The dynamics of context: A study of the role of context in the composing processes of student writers

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THE DYNAMICS OF CONTEXT: A STUDY OF THE ROLE OF CONTEXT IN THE COMPOSING PROCESSES OF STUDENT WRITERS

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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* * * * *

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INTRODUCTION

Understanding Context in School-Sponsored Writing

Two recent but ostensibly unrelated books make a similar point about the importance of accounting for context in understanding a text or an event or an issue. Writing in her book, Adam, Eve, and the Serpent, about the development of the early Christian church's interpretation of the story of Genesis, religion scholar Elaine Pagels addresses the difficulty of interpreting biblical texts. According to Pagels, exegesis (what one reads out of a text) is not merely eisegesis (what one reads into a text), but anyone concerned with the history of hermeneutics confronts the question of interpretation, a question biblical interpreters share with lawyers who debate the meaning of the Constitution, with psychiatrists as they reflect upon their interpretation of case histories, and with anthropologists and historians who ponder their data. What I am thinking of is what the anthropologist Foucault calls "the politics of truth" -- that is, that what each of us perceives and acts upon as true has much to do with our situation, social, political, cultural, religious, or philosophical. (xxvii)

For Pagels, interpretation will always be influenced by the context--social, political, cultural, and so on--within which the interpreter interprets.
On a somewhat different topic, economist Robert Reich proposes in *The Work of Nations* a new metaphor for describing the increasingly complex world economy in the 1990's. In place of the old metaphor of the "core pyramid," which once aptly represented the important place in the American economy of "high volume enterprises" like General Motors, Reich proposes the metaphor of "global webs" to describe the complicated inter-connectedness of what are usually termed "national economies." Such a metaphor is necessary, says Reich, because as almost every factor of production--money, technology, factories, and equipment--moves effortlessly across borders, the very idea of an American economy is becoming meaningless, as are the notions of an American corporation, American capital, American products, and American technology. (8)

For Reich, the old metaphors and concepts of economics no longer account adequately for the many factors that now shape commerce--for the contexts within which nations do business.

It is no coincidence that scholars in such diverse fields as religious studies and economics are talking about very different subjects in similar terms, for thinkers in many disciplines have lately been arriving at the same conclusion: that what they seek to understand must be understood in context. Indeed, scholars in the humanities, and especially in composition studies, have been concerned with the same task in recent years: how to understand the
influence of the myriad factors--social, cultural, political, historical, economic, geographical--that influence, shape, and determine literacy and its functions and uses in society. In the relatively small field of composition alone, scholarship on the social, cultural, political, and historical aspects of literacy has blossomed, and the influence of this work is now being felt beyond the seminar rooms of professional conferences. Witness the recent controversies over proposed changes in the writing curricula at Syracuse University and the Universities of Texas and Massachusetts. In part, the proposals that sparked these controversies grew out of attempts to "contextualize" required writing courses, to make those courses reflect the now commonly accepted notion that writing is not merely a skill but a socially and culturally defined activity.

And yet, despite this flurry of scholarly and related political and administrative activity, those who are in the classrooms actually teaching writing and reading, especially those at the secondary and elementary levels, often seem unsure about just what it means to say that writing is a social and cultural activity. Their pedagogies, their techniques, their methods of assessment generally remain based on older models of writing and of learning, models that by and large exclude, dismiss, or de-
emphasize context. And much recent research is of little help to these teachers, for if context is now understood to be important in writing, few studies have addressed the question, "What exactly is context?" And few studies have illuminated just how a given array of contextual factors might influence the way students write.

What follows is a study, both theoretical and empirical, of context in school-sponsored writing. It seeks to accomplish two main purposes: first, to describe as fully as possible what "context" in school-sponsored writing means; and second, to describe the ways in which context shapes students' composing processes and the texts they create. By offering a fuller description of context and its roles in writing than is now available to scholars and teachers of writing, I hope to broaden prevailing theoretical and practical notions about context and to provoke composition researchers, scholars, and teachers to conceive of writing, and context in writing, in productive new ways.

The first chapter of this study challenges prevailing notions of context by presenting two readings of one student's text and how that text came to be. The first of these readings approaches this text from a cognitive-individualist perspective. In critiquing this perspective,
I argue that its primary limitation in helping us understand student writing lies in its inadequate conception of context, which in turn grows out of its assumptions about writing as a primarily cognitive activity. The second reading attempts to understand this same student text from a broader, sociocultural perspective. Such a reading demonstrates how a fuller sense of context in writing can deepen our understanding of this text and how it came to be.

Chapter II explores a number of loosely connected avenues of theory--sociolinguistics, epistemology, rhetorical theory--in an effort to examine what is already known about context and to ground a conception of context in writing in social constructionist epistemology. This chapter sets forth an argument for a more radical social view of writing than currently informs most research and practice in composition and lays the groundwork for a carefully drawn definition of context in writing and for the data-based description of context that appears in Chapters III, IV, V.

Chapter III is the first of three chapters based on a naturalistic study of the context of one high school composition classroom. This eighteen-week study, which employed naturalistic/ethnographic techniques, was designed to address two general questions: (1) What specifically is
the context of school-sponsored writing in a particular classroom; and (2) how does that context shape the writing of the students in that classroom? The chapter describes the methodology used for the study and presents a description, based on data gathered for the study, of the context of one composition classroom. The study described in this chapter provides empirical support for the theoretical perspective on context that is proposed in Chapters I and II.

Chapter IV explores the complex influence of context on the composing processes of students by presenting data from the study described in Chapter III. This chapter describes the ways in which particular elements of the context of a specific composition classroom shape how the students in that classroom go about completing their assigned writing tasks. In describing the influence of context on students' composing processes, Chapter IV begins to show how what we have come to call "the composing process" is intimately related to the context within which composing occurs.

Chapter V extends the discussion in Chapter IV by focusing more narrowly on connections between contextual factors and students' invention and revision strategies. This chapter is especially concerned with how various elements of context interact to shape specific aspects of
students' writing and how the influence of these contextual factors manifests itself in the students' texts. The data presented here demonstrate that these specific aspects of composing--invention and revision--can usefully be seen as part of the context within which students write.

Finally, Chapter VI synthesizes theory and data in an effort to tease out the implications of this study of context for practice and research in written composition. The goal of this chapter is to begin to build a more adequate theoretical model of context in writing than is available in composition studies and to explore the implications of such a model for teachers of writing and for composition researchers. To that end this chapter proposes a taxonomy of eleven "layers" of context. This taxonomy, which rests on the theoretical assumptions laid out in Chapters I and II and which grows out of the data presented in Chapters III, IV, and V, represents an attempt to provide a framework within which to understand context and its role in writing.

Throughout, this study focuses on school-sponsored writing and writing instruction. Although I am interested in expanding notions of context in writing generally, my primary goal in this study is to further our understanding of writing in educational settings and to foster a theoretical conception of context that helps us understand
adequately what and how students write in school. In the end, a model of context—or any other theoretical model in composition studies—is useful only insofar as it illuminates the writing our students do and thus enables us to become more effective teachers of writing.
CHAPTER I

What Context Means, or, Understanding Kara's Essay

As usual, Kara comes into the classroom a few minutes before the noisy rush of students that accompanies the 9:00 a.m. bell. She sits down in the back corner of the room and quietly arranges her books on the worktable in front of her as her classmates, none of whom seems to take notice of her, crowd through the door. A few minutes later as the bell sounds, Mrs. Smith enters and calls the class to order. After a few announcements about deadlines, Mrs. Smith begins to hand back the essays she has just finished grading. Kara, listening to her classmates' complaints about their grades, quietly waits for her paper. As she takes it from Mrs. Smith, she smiles softly. She has received a grade of "qualified," the highest grade a student can earn on an essay in Mrs. Smith's senior-level Advanced Composition class. It is the fourth essay of seven for which Kara has received a grade of "qualified" since the beginning of the semester. She is pleased.
Mrs. Smith, one of the most experienced and respected teachers in the English Department at her high school, is also pleased, for it seems to her that at this point in April, just about two thirds of the way through the semester, Kara has finally begun to adjust to the course. She had submitted an early draft of her essay for Mrs. Smith to review, the first time she had done so. And she signed up for a voluntary conference with Mrs. Smith, something she also had not done before. After the conference, Kara made all the changes to her draft that Mrs. Smith had suggested. It was, in Mrs. Smith's view, a well-written essay, one of Kara's best efforts.

Mrs. Smith, it would seem, has reason to be pleased. Kara, one of only two juniors in a class otherwise comprised of college-bound high school seniors, came into the course as a better-than-average writer. She had performed well in her previous English classes. But Kara resisted some of the requirements of Mrs. Smith's course--requirements like one-on-one conferences with the teacher and the submission of multiple drafts for each assignment. Her failure to follow the guidelines Mrs. Smith set for the students resulted in what Mrs. Smith believed was a below-average effort on Kara's part despite Kara's relatively good grades on her essays. To Mrs. Smith, Kara's writing would have been better had she adhered to the guidelines--
which Mrs. Smith had carefully devised while helping develop this course, in collaboration with several other English teachers, over a four-year period. Now, though, Kara's resistance to the guidelines of the course seemed to be softening. And Kara's writing was as good as ever. Her latest essay, "A Splash of Color" (see Appendix A for complete text), demonstrated her competence as a writer and her knack for using figurative language. Mrs. Smith particularly liked the following passage:

Standing alone in the corner, she watched as a flock of the "in crowd" passed her by. An envious look spread across her melancholy face as she saw them laughing and having fun, sharing secrets and tales about their boyfriends. She watched jealously as they flung bits and pieces of their lives in her face like splashes of color upon a white canvas. She longed to join in, to blend her colors in with theirs, but she was afraid of what they might say. She watched as they slipped away. . . .

Mrs. Smith noted on Kara's essay that this passage contained "good figurative language." More important, Kara's essay was almost completely free of the nagging mechanical errors, especially misused or missing commas, that plagued the students' writing and made Mrs. Smith's job of grading papers that much more tedious. From her point of view, Kara's work on this essay had all the right elements: good planning, careful revision through several drafts, a pleasing style, effective use of language, and few surface errors. This essay was evidence that Kara was
beginning to find success as a writer in Mrs. Smith's Advanced Composition class.

Some standard measures of writing quality would support Mrs. Smith's view of Kara's essay as a successful, if somewhat conventional, piece of student writing. For example, the essay contains elements that lend it cohesion according to Witte and Faigley's scheme ("Cohesion"): in the passage quoted above, a lexical tie occurs every 3.9 words, which places Kara's text between Witte and Faigley's means for high-rated essays (3.2) and low-rated essays (4.9); in other words, in terms of cohesion, Kara's text seems to be somewhere in the middle of the college freshman essays Witte and Faigley analyzed (195). Moreover, the revisions Kara made on her second draft fall in line with Bridwell's findings that "surface and word level revisions accounted for over half of the revisions the [high school] students [in her study] made" (207); of the 29 revisions Kara made on her draft, 21 (72.4%) could be classified as "surface" or "word level." (See Appendix G for discussion of coding schemes used in this study.) Finally, the subject matter of Kara's essay seems to fit into the category of expressive writing that some researchers have found to be common in many high school English classes (e.g. Applebee, Secondary).
In terms of the composing process, Kara's work on this essay reflects the findings of several researchers on students' composing behaviors. For instance, in her study of twelfth-grade student writers, Janet Emig found that "able student writers voluntarily do little or no formal written prefiguring, such as a formal outline, for school-sponsored writing of five hundred or fewer words" (Composing Processes 92), and indeed Kara wrote her first draft of her essay with almost no "written prefiguring" at all. Emig also found that "students do not voluntarily revise school-sponsored writing" (93). In Kara's case, revised drafts of assigned essays were required; like Emig's students, Kara seemed to revise only when she had to. Similarly, Nancy Sommers reports in a study of student writers and experienced adult writers that "the students understand the revision process as a rewording activity" ("Revision Strategies" 381). Again, Kara's behavior in this regard seems to support Sommers' findings on typical student revising behaviors: without a great deal of pre-writing she composed a complete first draft, on which she made several minor changes, mostly simple rewordings of her original phrases and sentences. In short, Kara's text and the composing behaviors she exhibited in writing that text seem typical.
But the apparent typicality of Kara's essay masks the complex set of related factors that influenced Kara and helped give rise to her essay. Indeed, these factors—including the nature of the assignment, Kara's interpretation of it, her interactions with Mrs. Smith and with her classmates, her background as a writer and a reader, her previous experiences in Mrs. Smith's class and at Thompson High School, her socio-economic status and ethnic background, even the time of day when she wrote and the tools she used to write—all helped determine the conventional nature of Kara's text and of her composing behaviors. That is, the seemingly conventional features of Kara's essay were shaped in part by various factors associated with the context within which the essay was written. In this sense, her text can be seen as, in Deborah Brandt's words, "a record of a writer's response to the exigencies of the communicative setting in which the text is composed" ("Text and Context" 93).

To state that the context within which Kara wrote her essay influenced her writing of that essay is to repeat something of a commonplace among teachers of writing: it is a bit of widely accepted lore, to use Stephen North's term, that students write for their teachers—or try to. And in the past decade or so, scholars like David Bartholomae, Patricia Bizzell, Shirley Brice Heath, Mike Rose, and Mina
Shaughnessy have begun to expose the complicated ways in which that bit of lore is true. Scholars in composition now generally agree, for example, that writing in an academic setting can and does differ from writing in, say, a business setting. Successful writers--students or professionals--find ways to adapt to the contexts within which they write; unsuccessful writers have difficulty doing so, as Bartholomae, Heath, Rose, Shaughnessy, and others have demonstrated. Context, it is agreed, matters.

And yet, what is known about context often seems too broad or too commonplace to be of much use in understanding the writing of a student like Kara. It seems too easy to acknowledge that she wrote her essay in the context of Mrs. Smith's class and leave it at that, focusing instead on the features of her text that might be deemed "effective" or not. Like Mrs. Smith, many teachers of writing tend to emphasize Kara's knowledge--or lack thereof--of text conventions, her word choice, the structure of her sentences, her paragraphing, and perhaps her use of metaphor or symbol, as if all these were a function solely of Kara's individual aptitude. And indeed, it is easy to see in Kara's behaviors, as Mrs. Smith apparently did, evidence of Kara's knowledge--or lack thereof--of these aspects of written language. Despite the interest among composition scholars in the social and cultural contexts of
writing in the past decade or so, composition teachers still tend to pass over in their dealings with students like Kara questions that focus attention on the circumstances under which Kara was writing: To what extent did specific contextual factors shape or give rise to specific features of Kara's essay? What effect did required drafts or one-on-one conferences, for example, have on how and what Kara wrote? How did Mrs. Smith's input influence Kara as she wrote? Is it important that Mrs. Smith required her students to write their essays using word processing technology? How much of what Kara wrote was a response in some form to contextual factors such as those? And which of these factors most profoundly influenced her writing?

In this chapter, I will argue that a careful consideration of such contextual factors is essential to an adequate understanding of what and how students write. In other words, consideration of the behaviors and texts of individual writers like Kara cannot be separated from a consideration of context, for it is only in context that Kara--or any other writer--makes meaning.

In order to highlight how such a consideration of context can enhance one's understanding of an essay like Kara's, this chapter presents two readings of Kara's essay. The first reading is based on what I call a "cognitive-
individualist" view of writing. This view, which rests on assumptions about writing and about knowledge that have been severely questioned in the past decade or so by theorists from various disciplines, nevertheless remains influential in providing many teachers of writing, especially at the secondary level, a framework for understanding and evaluating their students' work. The influence of this view may be partly a vestige of the central place that cognitive theories of writing occupied in composition studies in the seventies and much of the eighties. Whatever the source of its influence, the cognitive-individualist view of writing drove Mrs. Smith's approach to Kara's essay. More important to this discussion, such a view of writing, while powerful in the way it helps teachers understand students' writing, leads to an incomplete picture of how an essay such as Kara's came to be.

Having exposed some weaknesses of a cognitive-individualist approach to Kara's essay, the chapter then offers a second reading of the essay, based on a view of writing as a social and cultural activity. This second reading demonstrates the importance of considering the complex role of context in the creation of a text and highlights the ways in which a social view of writing can illuminate a text such as Kara's. Compared to a cognitive-
individualist approach to a student essay, this alternative social reading offers a more complete understanding of an essay like Kara's.

Context and the Cognitivist-Individualist View of Writing

The problem in talking about context, of course, is that context is, as Linda Flower puts it, "a large place" (Read-to-Write). "Context" can include virtually every conceivable influence on a writer as he or she is trying to create a text: time of day, the weather (I have less energy on overcast days, for instance), a shortage of computer paper, the writer's experiences at home or in elementary school, a university's open admissions policy, even who won the last presidential election (you might try to trace, for example, the influence of William Bennett's tenure as Secretary of Education on a local school's English curriculum). Glynda Hull and Mike Rose have traced specific features of an essay written by Tanya, a "remedial" student in their study, to Tanya's experiences with former teachers and to certain cultural attitudes associated with Tanya's ethnic background ("Rethinking"). Richard Ohmann has explored the connections between broad
socio-political events, such as the Cold War, and the character of freshman English classes in American universities (English). Kathleen McCormick has explored how "three interrelated culturally-based assumptions" about knowledge "guided" students' approaches to certain assigned writing tasks ("Imperatives" 1). More narrowly, Christina Haas has investigated the differences between the notes writers make to themselves with pencil and paper and the notes they make on their computers; in other words, the writing tool one uses can and does affect the text one writes and how one writes it ("Technological"). In short, teachers and researchers can take almost anything to be a contextual factor.

This nebulous character of context makes it a difficult concept to define. Perhaps in part for that reason, teachers of writing have tended to isolate and focus on the more immediate influences on their students as they write, such as the specific requirements of a given essay (its length, form, style, etc.) and the amount of time before the deadline. At the same time, teachers of writing have also tended to focus on their students' individual cognitive abilities and personalities as ways to explain students' performances on writing tasks. Indeed, during the 1970's and the early part of the 1980's, composition studies as a field was dominated by cognitive
perspectives on writing (see e.g., Emig; Flower and Hayes, "Cognitive"). The Flower and Hayes model of composing, which seeks to explain writing as a cognitive process by which "writers create a hierarchical network of goals . . . [that] in turn guide the writing process" (Flower and Hayes, "Cognitive Process" 377), provided a powerful theoretical picture of composing for many writing teachers, and the process movement popularized by scholars like Peter Elbow and Donald Murray helped reinforce an individualist view of the composing process.¹ It isn't surprising then, that Mrs. Smith would explain Kara's "successful" performance on her profile essay by pointing to Kara's decision to begin "applying herself" and her considerable talent as a writer more diligently to the assigned work in the course. For Mrs. Smith, Kara's success or lack of success as a writer was largely a function of Kara's own

¹In Chapter II I will review some of the work of scholars who have critiqued the traditional view of the writer as solitary agent. Here, though, it's important to note that one of the central assumptions underlying the process movement of the early 1970's seems to have been that knowledge and truth exist within the individual self (see James Berlin's discussion of "expressionistic rhetoric" in "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class," College English 50 [September 1988], especially pp. 484-487). The key proponents of a process-oriented pedagogy (Murray, Elbow, Macrorie) seem to have drawn on a conception of the writer that has its roots in the British romanticism of the early 19th Century, which often depicted composing as the result of inspiration brought on by the inward search for truth.
overlook the importance of the many factors mentioned above that might somehow have influenced Kara as she wrote—that is, it largely ignores context in a broad sense. In a way, Mrs. Smith's version makes the "large place" of context more manageable by focusing attention on the individual writer, Kara, and away from the complicated circumstances under which Kara wrote. Despite the work of scholars like Hull and Rose, David Bartholomae, Shirley Brice Heath, and others (e.g. Berlin "Ideology"; Cooper and Holzman; LeFevre; Rose, "Remedial"), who in the past decade or so have begun to underscore the narrowness of a cognitive, individualist perspective on student writers, Mrs. Smith's version of the story of Kara's essay remains a popular and powerful one among teachers of writing.

In this section, I'd like to examine this version, which I will refer to as the "cognitive-individualist" perspective, of the story of Kara's essay in order to highlight its limitations in providing an understanding of how Kara's essay came to be written. In doing so, I'll examine the Flower and Hayes model of the writing process, which has provided the theoretical and empirical basis for prevailing cognitive-individualist perspectives on student writing. In critiquing this model, I wish to demonstrate that although it provides a powerful theoretical picture of how writers write, it remains limited in helping us
prevailing cognitive-individualist perspectives on student writing. In critiquing this model, I wish to demonstrate that although it provides a powerful theoretical picture of how writers write, it remains limited in helping us understand student writing primarily because it rests on questionable assumptions about writing, which lead to an inadequate conception of context.

During the third week of the semester, Mrs. Smith gave the students an abbreviated version of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, a psychological personality-type indicator, and asked them to complete it for the following class meeting.\(^2\) Having studied the MBTI in a graduate course on the teaching of writing, Mrs. Smith used it as a way to help students understand their own writing more fully. This self-test, she explained to her students, would indicate what kind of personality each student had, knowledge which, according to Mrs. Smith, could reveal something important about one's writing. For example, an MBTI score indicating an organized, aggressive personality might suggest a writer who works in a somewhat rigid, organized fashion as opposed to a more "free-form" writer. Mrs. Smith emphasized that these tests were for the

students' own use and would not be collected or evaluated in any way. She shared her own results with the class as evidence that she was a very structured, organized kind of writer.

Mrs. Smith's use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator in her composition class reflects her continuing efforts to apply knowledge gained through research and theory to her own teaching. It also reflects her own conviction that writing is essentially a solitary act: from her point of view, how and what a student writes is determined largely by that student's personality and ability. Knowing more about yourself as an individual, Mrs. Smith believed, might help you be a more effective writer. The choice, in essence, is the student's.

As I note above, Mrs. Smith saw Kara's work on her profile essay as evidence that Kara had begun to make the choice to apply her individual talents as a writer to her assigned work in the class. From her point of view, Kara "had the ability" to do well in the class, but Kara had not applied herself to her work as diligently as she could have. That seemed to be changing. Moreover, Kara's text itself was the product of this individual, talented mind. The figurative language that Mrs. Smith liked in Kara's essay, for instance, grew out of Kara's own "natural talent" with language; it was a function of this student
writer's attempt to complete a given writing task as effectively as her own talents would allow her to do.

Mrs. Smith's view of Kara as a writer seemed justified given her own experience with student writers, her continual exchanges with her colleagues about teaching, and her ongoing graduate work. She had seen students succeed or fail in her classes based on their own initiative or lack of it, and her discussions with her colleagues reinforced her own experiences with students. In addition, a great deal of the scholarship on writing that Mrs. Smith had read helped shape her perspective, including respected work by Donald Murray and Peter Elbow, both of whose work stresses the individual writer's self-knowledge and personal decisions as keys to successful writing. In general, this view seemed to explain adequately the behaviors and writing performances of a student like Kara.

And so in working with Kara on her essay, Mrs. Smith saw it as her job to help bring out Kara's natural abilities as a writer. She routinely suggested to Kara that she begin her drafts sooner and that she submit them for comment well before deadline. When reading Kara's drafts, she pointed out awkward phrasing or mechanical errors; only rarely did she see a need to encourage Kara to reconceive her ideas. For instance, of the twenty-eight marginal notes Mrs. Smith made on Kara's first draft, only
one suggested a need to add new material to the essay; two asked for more information to clarify a sentence ("Where?" "Was this an admirer?"); two referred to effective use of language; and one pointed out a contradictory statement. The other twenty-two comments concerned syntax, usage, and mechanics. In reading Kara's draft Mrs. Smith did not seem to grapple with Kara's ideas; from her point of view, Kara already had "good ideas" and essentially needed work in setting forth those ideas effectively in her writing. In short, Mrs. Smith's approach to helping Kara revise her draft reflected her assumption that each student brought his or her own knowledge and abilities to an assignment; it was her job to bring that knowledge and those abilities into conformity with the parameters of the assignment, the conventions of standard written English, and her own expectations for the assignment.

For Mrs. Smith, then, a student's diligence or lack of it, use of time, abilities with the language, and sometimes the student's need or desire for a specific grade (that is, some students did not need to pass the course in order to graduate, while others did)--these factors largely determined the successes or failures, as Mrs. Smith perceived them, of her students' performances on a given assignment. From her point of view, all her students were quite capable of doing well with their writing assignments.
In fact, her very positive attitude toward her students, coupled with her high standards, made her a popular teacher among the students at her school and a respected one among her colleagues. And given the ethos of this predominantly white, middle-class, suburban school, Mrs. Smith's focus on her students' own initiative seemed quite appropriate.

What is noteworthy about Mrs. Smith's perspective on her students' writing, though, is how unwaveringly it focuses on the student as individual and how much, consequently, it seems to overlook—or at least de-emphasize—about a student's writing. For instance, although Mrs. Smith was quite aware of the fact that Kara was one of only two juniors in a class comprised of college-bound seniors, rarely did that knowledge seem to figure into her explanations of Kara's writing behaviors or her texts. The facts that Kara had taken fewer English courses at this high school than her classmates and that, unlike many, had tried to focus on "creative" writing didn't seem to influence significantly Mrs. Smith's assessment of how and what Kara wrote. In addition, although Mrs. Smith was sometimes mindful of special circumstances surrounding the writing of a student's essay, such considerations typically did not seem to alter her view of that student's work. For example, was it important that Kara's use of the computer was different for this
latest essay than for her previous ones? All her previous essays had been written on her own computer at home. As a result, she tended to do other homework during her writing class, when most of her classmates were working at one of the computers in the room. Often, this situation meant that Kara actually had less time to revise than her classmates, since she had to wait until she got home to begin making revisions to her drafts, while her classmates often began revising their essays in class as soon as they received comments from Mrs. Smith or from their peers.

Also, was it also important that Kara's essay was a version of a paper written for a creative writing class she had taken earlier in the year? Did the effective figurative language have its roots in that assignment for that other class? Perhaps because such considerations seem related to "external" factors or circumstances—that is, to factors "outside" Kara, as an individual—they did not seriously challenge Mrs. Smith's view of a student like Kara or of Kara's performance on the profile essay: even given such "external" factors, a student like Kara must still write the essay—her essay would reflect her choices and abilities, whatever the circumstances at the time.

Finally, Mrs. Smith was aware that her students often revised according to what they believed she wanted them to write—they revised based on their sense of the
circumstances under which they were writing—yet she rarely seemed to allow that knowledge to influence her as she worked with a student like Kara on a specific assignment. When she wrote simply "well done" and "qualified" on the final version of Kara's essay, she seemed unconcerned that every one of the revisions Kara made was in response to her own (Mrs. Smith's) specific written comments on the earlier draft. As Mrs. Smith saw it, whatever the reasons for Kara's choices, they were still Kara's choices.

