern of disintegration when the writer moves off from standard phrases” (p. 161). This disintegration is where one goes when he or she realizes that the exhibit is insufficient.
Academic writing is vast terrain, but the exhibit has made it slightly less so. It has provided a surface to which further instruction can stick. Before we move off the model, we need a bit of traction, and if models seem ubiquitous in formal instruction, it may be because eventually they afford this traction. Ideally teachers assign them, and students take them up, precisely so that the models can be left behind.

The final polished version of the first essay was supposed to serve as the first installment of the lesson that (a) models are valuable for making vivid certain curricular objects, (b) they are unavoidably insufficient, and (c) once recognizability of the curricular objects begins to develop, the model must be left behind. Interestingly, and I suppose not surprisingly, these final versions simply became another model for the essays the students wrote for their next assignment.

The first essay assignment of the quarter had been a comparison/contrast essay in which students summarized and discussed points of similarities and differences between two articles (Macklin, 2002; Annas 2002). The mid-term exam, given during the fifth week of the quarter, was a timed-session in which they were to write another comparison/contrast essay. For the exam, they chose one of the articles they had already used for the first essay assignment and paired it with a new article (James 2002). The “common” exam was given to all four sections of 107 in a large lecture hall one evening. Students were given approximately two hours to write a comparison/contrast essay.
Copies of the articles were furnished, as was writing paper, and exam guidelines. Students were not permitted to use notes or dictionaries; extra paper was offered to those who wanted to draft outlines or sketch ideas before writing.

All but two of my students repeated verbatim the introduction from their essay and used it as the introduction for their exam. Their thesis statements were also formulaic, with only the necessary changes to fit the new articles. In just the same way that this transfer had proven problematic for the first essay, several students once again found themselves with thesis statements they were not prepared to support. The new pairing of the articles, even though they were both on cloning, did not share the same similarities and differences that the old pairing had. The lesson of the models was apparently still a work in progress.

Following the mid-term exam, students had one more essay assignment to complete for the course, a “synthesis/response.” It involved a synthesized summary of two new articles (Levenson 2002; Reinert, 2002) and a personal response, rather like a “review.” This assignment presented yet another occasion to break down an exhibit. The curricular format is similar: a model with supporting exhibits is presented and discussed, identifying its conventional features. Then, an essay is assigned. This assignment was a next opportunity to observe how the students made sense of their curriculum.

Many students imitated their first essay’s thesis statement for this new assignment only to learn that it was inappropriate for a personal response essay, which was subjective rather than objective. Yet their recycling efforts tell us something about how they were
(still) reading the thesis statement as a piece of formal structure. It was for them still an invariant, inter-changeable part. Thus they embarked on the journey toward understanding that different tasks call for different thesis statements, all of which do the same “kind” of work. The task and question for them is: what kind of work is it?

Models then provide the objects a student must learn to recognize. They also provide the framework within which to practice objects that can only be learned through practice. One learns to write by writing, and while the model gives the impression of giving students something to write, this is a false provision; it gives them the wrong thing to write. Meanwhile, conscientious teachers are waiting for the dissatisfaction that will come when students recognize the insufficiencies of the model. With this dissatisfaction comes the understanding we are all seeking.

Inexperienced teachers may fail to recognize that cultural objects cannot be definitively modeled. Some impose a rigid structure on student writing without taking into consideration the innate, unavoidable—and therefore useful—insufficiencies of models. I believe my task is to help students work through these insufficiencies as a natural course of practice, recognition building, recognition refining, and finally, success. These landmarks, however, take a long time. In tutorials, each insufficiency that is resolved invariably will result in yet another model, which will once again prove insufficient for the next writing task. The ten-week period of the class is far too short to see students very far on this journey.
Propriety: Judgments of Form

Propriety is a term that links conformity and appropriateness. While members of the academic community may not be able to specify the ways in which their practices appropriately conform, they recognize what fits (Fox, 1991). While the margins are flexible and ever flexing, there are implicit conformities, ways that members are permitted to speak, that are characteristic of academic writing. These are the regularities that yield a recognizable type; for example, truth claims are generally couched in concessive contrast and attached to previous scholarship, which is acknowledged in very specific ways, and with a fair and reasonable tone as a sign of gravity.

Certainly such propriety has its own iterations within disciplines, but there still remains a recognizable quality, the Wittgensteinian notion of “family resemblance.” Novices are charged with discovering how one is permitted to speak, and what one may speak of, in the academy. For example, they must figure out what constitutes a truth claim, and what is considered fair and reasonable. Learning the social practices of academic propriety requires additional interpretive efforts for all newcomers to the university because they usually do not share the larger professional histories that ground these practices.

For this discussion, I would like to backtrack to the beginning of the quarter when students were introduced to their first essay assignment—the comparison/contrast essay. The lesson began with a close reading and discussion of the two assigned articles (Macklin 2002; Annas 2002). When I asked my students to name some of the
similarities and differences between the two articles, a peculiar kind of problem surfaced. They were surprisingly un-forthcoming with information. I am reminded here of Bartholomae and Petrosky’s (1996) discussion of the difference between reading and doing things with reading. They point out that many of the difficulties that many students have in the process of learning what it means to work on text-based writing are misdiagnosed as reading problems. I think it is possible that even students who read well enough for the readings in the course may be quite unfamiliar with what the task is asking them to do with their reading.

Although their classroom discussions, reading comprehension exercises, personal responses, and WebCT participation indicated to me that they had comprehended the articles, I see now that they most probably had not read them with this particular task in mind. Nor, I would argue, would this have been possible, given the difficulty I had in bringing the task to mind. The task was specific to certain kinds of similarities and difference and the ways of speaking that are attached to them. In this sense the phrase “similarities and differences” refers not to a list of some kind but to a practice, an activity that has no rules, only recognizable regularities. For novices, the parameters must be discovered by crossing a minefield of appropriate and inappropriate objects. In this case, it was a minefield of cultural binaries.
**Similarity and Difference**

When first asked about the similarities and difference between the two articles, students began with a collection of uncontestable assumptions: “This one is shorter,” “They are both written in 2002.” These may have been the “obvious” answers to them in advance of knowing what precise discriminations I was seeking, answers as obvious as the sense of the question. By now students had probably detected my habit of writing relevant answers on the chalkboard. I nodded in mild agreement to these responses, but none of them made it onto the chalkboard because, for the purpose of the essay, they were the wrong kind of differences or similarities. More focused questions, “How is Macklin’s opinion on cloning different from Annas’ opinion?” were met with silence. I began my search for something to write on the board, where earlier I had written and underlined “Similarities” and “Differences,” in preparation for the two columns of information that I assumed would be forthcoming.

This is a delicate matter. I did not want to drive their answers; I wanted them to find their own topics to discuss. I did not ant to imply that there were absolute “right answers.” Sometimes students in the past have identified and written about similarities and differences that I do not support, but I like to let them choose their own topics, even if some of them might not be ideal. Yet, at the same time, in the back of my head is the approaching mid-term exam, which will be graded by a panel of teachers. I know how these exams are graded and this certainly curtails the amount of freedom I
permit students to have. I am not altogether unaware that I am teaching to the test here. I feel obliged to equip them with successful topics for the exam, particularly since I feel that the exam is not a fair assessment of their accomplishments.

My quest for chalkboard worthy bits of information perhaps drove my dialogue with this student:

1. K: (To class) Macklin…Annas….what do you notice is different…or, or similar? (Pause) Anything.
   
   (Pause)

2. S: Uhm. She is not like him.

3. K: Uh huh….

4. S: (Silence)

5. K: So, they are different…

6. S: (Silence)

7. K: Ok. What is his view of cloning?

8. S: He is against.

9. K: OK. Yes, he is strongly against cloning. And Macklin?

10. S: She…uhm. She is not strong.

11. K: Good point, she does not state her opinion strongly. What is her opinion?

12. S: (silence)

13. K: Is she for or against cloning?

14. S: She says don’t just say no.
15. K: Right. So, we can say her opinion is…


I began the dialogue with a professional lie. I invited them to guess, to give me “Anything,” yet they had already offered “anything” only to find it didn’t count. This may explain their reticence; clearly just anything won’t make it onto the board. At the time, I believed my task was to pull answers out of the students, answers I was certain they possessed. In retrospect, however, I consider that for her it may not have been a matter of having an answer as much as not knowing how to speak of it. In line 3, I encourage her to continue, but she does not. In Line 5, I supply the preferred wording and invite her to complete my sentence, but she does not. She knows that one author is against cloning and the other is not, (Lines 2 and 14), but she seems uncertain about how to reply to my prompt, presumably because she can see how they call for a certain way of speaking. For example, in Line 9, I re-phrase her answer from Line 8; it’s not simply that he is against cloning, but how he is—“strongly.” When I emphasize the word “strongly,” she seems to grasp this as an important part of the answer and supplies it in her response in Line 10: “She is not strong.” What happened next, in Line 11, is impossible to recall. Perhaps my own use of the word “strong” triggered “style,” a category I did want them to consider, so that is the direction I pursued. Now I’m speaking not simply of opinion or strength of opinion, but strength of expression of opinion, in the negative. If she thought there might be a certain way of speaking called for here—about similarities and differences—I’ve now confirmed it. As if to turn and run, she appears to retreat to her same response (Line 16) that began the dialogue (Line 2).
In order to break down the task of finding similarities and differences, I organized students into groups and assigned each group a basis for comparison, or, what the textbook calls criterion points: topic, thesis, author’s purpose, intended audience, and style. (Students were invited to extend this list, and later several did.) After a very short time, the room became noisy with agitation, and I was summoned simultaneously by each group. Some groups did not know what their criterion point meant, as in the case of the group assigned to compare the authors’ theses. After conferring with them about thesis statements, they set about finding the thesis of each article. They approached it as a locational task, examining the introductory paragraphs carefully. In Annas’ article, the thesis statement was located in the first sentence of the introduction. Macklin’s article, however, was organized with the introduction dedicated to the opposition. Her thesis was in her conclusion. They reported to me that they could not locate it. (Actually this was good news. It shows that they did not assume that whatever was in the first paragraph was the main idea, a lesson learned by some in the summary assignment.) When I pointed out the thesis in the last paragraph of Macklin’s article, the group looked incredulous, as if I were playing a cruel trick, as if I were making up the rules as I went along. It occurs to me in the writing of this how often they must think this.

Other groups understood their assigned criterion point but were puzzled about obtaining information about it from the texts. The group assigned “style,” noted that one article used more question marks. When I asked them about the significance of this, they were silent. I gave them the term “rhetorical question” and explained it as a common
style device for authors who wanted to appear to be having a conversation with the reader. They listened carefully to my account, but no one took written notes. When the group submitted their findings in writing, they kept their initial finding -- that one article used question marks—with no elaboration.

In the group assigned “intended audience,” one mildly exasperated student exclaimed, “How can we know this?” The question has its point. When they learned that this information involved making judgments about evidence, one group was skeptical. The article by Annas (2002), for example, was excerpted from his article in the American Bar Association Journal. In this case, one had only to look at the type of publication to discover an audience—but what to make of the information was not culturally accessible to them. When I asked them what sort of people they thought would read this journal, they laughed. One student shrugged and said, “Anyone.” Not surprisingly, they did not associate journal with an academic milieu, nor did they know what Bar meant. The second article was published in U.S. News & World Report, and when I asked them how this publication differed from the law journal, one student said these sources were in fact similar rather than different in that “both are very difficult to read, “ reminding me yet again that every assessment has a position attached. In an ensuing discussion, students spoke of their difficulty reading English language newspapers and newsmagazines like Time and Newsweek. Given that as L2 learners they considered both sources very difficult, it was unlikely that they could recognize that one source was professional and the other was for a more general public. This also
constrained what they were able to ascertain about the differences in style in the articles, and thus the unintended good sense of the first reply, “How can we know this?” The operative logic of the reply is a socio-logic.

The students seemed to grasp from our discussion that determining intended audience or author’s purpose entailed guessing; their next task was to find the limits of guesswork. One student wrote:

Both articles have the same age audience who are reading their article.