Mrs. Smith's version of the story of Kara's essay represents one teacher's interpretation of the cognitive-individualist view of student writing that dominated composition scholarship, research, and teaching until the late 1980's—and is still very influential among teachers, especially at the secondary level. As I suggest above, this perspective on writing gained force among teachers in the late 1970's largely through the work of Linda Flower and John R. Hayes and their colleagues. Flower and Hayes have explored the cognitive aspects of the act of writing, applying concepts and models from cognitive psychology to the task of understanding the writer's mind. The Flower and Hayes model of the composing process, which seeks to describe the various cognitive processes involved in writing, has been the most thoroughly researched and
carefully worked out model of composing available to composition scholars and to teachers of writing at all levels. Its focus on the mental activity of the individual writer is virtually exclusive, and part of its appeal to scholars and teachers of composition, I think, has been the model's convergence with traditional conceptions of the solitary writer. In addition, this model could offer justification for the argument, popular among many educators, that writing aids thinking and learning and enhances students' "critical thinking skills."

Like Mrs. Smith's view of her students as writers, the Flower-and-Hayes model is based on the assumption that writing is essentially an individual act, a function of a particular writer's representation of the writing task before him or her and the decisions he or she makes in completing that task (see Figure 1). The Flower and Hayes' model treats many of the contextual factors mentioned above essentially as "external" factors that might impinge upon or influence a writer's representation of a task or set a particular cognitive process in motion. These "external" factors, however, do not significantly alter a cognitive process once it is set in motion. For example, Kara's use

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3See footnote 1 above. Also see Linda Brodkey, "Modernism and the Scene(s) of Writing" (College English 49 [April 1987]: 396-418) for an interesting discussion of the influence of modernism on the conception of writer as individual.
of the computer might be seen as part of the "task environment," which somehow influences Kara's mental representation of the writing task at hand; the basic cognitive aspects of her composing process, however, remain intact. According to this model, while composing, Kara still moves cognitively through the various stages of the composing process, whatever the circumstances under which she wrote. Thus, the picture of Kara as writer provided by this model is a cognitive one in which the nature of such external factors as the use of a computer or Mrs. Smith's marginal notes or Kara's previous experiences in her creative writing class does not figure prominently. The model is not concerned with explaining the specific role in the writing process of such factors; they exist simply as
part of a writer's "long-term memory" or the "task environment." Context, in other words, is only vaguely referred to in this model; moreover, the specific nature of context and of its influence on the writer's composing processes are not accounted for.

Over the years the Flower-and-Hayes model of the composing process has evolved in ways that reflect the importance of context in constructing meaning in a written text. For instance, a more recent representation of "discourse construction" includes elements labelled "social context," "discourse conventions," and "language," which affect both writer and reader as they construct meaning in a text (see Figure 2). This refined version of the model includes other, broader factors that are "external" to the writer's mind ("social context," "discourse conventions," "language"). At its heart, though, the model remains focused on the cognitive processes of the writer as individual, very much as Mrs. Smith's view of her students' writing does, in a way that limits its ability to illuminate how context influences students' writing. Despite its refinements, the model still rests on the assumption that writing is essentially a solitary, goal-driven, cognitive act. As a result, the Flower-and-Hayes model offers only a partial version of the story of Kara's
Figure 2. Flower’s Conceptual Model for Discourse Construction. (Source: Linda Flower, "Interpretative Acts.")
essay, for it inadequately depicts the important role of context in composing.

To illustrate the limitations of such a model, let me return for a moment to the passage from Kara's essay referred to above. Here's the second paragraph of that passage from the final version of the essay, a passage that Mrs. Smith praised:

Standing alone in the corner, she watched as a flock of the "in crowd" passed her by. An envious look spread across her melancholy face as she saw them laughing and having fun, sharing secrets and tales about their boyfriends. She watched jealously as they flung bits and pieces of their lives in her face like splashes of color upon a white canvas. She longed to join in, to blend her colors in with theirs, but she was afraid of what they might say. She watched as they slipped away.

4The Flower and Hayes model of composing is intended to provide a theoretical understanding of how writers write; it is not intended to be a pedagogical or diagnostic tool per se. Yet its power as a way of understanding student writing and its widespread acceptance by teachers and researchers in composition have made it an important conceptual tool with which compositionists have tried to explain and improve student writing. As such, its influence on how teachers and scholars in composition understand student writing has been profound. Moreover, this model and the "cognitive research paradigm" it represents remain a focus of debate as composition scholars such as Mike Rose and Glynda Hull, as well as Flower and her colleagues, strive to bring together social and cognitive perspectives on writing. Given all that, my point here is twofold. First, despite its power and influence, a cognitive model can offer us only a limited view of student writing because it inadequately accounts for context. Second, precisely because of its power and influence as a way to understand student writing, the limitations of this model in terms of how it accounts for context reflect some of the limited notions about context that inform composition studies in general.
Compare this to the same paragraph from Kara's earlier draft of the essay before Mrs. Smith read it:

Standing alone in the corner, watching as life pass her by, a thoughtful look spread across her melancholy face. She watched others as they flung bits and pieces of their lives in her face like splashes of color upon a white canvas. She longed to join in, to blend her colors in with theirs, but she was afraid of what the others might say. So she kept watching as life slipped away.

Kara's revisions from version one to version two seem relatively minor: she gets rid of the ineffective, general use of "life" in the first and last sentences of the paragraph and adds the more concrete images of the students in the "in-crowd"; she corrects the form of the verb "pass" in the first sentence; and she changes the verb form of the final sentence from the progressive to the simple past ("watching" to "watched"), which seems to fit the mood of the paragraph better and which is more consistent with the other verbs of the paragraph. She also changes "thoughtful" to "envious" to modify the noun, "face." The most significant change is the addition of the material about the "in-crowd": those she referred to simply as "others" in the earlier version are now identified as a group of popular girls engaged in a particular kind of social intercourse about their relationships with boys. In the revised version this image is more vivid, and Kara offers more information for the reader to make sense of the situation she is describing.
Less obvious about Kara's revisions, though, is the effect they seem to have on her text in terms of evaluation, in the sense of that term as William Labov uses it in his analysis of narrative (Language 366-396). The details Kara adds in this brief paragraph describe the action of the scene more explicitly, but they also provide more information, both explicit and implicit, about how Kara feels and how she responds to what is happening around her. These changes provide what Labov calls "embedded evaluation" of the action Kara describes in the passage. The result is a richer, more effective passage, one which goes beyond a straight description of the scene. Her substitution of "envious" for "thoughtful," the addition of sentence two with its specific description of what the "in crowd" was doing, and the addition of "jealously" all help make the final sentence of the paragraph ("She watched as they slipped away.") more effective in what it implies about her situation and her feelings than the bald, thematizing final statement of the original paragraph ("So she kept watching as life slipped away.").

In attempting to understand how Kara created this text, the Flower-and-Hayes model of the writing process would enable us to describe the cognitive processes that seemed to be in operation as Kara worked through each draft. We would want to explore the "web of purposes" Kara
created as she attempted to construct meaning in her essay, a web of purposes that Flower calls "an internal, cognitive construct" ("Construction" 531). We would also want to try to pinpoint how that web of purposes manifested itself in the various stages of writing as identified in this model ("planning," "translating," "reviewing"); here our focus would be on the "reviewing" stage (see Figure 1 above).

The model would also help us explore the ways in which Kara negotiated the constraints of the assignment—how her mental representation of the task affected her decisions as writer as she moved through these various stages of the writing process.

From this point of view we might note that in revising the above paragraph Kara translated a broad, abstract term (life) into a more vivid concrete image (the "in-crowd") and we might investigate how that change was a function of the way Kara represented the task. We might note, for example, that Kara was concerned about avoiding statements that were too general, because she knew that Mrs. Smith valued concrete illustrations of abstract ideas. Such information would support the inference that Kara represented the task as a function of the web of purposes she constructed for herself, constrained by the assignment and the conventions of the class for which she was writing (which are part of the "task environment"), and then made
choices about specific portions of her text accordingly. We would see that the process of composing her text was a purposeful, cognitive one, and that the decisions Kara made as she revised her text were "meaningful, rhetorical acts," to use Flower's phrase.

More specifically, using the Flower-and-Hayes model we might try to pinpoint where in Kara's composing process her sense of Mrs. Smith's requirements and preferences came into play. Kara might have been conscious of Mrs. Smith's preference for detailed description as she added the phrases, "laughing and having fun" and "sharing secrets and tales about their boyfriends." According to this model, Kara's sense of Mrs. Smith's preferences can thus be understood as part of Kara's mental representation of the "task environment" (or perhaps her "long term memory"), which affected the cognitive process of "reviewing" the text. Similarly, we might also account cognitively for the influence of Kara's tacit understanding of evaluation in narrative, which would be part of what is termed "writer's long-term memory" in this model. Thus, her addition of the details about the "in crowd" might also be understood as a cognitive move involving her long-term memory. According to this model, then, as Kara revises her paragraph, she moves cognitively between the "task environment" (which includes the "rhetorical problem" she faces and her sense
of Mrs. Smith's preferences), her long-term memory (which includes her knowledge of topic, audience, and writing plans), and the process of writing the text itself. Somehow, as a result of these cognitive moves, she chooses to add the details about the "in crowd . . . laughing and having fun, sharing secrets about their boyfriends."

The picture that would emerge from such an analysis—a picture of Kara as an individual writer cognitively negotiating the constraints of a particular rhetorical situation—would provide us with clues about the ways in which she mentally went about completing an assigned writing and reading task. The power of this picture lies in the detailed representation it can provide of what Kara might be thinking—and what might be happening unconsciously or semi-consciously in her mind—as she writes and revises this text. For a teacher like Mrs. Smith, who emphasizes her students' individual abilities and initiative, such a picture offers a window into a student's mind as that student writes.

Despite the power of this picture, however, it leaves us with a less than clear sense of the nature of certain contextual "cues," as Flower calls them ("Studying Cognition"), that seem to have been central in shaping how and what Kara wrote. For example, Kara's sense of Mrs. Smith's preference for detailed description becomes part of
the broad category, "task environment," which impinges upon Kara as she moves through the "reviewing" stage of the writing process. Part of what is omitted from such a picture is a fuller consideration of the nature of a factor such as Mrs. Smith's preference for detailed description and its specific role in Kara's decision to add those lines to her text. Labelled so broadly, such a factor cannot be understood in a way that reflects the profound influence it seems to have had on Kara as she revised.

For instance, Kara revised only in response to specific prompts from her teacher, and no doubt she responded to those prompts in a way that was shaped by her sense of that teacher's identity and her ideas about writing, her past experiences with that teacher, and so on. In other words, the nature of these "cues" from the task environment helped shape how and what Kara wrote and revised; the same "cue" in a different classroom with a different teacher might have--likely would have--elicited very different results from Kara as she revised this passage. While the Flower-and-Hayes model acknowledges the existence of these contextual "cues" and their influence on Kara's writing and revising, it does not distinguish between these cues; consequently, to describe Kara's revisions as products of certain cognitive processes which are somehow affected by "task environment" and "long-term
memory" is to paint only a partial picture—a kind of
generic cognitive picture—of how Kara's text came to be. Such a picture leaves us unable to explore how a specific contextual factor such as a teacher's preference for detailed description manifests itself in a student's composing behavior and in the text that student creates. In short, to see a factor such as Mrs. Smith's preference for detailed description as part of a broad category like "task environment" obscures the profound influence that factor may have on a writer like Kara as she wrote and revised.

Flower's more recent work has begun to acknowledge and address some of the limitations inherent in a cognitive-individualist perspective on writing. In recent years, her perspective on the act of composing has evolved from that of an exclusive focus on the cognition of the individual writer to a somewhat broader view which acknowledges that the individual writer composes in a context. In a 1989 CCC article, for example, Flower argues for "a far more integrated theoretical vision [of writing] which can explain how context cues cognition . . ." ("Studying Cognition" 282). Such a vision would recognize "that cultural and social context can provide direct cues to cognition" but "that context is also and always mediated by
the cognition of the individual writer" (287; original emphasis). For Flower, then, the central issue is no longer simply how the individual writer makes meaning through the purposeful, cognitive act of written composition, but rather how the writer negotiates meaning through the act of composing, in which "the bounded purposes that emerge from this process are highly constrained but at the same time meaningful, rhetorical acts" (287; original emphasis). That is, to understand the composing process, we must somehow account for the interaction of the individual writer's cognition with the social and cultural contexts within which that writer composes. Thus, although Flower is still primarily interested in fathoming the workings of the individual writer's mind as he or she composes, she now asks in her research, "How might we conceive of the writer in a social context?" ("Collaborative Planning").

Flower's developing vision of the process of composing a written text can be seen most clearly in the recently published Reading-to-Write. In that project, Flower and her team sought to explore the ways in which college freshmen at Carnegie Mellon University represented to themselves and then completed a particular reading and writing task that was assigned in a required rhetoric course. One goal of this study, Flower writes, is "to
understand reading-to-write as [a] rich cognitive and social phenomenon"—"as a rhetorical act occurring in the charged context of entering college" (1). Given that goal, Flower and her team ask, "What shape does a given cognitive process take when it is embedded in the historically defined context of entering college, in the social situation of a class, and in the immediate context of a particular assignment?" (12). This focus on "embedded cognition," Flower continues, "would assert that this process [reading-to-write] doesn't go on in a vacuum; rather, it occurs in "the social context of a class and a myriad of assumptions about academic writing," a context that "is an even more complex reflection of school and the cultural community to which the student belongs or aspires" (12).

What emerges from these statements—and, more specifically, from two chapters of the study entitled "Translating Context Into Action" and "The Cultural Imperatives Underlying Cognitive Acts"—is an apparent conception of context as a complicated set of factors, including a student's personal educational history, the "social situation of a class," the parameters of a given assignment in that class, the broader cultural setting within which that class takes place, and so on. As I've been arguing, these are precisely the kinds of factors
which Mrs. Smith seemed to overlook in her assessments of Kara's essay, but which I believe must be taken into account in order to achieve an adequate understanding of how and what students write.

Having established that students work "within larger institutional contexts" and that "reading and writing can be seen as much more culturally motivated, directed, and constrained than we might have initially thought" (195)—that, in short, context is important in writing—the difficulty for a researcher like Flower is to find a way to account for such broad contextual factors within the framework of what she calls a "cognitive research paradigm" (10). Flower herself acknowledges this difficulty in her introduction to the study:

The context in which writing occurs is a large place which also includes the history students carry in their heads and the world outside of class that influences what they value and assume about academic work. Our writer-centered investigative stance could only reach that world indirectly. (28-29; my emphasis)

As a result, while the researchers attempt to explore how the broader context "clearly impinged on the reading-to-write process as we observed it" (28), their investigation provides a picture of the cognitive "actions" that seemed to be at work as individual students represented to themselves the tasks within the context of their class; such a picture begins to bring into focus the role of context in writing, but it continues to depict
context in terms of cognition. That is, contextual factors such as the writing prompt, the teacher's instructions, the students' educational background, and so on, are seen as part of a mental construct within the student's mind, the workings of which remain the primary focus of the study. Moreover, in focusing as this study does on students' mental representations of a writing task, the researchers (inadvertently, I believe) set up a dichotomy between cognition and context; given this dichotomy, they then try to find points of intersection between the two. Thus, in this study writing is presented as, in Flower's words, "a social and cognitive event," but the context of that event, despite the researchers' careful efforts to define and describe it, remains much more incompletely drawn than the cognitive actions of the students they studied.

Flower may be right about the "largeness" of context: gaining access to "the history students carry in their heads," for example, may well be an unsolvable research problem, whatever methodology is employed. At the same time, though, the difficulties of operationalizing "context" in any study stem not simply from the "largeness" of context but also from the continuing tendency among composition researchers and teachers to focus on what we refer to as "the mind" of the individual student and to
conceive of writing as primarily a solitary, cognitive act. The result of such a tendency is that context, no matter how carefully defined and described, remains a kind of background against which individual students grapple cognitively with assigned reading and writing tasks. Or, context is depicted in a dichotomous relationship with cognition. Either way, the two are seen as separate entities. Moreover, privileging the individual writer's cognition over the powerful social and cultural aspects of the context within which that writer works tends to obscure the notion that a text like Kara's and the revisions she made were very much a product of her social interactions with her teacher--a kind of collaboration--rather than the product solely of that student's individual cognitive processes.

As my reading of Kara's essay from a cognitive-individualist perspective indicates, and as Flower et al.'s *Reading to Write* study powerfully suggests, a cognitive perspective on writing inadequately explains how and what a student writes. The focus of a cognitive-individualist model on what happens "inside" the mind of a student like Kara as she revises her paragraph seems to preclude a consideration of context beyond identifying certain contextual factors as important "cues" to a cognitive act. Such a focus on individual cognition hinders attempts to
answer the many questions that Kara's revisions in this passage might raise. What, for example, was the role of Kara's previous experiences with narrative writing in these revisions? How do Kara's developing attitudes about narrative, and about writing and reading generally, figure into these revisions? What effect did her previous experiences with Mrs. Smith have on these revisions? What effect did her interactions with her tutor and her classmates have on her writing? What role do the values of her community and school play in her writing? Do such factors as these differ in the cognitive processes they initiate? Where in Kara's text can we see the influence of such factors? Does Kara's sociocultural background have any influence on her writing? In what ways?

To address such questions, we need a version of the story of Kara's essay that focuses less on her individuality as a student writer and more closely on her place in the intricate web of practical, social, and cultural factors that constitute the classroom, the school, and the community in which she exists as a student and a

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5In Reading to Write, Flower et al. do address some of these questions in an attempt to show that reading-to-write is both a cognitive and a social activity. As I will argue below, however, although Flower et al. try to account for the influence of context on the students they studied, they continue to conceive of context as external to the writer and they continue to perceive writing as primarily a cognitive act. In Chapter II, I will propose that context must be understood as part of the writing process, not as external to the writer.
writer. In such a version of the story of Kara's essay, Kara's place in that web and her responses to the elements that comprise that web become the most important determinants of how and what she wrote. Such a version would encourage us to view Kara not simply as an individual mind composing within a powerfully influential context, as Flower et al.'s study suggests; it would encourage us to see the act of composing as inherently part of that context—and the context as part of composing. The following section proposes just such an alternative version of the story of Kara's essay.

2

A Social View of Kara's Essay

The story of Kara's essay could—and perhaps should—begin with Kara's first experiences with literacy. In telling this story, I could trace her love of language, for example, back to her mother's early efforts to read regularly to Kara when Kara was a very young child. And I might follow the story of Kara's development as a writer and reader through those pre-school years into elementary and then middle school, recounting her experiences with various teachers and assigned tasks and attempting to correlate those to Kara's habits and abilities as a writer.
now. In short, I could explore Kara's personal background as a literate person to show how that background has influenced her as a writer today. I could tell the story of Kara as a writer and reader much as Shirley Brice Heath tells the same kind of story about how the residents of Roadville, Trackton, and Maintown acquire literate behaviors (Ways With Words). Such an account would underscore the point that context comprises a complicated set of inter-related social and cultural factors, which may be quite remote temporally from a particular act of writing. That is, some of these factors that contribute to Kara's idiosyncracies as a writer in the present have their origins in the past of ten or fifteen years ago.

But the ineffable "large-ness" of context and the importance of the many complicated contextual factors that figured into the writing of Kara's essay are evident even if I begin the story of her essay much later, at the start of the second semester of the 1989-1990 school year, when Kara entered Mrs. Smith's advanced composition class. On that first day of class, late in January, Kara sat in the same seat in which she sat when Mrs. Smith returned "A Splash of Color" to Kara almost nine weeks later. On that day, too, Kara seemed to listen quietly as Mrs. Smith

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6The information presented here is drawn from data gathered as part of the naturalistic study described in Chapter III.
described the course and set forth some of the ground rules. Mrs. Smith emphasized diligence: "This [class] is really self-motivated. I can't stress that enough . . . You can learn as much as you want to in this course." She also warned the students that "you have to be willing to revise your papers" in this course, that "good writing is rewriting," and that "I really push for you not to use the passive voice." And she briefly described the ten writing assignments that the students would have to complete over the next eighteen weeks. During this discussion Kara learned that Mrs. Smith required at least two drafts of each essay and that at least three other students would have to critique, or "peer conference," each essay—something Kara wasn't too thrilled about, since she preferred not to consult with classmates about her writing. And she learned about Mrs. Smith's grading system for the course: each essay would receive a grade of "qualified," "accepted," or "unaccepted"; eight "qualified" essays and two "accepted" essays would mean a final grade of "A" for the course; six "qualified" and four "accepted" would mean a "B"; five and five a "C," and so on.

All this sounded quite "rigid" to Kara, who confessed two weeks later that she didn't like a lot of "rules and structures" when it comes to writing. But it was clear from the start that "rules and structures" characterized
Mrs. Smith's course. On the third day of class, Mrs. Smith began a four-day exercise designed to introduce the students to the four forms of writing that they would have to work on during the first nine weeks of the course: narrative, cause and effect, description, and persuasion. Each form carried with it specific requirements regarding length, content, and structure, which were spelled out in a series of handouts called "rubrics" (Appendix B). During these classes, Kara learned more about the features of writing style that Mrs. Smith liked and disliked, about the specific requirements of particular essay forms, and about the importance of deadlines in Mrs. Smith's class. In short, Kara began to get a sense of what writing for Mrs. Smith would mean. "It will take more time to write the stuff for this class," Kara said the following week. She seemed to recognize that she might have to alter the ways she typically went about writing an essay. This class was, in Kara's view, "more serious":

Last semester I was in a creative writing class and that was a really relaxed class, and it was just like I just write whenever I wanted to . . . There were deadlines, but if you missed them then she [the teacher of the creative writing class] really made no big deal out of it. But I feel that this class [Mrs. Smith's] has a more rigid structure.

Not only would Kara likely have to alter her writing strategies and behaviors for this class, but she might also
have to adopt—or at least consider—different attitudes about writing than she had previously held.

In this structured course, Mrs. Smith established the boundaries for the topics students could write about and the forms their writing would take; she also set guidelines for the composing behaviors students might engage in as they wrote. For instance, all students were required to write at least two drafts of each essay and to share the first of those drafts with three student readers before they could submit the essays to Mrs. Smith. In addition, all drafts after the first draft were required to be submitted on computer printouts; that is, the writing for the course was to be done using word processing. And since most of the class time was devoted to writing and to individual conferences with Mrs. Smith, students had plenty of time to work on their essays during class at one of the fourteen computers that lined the classroom walls. Finally, deadlines were tight and virtually inflexible. Mrs. Smith continually stressed the importance of beginning each assignment early, and she often reminded students about deadlines.

These circumstances meant that several behaviors often associated with the composing process became "standard" practice in Mrs. Smith's class. First, students composed in drafts, whether or not they would have chosen to do so
otherwise. Second, they revised their essays regularly. Third, they consulted regularly with their peers about their writing. Fourth, they wrote used word processing for their essays. Fifth, they generally wrote quickly and under pressure of deadlines. For the most part, students adjusted their schedules and strategies to these requirements: they wrote when they were required to, with the required technologies, and in required ways. No doubt the structure of Mrs. Smith's classroom influenced the students' composing behaviors in less obvious ways as well (e.g. they may have written more words per essay than they might have if computers had not been required); clearly, though, writing in this course took very specific forms and involved several specified behaviors, all of which were determined by the nature of Mrs. Smith's course and by her own attitudes toward and beliefs about teaching writing—not necessarily by the individual students themselves. Although each student responded to the circumstances of this class somewhat differently, all were part of the social and institutional "discourse community" into which Mrs. Smith's class evolved. 7

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7 In recent years several scholars have discussed the problematic nature of terms like "discourse community" and "community" as they are used in composition scholarship and research. See especially Joseph Harris, "The Idea of Community in the Study of Writing," CCC 40 (February 1989): 11-22. See also Patricia Bizzell, "Foundationalism and Anti-Foundationalism in Composition Studies," Pre/Text 7 (Spring/Summer 1986): 37-57; and John Schilb, "Ideology and
We might, then, see some of the difficulties Kara had in adjusting to Mrs. Smith's course as a function of her efforts to adapt to (or resist) a set of social and institutional parameters associated with the course--her struggle, that is, to become part of that social and institutional structure--rather than only as a matter of an individual student applying her cognitive abilities to a given set of academic writing tasks. In somewhat the same way that the Roadville children in Heath's study had to adapt to expectations for language use that were different in school than at home, Kara found herself expected and encouraged to behave in somewhat unfamiliar ways as a writer in Mrs. Smith's class. For example, Kara was not accustomed to submitting several drafts of her essays to her teachers for comment, a practice Mrs. Smith expected. In the beginning, she rarely submitted her drafts to Mrs. Smith early enough for Mrs. Smith to comment on them and to allow time for revision before the deadlines. In addition, although Mrs. Smith was available for individual conferences each day in class, Kara never signed up for one in the early weeks of the semester. Also, although Kara was quite familiar with word processing and was accustomed

Composition Scholarship," Journal of Advanced Composition 8 (1988): 22-29, especially p. 23. For my purposes here, the term "community" refers to the group of students and the teacher who came together regularly for this course and the norms of behavior that governed that group. I'll go into more detail about this "community" in Chapter III.
to writing most of her academic papers on her own computer at home, she resisted using the computers in Mrs. Smith's classroom, which were different from her own. As a result, during the early weeks of the class Kara rarely spent her class time at one of the computers; instead, she would read at one of the worktables in the classroom, work on homework for another class, or, less frequently, make notes for the essay on which she happened to be working. Mrs. Smith noticed these behaviors, and although she didn't punish Kara directly for them, she regularly made oblique references to them when she returned Kara's essays: "If you had taken the time for a conference with me, this could have been a better paper."

In this version of the story of Kara's essay, then, Kara exhibited composing behaviors in the beginning of the semester that were somewhat outside the norms set for the "community" of Mrs. Smith's classroom. (I am, of course, leaving undiscussed the myriad social norms that govern student and teacher behavior in schools generally, although these were certainly part of the context within which Kara was writing.) Although Mrs. Smith characterized Kara's writing as "good," and although Mrs. Smith felt that Kara had a great deal of talent as a writer for such a young student, Kara was not abiding by the rules that governed writing behavior in the course.
By the time Kara began to work on her profile, "A Splash of Color," the structure of Mrs. Smith's advanced composition course and the complicated social and institutional norms at work in that course had begun to influence her writing. To succeed as a writer in the class required that Kara accept these norms, or appear to—at least temporarily. Whatever her own abilities as a writer, Kara could not earn high grades in Mrs. Smith's class if she did not write about specified topics in specified ways at specified times. And she could not be a "successful" student in that course if she did not exhibit the kinds of behaviors expected of students in the class. Clearly, Kara's ability to adapt to these constraints is in part a function of her individual cognitive skills, her ability to "read" Mrs. Smith and the course, and her own level of proficiency with the written language—among other things. But these alone did not determine what and how Kara wrote. Instead, these abilities manifested themselves as a result of the contextual factors I have been describing. How these factors influenced Kara's essay can be seen in part in the way she composed and revised her essay, "A Splash of Color."