And another wrote:

Both articles are published in 2002, which is surely for today’s reader, not for readers 20 years ago.

Others simply supplied similar kinds of descriptions and left the reader to make something of it. Later, in an essay, one student offered the following as a complete body paragraph:

The intended audience is different. Macklin’s article appears in *U.S. News & World Report*, and Annas’ article appears in *American Bar Association Journal.*

By the end of the hour I had circulated through each group to help decipher the criterion points and give examples of similarities and differences. It was exhausting work, in no small part because in no useful sense are any rules attached. I could only offer them a kaleidoscope of examples.
**Fact and Opinion**

Once equipped with lists of the kinds of similarities and differences that the phrase intends, and which would serve as the content of their essay, we turned to the crafting of a thesis statement.

In the basic writing textbooks, virtually all essay instruction begins with the thesis statement, and it is hard to imagine an alternative. Following several pages on narrowing a topic for an essay and clarifying the purpose for writing, neither of which students in this class would have much liberty choosing, the textbook launched into a lengthy discussion of thesis statements. This was in effect where one was expected to begin the actual writing.

Over the years the general consensus of my students is that thesis statements are the most difficult part of writing an essay. This could be because students must have some understanding of what an essay is in order to craft this hook on which it hangs. The content of the essay hangs on the promises made in the thesis statement, but without having written an essay, it is difficult to see its work in the exhibit essay. Nevertheless, we begin with formal instructions about writing one.

The textbook begins the lesson on generic thesis statements with a list of thesis statement “rules:” (1) It is a complete sentence expressing a thought and usually does not begin with an interrogative word; (2) It limits the writer’s idea to a manageable size; (3) It should not give the writer’s intention directly, and (4) It often indicates the writer’s
opinion or purpose rather than stating a fact, and thus it is frequently an idea that can be disagreed with. (O’Donell and Paiva, 1993, p. 35). I presented these rules and gave examples of each.

The following day, I began class by asking students to recall these rules. They recited all of them back to me with no apparent difficulty, and I wrote them on the chalkboard. Next, we turned to an exercise in which students were to analyze some thesis statements and assess their adequacy according to the list of rules. They worked in groups. I thought this would be a quick exercise given the speed with which they’d recited the rules. Recognizing the rules—or breeches of them—in actual sentences, however, proved quite difficult. For example, one group correctly declared the following as an unfit thesis statement because it stated an “indisputable fact:”

Unemployment rose 5% last year.

But when I asked them to change the sentence to make it appropriate, they offered:

The unemployment percentage has increased the previous year.

Perhaps they understood that the number itself caused the fact problem. It would seem that reorganizing a wrong answer is different from producing a “right” one. Another group set aside the following statement as a candidate thesis statement on grounds that it is an indisputable fact:

Using bicycles instead of cars in cities would help solve the problem of pollution and overcrowded highways.
They insisted that the statement was an indisputable fact because no one would dispute it. 

One student exclaimed, “How could this not be true?” This discussion led to a closer examination of the distinction between fact and opinion. This statement was also labeled as fact:

The Santa Fe Opera, which attracts talented young singers and the best musicians, deserves its excellent reputation.

One student explained that if it has the best musicians and talented singers, then it certainly deserves its reputation. “Who would disagree?” the student asked. In the background another student mumbles to him, “Somebody stupid!” and they both laugh. I was surprised by these answers. It had never occurred to me to what extent fact and opinion are culturally bound here to the academy’s very specific and non-vernacular understanding of these terms.

**Subjective and Objective**

Students had been told that in their essay assignment they should be “objective.” In other words, they were to assume a “reporter’s stance” as opposed to a subjective “reviewer’s” stance. “Reporters” and “reviewer” are hardly clarifying; none of them has ever been either. Objective and subjective presented yet another baffling binary, not to mention a paradox. They had just read the “rule” that a thesis statement reflected the author’s opinion or purpose, and now they were being asked to eliminate opinion. Furthermore, they—and as it turned out, I—had only a vague notion of what was meant by objective and subjective, despite the examples I gave. And what was meant by the author’s purpose here was confusing because there were two authors: the
student writer as author of the essay and the author of the texts she or he is writing about

Furthermore, when discussing the similarities and differences between the two articles, the word “purpose” had come up in a different context. We had studied Macklin’s purpose for writing her article (to discourage hasty legal action against cloning) and Annas’ purpose for writing his (to convince people that cloning is morally wrong). So “author’s purpose” had already been introduced as a criterion point. There was confusion about all these purposes going every which way. The answer was something like, “The purpose of this author (student writer) is to explain the purpose of that author (article writer).” To clear up the subjective/objective thesis crisis, I instructed students not to give their own opinion but to state their purpose as pointing out similarities and differences in the two articles:

K: You know that a thesis statement should give opinion or purpose, Ok? Now, the instructions just said “no opinion,” so what do you do? Well, in this paper your thesis is gonna give your purpose instead of your opinion… Your purpose in writing this paper is to show your reader what some of the similarities and differences are…

These words, spoken with the confidence that I was clarifying a problematic rule, only created an alternative binary of opinion/purpose. My practical ad hoc solution was designed to finesse a problematic rule, but I had left intact the unstable binaries that rendered it problematic. Thus, there is no hope of definitional solutions, only local maneuvers. This reminds me that not only students must confront cultural binaries. Teachers as well are constantly charged with finding a way to instruct despite them. We have to figure out how to reach across them to students.
My local fix came back in an unexpected way. One student offered as her thesis statement:

I found a number of differences and similarities from these two articles.

She rejected the criterion points that had been discussed in class and modeled in the exhibit (e.g., topic, opinion, style, intended audience). Instead she chose to follow my instructions very precisely: “You purpose in writing this paper is to show your reader what some of the similarities and differences are.” While I was using “similarities and differences” as a rubric, she heard them as the things themselves. She stated her purpose quite clearly and as I had inadvertently instructed.

Discussion

Models such as those discussed in this chapter, formal accounts of things like introduction, thesis statements, topic sentences, body paragraphs, conclusions—are organized in rule-like fashion. The exhibit essays are virtual demonstrations of the modeled coherence, and the students’ actual assignments (e.g., write a comparison/contrast essay) are themselves both exhibits on behalf of their curriculum of modeled representation and practices. Their task is to reproduce the modeled structure. The assignments are populated with what to students are arcane binaries—similarities,
differences, fact, opinion, subjective, objective, reporters’ stance, personal response.

Students are charged with figuring out what these terms mean here for the assignment in question. Both the models and the arcane terms are portrayed in the exhibit as stable, formal, evident objects (i.e., a thesis statement will always look like this; objective statements will always look like this). Both offer formal, generic descriptions of social practices that are far from generic and formally structured. On the contrary, academic writing practices are tied to distinctive occasions. Yet the models and exhibits and terms associated with these social practices convey the practices, not just as linear and structured, but vividly so. This promise of structured order is of course a false promise.

Students who carefully follow the model’s lessons sooner or later discover that they have been misled; the models offer false comforts. In Garfinkel and Sacks (1970) phrase, they make specifically false provisions of certain aspects of the practice they claim to represent.

These false provisions have something to do with the familiar critique of models as a curricular design. The criticisms are longstanding. On the other hand, models have a relentlessly time-honored presence in formal instruction, so it is likely that they are doing some work. Part of my interest is to see what this work is. In light of the materials presented in this chapter, I would like to reiterate that models (mock-ups, sample essays, and exhibits) achieve what a pedagogy for novices must achieve: it must be vivid, and they are. Models and their exhibits are ways of doing vivid representation—evident,
orderly, even confident—and they achieve this by providing a parodic version of the social practices and conventions they represent. Their vividness and instructional effectiveness so far as it goes owe to this false provision. Without them, models would be the real thing, and the real thing in the case of academic writing would be, say, a published article in a professional journal, including the professional practices of writing and reading it, and thus everything that a novice can’t know. In such a case, the novice would be confronted with the full range of instabilities of such instructional objects as thesis statement, topic sentence, and so forth.

So, models do their work, owing to the deliberately “false provisions” Garfinkel & Sacks, 1970). By Garfinkel and Sacks’ account, every model or “mock-up” owes its instructional effectiveness to the ways in which it faithfully represents some features of the modeled affairs, and makes false provisions for others. A plastic model engine is emblematic; it allows one to see the parts move and yet is specifically not an engine. Models and exhibits offer the novice a field of stable objects on the (false) promise that the objects of instruction can be picked up and handled as invariant, neutral, interchangeable, even rule-governed objects. The promise (and in some measure they do it) is a field of orderly objects and relations that the student can master, and the students in turn, with or without my encouragement, set out to master it. In my course, the models offer a first field that students can navigate. As it turns out, however, as they do take them up in their assignments, they discover that the objects are far more liminal than the model has implied.
Cultural binaries are implicated in this discovery. They are the central expressions of the false provision of the model and present themselves when the students set out to produce the modeled coherence in their own writing. The binaries, e.g., similarities, differences, fact, opinion, subjective, objective, are the first to crumble when they are picked up and handled as stable objects. Yet it is this false promise that enables students to pick them up in the first place. It affords them a vision of their task that, on the face of it, they can do.

Models, then, leave students in a bind. They beckon students to follow their lead, but they lead students down the wrong path. Students can’t know this until they receive the teacher’s comments. Then they discover that the exhibit’s thesis statement was inappropriate for their essay, or that the exhibit’s introduction is not interesting enough for their essay, or that interspersed among the things that they cannot transfer to their own essay are a dozen or so things that they must transfer, like punctuation for quotes, like body paragraph attachment to the thesis statement. Resolving the binaries and the false provisions entails learning to make the kind of judgments that are germane to an academic text. The tutorial between student and teacher is the site of reckoning. Here students receive the bad news and here they learn how to fix it. The following chapter will discuss how tutorials are implicated in the learning of judgments.
CHAPTER 6

TEACHING AND LEARNING JUDGMENTS

My premise from the outset has been that academic writing conventions are comprised of social arrangements, agreements, and cultural objects shared by a community of practitioners. From this it follows that this practice called academic writing is filled with cultural reckonings, judgments of propriety, and figure-ground relations. The occasions for these reckonings are in turn tied to settings, tasks, and purposes that are neither fixed nor stable yet regular and recognizable. By these understandings, we might then expect that teaching these social practices to novices through a wholly formal curriculum is more than the most scrupulous lesson plan can do.

For newcomers, who do not share in the larger cultural histories that ground the objects and arrangements of the community of practice they hope to join, learning them requires exposure and practice, both of which involve endless interpretive tasks. The previous chapters discussed the role of instructions and models in providing a first reckoning of academic writing while highlighting the unavoidable insufficiencies of models and definitions. It is not that they are pointless but rather that their purposefulness may be different than what we tend to imagine. This chapter will focus on what happens next as students confront the shortcomings of the formal curriculum and
learn to make judgments that are relevant to academic writing. More specifically, I will examine the difference between learning academic conventions through a formal curriculum and learning them through experience and participation. The divide is quite clear in my class, and I presume it can be found in any comparable class. I believe we will find it wherever a formal pedagogy intends to teach a cultural curriculum. I will discuss the use and usefulness of formal curricula as well as how students learn conventions that cannot be accounted for by formal models. These are learned and practiced in a very different way.

As discussed in the previous chapter, for their first essay most students treated the model they were presented as a prescription for their own writing. While this general model for writing an essay guaranteed that students were able to produce something to hand in for the assignment, following it was no easy task, and its pedagogical effectiveness was achieved through certain “false provisions” (Garfinkel & Sacks, 1970). The objects of instruction in the particulars of my class – thesis statement, topic sentence, support, and so forth—were portrayed in the model essay as stable and rule-governed. This was the false provision that promised and premised the model’s instructional effectiveness –its follow-ability— and the students took the promise seriously. I take it that similar kinds of instructional models were already familiar to them, along with the expectation that models and exhibits as-stable-objects offer formal procedures and prescription for whatever is being modeled.
By Lave’s (1990) account, whenever a pedagogy for novices is devoted to specifying procedures rather than providing opportunities for practice, the “specification of practice...is bound to result in the teaching of a misanalysis of practice” (p. 324), and indeed it did. Formal curricula tend to misrepresent social practices and how they are achieved and thus result in hybrid practices that may be recognizable or sensible only in the classroom in which they are taught. Lave calls these “syncretic” (p. 324) practices and says they “will not in fact reproduce ‘good’ practice” (p. 324).