Kara's first draft of "A Splash of Color" was actually a revised version of an essay she had written the previous semester for her creative writing class. "Deciding to use
it [the essay] for the profile was kind of like choosing," Kara explained the week she began working on the profile assignment. "I didn't have any ideas and I was kind of sitting around, hm, maybe I could use this paper and I brought it in and she [Mrs. Smith] said that that would be fine." Mrs. Smith, however, did not know that the essay had been written previously for another class, and Kara did not tell her. As far as Kara was concerned, the essay fit nicely the requirement of the assignment to "write about someone you know well." Still, Mrs. Smith was involved to an extent in Kara's decision to use the essay for the assignment.

To arrive at the "first" draft of the profile essay, then, Kara revised her essay from the creative writing class according to the conventions for writing Mrs. Smith had by then established: she lengthened it, corrected some mechanical errors, and changed the verb tenses throughout. "I need to keep to one tense and add some more description," she explained. (Consistency in verb tense was one of Mrs. Smith's emphases.) In short, Kara's invention and revision strategies were shaped in part by the parameters of two assignments in two different writing classes, by her sense of what Mrs. Smith's assignment called for, and by her gradual acceptance of the norms of Mrs. Smith's course. Whatever individual abilities Kara
possessed in terms of being able to draft an essay such as this, the content of that essay—and Kara "created" that content—was determined to a great extent by the assignment and by what Kara perceived Mrs. Smith wanted.

At the same time, Kara was adapting to the structure of Mrs. Smith's class in what Mrs. Smith perceived to be an efficient way: she was now working on her essay well ahead of the deadline, in part because she didn't have to compose a first draft from scratch. Mrs. Smith noted on the draft Kara submitted, "I'm glad you've handed your paper in early so you can polish it to its potential." Even more important, Kara signed up for a conference with Mrs. Smith while she was in the process of putting together the "first" draft—something she had not done for any of the previous assignments. Mrs. Smith was as pleased about that as she was about the way Kara's essay seemed to be shaping up. Kara was now beginning to exhibit a composing behavior (participating in a writing conference) that Mrs. Smith valued highly. That particular behavior helped shape her invention and revision strategies for this essay: she discussed the idea with Mrs. Smith as she was beginning the first draft and she incorporated Mrs. Smith's suggestions into her revisions. And Kara was using class time to work on her essay, another behavior valued by Mrs. Smith, and one which Kara's previous failure to engage in set her
apart from most of her classmates, who generally used class
time to work on their papers. In short, Kara's behavior as
a student writer was beginning to fall in line with
"acceptable" composing behavior in class; conversely, the
norms Mrs. Smith tried to establish and reinforce in her
class were beginning to influence—perhaps even determine—
some of Kara's composing behaviors.

A review of the revisions Kara made on her essay reflect her growing awareness of (and perhaps her acceptance
of) the norms set for writing in the class. Kara's
revisions, in terms of both style and content, were
profoundly shaped by Mrs. Smith's comments on Kara's drafts
and by Kara's own perceptions of Mrs. Smith's attitudes
about what constitutes "good" writing. For instance, in
the first paragraph of the draft Kara submitted to Mrs.
Smith, she had written:

Her face was frozen in a smile that did not reach her
eyes, for they held a sadness masked only by people's
wish to deny it.

Under the phrase, "Masked only by people's wish to deny
it," Mrs. Smith drew a line and wrote, "unclear." In her
revised version of that sentence, Kara wrote,

Her face was frozen in a smile that did not reach her
eyes, for they held a sadness hidden only because
people pretended not to see it.

Similarly, Mrs. Smith wrote "awkward" next to the last
three words of this sentence on Kara's early draft:
As long as her heart remained open to the Lord, she would have friends, people to laugh with her and cry with her, people to share life with.

Kara revised the sentence to read,

As long as her heart remained open to the Lord, she would have friends: people to laugh with her and cry with her, people to accept her for who she was, not who she pretended to be.

It's interesting to note here that, while these rewordings fall squarely into the category of word-level revision that Nancy Sommers found the student writers in her study engaged in most often (Sommers, "Revision Strategies"), Kara reworded in response to specific prompts from her teacher. In fact, every one of the twenty-nine revisions Kara made on this essay was a response to one of the comments written on Kara's draft by Mrs. Smith. This fact is even more striking given that Kara did not make a single revision in response to three suggestions for revision made by an English tutor on Kara's "first" draft before Kara submitted it to Mrs. Smith.

From this point of view, the revisions Kara made, while they do reflect her own decisions, become part of a much more complicated set of related factors than the cognitive-individualist perspective allows for. Flower's assertion that such contextual factors "cue" cognition thus seems inadequate, in large part because these "cues" are seen as external catalysts for the writer's cognitive acts,
rather than as part of an intricate matrix of inter-related contextual factors that make writing a social act as well.  

For instance, the fact that Kara revised only those sections of her essay about which Mrs. Smith commented seems to suggest that the way Kara represented her task and then went about completing it was profoundly shaped by Mrs. Smith's tendencies, techniques, and remarks as a teacher. Kara's mental task representation would likely have been different had Mrs. Smith made no comments on the draft, even though Kara's "web of purposes" in this case might have remained essentially intact. That is, Kara would still have been completing a specific writing task for a specific teacher in an effort to achieve what she considered to be an acceptable grade. Thus, what Mrs.  

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8The data-gathering technique of think-aloud protocols, employed so extensively by Flower and Hayes and their colleagues, reflects this same limitation. Although Flower and Hayes suggest that protocol analysis can provide important information about a writer's mental processes during composing, they seem not to take into account the possible influence of the technique itself on the data. For example, how does the presence of a researcher, a tape-recorder, an unfamiliar room, etc. affect how and what the writer writes during the session? How does the need to continually speak during composing affect the writer? Some critics have charged that protocols are flawed as tools for composition research because they de-contextualize the composing process. I would argue, however, that the writing done during a think-aloud protocol session is highly contextualized, but the context of a think-aloud protocol session happens to be very different from the context of a classroom like Kara's; consequently, the way the writer composes in such a session is likely to be different from the way that writer composes in some other setting.
Smith did, what she said, and who she was seems profoundly to have influenced what Kara wrote. And it seems likely, given Kara's comments about Mrs. Smith's class, that Kara's previous experiences with English classes somehow influenced her decisions about what to revise. Consider, too, that both the English tutor and Mrs. Smith noted that Kara's use of "life" in this paragraph was vague and that both suggested she illustrate her point with "specifics." Yet Kara ignored the suggestions of the English tutor as she revised her rough draft, whereas she took Mrs. Smith's suggestions about the very same issue into account as she revised the final version of the essay. Kara's decision to ignore the tutor's comment but take Mrs. Smith's comment into account would suggest either that Kara's representation of the task at hand was different after Mrs. Smith commented on the draft or that it was more profoundly shaped by Mrs. Smith's comments and by Kara's sense of Mrs. Smith's attitudes about writing than by the tutor's comments. Whatever the case, what's important here is not simply that Kara represented the task mentally and then acted according to her representation of the task, but also that the context within which she was working affected her representation of the task in specific ways and that specific contextual "cues" elicited quite different responses from Kara. In other words, Kara's decisions
about what and how to revise in this instance were social decisions, not simply cognitive moves.

From this perspective, Kara's revisions would be explained quite differently than the Flower-and-Hayes model—or any other cognitive-individualist model—might explain them. We would be concerned not so much with the cognitive processes that were "cued" by contextual factors, but with the specific character of those "cues" and how they shaped Kara's composing behaviors and her text. In other words, we would begin to see the context as integrally part of the creation of Kara's essay, not simply as a set of external influences on her as she mentally composed her essay.

As a result, we would want a fuller understanding of the role of Mrs. Smith's attitudes toward writing, for example, and the way those manifested themselves in her class. We would want a fuller sense of how Kara's past experiences with narrative and with English assignments generally might have figured into her revisions. We would explore how the "community" of Mrs. Smith's class helped shape Kara's attitudes about writing style and perhaps about narrative as a genre and how those attitudes manifested themselves in how and what Kara wrote; we might begin to examine how Kara's addition of the descriptive phrases about the "in crowd" reflected such factors as Mrs.
Smith's attitudes toward writing, the way she organized and managed her class, and her specific responses to her students' drafts. It would not be enough to label these simply as part of Kara's "long-term memory" or the "task environment"; we would want a more detailed picture of such factors and how they figured into Kara writing. Thus, to understand fully how context "cued" cognition in this instance would require an understanding of the nature of that context--an understanding that goes beyond simple acknowledgement of the "presence" of a context.

**Conclusion**

In the social version of Kara's essay, then, what Kara wrote was a response to a complicated set of social and institutional requirements, parameters, and norms governing the form and content of her essay as well as the behaviors she engaged in to write that essay. If we focused our attention on Kara's cognitive abilities as an individual writer, we would no doubt attempt to understand the specific cognitive processes, to the extent that we could determine these, activated or employed by Kara as she completed the task of writing and revising her essay. But such an investigation, which would try to account for the decisions Kara made as an individual writer with her own particular set of cognitive abilities, could only provide
us with part of the story of this essay. For whatever her cognitive abilities, Kara almost certainly would not have made the revisions she chose to make had it not been for the way Mrs. Smith ran her course, the way she responded to Kara's essay, Mrs. Smith's attitudes toward writing in general and toward this assignment in particular, and to a host of related factors somehow influencing Kara as she wrote and revised this essay. In other words, the context—social, situational, cultural, immediate—within which Kara wrote "A Splash of Color" in a number of very complicated ways profoundly shaped—and perhaps even determined—the behaviors Kara engaged in as she wrote and revised her essay. What and how she wrote—and how her writing was received, used, and evaluated—were a function of that context. How Kara went about completing this task for Mrs. Smith's class seems to support Linda Flower's assertion that context "in many ways determines, directs, or prompts the kind of thinking the individual writer will do" ("Studying Cognition" 287).

The full story of Kara's essay must also include contextual factors that are less immediate or obvious than those I have focused on so far in these pages. For example, I haven't explored the implications of Kara's ethnic background, the fact that she is a young white woman growing up in a predominantly white, middle-class suburb of
a large midwestern city. Nor have I accounted for the ways in which broader political, cultural, and historical factors might have given rise to the course Kara was taking at the time, in the way Richard Ohmann, for example, explains the character of college freshman English courses in *English in America*, or in the way James Berlin traces the development of writing instruction in the U.S. (*Rhetoric and Reality*). I have not accounted for the ethos of the school and how it might have helped shaped Kara's attitude toward her school-assigned writing tasks, as Goodlad attempted to do in his study of high schools (*Place*). Such factors also figure into the writing of Kara's essay, perhaps more profoundly than the factors I have discussed here, though perhaps in less direct ways than, say, Mrs. Smith's marginal notes in Kara's draft or Mrs. Smith's multi-draft requirement in the course. Still, a full accounting for how and what Kara wrote would include these broader factors as well.

But even without such a broad consideration of context, the version of the story of Kara's essay presented here suggests the importance of exploring fully even the most immediate and seemingly obvious contextual factors that might influence a student writer like Kara. It further suggests the need for a fuller conception of context than currently informs composition studies. Such a
conception of context would allow us to pinpoint more easily such immediate contextual factors as Mrs. Smith's insistence of using specifics and holding individual conferences as well as broader social and cultural factors that might have shaped, altered, or even given rise to Kara's decisions as a writer. As Flower points out, we need "a more integrated vision of how cognition and context affect one another in the process of real students' writing" (Reading to Write 14), but that vision need not encourage us to see cognition and context in a dichotomous relationship, for if it does, it begins to obscure the inherently social nature of writing and hinder our understanding of context. Our vision of writing, then, must enable us to conceive of context as bound up with cognition.

In the next chapter, I'll lay the groundwork for such a conception of context by reviewing what previous research and theory can reveal about context and by pushing the limits of our traditional understanding of what context in writing means. I'll suggest that we look to social constructionist epistemology as a foundation for a new conception of context in writing.
CHAPTER II
Reconceiving Context in Writing

The version of the story of Kara's essay offered in the preceding section is incomplete; indeed, it could never really be complete in the sense that "context," as I have been using the term, can encompass practically every aspect of the writing of Kara's essay, from seemingly mundane factors like the kind of paper Kara used as she began writing her essay to broader influences like the cultural attitudes toward writing and reading that informed the curriculum in which Kara took courses. But part of the purpose in telling this version of the story of Kara's essay is precisely to highlight the ineffable nature of "context" as a concept in the teaching of writing and to underscore the difficulty of defining that term. A key problem in accounting for context in our students' writing stems not only from our tendency to focus on the individual writer as the central element in the creation of a text, but also from our lack of adequate working definitions of context. As I suggest above, to say that
context is important in writing is a commonplace among composition teachers and scholars; to state more precisely what we mean by context is quite another matter, for despite the interest among composition scholars in the sociocultural contexts of writing in the past decade or so, "context" as a theoretical concept remains nebulously and inadequately defined in the scholarly literature.

This chapter explores some of the assumptions about writing and knowledge that have informed the discussion of context thus far. In examining some of these assumptions, I seek to ground the notion of context in writing in social constructionist epistemology and to show that in fact that's precisely what some scholars in composition and in related fields have been doing in recent years. The preceding chapter explored some of the ways in which Kara's essay can be seen as a product of the very social act of writing. This chapter considers the question of what "writing as a social act" means theoretically; and more important to the present study, it explores what conception of context arises from such a view of writing.

Theoretical Foundations of a Social View of Writing
In his seminal article, "What Is An Author," Michel Foucault asserts that "the name of an author . . . points to the existence of certain groups of discourse and refers to the status of this discourse within a society and a culture" (123). Foucault's concern here is to highlight the problematic nature of the notion of the individual author and to emphasize the power of discourse—of language—over the writer. But in doing so Foucault reveals the impossibility of separating the author and the text from the discourses in progress within a society and a culture. Although Foucault and other post-structuralist thinkers like Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida seek to challenge the notion of determinate meaning and to privilege text as language over author as individual—a project which seems to threaten the very enterprise of teaching writing—their work has forced scholars in humanistic disciplines to reassess the longstanding view of the author as individual meaning-maker. Scholars in humanistic disciplines, and especially in composition and rhetoric, have begun to acknowledge that, as Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede put it, "the concept of individual authorship, which strikes many people as not only commonsensical but also somehow inevitable, is actually a cultural concept, and a recent one at that" (Singular 77).
What has been emerging in composition studies in place of this traditional view of the author is a view of the writer as part of a broad social and cultural network. This social view of the writer takes many forms, from Nystrand's "social-interactive model" of writing, which focuses on how meaning in a text is reciprocally negotiated between writer and reader, to a broader conception of literacy as a set of culturally defined skills (as, e.g., in Heath; Scribner and Cole; Sherzer). These various versions of a social perspective on writing tend to emphasize different factors associated with literacy. For example, Nystrand is interested in exploring how meaning in a text is encoded and decoded by writer and reader and seeks to "conceptualize writing not as the process of translating writing purpose and meaning into text but rather as the writer's negotiation of meaning between herself and her reader" ("Social-Interactive Model" 76). Heath seeks to understand the ways in which literacy is shaped by communal and cultural norms and conventions (Ways With Words). Sherzer investigates how cultural norms and conventions shape the specific structures and meanings of spoken and written texts ("Discourse-Centered"). Despite their different emphases, these various versions of a social view of writing share at least two basic assumptions about the nature of knowledge and literacy--assumptions
that have important implications for a useful conception of context in writing: (1) that knowledge is socially constructed; and (2) that literacy, the use of written language, is socially and culturally defined.

The first of these assumptions, that knowledge is constructed in social ways, is associated with a loosely defined epistemology that has come to be called "social constructionism" or "social construction." Social constructionism is not a distinct philosophical school, but an epistemological position that grows out of several different but related intellectual movements, including the sociology of knowledge (especially as espoused by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman), the New Pragmatist philosophy, the revisionist philosophy of science associated with Thomas Kuhn and Michael Polanyi, and the cultural anthropology of scholars like Clifford Geertz. While each of these movements is distinct in the sense that each represents an intellectual school of thought within a particular discipline, they all arose in large part as reactions to a positivistic view of reality; they have in common, according to philosopher Richard Rorty, "opposition to an idea of knowledge as accurate picturing of things as they are in themselves" (Olson 4). Kuhn, for example, challenges the notion that science, as the study of nature, is founded on the discovery of "objective" facts and "laws"
which describe nature as it really exists; he argues that what counts as a "fact" in a given scientific community is to a great extent a function of the values and philosophical perspectives of the scientists within that community who "discover" those facts (Structure).

Similarly, Rorty, the most influential of the New Pragmatist philosophers, critiques the idea of true knowledge as an accurate representation of an external reality. Rorty seeks to replace this view, which he associates with the post-Kantian "analytic philosophers" who have dominated philosophical inquiry since Kant, with the view that knowledge is socially justified. Like Kuhn, Rorty believes that "objective knowledge" is that which is accepted as such. "Rational certainty," he asserts, "must be seen as a matter of victory in argument rather than of relation to an object known" (Philosophy 156). Likewise, sociologists of knowledge like Berger and anthropologists like Geertz see knowledge as that which counts for knowledge within specific social and cultural boundaries, not as something absolute or immutable.

In short, the epistemological position that has come to be known as social construction considers all knowledge a function of social and cultural norms, conventions, practices, and attitudes. Kenneth Bruffee sums up this position as follows:
Social construction understands reality, knowledge, thought, facts, texts, selves, and so on as community-generated and community-maintained linguistic activities—or, more broadly speaking, symbolic entities—that define or "constitute" the communities that generate them... Social construction understands knowledge and the authority of knowledge as community-generated, community-maintaining, symbolic artifacts. ("Social Construction" 774, 777).

There has been in various academic circles much debate about this view of knowledge as socially constructed. For instance, Kuhn was criticized after the publication of The Structure of Scientific Revolutions for the loose way he defined "paradigms," the key concept by which he explained how scientists communally justify and privilege certain kinds of "objective" knowledge. One critic charged that this term, as Kuhn uses it, has no real "explanatory" value for either scientists or philosophers (Shapere 385).\(^1\) Rorty, too, has been attacked for the relativism to which his epistemological position seems to lead. Anthropologists like Geertz who espouse a social constructionist view of culture have also been taken to task by social scientists who worry about the social and ethical relativism that seems to lurk behind Geertz's ethnographic narratives: Aren't these narratives, they ask, simply one anthropologist's idiosyncratic interpretation of what is important and what isn't?

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\(^1\)For a thorough discussion of criticisms of Kuhn's ideas, see Robert Connors, "Composition Studies and Science" (College English 45 [January 1983]: 1-20).
These charges of relativism have proved to be thorny ones for composition scholars who have attempted to borrow social constructionist principles and apply them to the teaching of writing. On the one hand, conservative critics worry that social constructionist thinking leads to an "anything goes" approach to teaching, which ultimately undermines any kind of authority for knowledge. On the other hand, left-wing critics have expressed concern that, as John Trimbur has pointed out in his extended critique of Bruffee's model of collaborative learning, which is based on Rorty's social constructionist ideas, "the social constructionist rationale for collaborative learning may, unwittingly or not, accommodate its practices to the authority of knowledge it believes it is demystifying ("Consensus" 603); in other words, social constructionist ideas, as applied to teaching by scholars like Bruffee, simply reaffirm the established power structures of the status quo, which critics like Trimbur find problematic. For left-wing critics, the chief danger of pedagogies that are based on social constructionist notions about the authority of knowledge is that such pedagogies can obscure the ways in which "knowledge is not uniformly distributed in our society," as Greg Myers puts it (167), and the ways in which discourse can be normative.
The concerns of these critics are indeed serious, for they have to do with the mechanisms by which knowledge and power are controlled. At the same time, while these critics point out (correctly, I think) the ways in which the application of social constructionist ideas can help enforce conformity, exclude certain kinds of discourse and privilege others, maintain norms and conventions, and so on, they accept the basic social constructionist assumption that knowledge is socially defined and maintained, largely through discourse, which itself is socially defined. Marilyn Cooper, for example, worries that the ways in which knowledge is socially defined can be exclusionary, repressive, normative. As she writes in reference to the problems of applying the idea of "discourse community" to composition teaching, "it is the recurrent eruption of foundationalist assumptions in discussions of the notion of discourse communities that makes me reluctant to adopt it as a model for the operation of discourse as a whole" ("Why Are We Talking" 211). For Cooper, then, the normative mechanisms by which discourse communities function should concern us, yet the basic notion of a "community" sharing certain conventions, values, and so on through discourse remains valid. Similarly, Trimbur accepts the notion of consensus as one of the key terms in collaborative learning pedagogies based on social constructionist ideas, but he
wants to transform it from "a component to promote conformity" to "a powerful instrument for students to generate differences" (603). Thus, while these critics reject the social and political implications of how knowledge and power are managed by discourse communities, they accept the assumption that knowledge is socially defined through discourse.

That assumption need not mire composition scholars in a bog of relativism, for the central issue for such scholars is not whether knowledge rests on a foundation of some sort of universal truth, but how that knowledge comes to be "discovered," accepted, and used. The inherently social nature of knowledge-making and knowledge-sharing is the point. Consider the question of whether Geertz's famous article on the Balinese Cockfight is an accurate representation of what happened or his own biased interpretation of what he believed he observed. In either case, Geertz nevertheless witnessed something: a series of events, some kind of cultural and social phenomenon, or something else. What he observed depends in large part on what Kenneth Burke calls a "terministic screen," that is, Geertz's own interpretative framework, based on his professional training, cultural background, and so on. What others make of what he saw also depends in part on their training, cultural backgrounds, and so on. And what
"knowledge" is gained as a result of Geertz's research and his writing depends in part upon how Geertz's work is disseminated to other scholars, upon the conventions governing that dissemination, and upon the norms governing interpretation of his work. As a result, the distinction between what is there and what Geertz thinks he sees there blurs. As Geertz himself has pointed out, referring to his analyses of Moroccan culture,

analysis penetrates into the very body of the object—we begin with our own interpretations of what our informants are up to, or think they are up to, and then systematize those—the line between (Moroccan) culture as a natural fact and (Moroccan) culture as a theoretical entity tends to get blurred. ("Thick" 15)

For Geertz, it would seem, there is something there that we are calling "Moroccan culture"; the question is what will we make of it. In the end, whatever one believes about what Geertz saw and wrote, what counts as knowledge about what he saw and wrote is a product of social interactions; how that "knowledge" is finally used is socially and culturally determined.

In one sense, this answer to the charge of the relativism of social construction sidesteps the larger issue: If knowledge is socially constructed, then is all knowledge simply what is socially agreed upon as knowledge? Is there then no universal foundation for truth? Such a question is well beyond the scope of this study to address adequately. But religion scholar Elaine Pagels provides
some insight into the issue. In addressing the question of the potential relativism of biblical interpretation in the introduction to her book, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent*, Pagels writes,

> Those who are unfamiliar with biblical interpretation or cynical about it may assume that the controversies and diverging interpretations [about biblical truth] described here merely confirm what they have suspected all along: that biblical interpretation is no more than ideology under a different name. Yet those who seriously confront the Bible will realize that genuine interpretation has always required that the reader actively and imaginatively engage the texts. (xxvii)

Actively and imaginatively engaging texts, be they biblical texts, social events like a cockfight, or a student essay, depends in part on decisions a reader makes about the nature of "true" knowledge. But it will always be also a social activity, influenced and shaped by the reader's social and cultural identity, the discourse in which that reader engages, and the norms governing that discourse. Ultimately, then, what social construction offers composition scholars is a way to understand the inherently social nature of knowledge. Whether or not knowledge is socially "constructed," it is always socially "defined" and socially "used."

If knowledge is, in Rorty's phrase, "socially justified belief," then language becomes central to knowledge-making, for language is intimately part of
knowledge-making, as Bruffee suggests in the passage quoted above. Language is part of our representation of the world, as Kenneth Burke's notion of "terministic screens" suggests (Language 44). Language, then, must also be seen from this social perspective; that is, language, like knowledge, is a function of social and cultural norms and conventions. Thus, literacy, the use of written language with all its conventions and in all its various forms, is also socially and culturally defined. This is the second important assumption associated with a social view of writing.

This assumption about the social nature of literacy has gained credence in recent decades through the work of anthropologists like Geertz, sociolinguists like William Labov, psychologists Scribner and Cole, and ethnographers like Del Hymes and Shirley Brice Heath. These scholars have explored the ways in which social and cultural factors shape the nature and uses of language in various settings. In short, taken collectively, this work highlights the complicated ways in which literacy skills are defined by the social and cultural uses to which they are put and by the social and cultural attitudes that govern linguistic and social practices.

In his essay on ethnographic theory and method, "Thick Description," Clifford Geertz sets forth what he calls "a
semiotic concept of culture." For Geertz "culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes can be casually attributed; it is a context--something within which they can be intelligibly--that is, thickly--described" ("Thick" 14). In other words, social practices, behaviors, etc., which for Geertz are always at heart semiotic, must be understood within the context of the culture within which they occur. Because language too is semiotic and because language is inherently part of social practice and behavior, it too must be understood within a cultural context. As Joel Sherzer puts it, "language is both cultural and social. It is cultural in that it is one form of symbolic organization of the world. It is social in that it reflects and expresses group membership and relationships" (196). Sherzer uses narratives from the Kuna Indians of Panama to demonstrate that what strikes western readers or listeners as temporally illogical about these narratives is actually quite "logical" to the Kuna: these narratives "are steeped in Kuna tradition and represent a natural and logical intersection between language and culture" (305). The structures and forms of a language, that is, grow out of cultural forms and traditions and can be understood fully only within the context of those cultural forms and traditions.
If, as Sherzer argues, language is intimately related to culture, then the forms and uses of language may well vary from one cultural context to another. Shirley Brice Heath has described just this sort of variation among three rural communities in the American South. Heath has shown, for example, that the "literacy habits" of residents of one of these communities "do not fit those usually attributed to fully literate groups" ("Protean" 356). Instead, the literacy habits of these residents, which include such activities as reading newspapers, deciphering tax forms, determining prices while shopping, and Bible readings, incorporated features of what Heath calls "the oral tradition" along with features associated with written English:

[W]ritten information almost never stood alone in Trackton; it was reshaped and reworded into an oral mode. In doing so, adults and children incorporated chunks of the written text into their talk. They also sometimes reflected an awareness of a different type of organization of written materials from that of their usual oral productions. (356)

According to Heath, these patterns of literacy habits did not hold for the other communities she studied, but varied "for communities with different cultural features" (365). Some of the features Heath cites as influencing patterns of literate behavior include "the use of space in the community and the ways in which adults relate to preschool children" (365). In Trackton, for instance,
the linkage between houses by open porches, the preference of young and old to be outdoors rather than inside, the incorporation of all the community in the communication network of each household, and the negative value placed on individual reading, reinforced the social group's negotiation of written language. (366)

In the other two communities Heath studied, however, different cultural influences were at work and the literacy habits of residents of those communities varied accordingly. Heath concludes that

in what may be referred to as the post-industrial age, members of each community have different and varying patterns of influence and control over forms and uses of literacy in their lives. They exercise considerable control within their own primary networks. In institutions, such as their churches, they may have some control. In other institutions, such as their places of employment, banks, legal offices, etc., they may have no control over literacy demands. The shape of literacy events in each of these is different. (370)

Heath has also explored the influence of social and cultural attitudes and practices on the way children from different communities learn "ways of taking" meaning from printed materials. According to Heath, "each community's ways of taking from the printed word and using this knowledge are interdependent with the ways children learn to talk in their social interactions with caregivers" ("Bedtime" 50). Heath describes differences in the ways children from Trackton and from Roadville, two rural communities of different racial makeup, responded to printed materials and made meaning from those materials. These differences, Heath argues, are tied to social and
cultural factors, such as those mentioned above. Heath concludes that "literacy events" such as reading stories "must . . . be interpreted in relation to larger sociocultural patterns which they may exemplify or reflect" (74).

Heath reminds us of the historical development of literacy in Europe, which was shaped by such events as the invention of the printing press and other writing technologies. Such developments made the technologies for literacy available to ordinary people on a vastly greater scale than ever before. And yet, Heath writes, this history suggests that "the contexts and uses of literacy in each society determined its values, forms, and functions" ("Protean" 367). In other words, what defined literacy was not the particular skills associated with using written language, but the social and cultural circumstances surrounding the application of those skills. As Scribner and Cole concluded after studying the cognitive effects of literacy among the Vai people of modern Liberia, "literacy is not simply knowing how to read and write a particular script but applying this knowledge for specific purposes in specific contexts of use" (236). Thus, literacy must be seen "as a set of socially organized practices which make use of a symbol system and a technology for producing and disseminating it" (236).
Writing as a Social Activity and the Meaning of Context

The ramifications of a social view of literacy for a definition of context are profound. To the extent that literacy is, as Scribner and Cole describe it, "a set of socially organized practices," the social contexts within which literacy is practiced become central to the process of meaning-making. Moreover, we cannot understand literacy adequately unless we understand adequately the contexts within which literacy is practiced. Thus, to define literacy--and to understand writing specifically--requires a description of the contexts of literacy and their relationship to literate practices. It also requires a shift in the way we look at a text like Kara's essay and how it came to be. That text is seen not primarily as a function of the particular literacy skills that Kara, as an individual writer, brought to bear in a particular situation; rather, since those skills are "socially organized practices," her essay becomes to a great extent a function of the social context within which she created it.

From this perspective, the context within which a writer like Kara is working is not simply the "scene" (to
use Kenneth Burke's term) in which she writes; nor, as Deborah Brandt has pointed out, can it "be construed as a kind of static stage upon which a writer makes an entrance but rather as a dynamic 'here and now' that, moment by moment, guides and constrains a writer's effort to bring forth meaning" ("Toward" 141). Context, that is, is an integral part of the act of writing itself, inseparable from the act and from the text that is ultimately produced. The context of writing, then, doesn't simply influence meaning-making in writing; it is part of the process of meaning-making in writing.

Precisely how context enables meaning-making in both spoken and written texts is an issue that linguists have been exploring since at least the 1920's, when Bronislaw Malinowski argued that the meaning of an utterance in a conversation is a function of the social and linguistic contexts of that utterance. Essentially, linguists have attempted to understand how a particular statement or question or even a single word comes to mean in a particular situation. How, for example, can we determine which of the several possible meanings a speaker intends—or a listener understands—when he or she says—or hears—

"later?" Depending upon the circumstances, that single word could mean, "So long, I'll see you later," or "I'll do what you are asking me to do later," or "The mail doesn't arrive until later," or "I'd rather have dinner later than 4:00," or something quite different from all of these.

Linguist Michael Halliday has investigated the ways in which what he calls "the context of situation" of an utterance largely determines what a speaker says and what a listener understands a speaker to say. Halliday identifies three elements of the context of situation: field (what is happening at the time), tenor (who is taking part and their respective social positions), and mode (the role assigned to language; e.g. monologue as opposed to a debate). According to Halliday, these elements determine the register, or the range of meanings an utterance can have in a given situation. For Halliday, then, the meaning of a text is always a function of social context: we cannot determine the meaning of an utterance without understanding the circumstances within which the utterance is made (field), the social situations of the conversants (tenor), and the use(s) to which language is put in that situation (mode).

Linguists like Halliday seek to explain how social context enables meaning in a text both when that text is being produced (e.g. when a speaker says, "Later") and when
that text is being interpreted or decoded (when a listener hears the speaker say, "Later," and interprets that utterance to mean, say, "See you later"). As composition scholars have applied linguistic concepts in their attempts to explain how writers and readers make meaning with written texts, they have tried to demonstrate differences and similarities between writing and speaking in terms of "context of situation." For instance, a spoken text is usually interpreted or "processed" by a listener at the moment of utterance, whereas a written text is usually read at a later time and outside the writer's presence. But as scholars like Martin Nystrand and Deborah Brandt have pointed out, meaning in a written text depends as much upon what Brandt calls "a shareable social reality" ("Toward" 152)--that is, the context within which that text is written and read--as does any spoken text. As Brandt puts it,

"Like a speaker who must attend to the intersubjective context of an unfolding dialogue in order to participate appropriately, a writer too must monitor the shared world that the language of the text activates." ("Toward" 154)

In other words, the very social nature of language--and of literacy--means that meaning in a written text depends upon context. Thus, as Brandt points out, "it is not enough to say that meaning occurs in contexts of use but rather that without contexts of use, meaning cannot occur" (146).
What Brandt calls "contexts of use" refer primarily to the immediate circumstances under which a text is shared, read, or otherwise used; she is interested in how the specific circumstances of "contexts of use" influence meaning-making. But these "contexts of use" are themselves products of disciplines, institutions, cultures, and societies. For example, why Kara wrote her essay and the circumstances under which she did so were determined in large part by broader institutional, social, and cultural forces that create "contexts of use." In other words, Brandt's "contexts of use" are socially and culturally defined. The meaning of a text and the ways in which that text is produced and used, then, are context-dependent on several ever-broader levels at once: from the immediate situation in which that text is written and read to the much larger context of the culture in which the text is written and read.³

³I am distinguishing here between what Martin Nystrand calls the "context of production" and the "context of eventual use." The first, according to Nystrand, "refers to the moment and situation of the text's creation by speaker or writer"; the second "refers to the occasion on which the text is actually processed by hearer or reader" ("Role" 206). Although the two are clearly related, my focus here is on the first: I am interested primarily in understanding how context figures into the act of writing—what Nystrand calls the "production" of a text. Consequently, I am passing over the complicated issues associated with how a reader constructs meaning in a written text, issues that have occupied scholars as diverse as Stanley Fish and Frank Smith. At the same time, it's essential to keep in mind that, as Nystrand points out, "the context of use impinges as much upon the writer as the
To assert that context enables meaning-making in writing is not to ignore or dismiss the importance of the writer's intentionality or of his or her individual cognitive abilities with the written language—clearly, those factors are central to the process of meaning-making in writing; it is simply to acknowledge that the writer makes meaning only in context. Linda Flower has asserted that "the critical intervening force" in a writer's creation of a text is "the critical, strategic negotiation" by the student of the task at hand ("Collaborative"). But the writer does not interpret and then complete his or her task outside the context within which that task was assigned and performed. The writer's intentionality and individual cognitive abilities do not function in some sort of monolithic, acontextual fashion; they function only in a context. What Kara intended to "say" in her essay, for example, was bounded, shaped, and enabled by the context within which she was writing that essay—by the course Kara was in, by Mrs. Smith's requirements, by the day of the reader" ("Role" 206). As I will demonstrate below, the function and use of a text and its intended audience all constrain the writer—they are part of the context within which that writer works. In Nystrand's words, "throughout the process [of writing], the context of use . . . regulates production at every turn" (206). My discussion of context, however, will not include the specific issues associated with understanding how a reader makes meaning of a text in a given situation.
week, by the time constraints pressing Kara. Likewise, the specific cognitive skills she brought to bear on the writing of that essay were brought to bear as a result of the contextual situation in which she found herself: Mrs. Smith's requirement that a profile focus on a specific individual, for instance, may have prompted Kara to use a concrete narrative in order to make an abstract point about self-esteem. Thus, Kara's decisions as a writer were profoundly a function of the task, the course, the school, the community, and so on. Conversely, these contextual factors can be seen as part of her decisions. In other words, context, text, and writer form an intricate, inseparable matrix.

3

Toward a Working Definition of Context in Writing

Given the discussion thus far of a social view of writing based on the assumption that knowledge is socially defined and the implications of such a view for understanding the relationship between context, writer, and text, how, then, can we conceive of context in writing?

An adequate conception of context in writing must rest on the assumption that "context" is part of a matrix that
includes context, text, and writer--that each of these elements of the act of writing is inseparable from the others. We might think of "context" in writing as that indistinct part of the matrix which refers to the myriad complex, inter-related factors that somehow enable and shape how and what a writer writes. The individual abilities, intentions, and decisions of the writer, because they "belong to" the writer and are thus part of the matrix of writer, text, and context, must be viewed as part of the context of an act of writing, even as they are also separate from context to the extent that they too influence the context. The emerging text as well is part of the context, as Brandt has argued (see "Toward," especially p. 141), in that it helps shape the writer's behaviors as he or she continues to compose.

In this sense, context encompasses elements of an act of writing that are traditionally conceived of as separate from context, such as the text, the writer's cognition, the writer's motivation, and so on. The traditional conception of writing places the writer at the center of the act of writing, apart from, though influenced by, context. I am arguing here that the "boundaries" between context and writer are not so clear-cut. If "context" includes such sociocultural factors as a writer's ethnic background, his or her previous experiences with literacy, and the
attitudes toward literate behaviors of the community to which that writer may belong, then "context" can be said to be located "within the mind" of the writer as well as "outside" that writer's mind. Conceived of in this way, context is still mediated by the writer, even as the writer is part of that context, for the writer's decisions and abilities influence the context.

A baseball analogy might help clarify this apparent paradox. If we think of Oakland A's outfielder Rickey Henderson, baseball's all-time leader in stolen bases, we tend to think of his achievement as a base-stealer in terms of his amazing quickness, his ability to read a pitcher, and his speed as a runner. No doubt all these have contributed substantially to his attainment of the record for stolen bases. At the same time, many other factors help determine how many bases Rickey Henderson steals: the specific situation during a game (Are the A's leading or trailing their opponent? Is it early or late in the game? Are there one or two outs?), the opposing team, the pitcher and catcher against whom Henderson attempts to steal, the batter at the plate, the batter on deck, the point in the season when the game is being played, the A's standings at that point, and manager Tony LaRussa's assessment of these factors. Several commentators have pointed out that Henderson might have stolen more bases on a different team,
that Vince Coleman usually steals more bases per year than Henderson because he plays on a different kind of team, and that other players, such as Tim Raines, would be closer to Henderson's numbers if they were on different teams. All of which underscores the argument that Henderson's record is not merely a reflection of his own abilities but of those abilities and a host of other considerations. Moreover, whatever his particular individual abilities, Henderson is part of a team, and team considerations will shape what he does and what opportunities he will be given. Indeed, Henderson's abilities help determine those team considerations: they shape LaRussa's assessment of a particular game situation and thus his decision about whether or not Henderson can attempt to steal. In this sense, a kind of dialectic exists between the circumstances at a particular point in a game and Henderson's ability as a base-stealer: his ability thus becomes part of those circumstances even as they are separate from them. In the same way, the writer of a text is both part of and separate from the context within which he or she is writing.

To conceive of and discuss context in this way can be difficult, especially since our traditional conception of the writer as solitary, individual meaning-maker is so
strong. We still hesitate to think of the writer as a social entity and to think of aspects of the act of writing, such as invention, as the product of a "self" that is, in Karen LeFevre's words, "not merely socially influenced but even socially constituted" (Invention 2). In addition, the very way we typically refer to "context" obscures the idea that context includes the writer: we usually talk about writing done "in a context" or a writer working "within a context," as if the context were a place wholly outside the writer. We speak of context as a separate "place" or set of influences on a writer, though to do so misrepresents the nature of context and of its role in writing.

Still, it will serve my purposes in this study to focus attention on context at times as if it were indeed separate from the writer. It will be helpful for the purposes of this discussion, then, to view context, writer, and text as distinct elements of the act of writing, but at the same time to view the "boundaries" between these elements as unstable, or indistinct. As a result, in discussing a contextual factor such as the wording of the profile assignment Kara was given in Mrs. Smith's class, we might see that assignment as simultaneously "outside" Kara,

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4For a good discussion of this issue, see chapter 3 of Lunsford and Ede, Singular Texts/Plural Authors, pp. 72-102.
in the sense that it was spoken by Mrs. Smith and physically recorded in writing on a piece of paper that Kara received from Mrs. Smith, and "inside" Kara, in the sense that Kara represented that task to herself and her representation was a function of her own abilities, her past experiences with such tasks, her attitudes toward the task, and so on.

To conceive of context in this way is to reconceptualize the act of writing. It forces us to shift attention from an often exclusive focus on students as individual configurations of literacy skills and experiences and cognitive abilities to a focus on the complex array of circumstances and factors that allow those skills, experiences, and abilities to play themselves out. While such a view of writing should not dismiss the essential role of the individual writer's abilities, experiences, personality, etc., it should call into question the traditional centrality of the individual writer's role in composing and bring into clearer focus the astoundingly complex matrix of context.
CHAPTER III

Exploring Context in School-Sponsored Writing: A
Description of the Study

The preceding two chapters propose that context as a theoretical construct be reconceived as something more than the scene or background against which students write. Context, I have argued, might best be understood as an astonishingly complex matrix of factors that shape an act of writing; the process of writing and any text produced through such a process can thus be seen as part of the context within which that act of writing and that text occur.

But how might such a theoretical view of context—and of writing—correspond to what we observe in an actual classroom? That is, what constitutes the context within which a particular group of students in a particular class write and how might that context influence, shape, or constrain how and what those students write? This chapter describes a research project undertaken in order to address these questions. Ideally, the project described here can provide empirical support for the theoretical view set forth in the preceding chapters.
A Description of the Study

The data presented in this chapter and in Chapters IV and V were gathered as part of an eighteen-week naturalistic study of the writing of students in one senior-level high school advanced composition class. The study began as an attempt to understand the context within which a group of students such as these wrote and how that context may have influenced their writing. It was based on two central research questions:

1. What are the contexts of school-based writing? More specifically, how can we define, describe, and classify the contexts of the writing tasks that occur within a particular classroom?

2. What influence do these contexts have on students' composing processes and on their written texts? In other words, how do these contexts come into play as students conceptualize and complete their assigned writing tasks?

Methodology

To address these questions, I became a participant-observer for one semester (eighteen weeks) in one section of Advanced Composition at Thompson High School, located in a middle-class suburb of a large midwestern city. During that semester, I attended the daily class meetings, inscribed field notes, audiotaped interviews with the
students and the teacher, made copies of the students' writing for the class and of the teacher's records, and acted as a resource for the students when they sought advice on their writing. My approach to collecting these data was naturalistic, and I employed the methods of ethnography to gather these data, including inscription of field notes, open-ended interviewing, regular observation of the students and the class over an extended period of time, and the collecting of materials (such as drafts of assignments, notes, etc.) from the participants. My intent in employing this approach and methodology was not to "prove" that the context of this class influenced the students' writing in an anticipated way; rather, my purpose was to describe as fully as possible the different contextual factors that affected the writing of this group of students and to begin to explore the ways in which these factors influenced the students' work in that class. The methods of ethnography are particularly well suited for such a purpose, since ethnographic research is designed to investigate the activities of the individuals or groups under study within the context of their "natural" or typical surroundings (Erickson; Kantor, et al.); to alter the class setting for the purposes of this study, for example, by devising specific writing prompts or by dividing the students into groups for some sort of quasi-
experimental manipulation, would have changed the context under study and thus would have made investigation of the research questions posed by this study impossible.\(^1\)

As participant-observer, I attended 61 of 82 class meetings (75%) during the spring semester, which began on January 23, 1990 and ended on June 7, 1990.\(^2\) Classes met at 9:00 a.m. Monday through Friday for 54 minutes. I usually arrived a few minutes before the 9:00 a.m. bell and sometimes stayed to interview students after the class was over.

On the first day of class, the teacher, Mrs. Smith\(^3\) introduced me as a graduate student who was conducting a research project about how they [the students] wrote. I was given approximately ten minutes to explain the project and to hand out a description of the study along with consent forms, which were to be signed by the students and their parents (see Appendix H). During this time, I did not reveal the specific focus of the study to the students;

\(^1\)To the extent that my presence in the classroom was "unnatural" or "unusual," I did indeed "alter" the class setting; however, I did not ask the teacher to change any procedure, assignment, policy, or activity to accommodate my study. As much as possible, I was simply observing what would have gone on in the classroom had I been absent. The following pages describe more fully my role as a participant-observer in the classroom.

\(^2\)I missed class meetings for a variety of reasons, but usually because of scheduling conflicts, which were sometimes caused by the rescheduling of classes at the school to accommodate special events.

\(^3\)All the names used in this chapter and throughout this study are pseudonyms.
instead, I explained that I was interested in learning more about how they wrote. I stressed that their participation was entirely voluntary and would have no impact upon their grades for the course (Mrs. Smith reiterated this point); I also stressed that they could decline to talk to me at any time for any reason, even if they had signed the consent forms, and that they could withdraw their consent at any time. I explained further that I would generally observe them in class, talk to them during and after class, and read and analyze the writing they did for the class. Mrs. Smith also emphasized that I would be available to the students as a resource for their work during class meetings. We both emphasized, however, that I would have no voice in the grading of their essays or in evaluation of their work for a final grade for the course. In short, I would be available for consultation, but I would have no authority in the class as an evaluator or as a disciplinarian. Periodically during the course of the semester, Mrs. Smith reminded the students that I was available for consultation and would sometimes refer students to me or ask for my opinion on some matter during class discussions; such interactions between Mrs. Smith and me occurred perhaps once each week. Otherwise, I sat quietly in the rear of the room with no overt role in the running or teaching of the class. As the semester wore on,
however, I became more directly, though informally, involved in the class since students began to seek me out for advice on their writing or for answers to questions they had about writing.

For the most part, I spent my time in the class taking field notes, observing the students, listening to their conversations among themselves and with Mrs. Smith, asking them questions about what they were doing, and consulting with them whenever they approached me, which usually happened several times during a class period. After the first two weeks or so, approximately 50% of my time was spent talking with students about a specific assignment on which they were working and 50% observing them and the class activities. By the third week, the students generally seemed to accept me as a part of the class, and several regularly approached me during class meetings with questions and concerns about their writing assignments.

I inscribed my field notes on regular white looseleaf paper, recording class activities and student behaviors. Sometimes I would audiotape a class discussion, but because the class was run as a workshop, there were few organized discussions during the semester, and for that reason audiotapes of class meetings were of poor quality and generally not very useful. I never audiotaped my conversations with students during the class meetings,
because I wanted to minimize the extent to which I might distract them from their work. Whenever I did have conversations with the students during class, I made notes about these in my notebook. Over the course of the semester I made 185 pages of field notes, of which approximately one-third are devoted to my conversations with the students during these impromptu interviews.

Periodically during the semester I asked students if they would meet with me outside of class to talk to me about their writing for the course. Students always agreed to do so, though sometimes scheduling a convenient time was difficult, since their daily schedules were generally rather tight. These interviews were always conducted on the school grounds during the regular school day or shortly after classes let out at 3:00 p.m. During the semester, I met with five students in this fashion for a total of nine times (I met with four students twice and one student once). All these interviews were audiotaped (for a total of approximately four hours of tape). I also met with the teacher twice, once at the mid-term point in March, and once at the end of the semester; approximately two hours of audiotape were recorded during these two interviews. In addition, I consulted regularly with her during and after the eighteen weeks by telephone.
At the outset of the study I had intended to interview each of the twenty-one students in the class at least once; during the first few weeks of the semester, however, it became clear that comparable kinds of information gathered during these audiotaped interviews could be gathered by simply taking fuller field notes and talking to the students during the class meetings. The classes were run in such a way that the students used the time as they saw fit. Usually, they worked alone or in small groups on their assignments for that week, while Mrs. Smith consulted with individual students at her desk. Consequently, students had flexibility in deciding how to use class time, and many were willing to discuss their writing during that time. In addition, it became quite difficult to schedule interviews outside of class. For these reasons, I decided to concentrate on inscribing careful field notes during class rather than on interviewing students outside of class.

In addition to my interactions with students during and after class, I had access to all of the writing the students did for this class during the semester. The students kept all drafts of their assignments in folders which were stored in a filing cabinet at the front of the classroom.

4 Twenty-two students enrolled in the class; all but one consented to participation in the study. See "The Students" below on page 11.
classroom near Mrs. Smith's desk. I had free access to these files, the contents of which were photocopied during the course of the semester and shortly thereafter; all told, copies of 618 drafts of student essays, totalling approximately 2000 pages, were made.

The types of data gathered in this study, then, fall into three categories:

1. field notes inscribed during class meetings;
2. copies of drafts of essays students wrote for the course;
3. transcripts of tape-recorded interviews with the students and the teacher.\(^5\)

The Students

Twenty-two students enrolled in Mrs. Smith's Advanced Composition course for the spring semester, 1990. Of those, twenty-one participated in this study (the parents of the twenty-second declined to sign the consent form to allow their child to participate). None of these twenty-one students withdrew from the study during the semester.

All but two of the twenty-one students who participated in the study were seniors in their final semester of high school. The other two were juniors. The average age of the participants was eighteen. Thirteen of

\(^5\)Transcription of the interview audiotapes was done by a private businessperson with many years of experience transcribing audiotapes for educational research projects.
the students were male; eight were female. Nineteen of the students were white, one was of Puerto Rican decent, and the other was of mixed Hispanic and Asian heritage (her mother was Guatemalan and father was Thai). All twenty-one students lived at home with one or both parents in Thompson, a predominantly white, midwestern, suburban community of approximately 50,000 residents.

Because the Advanced Composition course was designed as preparation for college freshman composition, the students who typically enrolled in the course tended to be college-bound seniors, although it was not unusual to have a few juniors or even occasionally a sophomore in the class. As a result, the students in the class represented a cross-section of college-bound students from Thompson High School.

Limitations

The most serious limitation of the methods of data-gathering used for this study is the lack of access to important aspects of the students' backgrounds and their literate activities outside class. That is, although their sociocultural backgrounds, their parents' socio-economic status, their previous school experiences, and other factors all bear on their writing for this course and should be considered part of the context within which the
students wrote, I did not have access to those aspects of their lives in most cases; moreover, considerations of time and funding limited the focus of this study to classroom activities and behaviors. As a result, the bulk of the data was gathered in this classroom during class meetings. Thus, this study focuses on school-sponsored writing within the realm of this particular course and on the factors that seemed to be most influential in shaping how and what the students wrote for the course. As it was conducted, the study could not investigate adequately such issues as the connections between how writing and reading were used and perceived in the students' homes and the writing done in this class; the connections between the uses of writing in other classes at Thompson High School and the Advanced Composition class; and so on. As it was conducted, then, this study allows for no more than speculation about the influence of broader factors such as the socio-economic status of a particular student's parent on that student's writing for this class.

Another limitation of the data-gathering methods used for this study lies in my limited contact with students in school. Although I attended most daily class meetings and observed and interacted with the students at those times, I saw or met with the students outside the class only rarely. As a result, I was unable to compare the behaviors I
observed with the students' behaviors in other classes and in other areas of school life.

It is important to note here too that this study explores the role of the context in the writing of a particular group of students at a particular time and place; it is inappropriate, therefore, to draw broad conclusions about the influence of specific aspects of context on the writing of students in general. Clearly, much of what was observed in this study and some of the conclusions drawn from those observations might usefully be applied to other groups of students in other settings, as I will argue in Chapter VI; at the same time, care should be taken to qualify connections made between the role of context in the writing of this group of students and its role in the writing of other groups.

Analysis of the Data

At its inception, this study was shaped by three broad assumptions:

1. that writing is a social activity in which context plays an important role in the creation of texts;

2. that context is a complex issue most likely encompassing several related factors, some of which might be removed from the time and place of the creation of a given text;

3. that some contextual factors would likely be more influential in shaping a writer's work than others.
These assumptions influenced both the gathering and analysis of data in this study in a way that blurred the boundary between the data-gathering and data-analysis phases of the study. In other words, analysis began almost as soon as the gathering of the data began, and the analysis inevitably influenced the gathering of data. It was from this recursive process, supplemented by careful review of the notes, student texts, and interview transcripts once the actual data-gathering was completed, that the description of context and its role in the students' writing presented in this and the next two chapters emerged. The next few pages describe in greater detail this process of data gathering and analysis.

When I first went into Mrs. Smith's class at Thompson High School, I inscribed in my notes any activity, statement, or observational detail that seemed remotely related to what might be construed as a "contextual factor." I expected to be able to observe various contextual factors that somehow influenced how and what the students wrote and to be able to group these factors under two or three broad headings, such as "classroom context" or "cultural context" or what Flower and Hayes call the "task environment." This expectation was justified by the great deal of research in composition studies that has explored
the influence of many different factors on the writing of students. For instance, several researchers have investigated the effects specific kinds of writing tasks had on students' writing (Brossell; Durst; Greenberg; Hillocks). Russell Durst, for example, found that assignments calling for analytic writing and assignments calling for summary writing elicited from students different "cognitive operations" on the students' part as well as different "levels of abstractness and organizational structures" in the students' texts ("Demands"). Other researchers have looked at how various teaching styles and techniques can affect students' writing (see Hillocks, pp. 113-128). In addition, the work of scholars like Heath suggested that less obvious but no less powerful social and cultural forces might be at work in shaping the work these students did for Mrs. Smith. For example, nearly all these students were from white, middle-class families who ostensibly valued educational success and who viewed writing and reading as skills that are essential to that success. I expected that such factors might emerge in my observations; I did not, however, begin gathering data with specific categories of contextual factors in mind.