While many of my students’ first essays were very essay-like in appearance – one could hear them trying to speak that way—they did not in fact represent good practice. Reading models and exhibits for a “right answer” routinely resulted in oddly shaped assemblages, much like a human form with arms, ears, and waists in odd places. This was not simply because the students were novices to the task and from non-Western academic practices. It was also that they had taken the models and exhibits quite seriously, including their false provisions. The models promised procedures, and students worked hard to find and apply them, reproducing, for example, the grammatical structure of textbook examples and their vocabulary and paragraph positions, or borrowing the exhibit essay’s thesis statement. The resulting essays were syncretic in these ways, yet the students certainly worked hard to produce them.

25 The criticisms of student writing which are routinely made to my department by the English department offer support for Lave’s analysis. Many of our students matriculate out of our program without recovering from the prescriptions of the writing models. Their work in subsequent English courses is frequently marked down for being too formulaic or lacking depth (A. Hirvela, personal communication, July 2, 2004).
For those who already know how to write conventional essays, there are something like “procedures,” or at least we can speak of our writing that way. What the model cannot disclose, much less teach, however, is that whatever procedures the crafting of a well-shaped essay may display, they are procedures of a peculiar kind. Rather than being reliably stable, iterable, or rule-governed, the work of writing an essay and constructing and organizing its familiar objects entails deeply cultural judgments, and judgments are always bound to context. These judgments-in-context organize the task, and the models that we find in our composition textbooks are obliged to be silent about the contexts that organize them, namely, the context and judgments of writing a textbook exhibit. This is another feature of their “false provision.” Thus the models can say nothing of the judgments-in-context that produced the skills and recognitions that we must nevertheless teach. If we are to teach the exercise of judgment-in-context, and if students are to learn it, an alternative pedagogy is required, and for this course, that pedagogy is found in the student-teacher tutorial.

An Alternative Pedagogy

In order to begin to develop the kind of judgments and recognition of objects in their various forms that competent writers produce, students need contact and focused time with a competent practitioner engaged in doing it. In this classroom, I am the experienced practitioner who represents the “community of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29) they are attempting to join. Although we tend to think of tutorials as ancillary or supplemental to the curriculum of the daily class meetings, I will argue that it
is in tutorials that the students gain a different kind of access to their formal curriculum of models, exemplars, and tasks, which in turn leads to the kind of understanding necessary for making appropriate writing judgments. In the process, it may be that discovering the insufficiencies of the formal curriculum is quite central to the pedagogy of the course.

For each graded writing task in the course, students typically write a first draft of the assignment and turn it in for my comments. Once they have had a chance to review the comments, they schedule a 20-minute tutorial with me to discuss their draft and possible revisions of it. Students are required to have 4 tutorials per quarter, but those who are experiencing difficulty might have more.

These sessions stand in sharp contrast to the formal pedagogy of the classroom and textbooks. Though we can reasonably think of the students as “legitimate peripheral participants” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29) in every venue of the course, the tutorial is the site where they become in some sense active participants in the academic community, as “both member of a community and agent of activity” (p. 122). Lave’s corpus of studies has strong attachments to the metaphor of apprenticeship, and the tutorial is the closest we get to an apprenticeship pedagogy in our course structure, the closest thing we have to “learning in practice” (Lave, 1990, p. 310).

26 Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of legitimate peripheral participation describes settings wherein novices are in the company of competent practitioners who are doing what they (the novices) are attempting to learn how to do. By their account, learning in the ordinary world traditionally involves watching first from the periphery then gradually becoming a participant through the incremental development of skills and competence.

27 The peer contexts of practice, when students write and exchange writings among themselves, while useful, seldom can provide the access to competent practice that the phrase "community of practice" implies. At least as Lave develops it, LPP presumes competent practitioners on the scene, and the students find this most directly in tutorials.
A “Way In”

In Lave’s (1990) ethnographic study of Monrovian tailoring apprentices, she observed that the practical curriculum involved learning through stages, subdivided into phases she calls “way in” and “practice.” Progression from one stage or phase to another was based on active, practical forms of participation. The “way in” phase involved “attempts to construct a first approximation of the garment” (p. 313) by undertaking various parts of the process, for example by hemming or attaching buttons. This brings to mind Bartholomae’s (1985) description of the process of approximation, the “periods of ‘crude mimicry,’” (p. 162) by which novice writers learn the “commonplaces, set phrases, rituals and gestures, habits of mind, tricks of persuasion, obligatory conclusions and necessary connections that determine ‘what might be said’ [in the] academic community” (p. 146). It would appear then, as Lave and Bartholomae suggest, that every novice has to find a “way in” to the practices or competencies he or she hopes to learn, and such a way appears to involve degrees of approximation.

For Lave’s (1990) tailoring apprentices, the “way in” involved performing tasks that were structured to minimize failure and control for costly errors. Once these initial approximations turn into skilled performance, the apprentice then moved into the “practice” phase (e.g., making actual garment parts) and remained there until a high level of skill and speed was achieved. According to Lave, the curriculum of tailoring is then a curriculum of “landmarks” rather than prescriptions, and apprentices spend a lot of time
“doing what they are learning and vice versa” (p. 314). She argues that learning how to tailor is very much a matter of learning how to see, and such seeing is developed through active participation in doing what one is learning how to do.

Without overcharging the metaphor, learning the cultural conventions of academic writing may have some useful continuities with older apprenticeship forms. The students’ “way in” seems to begin with approximating (copying verbatim or imitating) formal models. If they are successful in their studies, the textbook models will be displaced by more knowing or competent understandings, but we have to begin somewhere, and perhaps this is the central value and place of our curriculum of formal models and exemplars, complete with their “false provisions” (Garfinkel & Sacks, 1970); they afford a way into an unfamiliar practice. Once students produce their first approximation of an essay, however, they are ready to progress from the formal curriculum to a sort of “learning curriculum.”

This is the tutorial, and it begins by displacing the position of the formal curriculum as the central content of the course with a new curricular field – the students’ own work.

A New Curricular Field

The coursepacket and textbook for the course offer a number of essay exemplars (what I call “exhibit essays”) that model the writing conventions that are targeted in the curriculum, such as thesis statements, topic sentences, support for a point, documenting

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28 Lave (1990) characterizes learning in practice as a learning curriculum. She contrasts it to what she calls the teaching curriculum, which stands on behalf of modern, professional education, where knowledge is formally represented and separated from its use in everyday life. The teaching curriculum is the formal curriculum of the course.
citations, and so forth. The coursepacket’s exhibit essay, which most closely corresponds
to their first assignment (a comparison/contrast essay, approximately 500 words in
length, of two articles on the same topic), was clearly the model of choice for students
who chose to follow an exemplar, and most of them did.

Yet despite the availability of models and exemplars, and it would be hard to find
a textbook on writing without them, an exhibit essay is effective only in certain ways (as
discussed in Chapter 5), and quite insufficient in others. As the product of various
teaching, writing, and publication practices and conventions, it is put in place by a host of
conventional writing judgments that are not themselves part of the demonstration. For
example, a good exhibit is a vivid one, in which the various parts and relations can be
clearly seen by novices. The judgments and conventions that produce vivid exhibits and
their purpose can be seen and taken for granted by the already competent but are usually
invisible to the cultural stranger. While an essay can display the results of judgments at
every turn, if one has eyes to see them, it neither speaks of nor points to them, and thus
cannot teach them.

Furthermore, because context is so deeply implicated in the judgments of every
essay, and despite its exemplary status, the exhibit is really only a case, a particular way
of proceeding under particular contingencies. Cultural strangers to academic writing
practices, however, cannot be expected to recognize this aspect, and are indeed urged by
the very foundation of the curriculum to ignore it. For them, the exhibit is offered and
read as a template. This is perhaps the central insufficiency of an exhibit essay, and it
only became revealed when my students attempted to apply the exhibit essay to their own
writing. Only then was it seen that judgments, rather than stable patterns or recipes, are implicated in every piece of writing. Tutorials are usually the site where this notion surfaces, when the student’s own writing becomes the relevant case for a curriculum in judgments for which the exhibit could only be silent. It is the point of contact between their writing and the conventions of the community of competent practitioners as active, practical practice.

In tutorial students learn that what they’ve produced is only an approximation of an essay. Many of them also learn that the formal models are also approximations. As the instructor, I can usually see in the structure of their drafts how they have labored to follow their formal curriculum of instructions and exemplars. The drafts provide us with a basis for discussion, a context within which to examine how writing judgments have been recognized, organized, and produced, and where they have not. As I will show in the forthcoming examples, students have made assessments and judgments in crafting their assignments based on an array of considerations all of which are thoughtful, yet few of which may be recognizable as the actual practices of the writing community. Indeed, in most cases, students are making judgments about their pedagogy; the drafts they bring to tutorial display their readings of the model. Their practical task has been to write in such a way that I can see in the draft that and how they have followed their instructions and acquitted the task. This tends to be the locus of their judgments, and as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, quaint difficulties often follow.
In tutorial I often begin by identifying “obvious” structural problems and crafting immediate remedies, for example, an appropriate thesis, a newly structured sentence, a different point of comparison or contrast, and so forth. My orientation, like theirs, is practical—trying to improve this assignment before its final submission. Since all problems and remedies involve making judgments, and since judgments are context-bound and thus specific to cases, the remedies must be worked through that way, too, with an eye to practical tasks and contexts. The implicit pedagogy here is that students will learn judgments through hearing mine. My job in tutorial is to show them over and over what competent judgments look like and where they are called for. This is a delicate matter. Some consider it inappropriate, if not “a carryover from the current-traditional period” (Johns, 1995, p. 285), to displace a student’s voice, or impose upon his or her writing an alleged “right answer.” I frequently struggle with this tension in tutorials. Alongside my respect for my students and their work, there are indeed appropriate and inappropriate judgments, and as a native guide my responsibility is to ensure my students success in learning to see and produce them. Their academic future will substantially turn on judgments of how well they do so. This position is explored more thoroughly in Reid (1994), in terms of what she calls “the myths of appropriation.”

Ideally, in working through the practical contexts of their drafts in tutorials, students begin to see that each writing task will present its own cases for judgments. I assume that through exposure to a collection of such cases, the elusive boundaries of the

29 Elbow (1994, 1998, 1999), Silva (1999), Raimes and Zamel (1997), Spack (1988), Zamel (2000) are just of few of those who have spoken on behalf of student ownership of ideas, voice, and authority. These moral topics are beyond the range of my more modest interest in describing how this pedagogy for novices works, however it works. In that sense, my aims are naturalistic rather than normative.
conventions of academic writing will begin to take shape for them. One quarter, however, is hardly enough time to witness anything but the first broad outlines of this exposure. The following materials show how students both reckon with the insufficiencies of the models and gain exposure to the kind of judgments that are used by the community of competent practitioners.

The assignment for the first essay asked students to compare and contrast articles by George Annas (2002) and Ruth Macklin (2002) on human cloning. These authors had opposing views on cloning, and students were asked to analyze and explain in what ways the two texts are similar and/or different in terms of two or three of the following criteria: content/topic, the author’s purposes, main idea, intended readers, organizational pattern, or author’s style. The assignment followed approximately two weeks of class time devoted to discussing the articles, the elements of an essay, and the above criterion points. In advance of writing their first essay, students had discussed and developed the various criteria in group projects, had seen examples of organizational patterns for comparison/contrast essays and sketched out their own, and had developed possible thesis statements.

In fact, if the members of my department could offer a criticism of the university's English department, it would concern their unrealistic expectations that we can see students through to the completion of such a lengthy journey.
**Judgments of Degree**

The thesis statement of the exhibit essay shared a balance between generalization and specification:

[Both authors] express their opinion about college education, particularly the liberal arts. However, they have different views about it and different styles in presenting them.

From this, we know that the topic will be liberal arts college education, we know that the authors will have different views about it, and we know their styles will be different. We do not know what the authors’ experiences with college were, why they were for or against it, nor how their styles differ; these are matters for subsequent development in the body paragraphs. While the exercise of judgment and restraint in the use of detail is available to the competent reader of essays, this is not a judgment that a novice can easily detect.

On this first essay assignment, one student offered a thesis statement that was too detailed. Rather than telling us in general that her two authors had a similar topic but different opinions, she detailed their differences in her thesis statement:

Based on the fear of something that might happen in the future, [the authors] both talk about legalizing and outlawing cloning with ethical, moral, scientific, and legal limits, but Macklin agrees to clone because she believes that cloning actually wasn’t such a bad idea, and people should think about it, while Annas does not agree to do that because people should have human dignity.

I am struck by how much her thesis statement looks like a main idea for a summary as we discussed it earlier in the course. This assignment followed the summary writing unit, so perhaps she felt obliged to represent the whole article in her thesis statement, perceiving that a thesis statement is to an essay what a main idea is to a summary. There are
definitely family resemblances. Student had been urged to tap an author’s thesis statement of an article as a resource for determining the main idea. Here, the student is asked to generate her own thesis statement about the main ideas of the articles she read. What was more evident at the time was that after her thesis statement, she simply repeated the same information – no more, no less – in her body paragraphs. Two possible explanations occurred to me. First, having nothing more to say about the topics, she was obliged to repeat the information in order to comply with the body paragraph requirement of the formal model. The result was a set of body paragraphs that did not elaborate on the thesis, and thus did not offer much more to the reader than the writer’s grasp of a formal requirement. The second possibility was that she was displaying her reading of the exhibit essay. Body paragraphs do indeed repeat a certain amount of information from the thesis statement. The measure, however, is a matter of degree, and she may have only detected the repetition, not the elaboration, of the thesis points in the body paragraphs.

In a similar case of judgment, one student wrote a thesis statement that promised only to discuss “similarities and differences:”

In the articles of Macklin (2002) and Annas (2002), there are some similarities and differences.

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31 Her thesis statement was not inaccurate. It was not wholly outside of convention. One can imagine cases in which the thesis statements of experienced writers do make vague promises (e.g., "two reasons;" "several examples;" "five consequences") and wait until body paragraphs to specify these. Furthermore, I can imagine that there are teachers who would not quibble with this student’s thesis statement. But I want to instill in my student a thesis statement that is not a gamble, that would stand to be acceptable to as many readers as possible. The student’s thesis statement did not assure me that she understood the function of the convention.
The thesis statement of the exhibit essay, rather than simply stating that the two articles had similarities and differences, had specified the criteria that formed the basis for these (topic, content, and style):

[Both authors] express their opinion about college education, particularly the liberal arts. However, they have different views about it and different styles in presenting them.

I could say she didn’t follow it closely enough, but “enough” is a judgment of degree, too. In tutorial, as we read her body paragraphs together, I listed the focus of each. These were topic, opinion, and style, the same used in the exhibit essay. Next, I suggested that she include these in her thesis statement as a way of preparing the reader for the discussion of these topics in her body paragraphs. To my surprise, she expressed her concern about plagiarism, and how this had organized her minimal thesis statement. Because she was using the same points as the exhibit essay (topic, opinion, style), as a plagiarism-avoidance strategy she had chosen to omit direct reference to them in her own thesis statement. The tutorial then turned to ways of understanding and judging what is plagiarism, what is “public domain,” and writing a sufficiently detailed thesis statement.

These cases illustrate the silence of the exhibit on judgments of degree, and the central place of such judgments to the writing task. Only in discovering that they were standing outside the invisible boundary between appropriate and inappropriate detail in a thesis statement did students learn that such judgments and lines exist. Furthermore, judgments can be incredibly complex.

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32 Plagiarism is no less a cultural curriculum than any other academic writing convention. It is a very large concern in the fields of second language writing and contrastive rhetoric because infringement on intellectual property carries severe consequences in the academy (cf. Block, 2001). It is taught and learned, however, the same way the other conventions are: through exemplars and collections of cases of judgment.
Both students were involved in figuring out what aspects of the exhibit were optional, contextual, or obligatory. One student grappled in addition with what aspects one could “copy” without venturing into inappropriate use of another writer’s text. Furthermore, judgments about the degree of specificity in thesis statements are implicitly linked to an understanding of what kinds and degrees of information are produced in body paragraphs. While these kinds of connections may be taken for granted by insiders, they are not really obvious to novices. These two students began the task by working with what the exhibit essay could say. In tutorial they discovered what it could not say.

The lesson is no less problematic when students are asked to make clear the connection between a claim or characterization and the writing that supports it. This is the relationship that obtains between thesis statements and body paragraphs, and within paragraphs. For example, one student took seriously the class lesson on using quotations or examples as support for a claim:

Macklin has a soft and friendly style. She mentions about “spare parts” (p. 166) in explaining who is going to use human cloning.

There is much in the sentence that would be unavailable to a reader. It is not clear how Macklin’s mention of “spare parts” is evidence of “soft and friendly,” or even what “spare parts” means. The student is not writing to accommodate just any reader but one specific reader: me. She knows that I have read Macklin and understand the spare parts reference because we discussed it in class all week. She trusts that I can make the bridge between “soft and friendly,” and Macklin’s term. She is writing with a specific, local, and practical understanding of audience, grounded in her practical task. We could say
her sense of audience is tied to the local orbit of her participation. She must learn to see a
different audience as terms of her membership in the larger community of practice.
Bartholomae (1985) argues on behalf of the difficulty of this for students who are not yet
part of the academic community. Asking students to imagine that their reader has not
read the article still begs the question of what a reader needs to know. Again, it is
something that must be figured out in the context of the academy. As with the other
cases, we begin with the student’s pedagogical context as a “way in” to a more
conventional understanding of academic audience.

Judgments of Sameness and Difference

The exhibit essay for the first essay assignment was crafted to make certain
certain convenions vivid for novices by providing them in exaggerated forms. This is one of
their “false provisions,” and a central one. While this renders them visible to novices, it
can present problems when they are followed too carefully. How they are followed is a
regular topic for tutorial.

This is the exhibit essay about college education, wherein the thesis statement
presented three comparison and contrast points (topic, opinion, style). Each of these
points was treated separately in a body paragraph. While this simplistic linear
arrangement is meant to highlight the organizational structure of the essay and the thesis-
body connection, it conveyed to some students that criteria are to be treated as self-
contained and unconnected parcels of information. And indeed such an arrangement can
be appropriate and effective. However, propriety depends on context, about which the
exhibit essay says nothing and can say nothing. Students who chose style and intended
audience as points of comparison and contrast soon discovered that the independent box structure wouldn’t work because these two points have a distinctive, mutually elaborating relationship.

We can see the relationship in the following example, when the student discovered (as I discovered) that he was not able to discuss style without implicating intended audience, nor audience without implicating style: (References to style are double underscored, and audience, single underscored)

His paragraph on style read:

One difference between these two articles is style. Annas’ article is very strong with his opinion. Macklin’s article is gentle and polite. She starts to say with basic knowledge about her topic because readers might not know about this sheep cloning. Annas does not need to give background, he starts to support his opinion strongly with legal vocabularies because only lawyers read this article.

His paragraph on intended audience read:

The other difference between the two articles is intended audience Annas’ article consists of a lots of strong opinions and legal vocabularies and no much backgrounds. It seems to be intended to higher educated people such as lawyers. While, Macklin’s article consists of gentle and polite words and a basic knowledge about sheep, Anybody who is general reader and knows a little bit about cloning can understand easily.

The student took seriously the exhibit essay’s illustration of independent, isolated body paragraphs but was then compelled to repeat the same information in each body paragraph. (He provided some novelty by changing the order of presentation of the two authors.) In tutorial, he indicated that he was aware of the redundancy but not its inappropriateness. He was, in his opinion, doing just what the model recommended and demonstrated. In his case, I proposed that he combine style and audience in a single
Just as the exhibit essay could not say that its criterion points happened to be among those that could be treated independently, neither could it say that the selection of points depended on context or that the structured relationship of discussion points and paragraphs might vary. The exhibit essay’s points – topic, opinion and style—had been chosen with articles by Bird (1975) and Sorkin (1997) in mind, and the discussion of their similarities in topic and differences in opinion and style was grounded in judgments about the content of these two articles. For example, the body paragraph on topic described Sorkin and Bird’s common college experiences, as it was available in their articles. The second point, opinion, discussed the different value each author placed on these experiences. So, the content of the articles in the exhibit essay was very much
implicated in selecting the criteria for comparison and contrast and organizing their treatment. The exhibit essay as an exemplar elides the ways in which it too is entirely a case, tied to a context and organized across a series of local judgments.

Taking their lead from the exhibit essay, several students chose to discuss the very same criterion points – topic, opinion and style—in their articles by Macklin (2002) and Annas (2002). As it was with style and audience, however, the content of these articles did not accommodate a separate discussion of topic and opinion because both authors were presenting arguments; the topic was their opinion. Some students identified the topic as “cloning,” but they quickly found that aside from the word they had nothing more to say, so they discussed the authors’ opinions. When they got to their next point, opinion, they found that they had already produced this discussion under topic. (One student offered a one-sentence body paragraph on “topic” because he couldn’t think of anything more to say. I encouraged him to select a different criterion point.) Other students simply repeated the authors’ opinions in the second body paragraph, giving their essay a strange redundancy, yet not without reasons.

**Judgments of Responsibility**

The exhibit essay for the first essay assignment was short and virtually skeletal in its presentation of the essay parts (e.g., thesis, topic sentences, support) and formal structure (introduction, body paragraphs, conclusion). Perhaps because of this, it was the most closely followed. Its introduction consisted of only three sentences, and its three body paragraphs offered rather hurried content and support. However, it vividly illustrated with labels and arrows the connection between the thesis statement and body
paragraphs. The thesis statement of this exhibit essay offers the three points of comparison and contrast between two articles discussed above, and each body paragraph takes up one of them. Yet, this relationship between the theses and paragraphs apparently is not an easy matter to see or say. Despite my instruction that everything promised in a thesis statement must show up in the body paragraphs, and a handout with a graphic display of this connection, students grasped the lesson in various ways.

Some missed the connection altogether and had body paragraphs that discussed topics never mentioned in their thesis statements. For example, one thesis statement proposed to discuss “topic, opinion, and style,” but the body paragraphs discussed “intended audience, organization, and use of support by the authors.” In tutorial discussion, these students seemed surprised when I mentioned the expected connection. It had been stressed in class and in the exhibit essay, yet many students apparently saw it as any three points in a thesis statement and any three points in a body paragraph; the symmetry seemed to them a matter of “how many” points rather than which points. As though the points themselves were fungible or equivalent in their placements, just as long as three were to be found.

One of the students, however, saw the connection in a completely different but nonetheless “responsible” way. In tutorial he indicated that he did not see the thesis-body paragraph correspondence as desirable. He felt that writing this way rendered his essay repetitive. Furthermore, he wanted to convey as much information to his reader as possible, so he took up three points in his thesis statement and three others in the body paragraphs. The responsibility he felt to his reader warranted his judgment.
Several students offered yet another reading of the criterion points themselves. While the exhibit conveys them as a sort of table of contents to prepare a reader for the subsequent body paragraphs, they saw them as information bites, and the more the better. One student offered as a thesis statement:

The authors have similar ideas, topics, background, support, but they have different style, opinion, organization, and audience.

Her essay’s body paragraphs did not include all of these points; reasonably she only discussed the ones about which she had something to say. But she still felt that her reader needed to know that all of these topics were relevant to a fully considered comparison. She seemed to regard each one as a “fact,” and suggested that she would be negligent if she did not report all of them to her reader. In each case, the question was not whether they saw the relevance of the points, but how they saw them relevantly used. For some just how they were used had moral economies attached.