Each week during the eighteen weeks of the semester, the field notes were reviewed in an effort to begin to find
connections between the observations transcribed in the notes. Such review led to cross-references in the field notes, so that a particular observation made on one day was noted to be similar to an observation made on a previous day. (In the field notes, the cross-references appear as simple notations: "see FN [field notes], 1/28/90, p. 3.") These cross-references suggested that the recorded observations might be grouped into broad categories, and by the beginning of the third week of the semester, several general category headings begin to appear in the field notes: "social" (referring to interactions between students and teachers); "classroom" (referring to the course itself and how it was conducted); "personal" or "immediate" (referring to a particular student's own background and his or her situation at that moment); and "institutional" (referring to the atmosphere, rules, and implicit values system of the school). These headings did not alter the method of inscription of the notes in any way, but were written in the margins next to particular entries as aids to subsequent review and analysis of the notes.

As the semester progressed, it became clear that these working categories were often too broad to be useful as aids to field note inscription. For example, by the sixth week I began to distinguish "course context" from the "classroom context": "course context" referred to
observations that related to the structure of the course, the requirements and deadlines, its content, and so on; "classroom context" referred to observations that related to the physical setting of the classroom. In this fashion, the categories became refined as the gathering of data continued. By the end of the semester, this ongoing analysis of the data gave rise to five broad categories of data (presented below in this chapter).

Once the semester was over and the formal data-gathering phase of the study ended, the entire body of field notes was reread, using the categories that had emerged from these notes during the semester, in order to determine if these categories were indeed useful in classifying the kinds of observations inscribed in the notes. That rereading led to refinements of the categories. For instance, "teacher context" was classified as part of "course context." In addition, several of the existing categories were more carefully defined and renamed: "social context," for example, became "interpersonal context" and was defined to include interpersonal relations among the students, their peers, and the teacher as distinct from broader social factors such as a student's socio-economic background. The categories were also refined as a result of reviews of the interview transcripts. In other words, the transcripts
were read in an effort to find further evidence that the emerging categories usefully described the kinds of contextual factors at work in this class.

Once these categories were refined, the field notes were re-read twice more in an effort to classify all the observations in the notes. During these rereadings, the categories were refined further as each heading was tested against the entries in the field notes. At the same time, data were reclassified as the categories became more carefully defined.

The categories discussed here, then, represent a description, drawn from the inscription and analysis of the field notes and the interview transcripts from the study, of those factors observed to be influential in determining how and what these students wrote. The process of gathering and analyzing the data was similar to what Stephen North, in describing ethnographic research, calls a "cycle of inquiry," which "runs from experience to inscription to interpretation and back to experience again . . . ." (Making 304). Obviously, the categories presented here, and indeed the very field notes from which they emerged, represent my own interpretation of what I observed; nevertheless, it is an interpretation constrained by the events I witnessed, the texts I gathered, and the many observations and speculations of other researchers who
investigated similar phenomena in other settings and for other purposes. Thus, these categories represent one carefully constructed and informed way of viewing and understanding the context of Mrs. Smith's class.

The Context of Mrs. Smith's Advanced Composition Class

The context of Mrs. Smith's Advanced Composition Class can be seen as encompassing five categories or groups of factors:

1. **Course context** - structure of course; sequence of assignments; teaching methods; teacher's style, philosophy, personality, etc.

2. **Task context** - parameters of assignment: length, format, required intellectual skills, etc.

4. **Interpersonal context** - student's social relations with peers, classmates, teacher; the social milieu of the class and school.

4. **Personal** - student's personality, values, etc; previous writing experiences; ethnic background; etc.

5. **Institutional/community context** - the social, economic, and ethnic character of the school and community where it is located; the administrative structure of the school; the ethos and values of the school and community.

What follows is a discussion of each of these categories. This discussion is not meant to be exhaustive; rather, it
is intended to convey a sense of the nature of Mrs. Smith's class and the complexity of the factors that comprised the context of that class. In addition, it will provide a basis for understanding Chapters IV and V, where a more detailed description of the role of context in the students' writing is presented.

The Course Context

As Chapter I suggests, Mrs. Smith's Advanced Composition Course was a highly structured, rigorous writing course, whose focus was on the practice of expository writing in various forms. At the same time, the workshop-style approach Mrs. Smith employed gave the class a hands-on quality and helped create a relaxed and informal classroom atmosphere. Generally, the course was taken as an English elective by seniors preparing to enter college, although it was sometimes taken by juniors who had their own reasons for enrolling in an advanced writing course. Although the course was not required, some students who took the course needed to pass it in order to fulfill the school's graduation requirement of four full years of English.

The course was offered every semester at Thompson High School, and given the high percentage of Thompson graduates who entered college, it was not surprising that the course
was usually fully enrolled and rather popular among students. The course was developed in 1987, after one of the English teachers returned from a professional conference with the idea for a writing workshop course specifically modelled on a college freshman composition course. With good support in the English department for such a course, it was officially added to the department offerings for the next year and has been offered ever since. Several members of the department regularly teach the course, using a standard syllabus that was developed collaboratively by these members. The syllabus is periodically reviewed and amended by the department, and each teacher has a fair amount of latitude in shaping the syllabus to fit his or her own style (see Appendix D).

The stated purpose of the course was to prepare students for college-level writing tasks; consequently, the course was structured around ten writing assignments that were thought by department members to be typical college-level writing tasks. While these assignments varied slightly with each teacher and over time, they always included some combination of narration, description, persuasion and several forms of exposition (such as comparison/contrast and cause/effect). The specific assignments used by Mrs. Smith are described below in the section entitled "Task Context."
A number of factors gave Mrs. Smith's 1990 version of the course its shape. Two broad sub-categories of factors comprised the course context:

(1) the structure of the course itself, including the explicit and implicit purpose of the course, explicit and implicit requirements for completing the course, the sequencing of assignments, deadlines, procedures and rules for completing assignments, and expectations for the use of class time;

(2) the style, personality, and teaching philosophy of the teacher.

Both these sub-categories are intimately related, of course, and neither can be separated from the other without oversimplifying the description of the course to some extent. That is, Mrs. Smith's personality and teaching philosophy surely influenced the rules and procedures she laid out for the course; conversely, her teaching methods were affected by the syllabus she was using. At the same time, separating these two sub-categories of the course context allows for a clearer description of the shape of the course and a fuller understanding of how the course functioned.

The structure of the course was at once rigid and loose: it was rigid in that the procedures that students' were expected to adhere to as they completed their assignments were clearly set and often inflexible; it was loose in that the workshop format of the course provided students with large blocks of class time for their work and
allowed them to use that time basically as they wished. Essentially, the 54-minute class meetings followed this pattern: At the bell, Mrs. Smith would call the class to order and take roll while the school announcements were read over the school-wide intercom system. After the announcements, Mrs. Smith would spend approximately five minutes or less attending to the business of the course: deadlines, absences, and so on. She would usually devote the next ten minutes of the period to a "mini-lesson" on some issue related either to a specific writing assignment (e.g., the need for detail in a descriptive piece, or the organization of pros and cons in an argument) or to written language generally (e.g., parallelism in sentences; varying sentence structure; use of the second person). Then she would turn the class over to the students. For the rest of the period (approximately 35 minutes), Mrs. Smith would work with students individually in student-teacher conferences, which she held at her desk, while the other students worked on their writing either individually or in small groups of their own choosing, either at the worktables arranged in the center of the room or at one of the fourteen microcomputers lining three walls of the room. During this time, students would write by themselves in their seats, work alone at one of the computer terminals in the room, consult with a classmate or group of classmates
at one of the worktables, or go off to an adjacent computer
lab or the library to work (with Mrs. Smith's permission).
This pattern was rarely deviated from, except during the
first and tenth weeks of the semester, when four or five
class periods were devoted to small group presentations
about the various writing assignments (groups of four or
five students would present information to the entire class
about how to write a descriptive essay or a cause/effect
essay).  

This rigid/loose format of Mrs. Smith's course enabled
students to work on each of the ten writing assignments at
their own pace within the deadlines Mrs. Smith set up for
those assignments. Students generally were given
approximately a week and a half within which to complete
each assignment (though these times varied somewhat
according to the assignment; for example, students had more
than two full weeks to work on the literary analysis
essay). Within that time, they could use the class periods
as they saw fit but were expected to follow scrupulously

6Of course, given the flexibility built into this
workshop-style approach, students were also free to work on
assignments for other classes during the class period, and
periodically some did so. Although I have no data that
would allow me to calculate a percentage of the time
students worked on other homework during Mrs. Smith's
class, my field notes and conversations with the students
suggest that such a percentage would be rather low, perhaps
less than 10% of the time. But the fact that students
periodically did other homework in Mrs. Smith's class
suggests the extent to which students could take advantage
of Mrs. Smith's open-ended format to fit their own needs.
several procedural guidelines. The most important of these guidelines governed procedures for submitting the assigned essays to her. Before Mrs. Smith would accept an essay from a student, the student was required to have his or her rough draft read by three other students, one of whom was not enrolled in the course. These peer readers were each to fill out a "peer conference form" provided by Mrs. Smith (see Appendix C) and return the form to the student writer. The student was then expected to revise the rough draft, using the peer conference forms as an aid to revision. Once the revised draft was completed, the student could submit the essay to Mrs. Smith, along with the rough drafts and the three peer conference forms. Mrs. Smith would then read the revised draft, write marginal notes on it, and return it the next day to the student, who could then revise it and resubmit it to Mrs. Smith for comment if there was enough time before the deadline.

Each time a student submitted a draft to Mrs. Smith, she returned it with written comments and a grade; the student could then decide whether to accept the grade at that point and move to the next assignment or to revise the essay and resubmit it in an effort to improve the grade. Mrs. Smith's gradings scheme was a variation on the standard scheme of A, B, C, D, and F. According to her scheme, students could earn a grade of "qualified,"
"accepted," or "unaccepted" for a particular assignment. These designations were explained in detail for each assignment (see Appendix B); for example, a "qualified" essay for the persuasive assignment is described in the rubric for that assignment as follows:

This paper uses logical arguments to successfully defend a point of view. It has an interesting introduction and effective conclusion. All major points are addressed. Arguments against the writer's position are mentioned and well-refuted. All pertinent information is correctly cited with correct footnotes or endnotes. A correct bibliography is included. It is virtually free of errors in spelling, mechanics, usage, and sentence structure. There is evidence of superior control of language.

An "unaccepted" paper for this assignment, by contrast, "does not use logical arguments to defend a point of view. The introduction and conclusion may not be effective. . . . It may have errors in spelling, mechanics, usage, and sentence structure." And so on. In order to earn an "A" for the course, a student had to earn grades of "qualified" for eight of the ten assigned essays, with grades of "accepted" on the other two. A "B" was earned for six "qualified" essays and four "accepted" essays. And so on.

Mrs. Smith's practices for reading and responding to student drafts were designed to encourage--and enable--students to write more than the minimum of two drafts for an assignment, if they desired. She "guaranteed" that she would read, comment on, and return a student's draft within twenty-four hours of the time it was submitted to her,
unless she announced otherwise, and she kept a written record of each time a student submitted a draft. Remarkably, Mrs. Smith was able to fulfill this promise for most of the course; only under unusual circumstances did she not hold to the guarantee: when the school calendar made it difficult to do so (e.g., in the case of a teacher's professional day or special school schedule at a holiday) or when she had compelling personal reasons for doing so (e.g., she left for an out-of-state family vacation during a school vacation in March, and she refused to accept any papers after a certain time during that week). This procedure made it possible for students to have their drafts read and assessed by the teacher several times before the final deadline for a particular assignment.

In addition, although student-teacher conferences were not explicitly required, Mrs. Smith strongly encouraged students to discuss their writing with her in conference, and in some cases she admonished students who avoided conferences (as we saw with Kara in Chapter I). Because she was almost always available to the students for conferences during class periods, students could get her responses to their drafts-in-progress— or to particular sections of their drafts— almost immediately, without waiting for her to read and return a complete draft.
Conferences were also opportunities for reinforcing explicit parameters and for conveying implicit ones for an assignment. During conferences, Mrs. Smith could respond to a student's work and make suggestions about how to proceed in ways that would encourage a student to adhere to her ideas for an essay.

The second sub-category of course context—the style, personality and philosophy of the instructor—refers to less obvious but perhaps more influential elements that helped give the course its flavor. These elements included Mrs. Smith's attitudes and values regarding reading, writing, and academic work; her perspective on student writing and on academic writing generally; and her attitudes toward her students and how they should be treated. Although these factors were more difficult than others (for example, the types of writing tasks that were assigned) to identify and classify, they surely gave this course much of its unique characteristics. As Patricia Stock and Jay Robinson assert in their ethnographic study of the discourse in a college composition classroom, "[A] teacher's beliefs about learning, as well as her political and ethical commitments, will have much to do with how a [classroom] community is constituted through the interactions of its members" ("Literacy as Conversation")
167); that assertion certainly seemed true of Mrs. Smith's class.

The students in the class reported that they found Mrs. Smith to be very approachable and very concerned about their work; they also found her to be very tough, one who held them--and herself--to high standards. Few students seemed intimidated by Mrs. Smith, though at times some became frustrated with her responses to their writing. At the same time, while there was often congenial chatter and banter between the students and Mrs. Smith, few challenged her outright and most seemed to regard her as a no-nonsense person who would not easily fall for tricks or excuses.

For her part, Mrs. Smith reported that she tended to emphasize high standards and adherence to guidelines, since these encouraged, to her mind, self-discipline and responsibility on the students' part. She asserted that she always tried to treat students as responsible young adults and that she expected them to take responsibility for their own work and actions. This attitude was reflected in her oft-repeated statement to her students, "You can learn as much as you want to in this course."

Regarding her attitudes toward writing and reading, Mrs. Smith's statements in class and in conference with students, her statements to me in interviews and informal conversations, and her written comments on student drafts
suggest that several assumptions shaped her thinking about writing and guided her in her responses to student writing. First, Mrs. Smith seemed to hold traditional, almost formalist views on writing. She stressed correctness and adherence to convention, especially to rules governing standard usage, spelling, and punctuation. Her emphasis on correctness can be seen clearly in the types of comments she wrote on the students' drafts. Most of her comments had to do with some aspect of the conventions of written English; for example, fully 88.5% of the comments she made on one of Mary's drafts concerned surface errors, word choice, and phrasing. She also believed that writing takes specific forms which are governed by specific rules of arrangement. For Mrs. Smith, form preceded content, and the great majority of her attention was focused on form rather than content in her responses to student writing.

Mrs. Smith's attitudes toward writing and academic work generally underscored her dealings with the students in her class. Her deep commitment to reading and returning students' drafts within twenty-four hours, for example, communicated to the students her own sense of the importance of their work; it also underscored her periodic

7See Chapter V for further discussion of Mrs. Smith's comments on students' drafts. Although this figure (88.5%) reflects Mrs. Smith's comments on one student draft, the percentage was similar for her comments on other students' drafts as well.
comments about the importance of hard work and commitment generally. Similarly, her often-repeated belief in the importance of her course for the students' preparation for college-level writing seemed to result in an increase in the students' tolerance for the very meticulous way in which she read their essays.

The Advanced Composition course I studied, then, like all courses, exhibited its own peculiarities and characteristics, all of which shaped the nature of the course and the writing done for it. It's important to note here, too, that Course context, as I am using the term, refers to many of the elements that are sometimes grouped under the heading of "classroom context." However, by separating "task context" and "interpersonal context" from course context, two sets of features that are usually associated with the "classroom context," the specific character of the course and the instructor are highlighted. As I will demonstrate in Chapter IV, these elements deeply affected how and what the students in this study wrote.

The Task Context

Because Mrs. Smith's course was organized around a series of carefully formulated assignments, each requiring the students to write a particular kind or form of essay,
the task context was an especially salient feature of her course and, as the next chapter will make clear, a very influential set of factors in helping shape the students' writing.

What I am calling the task context encompasses two broad categories of factors associated with the writing tasks assigned in Mrs. Smith's course: (1) task-specific parameters and (2) general parameters. Task-specific parameters are those which relate to or grow specifically out of a particular writing assignment. The most important of these was the "mode" or form of the essay. Students were required to write ten essays in nine different forms: description, narration, cause-and-effect, persuasion, definition, literary analysis, profile, editorial, and comparison-contrast. These forms governed both the content and structure of the students' essays. For instance, for the cause-and-effect essay, students were given a choice between two prompts:

1) How do you account for the popularity of one of the following phenomena: shopping malls, rock videos, romance novels, sensationalist tabloids like the National Enquirer? Write an essay in which you consider remote as well as immediate causes for the success of the phenomena you choose and analyze the effects of the phenomena on society. Use formal essay style.

2) Between 1946 and 1964, the birth rate increased considerably. Some of the effects attributed to this "baby boom" include the 1960's antiwar movement, the increase in the crime rate, and the development of feminism. Write an essay in which you explore some
possible effects of the baby boom generation growing older. What trends would you expect to find in the 1990's as the bulk of the baby boomers reach middle age? When they reach retirement? Be certain you consider all the causes and effects, not just the main ones. Use formal essay style.

These prompts obviously constrained students' choices of topics for their essays. In addition, students were expected to discuss "remote" and "immediate" causes and effects in a particular order, as outlined by Mrs. Smith in class and in several related handouts. These detailed task-specific parameters for the cause-and-effect essay thus constrained and propelled the ideas and information students might include in their essays as well as the way those ideas and information might be organized.

Sometimes task-specific parameters also included procedures or secondary writing and reading tasks. For example, students were required to submit an outline and 75 bibliographic notecards as part of the literary analysis essay; they were required to cite at least three sources for the persuasive essay. The task-specific parameters were less detailed for other forms. For the descriptive essay, for example, students were given two prompts from which to choose, but the instructions about how to approach either prompt were much more open-ended than those for either the cause-and-effect or literary analysis essays.

General parameters are those which were in effect for all writing assignments for the course. These parameters
included such matters as the length of an essay and rules governing language and usage. Many of Mrs. Smith's "mini-lessons" focused on usage and the conventions of written language, and she continually reminded students of these rules and conventions during conferences and in her written comments on students' drafts. In addition to reinforcing some of the conventions of written language generally (such as proper placement of commas in a quotation), Mrs. Smith also established some rules of her own regarding usage. For instance, she abhorred use of the passive voice and continually urged students to avoid it and to rewrite sentences employing it. She also generally banned the use of the first and second person in essays.

The task-specific parameters were always laid out in the "rubrics" that Mrs. Smith provided for each assignment. Each student received a rubric for each writing assignment, and extra copies of these rubrics were kept in a file cabinet that was always accessible to students in class. Mrs. Smith periodically referred to these rubrics during class discussions, during mini-lessons at the beginning of class periods, and in conferences with students; students often referred to them as they worked on a particular assignment. In addition, the peer conferences forms, which were required for each assignment, varied with each assignment, so that students were also reminded of
guidelines and rules governing a particular assignment even as they completed peer conference forms for a classmate's essay.

In addition to the rubrics, the first week of each quarter (the semester was divided up into two nine-week quarters) was devoted to presentations by the students on each of the various modes in class and to discussion of these modes, led by Mrs. Smith. These classroom activities were supported by the textbook, which included passages on each of the modes Mrs. Smith assigned. Through these class presentations and discussions, her handouts, and her oral instructions, Mrs. Smith established and reinforced the task-specific parameters for each assignment. At the same time, although she did not often explicitly indicate that assignments were governed by general parameters, her class discussions, conferences and impromptu conversations with the students, and her written and oral comments on the students' drafts all helped establish and reinforce these general parameters.

The writing tasks assigned in this course, then, set very specific parameters which constrained the students'

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The assigned textbook (Laurie G. Kirszner and Stephen R. Mandell. Patterns for College Writing: A Rhetorical Reader and Guide, 3rd ed. St. Martin's Press: New York, 1986.) was formally used by Mrs. Smith only during these group presentations by the students on the various essay modes. Data from the study suggest students rarely if ever referred to the textbook except during the two weeks of class when these presentations were made.
writing in a number of ways, as we shall see in Chapters IV and V. These tasks also limited and shaped the kind of discourse that occurred in the class, since certain forms of writing were not part of the ten assignments (e.g., poetry). In Mrs. Smith's Advanced Composition course, writing occurred according to previously specified forms and guidelines; furthermore, it was always evaluated and graded on the basis of the parameters set for the assignments.

The Interpersonal Context

One quite obvious characteristic of Mrs. Smith's Advanced Composition course was the congenial, very social atmosphere in the classroom during class meetings. To a casual observer, the class might appear at any randomly chosen moment to be not a formal class at all, but a casual, informal workshop group, or even (at times) a group of students socializing. The structure of Mrs. Smith's course, her procedures for completing assignments, and her own style of interacting with the students as responsible young adults encouraged this informal atmosphere. At the same time, the social relationships between various individual students and social groups influenced this atmosphere. This highly social environment was an important part of the context of the class.
Recent scholarly interest in the social nature of writing and in collaborative writing underscores the many social aspects of the creation of a text. As I am using the term here, however, interpersonal context refers more narrowly to the social interactions between students and between students and the teacher regarding the writing in this course. These social interactions occurred in a variety of forms and seemed to affect every aspect of the writing of assigned essays for the class.

The structure of this course encouraged and sometimes required students to interact with each other and with their teacher in specified ways. Required interaction among the students occurred primarily in the form of the "peer conferences" that were required for each assignment. Students also commonly interacted with the teacher during one-on-one conferences, which could be initiated by either the teacher or a student. In addition to these more "formal" settings for social interaction within the class, students had ample opportunities for other more casual interactions with each other. Consider these examples:

* Two students working independently at adjacent computer terminals discuss briefly the phrasing of a sentence one was revising or the meaning of a comment Mrs. Smith had written on one's draft.
* At the worktables where students sat in the center of the room, a student seeks another's advice on an essay.
In the midst of the noisy bustle of the class, to no one in particular, a student calls out, "How do you spell 'apartheid'?"

One student asks another for permission to read the latter's paper in order to get an idea for her own paper.

Mrs. Smith, finishing a conference with a student, directs that student to another, saying, "Ask Emily if you can read her paper. She did a good job with this one."

Two close friends, sitting at a worktable, discuss possible revisions to the essay one of them has just received from Mrs. Smith.

Near the end of a class period, while other students are preparing to leave the room for their next class, Mark and Jon debate the issue of affirmative action in reference to the essays they are working on.

The nature of the students' relationships with each other, their attitudes toward these social interactions, and their sense of the acceptable norms of school behavior influenced these interactions. In many cases, students who were friends worked very closely with each other on their assignments; in other cases, students interacted only minimally with each other regarding their writing.

This study was not designed to explore the complex norms of behavior that govern social interactions among students and teachers in an educational setting, nor could it plumb the depths of adolescent social behavior more generally. At the same time, however, the decidedly social character of Mrs. Smith's classroom constituted a prominent feature of the context within which the students in the
class were writing. It is important, then, to keep in mind that the activities and behaviors described in this chapter and the next two chapters occurred within this highly social environment.

The Personal Context

Composition scholars associated with the "Process Movement" of the 1970's have often emphasized the individual nature of writing and attempted to construct pedagogies that afforded students a great deal of autonomy in the ways in which they wrote (see esp. Murray, "Awk," "Grant," and "Our Students Will"; Elbow; Emig). Janet Emig, for example, has argued that students should be allowed more opportunities to engage in self-sponsored or "reflexive" writing whereby they can follow their own idiosyncratic ways of completing a piece of writing (Composing Processes, see esp. 97-100). Donald Murray has consistently called for approaches to teaching writing based on a recognition that "each individual student has something worth saying and his [or her] own way of saying it" ("Awk" 153). More recently, scholars have explored the ways in which students' socio-cultural backgrounds and individual educational experiences influence their writing (e.g. Hull and Rose; Rose). Such research underscores the importance of recognizing the differences between students
in the ways they write and in their attitudes toward writing and reading. The data from the present study reinforce many of these notions about the importance of differences between students. Like any other class, Mrs. Smith's was composed of a group of individual students, whose unique characteristics exerted their own influence and were, in effect, part of the context of the class.

Although the students in Mrs. Smith's class shared many characteristics (e.g., most were white and middle-class; most had lived in the local community for the majority of their lives; all were adolescents), each brought a unique perspective to the writing he or she did for that class. That perspective can be seen as a function of each student's socio-economic and socio-cultural background, ethnicity, gender, personality, and previous experiences with literacy both in and out of school—all of which helped shape that student's attitudes toward and abilities in writing and reading and his or her values regarding academic work generally and the specific work required in this course. These factors are part of the personal context of the writing done for this class.

Students revealed their respective personalities in a variety of ways as they wrote for their class. Some students were very self-disciplined and methodical, traits which served them well in Mrs. Smith's highly structured
course. Emily, for example, always turned in her early drafts well before deadline and made sure to submit several drafts to Mrs. Smith for each assignment. Bobbie, on the other hand, found it difficult to begin her essays early and rarely handed in more than the minimum number of drafts. Some students seemed very committed to their writing, which sometimes resulted in difficulties when they disagreed with the teacher's assessments of their work. Kate, for instance, struggled a great deal with her definition essay about love, in part, she said, because "I wrote this for her [Mrs. Smith]. It didn't turn out the way I wanted." Others wanted simply to complete each writing assignment in an effort to earn a high grade. At one point, Mark confessed that he didn't think his revisions on one of his essays improved the piece, but "it's what she [Mrs. Smith] wanted me to do, so that's what I did." Moreover, each student had his or her own reasons for enrolling in the course. Those students who needed to pass the course in order to graduate, for example, were often apt to spend more time on their drafts than those who didn't. In some cases, students failed to submit assignments in part because they could earn a low grade or even fail the course and still graduate.

The personal context manifested itself in other, more subtle ways in Mrs. Smith's class. In their statements
about their work for the class, for example, students would sometimes betray their own attitudes toward writing and school. These attitudes tended to be positive, shaped by a belief that academic success was a key to a happy and productive life in the future—a belief that could, perhaps, be traced to the community where these students lived. Yet students often displayed a range of differences in their attitudes toward their academic work. Sam, for example, approached his writing in a very pragmatic, utilitarian way; for him, writing seemed to be the skill to convey a specific idea in a clear, correct manner in order to achieve a purpose, which was often the achievement of a high grade. By contrast, Kara, who sometimes wrote short fictional pieces on her own, admitted to believing that "school writing" was "more important" than the poems and stories she wrote for herself, yet she seemed to enjoy playing with language and to perceive writing as a way to express her feelings.

To what extent the attitudes and behaviors described here were connected to students' previous experiences in school, to sociocultural factors, to ethnicity or gender was impossible to determine given the methodology and scope of this study; however, these attitudes and behaviors inevitably permeated the students' work, as I will try to
demonstrate in the next two chapters, and can usefully be viewed as part of the context in which the students worked.