**Judgments of Support**

The idea of “supporting” a claim or point was another recurrent topic of tutorials. Most students knew that support was an element of a body paragraph. It had been the topic of a week’s lessons, with a focus on quoting and paraphrasing. Yet, examples of well-selected quotes, paraphrases, or other means of supporting a claim or characterization, are silent about their connection to context and convention. Presumably, they are supposed to be evidently well formed, appropriate, sufficient, etc. And for knowing practitioners, they are. But for many students, although they could see “support” labeled on the exhibit essay, what the support was doing and how it qualified, as support was not readily evident. Here is a sample graphic from the coursepacket:
Sorkin thinks his liberal arts education at Syracuse University was very valuable to his future. When his drama teacher failed him, he says it was, “the single most significant event” (B9) of his life.

What is being supported here is the claim that Sorkin’s experience was valuable, yet on consideration, it is not easy to say how the quotation works as “support,” nor what is being supported. One would have to understand something of the “evolution of a playwright” to see it that way, and as well understand the intensity of his words.

Most students who made the claim, “The authors have different opinions,” supported the claim only by saying who was “in favor” and who was “against.” For example, one student wrote the following as a complete body paragraph:

There is one difference between the two authors of these articles. The authors have different opinions about cloning. Macklin is in favor of cloning but Annas is against it.

One can have no complaint with the truth of the formulation, which makes pointing out the cultural differences all the more difficult. In a knowing discussion of these opinions, a reader might expect to hear about the intensity or details of each author’s opinion, or perhaps some demonstration that the writer had correctly represented each position. In tutorial, we discussed the idea of finding and using textual support.

33 In this example, the type of support concerns more than pulling something from a text to serve as an example. It has to do with judgments about when an author's own words "speak for themselves."
Finding “support” in this case of this particular criterion point was a matter of locating where the author stated his or her opinion (usually in the thesis statements) and recording it in quotations, for the record. It was a simple and successful way of conveying to students what is meant by support, and how it can be done by looking right on the surface of the text for words that will support one’s claim. In this case, he revised his draft to read:

One of the difference between Macklin and Annas is they have difference opinions on cloning. Macklin is for cloning, she said, “Even if human cloning offers no obvious benefits to humanity, why ban it?”(160). On the other hand Annas is against cloning. He said, “Human cloning should be banned because it would radically alter our very definition” (162).

The fact that the authors for their assignment, Macklin and Annas, held opinions that were cleanly opposite and available in their thesis statements made them vivid and accessible, too; the analytic demands on the student, and me, appeared to be minimal. Students expecting this to be the case with other points of comparison and contrast, however, were led astray. Thesis statements are not always so overt nor opinions so neatly categorical. And finding textual support is not always a matter of grabbing a string of words. One must be in possession of how the words are being used, the cultural backdrop of word choice, the texture of semantics, not just in the English language but also in the relevant discourse community. More importantly, one must understand what requires support and why in the academy. For most students, making judgments about support and how to articulate these judgments requires seeing, in a deeply cultural sense,
things they simply do not see. Understanding the decisions an author might have made in crafting his or her text depends on knowing an array of possible alternatives with which to compare it.

The idea of supporting evidence was trickier in the second essay assignment, a synthesis/response. For this type of essay, students were to synthesize two articles on the topic of obedience by Levenson (2002) and Reinert (2002) and discuss their personal reaction or preference. Finding support for their own reactions and personal opinions did not typically depend on surface features or even particular phrases of the assigned texts but instead required students to position themselves to the textual dialogue. (It goes without saying that to do so, one must have an opinion or response.) Many students were forthcoming about their feelings but did not elaborate on their reasons. One student offered the following topic sentence of a body paragraph in which he explained why he preferred Levenson’s article:

I admire Levenson more than Reinert (2002) because Levenson loves his parents so much.

In this case, the student felt that he had stated his position (he admired Levenson), and supported the reader (Levenson loved his parents). In tutorial we discussed how his supporting statement was really a conclusion and how he had come to it. I discovered that he had good reasons why he believed Levenson loved his parents, but he had not thought of these as support. Like him, several other students assumed that support was

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34 The synthesis/response essay is the other kind of essay we write in the course. The synthesis part concerns weaving together two source summaries and discussing the authors’ contributions to the topic. This is followed by a response section in which students compare their personal reactions to the two texts. Each exercise has a culture of practice attached, roughly having to do with how we speak of others and how we speak of ourselves.
simply a matter of telling why they held their opinions. They saw their task as reporting an outcome rather than sharing and discussing how they came to it. In a way, support for a personal opinion or response becomes a matter of self-disclosure, and these are cultural judgments, too.

Tutorial was the site for introducing a more complex view of support:

K: So, how can you tell he loves his parents? He doesn’t say it, so how do you know?

S: He never complained, and, and, he did not do anything against their way.

K: Great! Great reasons. I think they would go very nicely in this paragraph. Yeah, he’s not angry or rebellious.

S: He was grateful.

K: Ok, what was he grateful for. What makes you think he is grateful?


K: Good! Maybe use that quote...where is that? Oh, here. “Here we act like human beings, not like animals.” So, he appears to be grateful for the manners they taught him. What else?

S: Not bring shame to family.

K: Great.

According to Bartholomae (1985), speaking on behalf of novices, “When the writer says ‘I don’t know,’ he is not saying that he has nothing to say. He is saying that he is not in a position to carry on this discussion” (p. 138). Some of the students who had done quite well with support on their first essay had trouble in the second essay. In some
cases, they had not quite understood what they had been doing when they crafted their support in the first essay. In others, their curriculum in the conventions of academic discourse had turned to questions of personal position, support, and therefore, disclosure. Bartholomae’s formulation is a suggested one: position – what one can say—is unavoidably implicated in their curriculum.

**Judgments of Style**

The most difficult lessons about support arose for those students who attempted to support claims about authors’ style. While authors’ opinions are frequently available on the surface of a text, style is never directly stated, yet to an insider it can be just as vivid. What constitutes style and how one speaks of it in an academic essay are among the most difficult lessons for students at this level.

In class, I had begun the discussion on style by giving my own views. This arose out of a local contingency. Students had been divided into groups to discuss the various criterion points; they were to identify whether Ruth Macklin (2002) and George Annas (2002) were similar or different in terms of author’s opinion, style, intended audience, organization, and so forth, and then present their findings to the rest of the class. The group charged with “style” presented a list of textual surface features, e.g., “One author uses question marks and the other has no marks” and “One is shorter.” I pursued their observation by asking what the use or lack of use of question marks or length might mean for a reader. I did not expect them to have the answers to these questions, rather my goal was to develop a discussion of what style could mean, beginning with surface features. In doing so, I gave examples of how I would discuss certain elements:
K: So what about length? Yeah, his is shorter, but which one was easier to read, huhhh?

[pause]

S: Macklin’s

K: Hers? OK, why?

[pause]

K: Well, we could say he uses difficult language – legal style – remember, he’s writing for lawyers. He doesn’t give examples or tell stories. But she, she’s trying to keep the audience interested. She mentions real stuff—Nazi’s, eugenics, that guy with the genetic defect, he’s real. She mentions science fiction, basketball. She doesn’t use hard vocabulary, she uses very ordinary language, like a conversation. He...he’s more direct, I think. He doesn’t waste time; he gets right to the point with that thesis statement right at the very beginning, sorta like, “OK, here’s what I think.”

In their writing, it became apparent that most of the students had heard me to be speaking casually, or, “personally,” simply giving my feelings, intuitions, or personal impressions with no further attachments. In fact, I was demonstrating a two-beat exercise of presenting a characterization of style and then developing and defending it with resources in the text. I was attempting to show not only what “style terms” might look like but how one might speak of them “for the record.” Given the prominence in academic writing of substantiating claims, “speaking for the record” is a voice that students must learn, a distinctive register of academic discourse that has attachments to authority and knowledge claims and the relationship of the writer to the text of which
Bartholomae’s (1985) study of native speakers in basic English found that “some students will need to learn to crudely mimic the ‘distinctive register’ of academic discourse before they are prepared to actually and legitimately do the work of the discourse, and before they are sophisticated enough with the refinements of tone and gesture to do it with grace or elegance” (p. 162).

Lave and Wenger (1991) locate such learning in co-participation rather than in individuals’ heads: “learning to become a legitimate participant in a community involves learning how to talk (and be silent) in the manner of full participants” (p. 105). They cite examples of how ways of speaking are tied to displays of membership in diverse communities, from Alcoholics Anonymous to Mexican spiritualists. Writing in a certain voice in the academy is one of the major ways to display membership in the community of practitioners.

Bartholomae (1985) believes that students acquire the ways of speaking by crudely mimicking the discourse. In order to mimic, however, one must recognize what one is to imitate. My students did not recognize what I was demonstrating, nor that I was demonstrating. On the other hand, when I offered suggestions to the class on how they could speak of style, I did not consider at the time how unavailable these judgments were to most of them. For me, it was a case of “thinking as usual” (Schultz, 1976), a taken-for-granted way of speaking about a text wherein claims require support. Without access to the community of practice – the one they were there to learn—their judgmental basis

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35 In the literature, voice is often discussed as either individualistic (Elbow, 1999; Harris, 1997), social (Bakhtin, 1986; Gee, 1996), or ideological (Johns, 1999; Ramanathan and Atkinson, 1999). These are rejected by Prior (2001), who believes they all assume stable rules that govern performance. Drawing on Voloshinov, he proposes voice as situated activity.
was nothing like mine. All they had were their own readings and vernacular assessments, the only place they can begin. Such judgments are always positional, and their position as novice writers and non-native speakers reasonably organized their assessments.

Thus, rather than offering claims and support in their essays, many students offered their personal impressions of style, possibly following what they believed I was doing. One student wrote, “Macklin says softly; it makes the article polite and friendly.” Another offered that Annas’s writing style was “more intelligent, strong, and difficult.”

We can see a certain “double move” in their efforts; they must say how the author is speaking, and thus reveal their own. These impressions seem closely tied to offering a certain voice, or, a certain confidence in offering one’s opinions of another, for the record.\(^{36}\) Armed with vernacular personal impressions rather than “academic conclusions rooted in scholarship, analysis, or research,” like Bartholomae’s native speakers, they do not yet know “what might be said” (137). Most of the students who did not support their claims in their first draft seemed puzzled when I mentioned it in tutorial. Of the few students who did include support, there were some interesting variations. One student, arguing on behalf of “style,” claimed that the one author used simple vocabulary, while the other used “big words which are difficult to understand.” He then went on to support

\(^{36}\) Expressivists, who advocate a view of writing as self-discovery, believe that free writing without rules or directives from the teacher or institution encourages the development of voice (e.g., Elbow, 1998; Murray, 1985). To my reading, at least, invocations of voice tend to be tied to claims of authenticity (Bartholomae, 1985), or "true voice," yet part of what these novice writers are doing is discovering and experimenting with multiple voices, and in the particulars here, "academic voice." Relieved of privileged iterations, voice is a useful concept.
these characterizations of style in terms of his most relevant community—his own:

Macklin, uses simple language and vocabulary. For instance, she says, “Many of the science-fiction scenarios prompted by the prospect of human cloning turn out, upon reflection to be absurdly improbable” (166). Annas uses many big words which are also difficult to understand. For example, he writes, “Congress and states should take a stand on this boundary” (163).

I was struck by his assessment. To me, his example of “simple language” was far more complex lexically and syntactically than his example of “big words.” But in tutorial he explained that he was able to grasp Macklin’s point despite her use of expressions like “prompted by the prospect” and “absurdly improbable.” By contrast, the idiom “to take a stand” in Annas’ article was far more problematic for him, as was the reference to “congress and states” (one being institutional, the other geographic) as well as the abstract use of “boundary.” For various reasons of his differential access to various cultural forms and histories, the one was clear enough for him and the other opaque. These were the judgments that organized his assessment of style, and put this way, they were completely sensible; one could say they were the only judgment he could make.

Who else would be convinced, however, concerns readership, or audience, and this becomes an issue of participation in the relevant cultural community.

Another student took a shot at what to her sounded like legal jargon:

Macklin uses general vocabulary, “Where did he come up with such a right?” (p. 166) but Annas uses legal vocabulary for example “a difference in kind, not in degree” (p. 162)

Again, we can see an organization of judgments, first in finding a rubric (legal versus general), and then in finding its evidences. She knew that Annas was a lawyer and that his article had been written for The American Bar Association Journal, and in tutorial she
allowed that she had enlisted the help of her roommate, a native speaker, to help her locate an example of “legal vocabulary.” I find the roommate’s selection no less interesting for how it finds in a delicate phrase, “difference in kind, not in degree,” evidence of the formality of legal discourse, notwithstanding that the evidence for general vocabulary actually refers to “rights.” We could say we have in these judgments—whether the student’s or her roommate’s—a difference in degree, not in kind. Such differences are chronic in the endless judgments the students face.

In tutorial, it is not only a matter of telling students that they need to find support in the text. Routinely in my tutorials, it involves telling and showing them. By working through a hunt for support with them, and working with their own text and ideas, I am able to convey both what I mean by support and how one organizes a search for it. The task is seldom easy, straightforward, or rule-governed. For example, a student offered the claim that Macklin’s (2002) style was “nice,” but she offered no support for it. I began the tutorial by bringing up the idea of support, then proceeded to search for it by looking in some likely places. Once the search began, however, things changed. While I agreed with her claim that Macklin’s style was polite, it was not readily apparent even to me how this identification was achieved. Without much time to ponder this, I began with hypotheses:

K: Can you find any examples of her being nice? Can you show me?

S: Show?

K: Yeah. Like, can you point to a word or a sentence that you think is expressed nicely, you know, polite?
S: Mmmm. [looks over the article]

[pause]

K: Well, how about her thesis statement? Remember her thesis, way at the end?

S: Oh. Um. Here.

K: OK, let’s read it.

S: “If it is ever attempted, it should take place only with careful scrutiny”

K: OK, now let’s read his. [Annas’]

S: Uhm. “Human cloning should be banned.”

K: OK, pretty strong. No “if.” Let’s see...seems to me that Macklin uses a lot of “if” statements.... and modals – here’s “should,” and “might,”—these are more polite than saying, “Do This.”

S: Oh. “If” is more polite.

The student was in search of textual support in order to see what it is; for her, it would probably be a novel finding, which it was. I, on the other hand, was suddenly in the position of having to convert my “thinking as usual,” into an “object of thinking” (Schutz, 1976), in this case, the taken-for-granted cultural practice of reading how a text could convey “nice.” I sensed there was an imperative tone to Annas, but proving it on the spot was difficult. At the time neither of us noticed that both authors used “should,” so modal use would be insufficient to claim a difference, and “if,” while certainly a component of her measured language, is not an assurance of politeness; single words can’t make the case. What wasn’t quite directly said is that such assessments are themselves comparative; one must read across the texts to find politeness. In her next
draft, the student singled out the use of modals as evidence of style, and also found a way to leverage a difference from them, given that both authors used them. She found degrees of intensity:

Macklin is using not strong modals such as “A world not safe for cloned humans would not be safe for the rest of us” (p. 612). But Annas drive us to ban cloning by using strong modals such as “Human cloning should be banned” (p. 612). (My underlines)

The student had discovered degrees of intensity as an aspect of style. And she was right; the two authors used modals differently. Macklin used them to create a measured tone and to qualify statements. Annas used them as an imperative (“Human cloning should be banned.”) She saw the different usage and expressed it as best she could (“strong” and “not strong”). In my view, it was a very thoughtful piece of work in making a judgment of style that was beyond what the curriculum could say.

Discussion

Students generally begin learning to make appropriate judgments about academic conventions by seeing and saying what they can, and their attempts provide a context for discussions and revisions. When the curriculum shifts to the tutorial, the “way in” begins with their vernacular offerings, or what they can say. When Bartholomae (1985) refers to students who are good bluffers, he is speaking of those who know enough about academic writing to use something other than vernacular understandings and expressions, even though they, too, are relying on them. Some of my students, however, do not have enough cultural familiarity with American academic writing conventions. They begin with what they know, and whatever the resources, linguistic or otherwise, they have, they
write. While they are unquestionably familiar with school literacies in their home countries, and in the case of the immigrant students in my class, high school writing, they are not familiar with the kind of academic writing that goes on in this university. This assumption is based on their performance on a university placement test, a departmental diagnostic test, and for some, an English Department test as well. These tests are designed to assess the degree of familiarity a student has with academic writing.

The formal curriculum with its lessons, models, and exhibits on how to write an essay provided a first reckoning of the mysterious objects of instruction that these students confronted. It provided them a first “way in.” Their readings of the models and exhibits on formal designs organized their first efforts and approximations at reproducing it. In tutorials, the approximations themselves – their first drafts—became a virtual new curriculum, one whose value is in coming to recognize and coming to terms with the insufficiencies of the formal curriculum, and the discussing of what else and what more their tasks entail. In the company of a competent practitioner, students begin to see what the models cannot say – the endless attachments of judgments to conventions and context.

The exhibits and models are transformed from the promise of prescription formats to the particulars of the case at hand. When students are able to recognize in their struggles the insufficiencies of the modals and exhibits, they are coming into possession of a certain kind of developing competence of judgment that permits them to see the exercises of still other judgments in the exhibits, about which the formal curriculum can only be silent.
It is not unusual to have students leave tutorial with a solid grasp of what they need to do but not with a full understanding of why. Most often this is because they cannot quite recognize the function in the academy of what they’re doing or being asked to do. This may be for them a kind of “double vision”: On the one hand it’s a course in academic writing and all its conceptual complexity; on the other it’s this course, and all its practical tasks and course-relevant judgments. Once when I complimented a student on her thesis statement, she looked surprised and said, “Oh! Is that my thesis statement?” Lave and Wenger’s (1991) account seems applicable here: “The apprentice’s ability to understand the master’s performance depends not on their possessing the same representation of it, or of the objects it entails, but rather on their engaging in the performance in congruent ways” (p. 21). Many students take the objects I give them and dutifully place them in the right places. In doing so, they generally take my word for judgments that they themselves can’t make. I cannot know if their grounds for agreement come from understanding my explanations, or simply accepting them as the “right answer.” Nevertheless, it is unclear how else recognition begins; directed seeing is itself a venerable pedagogy. The aim of course is that they will eventually come to see the relevance of the judgments and how to exercise it for themselves. Before they do, however, they must be shown the exercise, and learn to recognize its objects, tasks, and occasions and build a collections of cases of judgments, much as law students study the continuation of precedents. Though difficult to see in our own learning histories, it is through such collections organized and analyzed in practice, that the practice will unfold.
CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION

The primary goal of this study has been to describe the local, practical interpretive work of my students as they set out to make sense in the 107 course of their instruction in the conventions of an unfamiliar discourse community. This has been the “missing piece” of the familiar portrait of learners featured in the literature of first and second language writing, where the greater emphasis is still on formal skills and mental phenomena. There is an allied tendency in the research community to regard descriptive studies as “mere descriptions,” and indeed the literature is full of case studies that fail to rise above idiosyncratic or exhausting collections of surface detail, or, what Erickson (1986) calls “writing like crazy” (p. 133). Gilbert Ryle’s phrase, “thick description,” popularized by Geertz (1973), is frequently misused to warrant what can be called “mere" detail in case studies, or detail that is disengaged from an account of the coherence of local interpretative action. As Ryle and Geertz use the term, however, it underscores how meaning is organized in action. By the term they emphasize that producing descriptions of meaningful action, as is the work of producing meaning itself, is not accomplished by mere description but entails disciplined analysis and deeply interpretive work.
This study was informed by readings in sociology, anthropology, ethnomethodology, education, and naturalistic inquiry. Most especially it has proceeded on the understanding that meaningful action is indeed a joint construction (Mischler, 1979) and relentlessly produced in context wherein we act in ways that display and demonstrate in public view what we mean and how we understand (cf. Geertz, 1973; Hymes, 1972; Mehan, 1982; Mischler, 1979). “Meaning is always within context and contexts incorporate meaning. Both are produced by human actors through their actions” (Mischler, 1979, p. 110). These descriptions of how ordinary, meaningful worlds work are not intended to be recommendations for methodology, yet in an odd way, they are. If we would want to understand how teachers and students conduct their instruction and enact their curriculum, we would need to look to fields of action in context. In this sense, naturalistic inquiry “leaves the skin intact” (Garfinkel, 1967). It studies public worlds of action, and this is as true for naturalistic researchers as it is for classroom teachers.

Context in terms of academic literacy, however, most often refers to the overarching institutional organizations of a discourse community (e.g., Gee, 1996; Goldstein, 2004; Street, 1999). In this study I assume that the teacher, the students, and the curriculum bear the marks of institutional and thus sociohistoric influences. However, my focus is not on formal macro structures nor on the national-cultural “aspects” of the students. This has not been a study in contrastive rhetoric or cross-cultural communication. Nor has it been a study of curricular reform. Rather, it has been a study of curricular enactments, in the particulars of a closely examined case. As Prior
(2001) argues, whatever we make of sociohistoric forces, “language is always situated and social…oriented to the immediate context of a situation” (p. 59). Thus I focused on the immediate practical tasks and context of classroom assignments, methods, and instruction, and how students and teachers turned them into their actual course of study.

It is in these immediate contexts, in the work of daily classroom life, that teachers and learners “interpret each others’ actions and make, what seems to them, relevant responses” (Dyson, 1999, p. 144). This work of crafting “relevant responses,” however, has been for the most part overlooked in the literature of second language writing instruction. Few studies acknowledge how students’ understandings of their tasks and their work, and what is made of it by their teachers, are achieved from within their participation in those same contexts. In this study I attempt to describe what is sensible and competent about those situated achievements in the particulars of our formal curriculum in academic writing.

While prior studies in L1 and L2 writing research have attempted to account for the “unique combination of factors stemming from the institution and the program within which [writing] takes place and the factors that teachers and students bring to the process” (Goldstein, 2004, p. 65), they tend to analyze “factors” rather than actions. Among the pre-existing factors in the study of second language writing, national culture (i.e., Chinese-ness, Korean-ness) is perhaps the most frequently cited with the goal of identifying differences in order to predict both potential resources and areas of difficulty for students from different language-cultures. In this study, I assume that students’ national-cultural identities and experiences are implicated in their ways of making sense
of the world around them; however, I do not attempt to establish a relationship between their work in the class and national-cultural “tendencies” nor treat individual students as emblems on behalf of a particular national-culture. Similarly, the hosts of kindred factors that are typically tied to students’ performance (i.e., language, cognition, metacognition, literacy history, age, gender, motivation, affect, goals, genre familiarity, background knowledge, schemata) are not taken up in this study. In my view these factors are unavailable to naturalistic inquiry. By this I mean that if we tie naturalistic inquiry to the publicness of meaning in context, as Geertz et al advise, then many of the favored topics of the literature must be set aside, for naturalistic inquiry can have very little to say about them. For example, though “motivation may be a common topic in parent-teacher conferences, and thus topical for us that way, “motivational states” are unavailable naturalistically; we can only see what students do. The insight and promise of naturalistic inquiry is that such a seeing can teach us a great deal.

Such factors are well provided for in the literature, and this study seeks to offer an alternative perspective. The students – for whatever happened to be going on in their heads – were engaged in assuring me that they had followed instructions. They offered in public view what they hoped would be evidence that they had done what I had asked them to do. The site for analysis was, therefore, the public space of the classroom and how students set out to make sense of their tasks and demonstrate the sense they made.
The central premise and aim of this study is to reveal the extent to which the curriculum of academic writing is a cultural curriculum for these students. My use of "cultural" in this study refers to the social practices of the academic community and the tacit agreements and understandings that organize their conventions. These practices and conventions function much like culture does by Atkinson’s (1999) description: "partly cognitive, partly social, constantly reconstrued and reconstructed in the agentive activities if human beings, although not in a wholly unconstrained way" (p. 640). One could of course argue that all curricula are cultural, and it is an entirely agreeable argument, yet there is little evidence in the research and pedagogy of second language writing that acknowledges this. Furthermore, acknowledgment begs the question of how a curriculum is cultural, how it is learned by newcomers, and how one would then build a description of that work. Thus a consensus on the conceptual point tells us little of how then to proceed. The findings of this study hope to extend the conversation in the field by drawing attention to what is cultural about the curriculum in the detail of its practical enactment.