The personal context also includes two other sets of factors: (1) immediate and (2) situational. Immediate factors include contextual factors that are in place and at work at the time of writing and constrain the writer perhaps only at that time, for instance, the physical location where the student is writing (at home vs. at school), the atmosphere of that location (a noisy room full of classmates or a quiet corner at home), the type of writing implements used (computer vs. pen and paper, e.g.), and the time of day (during a free period in the morning at school or late at night at home). In some cases, these factors influenced a student's writing profoundly. For example, Kara rarely drafted in class, when many of her classmates worked on their essays; she preferred to write at home on her own computer. However, during the latter half of the semester, when she began to write during class, she tended to solicit her teacher's advice and that of her classmates about her work-in-progress—something she couldn't do when she wrote at home.

Situational factors include those factors related to a student's personal situation at the time of writing. For example, many students in this study held part-time jobs or were involved in extra-curricular activities, and these
commitments sometimes affected their schedules and, consequently, the processes by which they completed their writing assignments. For instance, one weekend before a Monday deadline for an essay assignment, Kara was kept late at her job at a veterinarian's office because of an emergency. Instead of getting home in the late afternoon, she wasn't able to return home until the late evening, a situation that left her far less time to work on her draft than she had planned for. Consequently, she had to work more quickly than she wanted to, and she admitted to making only cursory revisions on some parts of her essay (see Chapter IV for further discussion of this incident).

Similarly, students often found themselves pressed for time when they had assignments in other classes.

Some students wrote fewer drafts and made fewer revisions, and in some cases made different kinds of revisions, when they did not feel a need to earn a high grade on a particular assignment. For example, at one point late in the semester, Mark decided not to revise one section of his cause-and-effect essay according to suggestions Mrs. Smith had made on one of his drafts. That decision was unusual, since Mark typically revised very carefully, using his teacher's marginal comments as a guide for revision. In this case, though, Mark had decided that he didn't need a grade of "qualified" on the essay, since
he had earned grades of "qualified" on his other essays and was confident he would do so on the remaining assignments, which would ultimately be enough for him to earn the "A" he wanted for the course.

Although the kinds of factors I am calling immediate and situational are generally acknowledged by teachers to have some effect on students' writing, researchers have often ignored or discounted them in their investigations of student writing and writing processes. Yet for the students I observed in Mrs. Smith's class, these factors seemed very important in influencing how and what they wrote for a given assignment at a given time. Such factors, then, were part of the context within which these students wrote, and to understand how and what the students wrote requires some accounting for these factors.

The Institutional/Community Context

Thompson High School is a large public school in a suburb of a large midwestern city of 560,000 residents. Thompson, a moderately affluent and growing middle-class town of approximately 53,000 residents, was established in 1837 and is generally perceived by area residents to be a safe, pleasant, somewhat conservative place to live. Thompson High School is part of a district that includes eight elementary schools and a middle school. In the late
1980's and early 1990's, the district expanded rapidly as it tried to keep pace with the town's growth, fueled by a strong regional economy and "white flight" from the adjacent city. In 1988, for example, a new elementary school was opened; two more new elementary schools were opened in 1991. And in 1991, a second high school was opened in the district. All these schools were established in order to accommodate the rapidly growing population of school-age children in the district.

The opening of the second high school in 1991 created a number of problems and controversies for the district, controversies which seem to reflect some of the values of the school district and the community. Great concern was expressed by both students and parents regarding the district's plan to split the 1990-1991 sophomore class at Thompson High into two groups, one of which would remain at Thompson and eventually graduate from there, and the other of which would be enrolled in the new high school. The source of concern was a belief that the sophomores who would attend the new high school would lose a sense of the tradition that many in the community felt gave Thompson High School its unique atmosphere and reputation.

Thompson High School, through its policies and the statements and actions of its faculty and administrative staff, revealed a number of attitudes toward education.
Academic achievement was publicly recognized and rewarded at the school. The daily announcements regularly included praise and congratulations for students who had won academic awards or scored particularly well on standardized tests (for example, National Merit Scholarship semifinalists as chosen on the basis of SAT scores). Mrs. Smith sometimes publicly congratulated a student during class for such achievement. Similarly, pursuing a college education was praised and sometimes emphasized. Mrs. Smith periodically asked seniors for updates on their college admissions applications, sometimes praising a student for acceptance to a respected school. The school store reflected these attitudes by offering discounts on sweatshirts and other items to any senior who was accepted to one of several midwestern colleges and universities. Seniors were generally expected to attend college, and typically more than 75% of the school's graduates enrolled in college after graduation from Thompson. Moreover, Mrs.

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9 In 1990, 430 of 559 graduating seniors (76.9%) planned to attend college after graduating; 408 (73.0%) of those planned to attend four-year colleges or universities. In 1989, 556 of 702 graduating seniors (79.2%) planned to attend college after graduation. These figures may not reflect the actual number of Thompson High students who attended college after graduation, since some may have deferred attendance for several years, while others who initially reported no plans to attend college may have decided to attend after these figures were determined. In addition, the number of students attending college after graduation for 1989 may in fact be low, since 87 of the 702 graduating seniors (12.4%) that year did not respond to the school's standard senior survey; these 87 were included
Smith often used the prospect of college as a justification for the hard work students did in her class. "This is what you'll be expected to do in your college writing classes," she said at one point, restating an oft-repeated sentiment of hers.

Thompson High School also seemed to value public service. Students who participated in school or community activities, such as the Earth Day celebration or volunteer fundraising drives for the homeless, were publicly praised and sometimes rewarded. Each week the announcements included the names of students who had received "Best Get Better" pins, awards given to students who had performed some public service for the school. These pins seemed to be regarded with respect by the students and teachers. At one point in the semester, Mark said after hearing the most recent announcements of the award, "If I don't get one of those before the year is out, I'll be upset." On the one occasion during the semester when a member of Mrs. Smith's class received such an award, he was commended by Mrs. Smith and congratulated by his classmates.

The school also seemed to try to reinforce values of tolerance and order. At one point during the year, the school held several special sessions to discuss the use of racial epithets among the students. The incident that led among the 146 students who reported no plans to attend college after graduation.
to these discussions was apparently a relatively minor one, involving the use of a racial slur by a group of white students toward several Asian-American students. Yet the administration quickly organized the sessions, and Mrs. Smith and several students in her class publicly expressed concern about the incident. Within a week, concern about the incident seemed to pass, and most students seemed to believe that the incident was unusual.

In short, Thompson High School and the community where it is located provided a environment within which certain values regarding education and social behavior and responsibility were explicitly or implicitly expressed and reinforced. Students working in this environment were generally free of the kinds of social pressures created by overt racial strife, poverty, or administrative or political crises. In general, there seemed to be a sense of support for the kinds of academic activities Mrs. Smith expected of her students. Conversely, her students entered her class having already been socialized into certain norms of behavior and attitude, and she could reasonably expect students to act according to these norms and to share some her own own attitudes toward education and social responsibility.

Obviously, the description of the school and community given here is superficial at best, but it is intended to
provide a general sense of the larger institutional and community context within which the students in Mrs. Smith's class were writing. Although the present study allows for no claims about direct cause-effect links between this broad context and specific writings of the students, the presentation of findings from the study in the following chapters suggests that this broader context was part of the overall context within which these students wrote and as such influenced their work in various ways. Implicit in this discussion is the notion that, as Shirley Brice Heath has written, "literacy events" (in this case, the writing and reading in Mrs. Smith's class) "must . . . be interpreted in relation to larger sociocultural patterns which they may exemplify or reflect" ("Bedtime" 74).

Conclusion

The preceding description of the various sets of factors that together made up the context within which students in Mrs. Smith's class wrote and read is intended to provide a picture of the many complex factors that affected the writing and reading of those students. Given the methodology employed for this study, this description could not be exhaustive, and the influence of some factors on the students' writing was more readily observable than that of others. In the next chapter, my purpose is to
explore the effects of those factors on the students' writing and reading and to trace the influence of specific elements of the context to the students' writing processes and the features of their texts.
CHAPTER IV

Context and the Composing Process

In drawing conclusions about analyzing the revisions writers make on their texts, Stephen Witte and Lester Faigley have pointed out that "the volume and types of revision changes are dependent upon a number of variables besides the skill of the writer" ("Analyzing" 410). These variables, which Witte and Faigley call "situational variables," include

the reason why the text is being written, the format, the medium, the genre, the writer's familiarity with the writing task, the writer's familiarity with the subject, the writer's familiarity with the audience, the projected level of formality, and the length of the task and the projected text. (410-411)

"So important are these variables," Witte and Faigley assert, "that writing skill might be defined in part as the ability to respond to them" (411).

Witte and Faigley's assertion that writing skill can be seen in part as a writer's ability to respond to a series of what they call "situational variables" is one way of restating one of the central arguments of this study: that context might best be understood as part of--rather than separate from--the act of writing. In other words, what Witte and Faigley call "situational variables" are
integral to any act of writing: the nature of the writing task, the purpose of the task, the overall rhetorical situation in which the writer is completing the task, and the writer's previous experiences and background with respect to the task at hand--all these somehow figure into the act of writing. One's skill as a writer--and the writing one produces--therefore, might best be viewed in part as a function of the context within which one writes.

But how exactly does context figure into the process of writing a particular text? More specifically, in what ways do elements of context influence the writing of a particular group of students in a particular academic setting? The present chapter and the following chapter address that question by presenting data from the study of one group of high school student writers described in Chapter III.

This chapter describes connections between various elements of the context of Mrs. Smith's Advanced Composition class and the ways in which students in that class went about completing their assigned writing tasks. The central purpose of the chapter is to explore the influence of key elements of context on the processes by which the students wrote their essays for Mrs. Smith's class. In other words, how might features of the context shape specific activities or behaviors--such as choosing a
topic, gathering material about that topic, organizing that material, writing a rough draft, and revising that draft—that students engage in as they complete an assigned writing task? More broadly, how might we see students' composing processes as intimately tied to the context within which they write?

In examining these connections between context and composing, this chapter is concerned less with the students' texts and more with the observable writing-related activities or behaviors that the students exhibited as they completed their writing tasks. In other words, this chapter focuses on connections between specific features of context and how the students wrote; the next chapter examines how those connections manifested themselves in what the students' wrote, focusing more narrowly on how the students' texts were shaped by the relationships between context and two specific aspects of the composing processes of students, invention and revision.

Context and the Writing Process

Many studies of student writers at various educational levels have suggested that students do indeed go through various steps or phases, not necessarily in linear order, as they complete school-based writing tasks (e.g.,
Applebee, Context; Emig), although in some cases the students' writing "processes" are compared unfavorably with those of "experienced" writers (e.g. Sommers). Emig, for example, describes the "composing processes" of the students in her study as encompassing several "dimensions," including prewriting and planning (both of which Emig calls "preludes to the act of writing" [39]), starting, and reformulating, which includes "correcting, revising, and rewriting" (43). Linda Flower's widely cited "cognitive process" model of writing, includes three key "cognitive processes"--planning, translating, and reviewing--that writers engage in as they create a text (Flower and Hayes, "Images"). Many other studies refer to some version of these three basic "parts" or "stages" of the composing process.

The term "composing process" as used in such studies, however, is problematic in that it has come to refer both to observable activities or behaviors of writers, such as the actual act of putting pen to paper, and to a series of inferred mental or "cognitive" operations related to the creation of a written text by a writer. Some scholars have recently called into question the use of the term as it refers to cognition, perhaps in part as a result of the debates about the nature of cognition that are occurring
within the fields of anthropology and linguistics.\textsuperscript{1} In the present study, I am using the terms "writing process" and "composing process" to refer to observed activities students engaged in or writing-related behaviors they exhibited as they wrote. "Prewriting" thus refers to the note-making and discussion a student might have engaged in as he or she prepared to write an essay--not necessarily to any sort of apparent mental operations that might have accompanied those observable activities. Similarly, "revising" refers to the actual act of altering an existing essay, either with pen and paper or through the use of a computer--not necessarily to the "thinking" that might have occurred while the student was altering his or her essay. In other words, these "parts" of the composing process might be manifestations of certain kinds of "cognitive" operations, but here the terms refer to observable activities or behaviors related to the production of texts by the students.

Whether or not the kinds of studies cited above focus on the apparent cognitive operations underlying the writing of a text, most either emphasize or take for granted that writing a text involves a "process." Rarely, however, do such studies emphasize the notion that students' writing

\textsuperscript{1}See Jack Goody, The Interface Between the Written and the Oral (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) for an interesting discussion of the difficulties of defining and studying cognition.
processes might be intimately connected to the setting within which they write, be that setting an experimental one or an actual classroom. Applebee has described differences in the processes by which students completed school-based writing tasks across different subject areas, indicating that students exhibit different writing behaviors in completing different kinds of writing tasks (Contexts); for example, they might make prewriting notes more frequently for social science papers than for English essays.\(^2\) Other studies suggest that differences in the nature of writing tasks might account for differences in the steps students take as they compose a text (e.g. Durst). Yet these studies tend to focus on describing either the kinds of writing assigned in schools or the kinds of activities students engaged in as they completed assigned writing tasks; they do not attempt to identify connections between the students' writing processes and the contexts within which the students were writing.

Yet given some of the more recent studies of classroom discourse (e.g. Stock and Robinson) and the interest in what Marilyn Cooper has called "the ecology of writing" ("Ecology"), previous research on students' writing processes raises questions about the possible connections between these processes and the classroom settings in which

\(^2\)See especially chapter 7.
they occur. For example, how might we account for the apparent differences in students' writing behaviors from one classroom setting to another? Might the behaviors Applebee observed among students be products of the classroom environments in which they wrote? Indeed, recent critiques of Donald Graves' research on the writing processes of young children suggest that the influence of the researchers—that is, the context created by the researchers' presence—might account for the writing behaviors that researchers observed among the students. In his critique of Graves' researcher, Peter Smagorinsky asserts that Graves' research team might have created an environment in the classroom that encouraged students to engage in certain writing behaviors and to compose in certain ways ("Graves Revisited"). Smagorinsky's criticisms inadvertently underscore the importance of the role of classroom context—whether or not it is influenced by the presence of researchers—in shaping students' writing processes.

My observations of Mrs. Smith's class indicate that the ways in which the students went about completing their writing tasks for that class were profoundly influenced by various elements of the context of that class. In general, although each student in this study had his or her own way of approaching and performing the assigned writing tasks,
the students' writing processes can be seen as related to several features of the context of the course. As the description of Mrs. Smith's Advanced Composition Class in Chapter III makes clear, the procedures, rules, and guidelines established by Mrs. Smith (and in part by the common syllabus used by the English Department at Thompson High School) helped give that course its unique shape and structure. Among these procedures, rules, and guidelines were five that seemed particularly important in influencing how students went about completing the assigned writing tasks:

(1) the two-draft requirement;

(2) the mandatory peer conferences;

(3) the mandatory use of computers for assigned essays;

(4) the workshop-style format of the daily class meetings;

(5) Mrs. Smith's procedures for reading and responding to student papers, especially her "24-hour turnaround guarantee."

To varying degrees, students all seemed to adapt their own writing behaviors to these procedures and requirements. 3

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3As the discussion of the methods of this study in Chapter III indicates, I was not able to observe every student in the class as he or she completed every assignment; indeed, despite my regular presence in the class and routine interactions with students, it was possible for me to observe only a small part of all the writing activities that were actually occurring at a given time. In addition, I had access to an even smaller part of the writing students did outside of class. Nevertheless, in every case where I was able to observe students writing,
The rest of this chapter describes the connections between these features of the context of Mrs. Smith's course and the writing processes of her students.

The Two-Draft Requirement. Invariably, revising is identified as a key "step" or "part" of the composing process is revising, and as such, it has been studied extensively by researchers interested in understanding how students write. Many of these studies focus on how much revising students do (e.g. Applebee, Contexts; Perl; Sommers). One simple measure of the amount of revising that students do is the number of drafts they write for their assignments: more drafts often means more revisions. Although several factors might influence the number of drafts students write for an assignment, one feature of the context of Mrs. Smith's class seemed particularly important in this regard: her two-draft requirement.

Because Mrs. Smith usually would not read and evaluate a student's essay unless it was submitted as two drafts, her students wrote at least that many drafts of each assigned essay (a rough draft and a revised version of that rough draft). Indeed, of the 190 essays collected for this study, 182 (95.8%) comprised at least two drafts; only 8
(4.2%) comprised a single draft. In some cases, students decided for various reasons not to turn in any essay at all for a particular assignment, but such instances were rare. In most cases, students wrote more than two drafts per assignment; the average number of drafts for an assignment was 3.25. Table 1 shows the numbers of drafts each student wrote for the assigned essays in Mrs. Smith's class. Despite differences in the average number of drafts written for the various essay forms (an issue that will be taken up below under "Task"), the figures in Table 1 indicate that the students in Mrs. Smith's class routinely wrote more than two drafts of their assigned essays.

The figures in Table 1 may shed light on some previous studies of students' writing processes. Several well-known studies, such as Perl's and Sommers', tend to underscore the notion that "inexperienced" writers generally write fewer drafts and revise less extensively and less frequently than "experienced" writers. James Marshall reports in a study of the composing processes of eleventh grade students that less than half (44.5%) of the students in his sample reported writing a rough draft for papers assigned in their English classes and only 17.2% reported

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4Approximately 15 out of 210 total assignments, or 7.1%. This figure may not be exact, however, since a few students turned in assignments but did not put those assignments into their folders. As a result, the number of assignments that were not turned in was probably lower than 15.
Table 1

Numbers of Drafts Written by Students in Mrs. Smith's Class
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<th>Name</th>
<th>Cn.</th>
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<th>Ds.</th>
<th>Ps.</th>
<th>C/E</th>
<th>Df.</th>
<th>L/A</th>
<th>Pr.</th>
<th>C/C</th>
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Totals  56 75 61 79 70 70 56 37 70 68 642

(Key: Cn. - contest essay; Ed. - editorial; Nr. - narrative; Ds. - description; Ps. - persuasion; C/E - cause/effect; Df. - definition; L/A - literary analysis; Pr. - profile; C/C - comparison/contrast; T - totals)
writing multiple drafts ("Schooling" 113). In Mrs. Smith's class, however, students wrote a rough draft for an assignment more than 95% of the time, and 100% of the students in the class wrote multiple drafts for most of the assignments (only two of the 21 students failed to hand in two or more essays). In addition, they all revised to varying degrees, as we shall see in more detail below. Part of the explanation for these apparent discrepancies between students' behaviors in Mrs. Smith's class and those of students in previous studies, of course, lies in Mrs. Smith's two-draft requirement and in the other procedures she set in place for her course: in order to "succeed" as writers in Mrs. Smith's class—indeed, in order to pass the course—students simply had to write more than one draft and they had to revise. To put it somewhat differently, to participate in the discourse of the class, students wrote multiple drafts of their essays.

What is important here is the apparent connection between how students write and the exigencies of the situation within which they are writing. Previous studies of students' writing processes have often ignored or downplayed these connections. As a result, some studies indicating that students tend to revise infrequently may

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1Marshall reports that the percentages were even lower for writing assigned in social science classes: 40.2% wrote rough drafts and 9.9% wrote multiple drafts.
indirectly have measured the amount of revising the students were required to do in that particular context.

Peer Conference. Along with the two-draft rule, Mrs. Smith's requirement that students engage in peer conferences for each assigned essay also seemed to shape at least the initial stages of the students' composing processes. For most students, these early stages of writing an essay for Mrs. Smith's class involved, first, formulating an idea for a topic (usually on the basis of the rubric Mrs. Smith handed out for that assignment, about which more in Chapter V); second, gathering some information and/or developing ideas for the topic; third, writing a rough draft; fourth, sharing that rough draft with three peers who critiqued the draft using the required peer conference forms; and fifth, revising that rough draft. The amount of time and effort students put into each of these stages varied substantially from one student to another. Kara, for example, generally spent several days struggling slowly through her rough draft, revising periodically as she wrote. Mark, by contrast, usually produced his rough drafts quickly, within a day or two after the assignment was given, and then spent more time revising before submitting his drafts to Mrs. Smith for comment and evaluation. Despite these differences,
however, all students participated in peer conferences, roughly according to Mrs. Smith's guidelines, during these early stages of the assignment. In effect, peer critique became a routine part of the students' writing activities for assigned writing tasks: all the students read and commented on each other's early drafts to varying degrees.

While all the students participated in peer conferences, how the students used peer conferences varied greatly. Some students simply went through the motions of completing that part of the requirement, asking their peers (and, in some cases, me) to complete the form after the rough draft had already been revised (which was technically a violation of Mrs. Smith's rules). Others took more time at this stage, consulting the peer conference forms—and sometimes the students who had completed them—as they revised their rough drafts. Most students seemed to use the peer conference forms in a cursory way, completing this step of the assignment without conceiving of it as a very important part of their writing process. Janie, for example, admitted that although she always submitted the required peer conference forms with her essays, "I don't use the peer conference forms much when I'm revising."

And yet, although some students asserted that these required forms weren't important to them as they wrote, the use of the forms meant that some form of peer critique was
occurring among students early in the process of completing an assignment. Even when students asked classmates to fill out the peer conference forms after the rough draft had already been revised, students were nevertheless reading and commenting on each other’s texts-in-progress. At the very least, their drafts were being read by an audience other than what Marshall calls the "teacher-as-examiner" ("Composing"). And whether or not individual students were actually using their peers' comments as guides to revising, this sharing of drafts became an integral part of the classroom discourse about writing.

One apparent result of this routine sharing of drafts and work-in-progress is that students became accustomed to seeing each other's writing at various stages of completion, and they were encouraged to see their own writing as work-in-progress, which in turn seemed to encourage students to make changes in their drafts. Further, many students in the class consulted regularly with peers throughout the writing of their essays, even after it was required by Mrs. Smith for them to do so. Janie, the student who admitted that she didn't use the forms much when she revised, also reported that she routinely showed her drafts to a friend of hers, who "is a great writer," and she often consulted with three or four of her classmates about subsequent drafts as she revised.
Kara, too, often shared her drafts-in-progress with a friend after the peer conference forms were completed. Moreover, even when the peer conferences were completed seemingly quickly and superficially, students sometimes made changes to their rough drafts based on suggestions their peers had made in the peer conferences.

At the same time, some students used the peer conferences extensively in writing and revising their essays. Jon routinely asked Mark and Seth to read his drafts and incorporated many of their suggestions into his revisions. Kate also routinely shared her drafts with Janie and Lori and often consulted with them as she worked through subsequent drafts. (See Chapter V for detailed descriptions of this sort of collaboration among the students.)

In short, many of the students in the class regularly shared drafts with peers in the early stages of writing, often during class time, either as part of the required peer conferences or more informally at their own initiative. Such sharing and informal peer critique occurred more often as the semester went on--not surprisingly, since students became more familiar with each other and with the expectations of the teacher as time went by. Over time, this routine collaboration during the writing and revising of drafts came to be accepted by the
students as part of the general discourse and practice of the class. The point here is that the peer conference requirement seemed to encourage collaboration on the part of students early in the process of writing an essay. Although several students reported that they would have shared—and did share—their work in progress with friends regardless of Mrs. Smith's peer conference requirement, many also reported that they did so only because it was required in Mrs. Smith's class. In this sense, both the frequency and kinds of peer critique among students in this class seemed to be related to the requirements set in place for the course and to the way those requirements shaped the general discourse and practices of the class.

The Use of Computers. As the use of computers as writing tools has become ever more common, more and more researchers have begun to investigate the possible effects of the use of computers on the writing of students (Gaunder; Kurth; Lytle). Although this research does not yet allow for broad generalizations about the effects of computer use on students' writing, it suggests that computers do influence how students write. In Mrs. Smith's class, the students' writing processes seemed to be influenced at the very least by the availability of computers in the class for writing and the requirement that
all drafts (except the rough draft) be submitted as computer printouts. In effect, the general availability and required use of computers meant that all students did at least a portion of their drafting and revising using Apple 2E computers equipped with Bank Street Writer word processing software.

Some previous studies of the use of computers for composing indicate that students tend to write longer drafts and revise differently when writing on computers (Fernandez; Kurth; Lytle; Moore). Other studies have explored the effects of computers on various aspects of the composing process; Christina Haas, for example, found that the technical writers she studied "had distinctly different note-making patterns" when they wrote with computers and when they wrote with pen and paper ("Composing" 512). Such research highlights differences in writers' composing behaviors when those writers are using word processors instead of pens and paper.

Because the students in the present study were all required to write with computers, it was impossible to compare potential differences in their composing behaviors when they wrote using different media. At the same time, however, the use of computers for writing in Mrs. Smith's class did seem to influence composing behaviors in several ways. First, students were encouraged to compose directly
on the computer, rather than write their rough drafts in longhand—something most of the students did; and as we shall see momentarily, composing on the computer represented a change in the habits of some students. Second, students were able to produce "new" drafts of each assignment very easily using word processing software, which seemed to facilitate revising and encourage more frequent revising on the students' part. In addition, because many students had access to computers only in school, students were encouraged to compose and revise in school rather than at home or elsewhere.

One measure of the influence of computer use on students' composing is the number of handwritten drafts they wrote. Recall that although Mrs. Smith required essays to be submitted as computer printouts, she did allow students to submit rough drafts in longhand. However, relatively few students actually wrote their rough drafts in longhand, in part because they eventually had to enter those drafts into the computer and would save time by composing directly on the computer. Of the 642 drafts collected for this study, only 34 (5.3%) were handwritten. Of these 34, 29 were rough drafts and five were revisions of earlier drafts. Ten of the twenty-one students in the class (47.6%) composed at least one handwritten draft at some point during the semester, but only two students
(9.5%) routinely composed handwritten drafts throughout the semester (i.e. they composed handwritten drafts for more than half of the assignments).²

These numbers suggest that the use of computers for writing became a routine and integral part of the students' writing processes in Mrs. Smith's class. Generally, students composed directly on the computer, and most of those students who composed handwritten rough drafts at the beginning of the semester did so only periodically as the semester wore on, usually when time constraints made it difficult or impossible for them to use the computers in school. In addition, the use of the computer seemed to encourage some students to alter their own processes for composing. Consider Janie's case.

Janie was one of a few of the students in Mrs. Smith's class who reported having had no prior experience with word processing before taking Mrs. Smith's class. For her, using the computer required some basic instruction in word processing (which Mrs. Smith provided during the first week

²These numbers conceal the possibility that some students may have composed handwritten rough drafts without actually submitting them to the teacher. One student reported that she usually wrote a rough draft quickly in longhand and then entered it into the computer with very few changes. She then printed that draft out and submitted it as her rough draft, discarding the original handwritten draft. Other students may have periodically followed the same procedure. My conversations with students and my observations of them during composing, however, suggest that very few did so, especially as the semester wore on.
of class) as well as some adjustment of her habits as a
writer. For instance, before taking Mrs. Smith's course,
Janie wrote using pen and paper. If an assignment had to
be submitted in typed form, she would simply type what she
had already written in longhand. For Mrs. Smith's course,
however, Janie was required to submit all drafts after the
rough draft in the form of computer printouts, using the
supplied word processing program to do so; thus, she could
follow her former writing routine only partially.