Bartholomae's (1988) bluffers, for example, may have been strangers to a certain practice, but they were not cultural strangers. His bluffers had enough cultural familiarity with, for example, what an academic argument looks like to attempt to mimic the discourse of making one. In other words, it wasn't so much that they knew, say, classical argument and its configurations within the academy, but rather that they were close enough to the culture to be able to recognize instruction in classical argument. They were already, in Lave and Wenger's (1991) phrase, legitimate peripheral participants.
Students, whether language learners or native speakers, who come to the university without a first cultural familiarity with the kinds of writing that will be expected of them are what I call, borrowing from Schutz (1973), "cultural strangers" to academic culture. Students who come from other countries and languages are cultural strangers to more curricula than this one, and the phrase clearly in no way suggests that they do not come with other, distinguished competencies from their own cultures. No doubt some of their competencies and judgments will be relevant and useful to their new tasks, and some will not. In whatever measure, however, each student was a cultural stranger to academic discourse in this class. That’s not always so in every class I have taught over the last 20 years, but it was in this one.

Findings and Their Significance

Three conceptual questions framed the research: (1) What do students do to make sense of a curriculum that assumes resources they do not have; (2) How is the curriculum of academic writing conventions a cultural curriculum, and (3) What can naturalistic inquiry offer to our understanding of learners and pedagogy in second language writing. The first two questions are intimately tied; to begin to answer one is to take up the other.

In response to the first question, I found that the students’ efforts to find practical solutions to the cultural puzzles of an unfamiliar discourse were problematic for a number of reasons. First, academic writing conventions are sensitizing concepts (Blumer, 1969). They only present themselves in the distinctive expressions of cases-in-context.
They do not possess fixed benchmarks, definitions, or precise parameters, nor are they enacted the same way by all members of the academy across its various domains. Yet, they bear family resemblances that render them recognizable to cultural members. Second, tied to deeply cultural systems of knowledge that are “unquestioned and unquestionable” for insiders (Schutz, 1962), academic writing tends to be taught as though its conventions were evident, logical, even common sensible (Fox, 1991; Lillis, 1999). And, for cultural members, they are. These are among the marks and achievements of membership. Finally, for newcomers, learning these conventions is a matter of learning how to “see” certain instructional objects and the relevance of certain judgments. Their instruction substantially becomes a curriculum of judgments. This takes time, exposure, and practice, and unfortunately, institutions, classrooms, and teachers do not always afford these.

Instruction and assignments call for action, and knowing what to do was a constant task and a constant puzzle for most students because the instructions were indexed to referents they did not have. These referents are cultural in the sense that they are tied to the community of practice of academic writing, which has been referred to as a culture in this paper. As shown in the preceding three chapters, their efforts to make sense of the assignments involved hard, methodic, interpretive work. Tied to the immediate demands of an intermediate course in academic writing, the students’ actions were routinely practical and sensible, once seen that way. Students had to learn how terms like similarities, differences, fact and opinion mean in the academic context. Many of these terms have lives outside of the academy and therefore had to be reinterpreted for
this particular context. Others, like thesis statement, main idea, support and style were novel terms that most students had to learn to recognize and produce. And they did. This study took interest in how they did this.

How the curriculum of academic writing is a cultural curriculum was also illustrated in how the students followed their instructions. I found that seemingly explicit instructions were not at all explicit to cultural strangers. The indexical character of language, or, how we mean, and how we mean on specific occasions assures the tasks that confronted them. For these cultural strangers, following instructions seemed to become a baffling study of words, each standing on behalf of an indefinite horizon of meanings, usage, and common practices, the correctness of which, paradoxically, was at the same time what the instructions promised to teach and also what they had to know, in some way, in order to follow them. It appears to be inherent in instructions that one must have a sense for the projected outcome in order to read relevant meaning into them. These novices tended to interpret instructions quite literally when they did not have knowledge of a projected outcome nor possess the tacit cultural assumptions that “fill in” the unavoidable incompleteness of every set of instructions. We could say what else could they do?

While explicit instructions are commonly recommended (e.g., Kirkland & Saunders, 1991), we need to understand the limits and (im)possibilities of such advice. When students cannot follow them, or do so “quaintly,” teachers cannot assume that they simply need to make the instructions more explicit; every specification will inevitably
beg another. By this, I do not mean that there are not instructions that are more or less useful, “follow-able,” or instructive. But what stands as the difference between better and worse instructions may not always be a matter of specification (Lave, 1990).

For the students in the study, following instructions involved a practical paradox: the instructions did not mean much when explained without a referent, yet a referent could not be produced without them. The paradox was routinely worked out, however. The models and exhibits (sample essays designed to illustrate the instructional objects of the model) provided the solution to this paradox.

This “solution,” however, only created a second paradox. The models and exhibits offered two promises. First, they offered relief from the indefiniteness of instructions by offering a “mock-up,” (cited earlier) which said, “Here, just do it this way.” If one copied the exhibit essay, one needn’t fret further with interpreting the instructions. The second promise was that if one did this, competent writing would result. Unfortunately, these turned out to be false promises. As Garfinkel and Sacks (1970) point out, “mock ups” owe their effectiveness to false provisions. This is not a complaint. It’s how they do their work. It’s how they manage to be instructive. In order to make visible certain objects of instruction, models trade on hyperbole; they exaggerate the practices and represent objects and structures as stable and formulaic. Although they provided students a “way in” by enabling them to begin somewhere, they placed students right back into a field of taken-for-granted cultural judgments. Academic writing is a cultural practice, and as such, cannot be accommodated by models for a few reasons. Models themselves can only be silent about the kinds of cultural judgments-in-
context that produce them. Furthermore, Models and exhibit essays owe their effectiveness to these deliberate false provisions, and this is what makes them models and not the things themselves. In addition to providing the “way in,” models and exhibits appear to have served a greater purpose. To discover the false provisions of the models and exhibits was to discover the relevance of judgment-making to the social practice of academic writing. Everything gone before seems to have led to this point, and I consider this the critical point of the curriculum. The insufficiencies are revealed and remedied in tutorials, which become the site where judgments about recognizable, competent academic writing are then learned. A place where students have access to a competent practitioner and in the context of their own work, their own problems they want to solve.

The findings of this study join a long running debate on the use of models. It agrees with Eschholz (1980) that their usefulness depends to a great extent on how teachers use them. But it continues on to suggest that for newcomers to the academy models can provide “a way in” to cultural practices, for which a firm grasp of the practices will depend on discovering the model’s masquerade as soon as its instructional purpose has been fulfilled. Those discoveries are its last instructional purpose. The study showed that once a student's first draft of following instructions and, in the case of most students, heavily relying on imitating the exhibit essay, was in place, no matter how “troubled,” they then had a context that gave their work significance. They were relieved of the task of understanding them “in general.” From numerous examples, it appears that once this “traction” was achieved, then the instructions were able to be
instructive in the ways in which they organize conventions that are indefinite, unspoken, and taken for granted. Judgments could then be summoned for these specific cases. The study also offers a new way of looking at student-teacher tutorials by highlighting them as a site of direct instruction in the judgments or reckonings of this cultural curriculum, an exercise made possible by the student-produced text as “case material” for examining, recognizing, and learning judgments. It is in tutorials that the insufficiencies of their formal models and maxims are also taught, discovered, and learned.

There seems to be a good bit of disagreement in the literature about the effectiveness of models and exhibit essays (e.g. Elbow, 1973; Freeman, 1993; Krashen, 1978; Smagorinsky, 1998; Williams & Colomb, 1993). These tend to focus on whether or not students can, should or should not imitate them. Following Garfinkel and Sacks (1970), this study extends the discussion by arguing that models and exhibits may be instructionally effective precisely because they misrepresent the affairs they model, and thus instructionally problematic, too. It also suggests that, given the difficulty of some students to access the skeletal formulations of the models, using “authentic” texts (not models or essays designed to teach, but rather good examples of actual, professional writing) might be problematic for learners at this level. While many in the field, myself included, advocate the inclusion of rich, diverse, authentic texts in the classroom, we may need to adjust our expectations of how imitable they are for newcomers to the academy. Exceptional writing is seldom formulaic. In fact, routinely we recognize exceptional writing for its departure from the formulas. Yet it appears that it is the formulas that the novice must first learn to see.
From the three analytic chapters a made a central critique of the professional literature in first and second language writing for insisting that learning academic writing involves a skills curriculum. My findings suggest that skills never show themselves until a curriculum of judgment is in place. This is what renders a skill “skillful.”

The third conceptual question involves research methodology, particularly naturalistic inquiry. The students and their struggles were examined in a way that is not well represented in the literature. As Polio (2003) points out in her survey of recent research in second language writing, there is an overwhelming emphasis on quantitative analysis of student texts to investigate such things as quality, linguistic accuracy, syntactic complexity, lexicon, content, discourse features, plagiarism, and so forth. The relatively few qualitative studies favor broad concerns, such as institutional, student, or teacher attitudes or program requirements. Of those studies that have investigated writing processes, many are case studies of individual students, and most rely on stimulated recall, coded text analysis, surveys, interviews, or talk aloud protocols (e.g., Allison, 1995; Bosher, 1998; Shaw & Liu, 1998; Whalen & Menard, 1995).

Heap (1982) points out three assumptions that appear to problematize the findings of many studies that are based on coding analysis. The first is what he calls the “unifunctionally rule” (p. 393) whereby the coded behavior or text is “conceived of as having one [and only one] function” (p. 393). Coded categories are designed to be mutually exclusive, but the functions of behavior and texts in the real world are not. Furthermore, code categories are routinely based on the analyst’s scheme of reference rather than the participants’ and thus prêempt and exclude locally endogenous meaning.
The second assumption is the “sequential irrelevance rule,” (p. 393), whereby research that divides events and texts into “units” neglects the sequential organizations that put them in place and make them recognizable. Such “units” are routinely the achievements of courses of action that cannot be understood by attending only to their outcomes. I have noticed that in writing research textual features are sometimes taken as evidence that a student has “mastered” or “internalized” (e.g., Newell, Garriga, & Peterson, 2001) a convention or concept. While this may of course be true, it is also possible that students do things as a response to and from within context that have no bearing on whatever concept the analyst is determined to entertain. Here, I think of the students who rigidly mimicked a model, or the student who had a lovely thesis statement but did not know it. In a textual analysis both would be candidates for “internalization,” “mastery,” and so forth. The findings of this study suggest, as Erickson (1992) puts it, “some activities are far more practically motivated than their results might reveal” (p. 4). The practical actions of these students and their ties to the local relevance of the classroom and assignments are only available to naturalistic inquiry.

The third assumption formulated in Heap’s critique is the “cotermination rule,” (p. 394) meaning that “no function outlives its event” (p. 394). By this Heap refers to research designs that imagine that interactions between classroom participants and events expire on the entry of a next code. In fact, we might expect that students and teachers develop ways of understanding and interpreting each other as a community that are linked to the time they spend together, the histories they build, and the practice they teach and learn.
This study also suggests that task representation may be an area worth revisiting in our inquiries into learning. It is commonly accepted in the field that experienced and inexperienced writers differ in how they understand a task (e.g., Flower, 1990; Fox, 1991; Lillis, 1999), and this has typically been attributed to background knowledge, experience, culture, and language proficiency and genre un/familiarity and so forth (e.g., Johns, 1990; 1991). In this study it appears that students may have written their way into understanding the task; their task comes into view after and not before they are obliged to begin it. This suggests that cultural strangers, or inexperienced writers, may not have the task “in mind” when they begin an assignment precisely because the “task” is the outcome of their learning.

This has been a descriptive study. And in a world of explanations, one might wonder what the significance of a description could be. In discussing the pedagogies of competing research paradigms, Macbeth (2004) observes how "Programs of explanation tend to yield prescriptive pedagogies for professionals, while programs of description tend to offer tutorials" (p. 1). He traces the former back at least to Thorndike's (1910) promise of a science of education that would determine instructional effectiveness through "clinical trials" and definitively identify "what works." Programs of explanation were renewed and extended by Bruner's (1966) theory of instruction, which argued that any curriculum could be ordered via the simplification of a generalizable formal structure and thus designed as an optimal sequence of presentation. On the one hand these technical designs, prescriptions, skills sets, and models of formally structured pedagogy
are directed to the education of students. However, as Macbeth points out, within this formal pedagogy for students, there is an implicit pedagogy:

A prescriptive pedagogy is a "telling" pedagogy; it tells teachers what to do and serves the normative purpose of establishing those practices that "work." Thus teachers and other professionals are given plans, designs, programs, and criteria, each a prescription for their classroom practice, warranted by science. (p. 4)

Macbeth further points out that this promised science of education offers prescriptions without fully understanding why or how the success they promise is actually achieved. What lies inside the "black box" of effectiveness studies is any understanding of how their claims for "what works" actually work.

Programs of description, however, are quite different. They are premised on an understanding of the world as already interpreted by its inhabitants, who are already engaged in assembling meaningful -- and thus orderly -- courses of action. Recovering and describing this first field of methodic practice is a task for description:

The answers to our inquiries no longer reside in the arcane expertise of high science, but rather in the "ignored orderliness" of everyday classroom life, as teachers and students take up their canonical tasks. Description teaches us how they do so. (Macbeth, 2004, p. 5)

The promise of a good description is that it can instruct us in things that we thought we knew well. In this case, it is the practitioners rather than the students who stand to be instructed, and descriptions of the work of teaching and learning academic writing stand as tutorials in that work. Whereas programs of explanation offer engineered remedies, a program of description offers a curriculum. As Gallas (1998) observed of her own descriptive studies, "I cannot orchestrate what ought to be when I do not understand what is" (p. 140). Such an understanding, I believe, is instructive, and a first measure of
whether such tutorials might actually be instructive is the extent to which the things described are recognizable to those who are competent to the affairs described. Though only anecdotal, the responses that I have received from other practitioners suggest that they do recognize in the descriptions of these students and this teacher in this particular class, practices and situations from their own classrooms and professional experiences.

If meaning is constructed in social contexts of interaction, there are few studies that have considered in what ways students’ actions are responses to very local contexts. As Macbeth (2000) reminds us, “Though lessons stand on behalf of knowledge, they first stand on behalf of practical tasks and orientations” (p. 59). In my view, the prevailing orientation in L2 writing studies, and classroom studies more generally, focuses on knowledge – how students express their thinking processes in the work they do – without consideration of the material exercises that organize its expression.

**Limitations**

It seems odd to address “limitations” in naturalistic inquiry, where the very premise is the primacy of context and the certainty of incompleteness. It is difficult to imagine what a “limitless” study could be. It is traditional in conclusions, however, to mention constraints on findings. As I pointed out earlier, and will reiterate here, the "explications of explications" (Geertz, 1973, p. 12) that organize every naturalistic inquiry are "essentially contestable...[and] essentially incomplete" (p. 29). The goal of such research, however, is not a "perfection of consensus [but] a refinement of debate" (p. 29).
Throughout the study, I frequently and interchangeably use the terms academic writing conventions, academic discourse, the academy, and the academic community. In doing so, I am not speaking on behalf of all of the many forms of academic writing, whose multiplicity may strain even family resemblances. Nor am I referring to an abstract or metaphoric or formal group or setting. Rather, I use them in terms of the very real context of this particular class and its curriculum in academic writing.

A further constraint that I have not mentioned thus far is that of time, as it works in the classroom and in studies of classrooms. Every classroom operates under the watchful eye of the clock. All lessons are accountable to this local contingency. Certainly one could imagine that what a teacher does or is permitted to do with given materials, how much time he or she has to do it, with whatever evaluation standards, and so forth influence what goes on in a course. My study, however, is not concerned with curricular reform or critique though there are, as a descriptive exercise, potential pedagogical recommendations. Its topics are quite different. It presents a view of what went on in a class as students labored to make sense of it under the conditions that were afforded (i.e., this teacher, these materials, the time allowed, and so forth) regardless of whether one would prefer this curriculum to another. Similar studies elsewhere are the only useful measure of whether these findings and descriptions extend beyond the particulars of this case.
Implications for Pedagogy

As this study began, I was mindful of the comments I have heard over the years from frustrated teachers who believed their students were lazy, inattentive, or even baffling in their habits. I knew this was not the case for my students, though we all had similar experiences. For example, I often wondered why they would not do what I explicitly, repeatedly, and with good cheer asked them to do. Furthermore, for years I had had a nagging feeling in grading sessions that we teachers were rewarding the wrong effort. It seemed to me that good grades tended to go to students who mechanically reproduced the model, whereas those who took risks to write something more creative and genuine and were venturing far from the model, were penalized if their essay wasn’t instantly recognizable to the graders as a replication of the model or exhibit essay.

Furthermore, I found evidence that students who entered the prickly sphere of making relevant judgments were in fact penalized on the final exam by graders, including myself. In one particular case, a student of mine had taken the risk of offering her own criterion points, which wandered pretty far from the steadfast ones of the exhibit essay. She attributed her interest in a short story to the fact that the author had used religious symbolism in one of the characters, and her belief that reality was a social construction. It

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37 For example, repeated pleas to students to use only the author’s last name in a text after the first reference to him or her routinely go unheeded, even despite written comments on their papers about this matter.

38 Grading exams has an inherently norming effect that seems difficult to counter under even ideal conditions.
was an intriguing thesis statement. Although a bit difficult to grasp quickly, it did show that she understood how to set parameters for her essay and set them up in a thesis, something we could not assume from the thesis statements of those students who had copied the model. Ultimately, her thesis was a bit too complex for a two-hour exam. She only minimally supported the thesis statement and had difficulty supporting her points. Her combination of religious symbolism, a typical literary motif, and a large sociological concept about reality made an odd pairing. Yet I could see that she was bending and flexing the model to see how far it could be stretched to accommodate her own ideas without exceeding the boundaries of academic writing. She received a “C” from the graders. I had a hunch at the time, one I can now confirm, that she had actually made the most progress toward recognizing academic judgments of any student in the class.

There are two concerns here, one global, the other local: First, instructors may need a better understanding of what models and exhibit essays are supposed to accomplish and what those accomplishments look like. Also, I believe that the grueling conditions under which the final exams are graded in my program, where teachers grade stacks of essays on the same topic for hours, virtually guarantee that essays whose organizational patterns are quickly recognizable will receive higher marks. Yet these essays may not be necessarily indicative of what students have learned in the course, or who have learned them well.

My findings suggest that our curriculum is indeed cultural and ridden with “unquestioned” assumptions that for our students require hard, interpretive work. Their efforts are far from lazy and inattentive, but rather thoughtful and sensible as “situated
achievements.” To be faithful to the organization of this study as a case, however, and to be consistent with the primacy of cases in the social world, pedagogical implications are case-based as well. My analyses were made of this case and the institutional life in which it took place. Pedagogical implications beyond this case, however, can best be summarized by Steinberg & Cazden (1979), who speak of their own students: “If our perception of them can be changed, and our awareness of their abilities as well as their needs expanded then our behavior toward them will be changed, too” (p. 265).

**Implications for Research**

As Polio (2003) points out, there are very few qualitative studies in second language research, and of those, even fewer are naturalistic inquiry. If descriptive studies are instructive rather than prescriptive (Macbeth, 2004) and if, as Gallas (1998) believes, understanding must precede prescription, then it would seem that the field could benefit from more naturalistic inquiry. Second language writing for graduate students who are cultural strangers has been taken up more enthusiastically (e.g., Belcher, 1989; Brandt, 1992; Casanave, 1995; Fox, 1991; Prior, 1995) than interest in “ordinary worlds” of basic, or entry level, cultural strangers.

In the literature, there is a marked preference for programs of curricular or instructional engineering. A large body of research is dedicated to documenting the influence of "internal" or "brought in" traits on student performance whose goal is to identify the design aspects of effective pedagogy. Contrastive rhetorical analysis, for example, seeks to identify national/cultural patterns and tendencies with the belief that
comparisons will reveal sources of difficulties confronting students from this or that culture, and that teachers will then be able to use this information to do something about them (e.g., Campbell, 1990; Carson, Carrell, Silberstein, Kroll & Kuehn, 1990; Kirkland & Saunders, 1991; Moore, 1997). Although these studies are clearly interested in socio-cultural influences, those influences are usually regarded as formal mechanisms in broad macro-cultural (and thus cognitive) terms. A case based program of naturalistic inquiry yielding tutorials for practitioners would proceed in a very different fashion.

Conclusion

Textbooks on academic writing typically encourage students to plan, revise, set goals, and evaluate their work. There is an implicit assumption in these instructions that learners already have the good understanding of the projected outcome that planning, setting goals, and evaluating hinge on. They assume that novices possess an understanding of projected outcomes or “task representations,” and the instructions are simply recommended strategies for how best to accomplish it. The conventional wisdom of the literature thus proposes a curriculum for novices in the image of mature practice. It implies that non-expert writers do the same thing as competent practitioners, just not as well. My study departs from the literature by suggesting that the curriculum in academic writing is knitted together with cultural conventions that are taken-for-granted by insiders. Cultural strangers must figure out how their instructions mean. They must learn not just vocabulary, but how one is permitted to speak, and not just what a main idea is definitionally, but what one is in a field of relations with other novel, arcane objects, and
thus culturally. They must follow instructions to unknown places. They must undertake a task in order to find out what it is. They must patiently discover this novel, unspoken curriculum and turn it into "objects of thinking" (Schutz, 1976, p. 96).

Their is a curriculum of sense-making tasks, and I appreciate the good sense my students show in their decisions regarding a curriculum that presumes cultural resources for following it. This is the paradox that they, and we teachers, confront. That these students do not possess the cultural resources to make the kinds of judgments that competent practitioners make underwrites many of the complaints and frustrations I've heard from teachers (e.g., "They just don't listen!"). What I've come to see instead is that for these novices, following a cultural curriculum involves hard, interpretive work. Seeing students this way opens the door into recovering what could be methodic, even disciplined, about the work they do in deciphering the puzzles of academic conventions. Students encounter a cultural curriculum requiring judgments, reckonings, first readings, and interpretations without end, not as matters of mastering the curriculum, but of being able to follow their instructions so that they might learn it.

We must re-examine our assumptions that the instructions we give can be "explicit" enough. Such advice mis-reads how language works, and how explicitness is found. Explicitness presumes competence. But competence of instruction is the aim; it can’t be a resource for achieving it, or at least not competence of that kind. Second, acquiring such assumptions requires local contexts of practice and experience, and we
need to be patient and thoughtful in furnishing those contextual resources and taking the measure of how they are put to use.

Ten weeks is hardly enough time for students to master any of the conventions of their curriculum. They leave the class with some fledgling competence in judgments whose development will rely on an accumulation of *like* situations as academic readers and participants in the academy. Ten weeks is too short to make them academic writers, but as the second ten weeks of a 30-week curriculum, this case is a useful setting for building a hopefully instructive description of their tasks, their work, and the cultural curriculum of models, exemplars, judgments and practices that organize their instruction in academic writing.

I cannot know the treasury of competencies my students brought to this academy with them nor the specific ways these facilitated the speed and the path by which they learned this curriculum. I cannot know which of the practices they suddenly recognized as familiar and transferable from their previous experiences with academic literacies once they grasped what I was trying to tell them. Part of the unfamiliarity for some was not that the objects of instruction were strange or logic-defying to them but that they hadn’t yet recognized them as something they indeed knew. Nevertheless, whatever resources students used, creating new knowledge or recognizing the relevance of old knowledge, they all made passed the final exam and made their way safely out of the course and onto the next level (108), where they would no doubt encounter more judgments to learn.
Recently one of my graduate teaching assistants came to me looking quite distraught. He said, “I told them to put the main idea in their first sentence, really, I swear.” He was afraid that I would blame him for his students’ not doing it. On an impulse, I gave him a draft of my Chapter 4. After he’d read it, he returned to my office and said with relief, “Oh, I feel so much better now.”

I feel better, too.
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