For some assignments, Janie did write her rough drafts
out in longhand, then shared them with her peers, made some
changes to them in pencil, and finally punched them into
the computer during class. She would then print out the
revised draft and submit it to Mrs. Smith for comment.
Once she received her draft back from Mrs. Smith, she would
make changes on the printed text using a pencil and then
punch those changes into her file on the computer. But
Janie apparently recognized that it was more efficient to
make changes to her drafts—and even to write her drafts—
directly on the computer. Of the ten assignments Janie
wrote for the class, only on three did she write a rough
draft in longhand; moreover, although she continued to
revise using a pencil, she also began to revise directly on
the computer. In short, the use of word processing seemed
to encourage Janie to alter the way she went about completing her writing tasks for the course.\(^3\)

Janie's case suggests not only that the way computers were used in Mrs. Smith's class encouraged students to compose directly on the computer, but it also illustrates the apparent influence the use of computers had on some students' revising behaviors. As I mentioned above, the use of computers seemed to enable students to revise more quickly as they worked within Mrs. Smith's guidelines for submitting drafts. Often, a student would receive an essay back from Mrs. Smith and then begin revising according to the marginal comments Mrs. Smith had written on the draft. Since Mrs. Smith usually returned students' essays at the beginning of a class period, students could immediately begin working on their revisions during class. Depending upon the nature of Mrs. Smith's comments on a draft and the student's sense of how much revision was necessary, it was

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\(^3\)Interestingly, Janie did not write all three of these rough drafts in longhand early the semester, as one might have expected. One of the longhand drafts was written early in February, the second in April, and the third at the very end of the semester in May. It is possible that in the cases of the latter two essays, which were written long after she had begun to use the computer routinely for her rough drafts, Janie was pressed for time and was not able to get to a computer while she was writing the rough draft. It's also possible that for some reason she wrote those drafts at home rather than in school. It's noteworthy that in some cases Janie's "rough draft" was a product of handwritten fragments that were incorporated into her draft as she wrote on the computer. In those instances, the use of the computer was still apparently influencing her writing process.
possible for a student to receive an essay with Mrs. Smith's comments on it at the outset of the class, revise it directly on the computer during class, print it out, and submit it to Mrs. Smith at the end of the same class period. Students who did not revise directly on the computer were less likely to be able to submit a revised draft to Mrs. Smith so quickly. And because submitting more drafts usually meant a better grade, the ability to revise a draft and submit it to Mrs. Smith again in a short period of time was clearly an advantage in the class.

The ease with which students could change their essays using the computer also seemed to influence the amount of time they spent revising. That is, a student could make rather substantial revisions to a draft directly on the computer and then print out a complete revised copy of the draft very quickly; the student could do so several times before a deadline, assuming he or she had submitted the first version early enough to Mrs. Smith. Thus, in the course of the time (usually ten days) between the the day an assignment was made and the deadline for that assignment, a student would typically spend more of that time revising than planning or drafting an essay. Along with several other features of Mrs. Smith's class—such as her twenty-four hour "turn-around" for reading students' drafts, her emphasis on revision, and her required two-
draft minimum--the use of computers for writing was an important feature of the context of this course that encouraged students to spend more time revising than drafting. (See below under "Procedures for Reading and Responding to Student Writing" for further discussion of time spent drafting vs. time spent revising).

Some studies of the effects of word processing on students' writing suggest that students revise quite differently when using word processors than when using pencil and paper. Margaret Moore, for example, found that fourth and fifth graders using word processors "made significantly more revision changes and significantly more meaning-related revision changes" than their peers who did not use word processors; she also found that students using word processors "increased the length of their final drafts and revised frequently" ("Word Processing" 636-A). Given such findings, we might infer from the discussion of the use of computers in Mrs. Smith's class that the students in the class produced longer drafts and revised more frequently than they would have if computers were not so readily available. That seems likely. But the issue is more complicated than a simple one-to-one relationship between computer use and frequency and nature of revision. Clearly, several other features of the context of this course combined with the use of computers to shape
students' writing behaviors, including the two-draft minimum, the required peer conferences, the nature of the writing tasks, Mrs. Smith's habits of response to her students' drafts, the students' previous experiences with revision, and so on. The important point here is that the availability and required use of computers were integral features of the context within which students in this class wrote, and as such they seemed to shape students' composing in significant ways.

The Workshop Format. A fourth characteristic of the course context that seemed to influence the students' composing processes was the workshop-style format of the class. Indeed, to the extent that this characteristic of the class facilitated and shaped the procedures and guidelines described above (i.e., the two-draft rule, mandatory peer conferences, and use of computers), the workshop-style format of the class should be considered one of the most influential features of the course context. The relatively loose structure of the daily class meetings and the flexibility students had in determining how to use their time during those meetings enabled students to follow Mrs. Smith's rules and guidelines at their own pace and with relatively little direct supervision by Mrs. Smith. Moreover, the open-ended structure of these class meetings
contributed to a casual, usually relaxed atmosphere, with which most students seemed quite comfortable. And equally important, the structure of the class meetings allowed students what appeared to be sufficient time to complete the assigned writing tasks according to Mrs. Smith's guidelines.

Some of the features of Mrs. Smith's workshop-style format were described in Chapter III. For example, Mrs. Smith often spent the first ten minutes or so of the class period in a "mini-lesson," usually devoted to some aspect of a particular assignment (the structure of a persuasive essay, e.g.) or to issues of usage, grammar, and syntax. Aside from those mini-lessons, most of each fifty-four minute class period was available to students to use as they wished. Students could write at the worktables or at one of the computers, they could read, they could chat with each other about their essays, they could sign up for a conference with Mrs. Smith, and so on. In short, students had wide latitude in the way they used the available time in a class period.

One of the most obvious ways in which this workshop-style format of the class seemed to influence the students' writing behaviors was in the way it encouraged and allowed for collaboration among students as they engaged in various stages of composing. One aspect of the collaboration that
typically occurred in the class, mandatory peer critique of
drafts-in-progress, has already been described in some
detail (see "Peer Conferences" above in this chapter). We
have seen, for example, that the required peer conferences
for each assignment not only encouraged but also mandated
some types of collaboration among the students. The
workshop-style format of the class helped establish an
atmosphere and framework within which students could easily
fulfill the peer conference requirement; perhaps even more
significantly, the format of the class allowed for other
kinds of collaboration among the students as well. In
short, the flexibility afforded students in their use of
class time, the relaxed atmosphere during class meetings,
and even such physical characteristics of the room as the
arrangement of the chairs around large worktables and the
proximity of the computers to one another, all seemed to
facilitate and encourage interaction among the students as
they worked.

In this environment, students often sought each
other's advice or help with their writing before and after
they had completed the required peer conferences. These
interactions generally took three basic forms:

1. brief, casual interactions regarding a
   specific issue related to an assignment; for
   example, questions to a nearby student about
   mechanics or convention ("How do you spell
   this word?"), confirmations of minor
   questions of usage ("Is this a passive?"),
or solicitations for advice on style or content ("How does this sentence sound to you?" "Do you think I should begin this paragraph in this fashion?");

(2) semi-formal interactions mandated or suggested by the teacher; for example, sharing of drafts as part of the required peer conferences, solicitation of advice from one student to another at the urging of the teacher ("Scott, read Jenny's persuasive essay and ask her about how she organized it.");

(3) informal but longer, more interactive consultations regarding matters more involved than usage or convention; for example, the discussion between two or more students regarding revision of a paragraph, consultation about the organization of an essay, and so on.

Collaborative interactions of the first kind were most numerous, but all were common. During a given class meeting (with the exception of those meetings devoted to the formal presentations on essay form described in Chapter III), approximately two-thirds of the students would participate in one of these forms of collaboration.  

4This figure is at best a rough estimate, which I arrived at by reviewing my daily field notes. Periodically, in making the field notes, I would record the activities of all the students in the class at a given time. For example, I might note at 9:15 (fifteen minutes into the class period) the names of all the students and what they were doing at that point. Although such a procedure does not allow for accurate accounting of how all the students used their time during a given class period, it does begin to paint an approximate picture of the kinds of activities students typically engaged in and how many of the students engaged in given activities over the course of a class period. In the case of collaborative interactions among students, my field notes make it clear that at least two-thirds of the students engaged in some form of collaborative interaction during a given class meeting.
It is important to note that "collaborative interaction" as described here is not necessarily "collaborative writing." Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede distinguish between two categories of "collaboration" among writers: "heirarchical" and "dialogic" (Singular 133). While the collaboration observed among students in Mrs. Smith's class would seem to have been of the latter type, none of the writing done in Mrs. Smith's class was formally assigned as "collaborative," nor was it considered as such by either Mrs. Smith or her students; that is, students were technically working on "their own" essays at all times, regardless of any interactions that occurred between them, and those essays were always assessed as their own work. What was observed among Mrs. Smith's students might better be described as "collaborative learning," but even that term is something of a misnomer, since Mrs. Smith never made formal collaborative assignments of any kind aside from the required peer conferences. In short, even though the collaborative interactions I observed among Mrs. Smith students seemed to have some of the characteristics Lunsford and Ede list in their discussion of collaborative learning (123), important distinctions obtain between what I am calling "collaborative interactions" and what Lunsford and Ede (and others) call "collaborative writing" or what
they and others like Kenneth Bruffee term "collaborative learning."

The first kind of collaborative interaction described above seemed to occur in Mrs. Smith's class most frequently when a student was revising a draft. Such interactions usually involved minor issues of grammar, punctuation, spelling, and usage. For instance, at one point during the sixth week of the semester, Janie was revising a draft of her persuasive essay and asked Lori, who was seated next to her at a worktable, about a passive construction Mrs. Smith had noted. The two then talked for approximately a minute about whether that passive construction was "correct."

This kind of interaction seemed to be facilitated by the students' proximity to each other while they worked and by the flexibility they had in determining how to use their time. It also seemed to be encouraged by the generally relaxed atmosphere in the class and the casual ways in which students interacted with each other.

The second type of collaborative interaction listed above usually involved either the required peer conferences, which are described above in this chapter, or instances when Mrs. Smith directed one student to another for help on a particular matter. For instance, in ending a conference with Janie about a persuasive essay Janie was working on, Mrs. Smith said, "Read Emily's persuasive
essay. You'll see how she did it." Janie had been having difficulty in structuring her own persuasive essay, and Mrs. Smith, after giving her some guidance on the matter, apparently wanted to provide Janie with a model to follow as she revised her draft. Janie then went over to Emily, who was working by herself at one of the tables in the room, and the two talked for several minutes about the latter's essay. Mrs. Smith often directed student's to one another in this manner, especially in cases like this one when she wanted one student to read another's essay as a model for a particular assignment. Again, the open-ended format of the class readily allowed for such interaction, which was both explicitly and implicitly encouraged and reinforced by Mrs. Smith.

The third form of collaborative interaction listed above usually--but not always--involved students who were personal friends or were socially comfortable with each other. Kate, for instance, often sought help from Lori on her writing and vice versa; Mark was apt to seek help from Jon; Mary and Bobbie, who always sat next to one another, regularly sought each other's help and advice. These interactions could last from a few minutes to an entire period and tended to involve broader problems or issues associated with a particular assignment. For instance, while working on a descriptive essay during the fifth week
of the semester, Jon was having trouble finding a way to use the sense of "taste" in his essay about a swim meet (Mrs. Smith's rubric stipulated that all five senses be used in the students' descriptions). Jon asked Doug, whose gregarious nature enabled him to interact easily with all members of the class, "How can I get 'taste' in here," handing Doug his draft of the essay. Doug began reading the draft and the two discussed the problem for several minutes. In this case, collaboration occurred at an early stage in Jon's writing of this essay and involved the need to add important new material to the draft; it was possible in large part because of the format of the class.

More often, this kind of collaborative interaction seemed to involve important issues of revision. At one point during the tenth week of the semester, Kate was struggling with her revisions of a draft of her definition essay about love. Mrs. Smith had read and returned the draft with many marginal comments, and Kate was having trouble revising the essay according to Mrs. Smith's suggestion. She had worked alone for the first ten minutes or so of the period, then she turned to Lori, who was working on her own essay next to Kate at the same table, and asked Lori for help in revising the last few paragraphs of the essay. The two worked together on the revisions
until the end of the period—approximately half an hour
(see Chapter V for further discussion of this interaction).

Although several students reported that they did
sometimes collaborate with peers on their writing for other
classes they were taking, and that they had done so
periodically in the past, it seems clear that most students
did not usually collaborate with peers in other settings as
regularly as they did in Mrs. Smith's class or in the same
kinds of ways. And indeed, whether or not they did so in
other settings, the kinds of collaboration encouraged and
mandated in Mrs. Smith's class seemed to influence the
students' work at various stages in their writing
processes. Students in the class collaborated with each
other—some more than others—at every stage of the
process, from invention to editing. Moreover, all students
collaborated in at least one of three forms described
above, and as the semester progressed, some began to
collaborate more often and some increased the depth of their
collaboration. Janie, Kate, and Lori, for example, who
worked together from the start of the semester, consulted
more regularly with each other during the second half of
the semester and worked together at all stages of the
writing process; each of these students accommodated or
adapted to the course context in a way that enabled them to
incorporate collaboration into their own processes of writing.

Although the data from this study allow for no conclusions about direct cause-effect relationships between the workshop-style format of this course and the frequency and kinds of collaboration described here, it seems clear that the atmosphere and structure of the class enabled and encouraged collaborative interactions among these students; moreover, the forms of these interactions seemed to be related to the structure and atmosphere of that class. For instance, the nature of peer conferences grew to some extent out of the guidelines set for those conferences. More important, the collaborative atmosphere encouraged and fostered by the workshop-style format of Mrs. Smith's course seemed to shape the ways in which students moved through their own processes of composing. Collaborative interactions of the kinds described above became for many students routine parts of their own composing processes.

Of course, the workshop-style format of the course very likely had other effects as well. For example, the flexibility students had in using their time may have contributed to the time they spent writing and revising. Similarly, the ease with which students could consult with each other and with Mrs. Smith during class time seemed to influence various aspects of their invention strategies (as
Chapter Five will make clear). In short, these feature of the course was integral to the discourse in which the students participated as they completed their assignments.

Procedures for Reading and Responding to Student Writing. The final characteristic of the course context listed above is Mrs. Smith's procedures for reading and responding to student papers, especially her "24-hour turnaround guarantee." As the description of Mrs. Smith's procedures for the submission, response to, and return of student papers in Chapter III indicates, students were free to submit as many drafts of an assigned essay as they chose to before the deadline, as long as they followed certain guidelines Mrs. Smith set for submission of papers. These guidelines included requirements that students submit at least two drafts, attach the completed peer conference forms, and submit the drafts in the form of computer printouts. As students worked through an assignment, each subsequent draft was simply attached to the previous drafts and the entire package was submitted to Mrs. Smith. Students were free to submit their drafts to Mrs. Smith at any time during the school day and in many cases even after the school day ended.5

5Mrs. Smith went to extraordinary lengths to accommodate students as they worked through the drafts of their essays. Not only did she allow them to submit their assignments at any time during the school day, but she also
Each time a student submitted a draft, Mrs. Smith read it, commented on it in writing, assigned it a grade according to her grading scheme, and returned it to the student within twenty-four hours. Mrs. Smith generally returned essays at the beginning of each class meeting. A student who received a draft with Mrs. Smith's comments could then decide whether to revise the draft and submit it again, if there was time before the final deadline. This basic procedure seemed to influence students' writing behaviors in two important ways.

(1) Students usually wrote more drafts of an assigned essay than the required minimum of two. Despite the requirement that only two drafts had to be submitted for each assignment, students usually submitted more than two. As Table 1 indicates (see above on p. 157), the average number of drafts per assignment for the class was 3.25.

Mrs. Smith's procedures for submitting drafts and the way she set and managed deadlines for assignments encouraged students to submit multiple drafts. If a student was able to complete the required first two drafts and the peer conferences within a few days after the assignment was made, that student had as long as a week—

permitted them to bring their assignments to her home, which was just a few miles away from the school. She even permitted students to bring their essays to her on Saturdays and Sundays, instructing them to put the papers in her mailbox if she happened to be out when they arrived.
and sometimes longer—within which to submit the essay to Mrs. Smith, receive it back with her comments, revise it and resubmit it. The student could follow this procedure as many times as possible before the deadline.

Mrs. Smith encouraged subsequent turn-ins in several other ways as well. For one, she periodically repeated to students her dictum that "good writing is rewriting." In addition, her comments were written in a way that encouraged students to make changes and resubmit their essays. For example, she often wrote on students' essays some version of this statement: "You're almost there. One more turn-in and this should qualify." Or, as she wrote on Janie's third draft of her descriptive essay, "Much better; you're definitely on the right track. Do a bit more showing and you'll qualify." In many cases when students had submitted only the required minimum of two drafts close to the deadline, Mrs. Smith would chastise them in a way that reminded them of the advantages of multiple submissions: "If you had allowed yourself enough time for another turn-in, this would have qualified."

Finally, her grading policies also encouraged multiple submissions. She usually assigned grades of "unaccepted" or "accepted minus" on early drafts and almost always increased the grade slightly with subsequent turn-ins. So, for instance, Janie earned grades of "unaccepted,"
"accepted," and "qualified" on the three drafts she submitted to Mrs. Smith for her descriptive essay. So consistent was this pattern of grading that in no case out of 190 sets of drafts collected for this study did Mrs. Smith lower a student's grade on a subsequent draft.

Such practices of Mrs. Smith's reinforced among students a belief that the more often a student could turn in an assigned essay, the better that student's grade on the essay would be. Dave expressed this awareness during the tenth week of the semester, one day before the deadline for his cause/effect essay: asking Sam to read his essay, Dave said, "I want to turn it in today so I'll have three turn-ins and get a 'qualified.'" Other students periodically made similar remarks:

You need at least three turn-ins to get a 'qualified' paper.

I could have gotten this paper 'qualified' if I turned it in one more time.

Indeed, from time to time Mrs. Smith explicitly reinforced the students' belief about a connection between high grades and the number of times an essay was submitted for evaluation. While discussing some of the requirements for the literary analysis essay, for example, Mrs. Smith remarked to the class, "You can't get this essay 'qualified' unless you have at least three turn-ins."

During the tenth week, as she handed back Paul's essay to
him, she said, "One more turn-in would have done it." Paul had submitted the essay only once and had earned a grade of "accepted" rather than "qualified."^6

Whether or not students would have written as many drafts without such a system as Mrs. Smith's cannot be determined by this study; clearly, though, the system of submission and response in this class encouraged students to write more than one draft of assigned essays and seemed to influence the numbers of drafts they did write.

(2) Students generally seemed to spend more time revising than drafting their essays for this class.7

6Mrs. Smith's influence on the amount of revision students did can be seen in another way as well. In one or two instances she suggested that a student didn't need to write another draft because that student's overall grade for the semester was already an A. For example, after assigning the second draft of Emily's narrative essay a grade of "accepted," Mrs. Smith wrote, "One more turn-in and you would have qualified this paper, but you already have an A for the first nine weeks [of the semester]." Emily decided not to revise the essay further. Such cases underscore the importance of Mrs. Smith's role as audience, evaluator, and authority with respect to her students' writing.

7The definitions of drafting and revising are somewhat problematic, since some studies suggest that there are no clear-cut distinctions between the drafting of new text and the revising of text already written. Indeed, as studies by Linda Flower, Nancy Sommers, and Sondra Perl, among others, indicate, writers often "draft" while "revising" and "revise" while "drafting"; testimony by such writers as Donald Murray corroborate those research findings. At the same time, while recognizing the difficulties of defining drafting and revising, I find it useful for the purposes of this study to distinguish between the two. Here I am defining drafting as that part of a student's writing process when he or she is creating new text in response to a new assignment; this "new text" is defined here as text written before the draft is shared with peers and/or
As we have seen, several features of the course context seemed to encourage revision: for example, the two-draft rule, the mandatory use of computers for assignments, and Mrs. Smith's procedures for submission of and response to students essays. In addition to these features, Mrs. Smith also encouraged revision by returning student essays with detailed, written comments. As a result, students always had a set of written suggestions for revising their essays. At the same time, her conferences with students usually focused on revising drafts that had already been written; although she did hold conferences with students in order to discuss possible topics for essay, most conferences were devoted to discussions of drafts in progress. Thus, Mrs. Smith's practices and habits for response to student essays, together with the way she organized her class as a workshop, emphasized revising. Not surprisingly, students also seemed concerned about revising their texts.

Submitted to the teacher for comment. In other words, "drafting" in most cases refers to a student's completing of his or her rough draft for an assignment. Revising, then, is defined as that part of the process when a student is working on his or her text at any time after having shared it with peers and/or submitted it to Mrs. Smith for comment. Obviously, in some cases, students who are "revising" are "drafting" new text in response to a comment by a peer or by the teacher; because this "drafting" occurs after the original draft has been completed, however, I am defining such "drafting" as part of "revising." "Invention" is defined in Chapter V.
Although the methods for gathering the data in this study provided no accurate way to quantify the time students spent drafting and revising, the data do suggest that students tended to write their rough drafts rather quickly and to spend less time drafting than revising. The number of drafts students wrote for each assignment would suggest as much; moreover, the students' own comments about their writing reinforced that suggestion. Finally, observations of the students during and outside of class further suggest that they spent more time revising than drafting. In no case was I able to document that a student actually spent less time revising than drafting, although it's likely that students did so in the eight instances when only a single draft was submitted for an assignment. But I was able to document several cases in which students clearly spent the bulk of their time revising particular assignments (see Chapter V for further discussion of the nature of the students' revisions).

Composing and Other Features of Context. Thus far the discussion in this chapter has centered on the influence of five salient features of the context of Mrs. Smith's class on the writing processes of the students in that class. While these five features represent the most obvious influences on students' composing as reflected in the data
collected for this study, other factors clearly played roles in the students' writing as well. Among these other factors were the nature of the assigned writing tasks, the character and organization of the school, the nature of the community where the school is located, and the students' personal situations at the time of writing. The data gathered for this study allow for no systematic investigation of the role these factors played in shaping the students' writing processes, but glimpses of their influence appear nonetheless in the data. This section briefly describes some of those glimpses.

(1) Task. Many researchers have investigated the influence of writing task on various aspects of students' composing processes (Brossell; Hoetker; Park; Shea). Many such studies suggest that the nature of a given task can affect both how and what students write (e.g. Shea). In the present study, students' composing processes seemed to be influenced by the nature of the tasks they were given. The next chapter describes in detail the implications of Mrs. Smith's assigned writing tasks for her students' invention and revision strategies; here, though, we focus briefly on two general ways in which the nature of an assigned writing task seemed to shape students' composing processes. First, the numbers of drafts students wrote
varied for some assignments. Second, different writing tasks encouraged students to engage in very different kinds of writing-related activities, such as reading, interviewing, and library research.

Table 2 indicates some differences in the number of drafts students wrote for each type of assignment.

Table 2

Average Number of Drafts per Essay Assignment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essay</th>
<th>Avg. No. Drafts</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Highest</th>
<th>Lowest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contest</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>3/4a</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editorial</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasion</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cause/Effect</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>3/4a</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary Analysis</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison/Contrast</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profile</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Essays</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{a}\)In these instances there were identical frequencies for both numbers; that is, both 3 and 4 drafts occurred an identical number of times.
Although at first glance the figures in Table 2 suggest little variation from one type of assigned task to the next, the numbers for two of the tasks, persuasion and literary analysis, merit further discussion. Note that the mode (or most frequent number of drafts) for the persuasive essay is five, higher than any other assignment; the average number of drafts is also highest for the persuasive essay, 3.89. Although many factors surely contributed to these numbers (e.g. the kinds of comments Mrs. Smith wrote on the students' drafts for the assignment; the point during the semester at which students were writing this essay; and so on), the nature of the task itself seems to have contributed to the number of drafts students wrote. For example, Mrs. Smith was very explicit in the parameters she set for this assignment (see Appendix B), especially with respect to the structure of the essay. As we shall see in the next chapter, she devoted several mini-lessons to discussions of how students should organize their persuasive essays, detailing the order in which various elements of the essay should be placed. In conferences and in her written comments on student drafts she continually stressed the importance of the structure of the essay.

Several students had difficulty with this aspect of the assignment, difficulties which they tried to address in subsequent drafts. Mark, for instance, one of three
students who wrote more drafts for the persuasive essay than for any other assignment, wrote an essay in favor of paying college student-athletes. In his first draft, Mark struggled to organize his essay according to Mrs. Smith's rubric, especially with respect to the required use of two "cons" regarding his main argument about the need for stipends for student-athletes. On his second draft Mrs. Smith wrote, "'You fail to develop many of your points sufficiently. Also look at your organization.'" Matt's subsequent revisions focused on these issues. Although several other factors likely influenced Matt's revisions, it seems clear that Matt, like many of his classmates, experienced a good deal of trouble with this assignment in large part because of the nature of the task itself. The specific demands of that task seem to have shaped the way Matt revised his essay.

Students seemed to have even more trouble with the literary analysis essay, an assignment on which Mrs. Smith placed great emphasis. She gave the students more time for this essay than for any of the others, and she devoted more class time to activities related to this assignment than to the others. For example, students were required to use at least five separate sources for this assignment and to cite their sources for a total of at least ten footnotes in the paper. In addition, students were required to compile 75
bibliography notecards according to specifications set by Mrs. Smith, and they had to submit an outline before submitting their first drafts—something she required for no other assignment.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Average Number of Pages per Draft</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contest</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editorial</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasion</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cause/Effect</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary Analysis</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profile</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison/Contrast</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These averages were determined by counting the number of pages students wrote for each draft. Because students' drafts were all printed out with the same margins (set by the word processing program used in the course), the average number of pages per draft is roughly as accurate a measure of draft length as average number of words per draft.
As a result, students seemed to engage in much more planning and drafting than revising for this assignment than for the others. Students generally spent a great deal of time searching for and reading through sources in the library, compiling notes on these sources, and devising outlines. Indeed, Mrs. Smith moved the class to the school library for two class meetings, and several students went to the town library on their own time. Not only did the students write the fewest number of drafts for this assignment, but the average length of their drafts was higher than for any other assignment (see Table 3). Both these numbers suggest that students did less revising on this assignment than on other assignments for the course. In short, the specific nature of the assignment influenced the students' composing processes: they planned, drafted, and revised differently for this assignment than for others, even though other key features of the context—including the workshop format, the use of computers, the peer conferences, and so on—remained the same.

Several other assignments also required or encouraged students to engage in writing-related activities that were unusual in the class. For example, the editorial assignment stipulated that students had to submit their final versions of the essay to a local newspaper for possible publication. This requirement seemed to encourage
some students to read the local newspaper as part of the
assignment, something that was unusual for them.
Similarly, one of the prompts for the narrative assignment
required students to interview their parents about their
own high school experiences, something student did not
typically do for other assignments. In other words, the
parameters of particular assignments encouraged students to
alter their typical processes for completing assigned
writing tasks by incorporating unusual activities into
those processes or by spending more time at one stage (e.g.
planning) than they normally might.

(2) The School and the Community. Thompson High
School, like any other public school, was in many respects
a product of the community where it was located, and it
reflected many of the values, attitudes, and socio-economic
characteristics of that community. How these factors might
have shaped the writing of the students in Mrs. Smith's
class could not adequately be investigated given the
methods and scope of this study, but in some cases the
influence of the ethos of the school and some of the more
obvious characteristics of the school (e.g. its size,
organization, budget) on the students' writing processes
was apparent.
For example, as a well-established, financially secure public school in a relatively well-to-do, white, middle-class suburb of a large city, Thompson High had many of the features and special programs often found in such schools: an adequate and well-run library, many active and well-supported student groups, various academic award programs, a regularly published student newspaper, and several academic support programs. Two of these programs that sometimes figured into the writing of the students in Mrs. Smith's class were the Academic Assistants program and "The Write Place," which was the school's writing center.

Academic Assistants were part-time employees of the school, usually certified teachers, who were attached to specific academic departments as tutors. The English Academic Assistant, like the academic assistants in other departments, kept regular hours during the school day, during which she was available to students for consultations about the writing they were doing for their classes. Primarily acting as a tutor, she was used by the students as a reader of early drafts and as a kind of coach for drafts in progress. She kept in close communication with teachers in the department, and sometimes consulted with them about a particular student who had come to see her.
Several students in Mrs. Smith's class periodically consulted with the English Academic Assistant about their assignments for the class. Some, like Kara, did so when they were having difficulty with an assignment. Kara seemed to use the Academic Assistant more often early in the semester than she did later, perhaps because she had difficulty adjusting to Mrs. Smith's course. A few students routinely consulted the Assistant. Mark, for example, took his rough draft for each assignment to her and asked her to read and comment on it before he shared it with his peers. He often printed up a second copy of his rough drafts especially for her, and she used those copies to write comments and suggestions.

Although only a small number of students in the class seemed to use the Academic Assistant's services as Kara and Mark did, those who did incorporated conferences with her into their composing processes. How that step might have influenced specific aspects of their writing would largely be speculation given the limitations of this study, but it seemed to have had obvious implications for some students. In Mark's case, for example, his use of the Academic Assistant meant that he had to begin his drafts somewhat earlier than he otherwise might have, in order to leave sufficient time to have a conference with her. And it is apparent that revising for him involved reading through the
comments she wrote on his drafts. Only rarely did he revise his rough draft before consulting with the Academic Assistant. In these respects, Mark's own composing process was shaped by his interactions with the English Academic Assistant.

The school likely shaped the students' writing in much less obvious but no less powerful ways as well. As an institutional community, Thompson High communicated certain values regarding behavior, authority, and responsibility to its students and staff, often implicitly through its organizational structure but sometimes explicitly through its policy decisions and through special programs for its students. For instance, the entire school participated in a series of special events during February, which was designated Black History month. One of those events was a school-wide writing contest with civil rights and the work of Martin Luther King, Jr. as its theme. All the students in Mrs. Smith's class participated in the contest as part of their assignments for her class, and many of them were writing while participating in related events. In some cases, their participation seemed to shape the way they wrote. During the early weeks of the semester, for example, Jon and Mark often engaged in impromptu debates about civil rights issues--debates in which other students periodically participated. For Mark, these debates were
sometimes sources of ideas for his essays, and he went back to his drafts in several instances to make revisions after finishing a discussion with Jon.

The issue of authority was a complicated one in Mrs. Smith's class, in large part because she was such a strong authority figure and had such a straightforward style in dealing with her students' writing. Although students often complained about what they perceived as her heavy-handedness in responding to their essays, they all seemed to retain respect for her, a value that was reinforced by the school community in several ways. Displays of blatant disrespect for teachers were not only discouraged but were also handled as disciplinary matters. At one point during the semester, an incident occurred that reflected the strong sense of respect for authority among members of the school community. A student called in during a local radio talk show and made some humorous but critical remarks about a teacher at Thompson; these remarks were made as part of a contest on the radio show to find "the dorkiest teacher." In his comments, the student named the teacher, causing a minor scandal at the school and in the town generally. The school administration looked into the incident for possible disciplinary action against the student. Interestingly, the students in Mrs. Smith's class were almost unanimous in supporting such action against the student. Although
several found humor in the incident, most declared the student's actions inappropriate.

This attitude toward teachers as authorities revealed itself periodically among the students in Mrs. Smith's class as they worked on their assignments for the class. One particularly revealing moment came near the end of the semester, when Mary was finishing up several assignments for the class in an attempt to avoid a failing grade. Mary had already fulfilled her English requirements for graduation, and she had already been accepted to a university for the fall semester, so she did not need to pass Mrs. Smith's course in order to graduate. As a result, her grade in the course provided little incentive to her, and she had failed to turn in several assignments. As the end of the semester approached, however, Mary decided to try to make up some of the work, with Mrs. Smith's permission, so that she would not fail the course. Nevertheless, she did not complete the literary analysis essay, which almost assured her of a grade of "F" for the course. In explaining her situation, she remarked that an F in the course wouldn't affect her average very much, nor would it have any bearing on her status as a university freshman in the fall. "But," she said, "I feel bad, because Mrs. Smith is so nice, and she always wants to talk to me about my work." Mary was referring to several
instances when Mrs. Smith seemed to go out of her way to help Mary with a particular assignment.

Although Mary's remarks might reflect nothing more than her affection for Mrs. Smith, it seems clear that that affection was enhanced by her sense of Mrs. Smith's status as a teacher. In the end, Mary spent the last two weeks of class working quickly on two assignments, even though she did not need to complete those assignments in order to graduate. Her decision to do so seemed to grow more so out of her attitude toward Mrs. Smith than out of any need or desire on her own part to do the required work.

To describe and understand the complex relationship between the school and community and the writing of the students there would require a much more extensive and long-term study than this one--something akin to Shirley Brice Heath's long-term study of literacy in the Carolina Piedmont. Yet the glimpses of the influence of these broader contexts, together with previous research like Heath's, suggest the importance and power of these contexts in shaping the writing students do. In short, an adequate understanding of how students write requires that we address the complicated relationships between literacy and
the social, institutional, and cultural contexts within which our students are writing and learning.\footnote{Chapter V includes further discussion of these issues with respect to the invention and revision strategies of particular students.}

(3) The Personal Context. Throughout this chapter I have periodically underscored individual differences in how students responded to various features of the context within which they were working. These references to differences among the students imply that context did not—and cannot—influence all students in the same way—that whatever the role of context, students remain individual agents, to paraphrase Linda Flower. Another way to conceive of the students' place within the context is to view their own personal situations as part of that context, though not a part of the context they "share" with other students. In other words, each student exists within and interacts with the context in a kind of dynamic, so that the student at once shapes and is shaped by the context. In effect, the "context" then becomes a dynamic network of contexts, encompassing individual students and their respective backgrounds and situations as well as the kinds of features that have been described thus far (such as the workshop format, the peer collaboration, the task, etc.) that are "shared" by all the students in a given class.
setting. The data from this study suggest several ways in which this view of the students in context seems valid.

Consider Sam's situation with his literary analysis essay. Like most students in the class, Sam struggled to write the essay according to the extensive and detailed parameters Mrs. Smith had set for the assignment. He had difficulty formulating a thesis for his essay, which was about Stephen King's ability to convey fear in a novel like Carrie; and he had difficulty incorporating his source materials in the way Mrs. Smith had stipulated. Unlike most of his classmates, though, Sam wrote more than the minimum required number of drafts--three--one of only four students to do so, and he seemed able to progress through the process of writing the essay in much the same way that he wrote his other essays for the course.

At the same time, however, Sam was frustrated by Mrs. Smith's feedback to his drafts. He tried to incorporate her suggestions for revision, but she still found his developing essay unsatisfactory. But after submitting his second draft and receiving it back with Mrs. Smith's comments, Sam did not revise as extensively or as carefully as he had done on other assignments. He made only relatively minor revisions so that the grade on his essay could improve from "unaccepted" to "accepted." Why didn't Sam take the care in revising his literary analysis essay
according to Mrs. Smith's guidelines that he took on other assignments?

There are surely several reasons, but one of the most important involves Sam's acceptance to college. During the month that he began work on his literary analysis essay, he learned that he had been accepted for admission to the college he most wanted to attend. Among the materials he received with his letter of acceptance were guidelines for submitting several pieces of writing that would be evaluated by the English Department at the college for possible exemption from the required freshman composition course. One of the required pieces of writing was an essay of literary analysis. At the time he submitted his final version of his literary analysis for Mrs. Smith's class, he was also putting together the essays he planned to send to his college. As he told me shortly before handing in his final version to Mrs. Smith, "I'll just make a few changes for Mrs. Smith, because I have to make other changes before I send it to [the university I'll be attending in the fall]."

These latter changes were in fact substantial. While his essay for Mrs. Smith totalled some five and a half typed pages (with standard margins), his new college would accept only a total of twelve pages for the four required essays. Sam had decided that his literary analysis had to
be shorter than five pages. But Mrs. Smith's comments suggested that he add some material to his developing essay: "Don't assume the reader knows what you're talking about," she wrote. She also suggested that he add transitions as well as sentences to introduce the quotes from his sources. In short, Mrs. Smith suggested revisions that were very different from the kinds of revisions he believed he needed to make before submitting the essay to his new college. In the end, Sam did not lengthen the piece as Mrs. Smith had suggested, and he made only cursory changes to it--enough to earn a grade of "accepted." Then he focused on revising the piece for college.

In this case, Sam's personal situation influenced his decisions about how to revise a particular assignment for class. To understand the number and types of revisions he made for this assignment, then, requires some understanding of the situation he was in and how that situation influenced his writing. In short, Sam's situation regarding his admission to college was part of the context within which he wrote his literary essay and as such had bearing on how he wrote that essay.

In some cases, very practical considerations seemed to influence how a student went about completing an assignment for Mrs. Smith's class. For example, Chapter III describes how an emergency at her part-time job as a veterinarian's
assistant forced Kara to stay late on a Sunday evening; as a result, she stayed up very late trying to complete an assignment that was due the next day. It's likely that this disruption caused changes in the way she wrote and revised that assignment. Similarly, an illness during the fifth week of the semester forced Steve to write his rough draft of an assignment the night before the deadline. During class the next day, he completed his peer conferences and quickly revised the draft in order to submit it by the deadline. After Mrs. Smith extended the deadline for him by one day, he revised the essay again, submitting it the following day. In only one other instance during the semester did Steve write more than two drafts. Is it possible that his personal situation in this case compelled him to revise more than he otherwise would have? With an extension granted by Mrs. Smith, he was under some pressure to use the time in a way that justified Mrs. Smith's decision. Given Steve's habits as a writer, it seems reasonable to suspect that the situation he found himself in at this point influenced the time he spent drafting and revising this essay.

Obviously, every student writer deals with the exigencies of his or her personal situation for every academic assignment he or she writes. Teachers by and large understand and allow for situations like the ones in
which Kara and Steve found themselves; it is unusual, however, to consider these situations part of the context within which a student is completing a writing task. Yet to think of such situations as aberrations might be to misrepresent their significance with respect to the role they play in students' writing processes. If students' writing processes are shaped by such contextual factors as the structure of a writing course or the parameters of a particular assignment, as I have been arguing, it seems reasonable to think that these processes might also be substantially shaped by the exigencies of a student's personal situation at a given time. All these factors interact to influence the way that student might write at that time. In this sense, then, a student's personal situation must be seen as part of the context within which that student is writing.

At the same time, viewing a student's personal situation—which is not "shared" by other students in a given classroom setting—as part of the context within which that student writes, raises some sticky questions with respect to attempts to conceive of context theoretically. In one sense, the extent to which a student's personal situation mediates between the broader "shared" context and that student's composing processes reveals the limits of the influence of context on
composing. At the same time, the fact that the student's personal situation plays a role in composing in connection with other features of the "shared" context underscores a key point of this study, which is that the contexts within which student writers work are multiple and varied. Further, the issue of a "personal context" comprising part of the broader context raises the difficult question of individual agency: to what extent does the individual retain some autonomy from context?

The concluding chapter takes up these questions in attempting to propose a theoretical view of context that both represents the complexity and profound influence of context on writers and at the same time allows for the role of individual agent within a context. For now the important point is that the exigencies of students' personal situations played a role in the students' writing along with other important features of the context within which those students were working.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the ways in which the students' writing processes were influenced by five key features of the course context in Mrs. Smith's class: (1) the two-draft requirement; (2) mandatory peer conferences; (3) the use of word processing; (3) the workshop-style
format of the course; and (5) Mrs. Smith's procedures for reading and responding to student texts. It has also briefly examined the influence of such other features of the context as the nature of the writing task, the students' personal situations, and the characteristics of the school and community where the students learn and live.

The key point to made from the data presented here is that the students' writing processes, while always to a great extent idiosyncratic and personal, seemed to have been profoundly shaped by the context within which those students wrote. This study suggests, as James Marshall has written, that "while students may come to school with some attitudes and practices [related to their writing] already in place, these attitudes and practices are influenced greatly by the school environment" (118). While the data and analysis presented here may not be enough to enable us to state, as Marshall does, that "to speak of composing processes without reference to the schooling which shapes them may be to isolate an effect from its cause" (119), it seems clear that to understand students' composing processes requires an understanding of the many interrelated contexts within which those students compose and the dynamic interactions of those contexts; it further requires an understanding of how those contexts shape those processes.
The next chapter pursues this point by exploring more narrowly the relationships between context and the students' invention strategies and revision strategies. That chapter examines the students' essays in order to illuminate the ways in which important features of context manifest themselves in the texts created in a particular context. In addition, Chapter V underscores the complexity of the relationship between many different features of context, all of which interact to shape a student's composing process and the texts he or she produces.
CHAPTER V

Invention, Revision, and Context: How Context Shapes Students' Texts

Chapter IV explored connections between how students write and the context within which they write. It demonstrated that features of context can influence the composing behaviors and activities that students engage in as they complete school-sponsored writing tasks. But understanding the role of context in students' writing is not simply a matter of identifying apparent relationships between the context and the various composing behaviors students exhibit as they write, for those behaviors ultimately contribute to the creation of a text. The connections between a context and the composing done in that context ultimately manifest themselves in the texts produced in that context. How, then, might students' texts reveal the ways in which context can shape writing? More specifically, how might the relationship between students' invention and revision strategies and the context within which those students are writing shape the texts they create? This chapter addresses these questions by examining the ways in which the students in Mrs. Smith's class engaged in invention and revision within the context
of her class and how their invention and revisions strategies shaped the essays they wrote. In short, whereas the previous chapter took a wide-angle view of the relationship between context and the composing process, this chapter focuses more closely on the relationship between particular features of the context and two aspects of the composing process, invention and revision.

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Context and Invention

Although many features of the context of Mrs. Smith's class influenced students' invention strategies, one feature seems to have been particularly important in shaping invention among the students in this study: the nature of the assigned writing tasks. As Chapters III and IV make clear, the writing tasks assigned in the class were carefully defined and constantly reinforced and were the focus of the students' work in the class. Because the Mrs. Smith's course was decidedly mode-based, virtually every important activity the students engaged in for the class was connected in some way to the assigned tasks. In effect, the course was structured around these writing assignments. Thus, a careful examination of the role of writing task in invention can provide insight into the
relationship between invention and other features of the context of Mrs. Smith's class, such as Mrs. Smith's methods of response to her students' writing and the collaborative atmosphere of the class. In short, a close look at the role of the writing task in invention can illuminate the complex relationship between context and student writing that is the focus of this dissertation.

Invention has long interested researchers who investigate how writers write. Many studies of students' writing have focused on or included investigation of the early stage or stages of the composing process, often called "pre-writing" or "planning" (e.g. Emig; Flower and Hayes, "Cognitive Process"; Flower and Hayes, "Pause"; Hayes and Flower, "Identifying"; Matsuhashi; Mischel; Pianko). Some researchers have reported that students engage in little pre-writing (Emig; Pianko), and in some cases distinctions are made between the amount of planning or pre-writing associated with school-sponsored writing and the amount associated with "out-of-school" or "personal" writing, as in Emig's well-known distinction between "extensive" and "reflexive" writing (Emig; see also Marshall). What is striking about this body of research is that the writing being investigated is often produced in response to a prompt, supplied by the researcher (e.g. the
Flower and Hayes studies; Matsuhashi) or by a teacher as part of an actual school assignment (Emig; Marshall); typically, this prompt is not discussed in great detail with respect to its possible influence on the writers being studied.\(^1\) As a result, generalizations about the apparent lack of prewriting or planning on the part of students may be misleading—and may misrepresent the ways in which students in various settings complete assigned tasks.

In the present study, observations of the students and examination of their essays indicate that some students did indeed seem to do little prewriting or planning, while others seemed to do much more than their peers. But these variations in the students' pre-drafting activities—what Stephen Witte has called "pre-text"—were related, at least in part, to a number of factors associated with the course context; moreover, the amount of planning students did, and the kinds of invention strategies they engaged in, were related to important features of the context of the class. This study suggests that students' invention strategies were as deeply influenced by contextual factors as the writing behaviors described in the preceding chapter—\(\text{that}\)

\(^1\)The exceptions, of course, are those studies which are designed specifically to investigate the possible effects of a writing prompt on some aspect of the writing process or the texts collected, as in Greenberg, Hoetker, and Park.
the connections between invention and context were multiple, often subtle, and always complex.

Invention in ancient rhetoric usually referred to the discovery of arguments in a speech. In the parlance of modern composition researchers, however, the term has come to refer more generally to the discovery and development of topics as well as to the activities writers engage in as they explore their topics for a written composition, including brainstorming, note-taking, reading, outlining, and so on. In the present study the term is used to refer to four aspects of the students' processes of invention for their assignments in Mrs. Smith's class:

(1) selection of a topic for a given assignment;
(2) exploration of that topic for ideas about developing it in a written text;
(3) discovery and collection of material for the development of that topic;
(4) organization of that material in the essays written for a given assignment.²

²The organization of material in an essay would technically be considered arrangement in classical rhetoric, but I include it here under the heading of invention largely for convenience. Because the arrangement of the students' essays gathered for this study was so closely connected to the writing tasks assigned by Mrs. Smith, and because the same kinds of contextual factors seemed to influence arrangement as influenced invention, it would have been rather unwieldy—and, I think, misleading—to separate these in my discussion.
As writers know, and as research into the composing process has confirmed, writing is a messy business, and invention, like any aspect of the composing process, is complicated, idiosyncratic, and often recursive. That is to say, it is impossible to separate neatly one "stage" or aspect of the composing process from another. In identifying these four elements of invention, then, no suggestion that these elements can always be clearly and accurately recognized is intended; rather, these elements of invention are identified simply as a means to describe and discuss a complicated process.

Invention and the Writing Task: Sam and Kara

Numerous studies have demonstrated that the way a writing task is formulated and presented to students can have a profound influence on the writing those students do (e.g. Brossell; Durst; Greenberg; Hoetker). As Chapters III and IV make clear, the nature of the writing task and the specific parameters set for each assigned task were among the most important factors influencing the students' writing in Mrs. Smith's class. This influence revealed itself in the numbers of drafts students wrote, their interactions with each other regarding their essays, and the amount of time they spent engaged in related activities, such as library research and outlining (see Chapter IV
above). With respect to invention, the nature of the writing task influenced how students formulated ideas for their essays; how much time they spent doing so; where students searched for information about their topics; what the students included in their essays; what sort of help they sought as they selected their topics and gathered information about those topics; and how they organized that information in their essays. In short, writing task influenced every important aspect of invention among the students in Mrs. Smith's class.

In order to understand how this feature of the context of Mrs. Smith's class figured into the students' invention, consider the cases of Sam and Kara as they worked on their persuasive essays for Mrs. Smith's class.

The Assignment. The persuasive essay, which Mrs. Smith called "the hardest essay to write in these [first] nine weeks," was formally assigned on the eighth day of the semester, when four of the students made a group presentation to the rest of the class on how to write a persuasive essay. This presentation included assigned readings from the chapter in the textbook on argumentation, sample student persuasive essays, and some handouts--including the rubric for the assignment--to guide students in writing this essay. The rubric required students to
select a controversial topic that interests you (and has not been overused), and write an essay. Direct your essay to readers who do not share your views and try to convince them that your position is reasonable. Be sure to acknowledge the views your audience holds and to refute any criticisms of your argument that you can anticipate. Try to appeal both to reason and to emotion to be effective. Clear your specific topic with the teacher.

Like all of Mrs. Smith's assignments, this one set some very specific parameters for the essay. Unlike several others, though, the rubric for this assignment described a general audience for the essay and instructed students to write in a way that specifically addressed that audience; among the nine other assigned essays, only the editorial specified an audience in this manner. For the persuasive essay, the imagined audience would be a hostile one, at least in terms of the particular argument the writer would attempt to promote in the essay. In addition, the students were instructed to refute anticipated criticisms of their viewpoints. This last element of the task was important with respect to invention, since it would require students to "discover" possible objections to the viewpoint they hoped to express in their essays, to "invent" rebuttals to those objections, and to arrange those objections and rebuttals in the essay.

In addition to the parameters set forth in the rubric, Mrs. Smith gave students additional parameters for the assignment. Three weeks after the assignment was first discussed in class (by which time a few students had begun
working on their persuasive essays), she spent more than thirty minutes of one class period discussing the assignment and expanding on the rubric. She focused on two important aspects of the assignment: (1) the structure of the essay and (2) the use of sources. Regarding the first, Mrs. Smith stressed that the essay must have "two cons, which you accept or refute." These, she said, should be placed early in the essay, preferably right after the introduction. In addition, the paragraphs devoted to discussion of these two "cons" should be followed by paragraphs that "are developed with pros." As for the use of sources, Mrs. Smith told the students that they were to use a minimum of two sources, which were to be cited a minimum of three times in the essay; they must also include a bibliography page. To illustrate these requirements, Mrs. Smith provided handouts with guidelines for citing sources. Finally, she emphasized that "in this persuasive paper you can't ever use 'I' or 'you.'"

Thus, students now had parameters governing several important aspects of the assignment, including the kind of information they were to use, where they should find some of that information, and how to arrange that information in the final text. In addition, students were given a rhetorical stance to take with respect to their imagined audience: they were to try to convince an audience hostile
to the stated position of the writer that the writer's position was a reasonable and valid one. In some ways, these requirements constituted a kind of template for invention for this assignment: students still were free to select a general topic, but once they decided upon a topic, they were constrained in several important ways by the parameters of the assignment as to how to develop that topic in their essays.

**Topic Selection.** Like most students in the class, Sam and Kara decided to wait until late in the first half of the semester to write the persuasive essay; both began working on it in earnest at the beginning of the sixth week of the semester.³ Sam, however, began to consider possible topics much earlier--on the day Mrs. Smith discussed the persuasive essay, which was eleven days before he actually began writing his first draft. During one class he talked briefly to Mark about some ideas for his essay. On that same day, several other students, having read Emily's persuasive essay, spoke to her about how she wrote her essay. Some spoke with Mrs. Smith about a possible topic for the assignment. Clearly, for many students in the class, deciding on a topic was a collaborative endeavor:

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³By this point, both Kara and Sam had written three other essays for the class, two narratives and a descriptive essay.
they discussed possibilities with each other and with Mrs. Smith before beginning the essay; in addition, students read persuasive essays written by classmates as they searched for topics. Even those students who didn't discuss possible topics with other students in the class were passively involved in this discourse, since Emily read her persuasive essay aloud to the class at Mrs. Smith's request. In short, the early stages of invention--topic selection--were done in a highly social and collaborative manner.

These discussions of potential topics were usually framed by the specific parameters for the assignments. The students who talked to Emily about her persuasive essay were partly interested in deciding whether or not their own ideas for topics were feasible for this assignment. As they discussed potential topics with each other, the students sometimes referred back to the rubric and other handouts provided by Mrs. Smith, and they sometimes checked with her briefly during class to clear a topic or seek her advice on a potential topic. For instance, Kate, after talking with Emily about the assignment, went to Mrs. Smith to ask if her idea for an essay about banning smoking in public places would work for the assignment. Several other students did so, too, among them Sam. During these interactions regarding topics, the students seemed aware
that, despite the apparent flexibility for topic selection in the rubric, only certain kinds of topics might be suitable for the assignment. If they were unsure about a topic, they checked with Mrs. Smith and with each other. Thus, as they searched for and chose topics for the assignment, their efforts were shaped by the specific parameters set forth by Mrs. Smith in the rubric and in her classroom discussions of the assignment.

At the same time, other features of the context combined with the nature of the writing task to shape students' topic choices: Mrs. Smith's interactions with her students, the collaborative nature of the classroom, the workshop-style format of class meetings, the structure of the course assignments, the students' social relationships. For instance, Kate was able to discuss the assignment with Emily in part because the workshop-style format of the class meetings enabled--indeed, encouraged--such discussion to take place during class time. In addition, Emily and Kate were friends, who often discussed assignments; they were socially comfortable with each other, and this level of comfort enhanced the kinds of collaborative interactions that were encouraged by the format of the class meetings. In addition, because Mrs. Smith typically set aside large blocks of class time for conferences with the students, Kate had to make no special
arrangements to see Mrs. Smith in order to discuss her idea for a topic. All these features of the context interacted to influence students' topic selection for the assignment, though in less direct ways than did the specific parameters of the writing task itself.

Other, perhaps less obvious, factors were also at work as students selected topics. For example, students tended to write about issues that were of concern to them; these issues seemed to reflect the values of the community and the students' socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Among the topics selected by students for the persuasive essay were several that might be associated with teenaged students in a relatively conservative, white, middle-class community: an argument to raise the age at which one can legally begin driving; arguments to ban the use of chewing tobacco and to raise the legal drinking age; an argument against a high school principal's ban on the wearing of Bart Simpson T-shirts. Juan, whose parents were born in Puerto Rico, wrote an essay in favor of admitting Puerto Rico as the 51st state of the union.

In addition, these students were experienced in writing essays for English teachers at this school, and they knew what kinds of topics were likely to be acceptable to their teachers given the parameters of an assignment such as this; that is, the values reinforced by the
institutional setting of the school likely played a subtle role in students' topic selections. Similarly, students were likely influenced by the broader social and political discourse of the society generally. For example, since many of these students seemed quite aware of important social and political events at the time, it isn't surprising that several would write about an issue like drug abuse.

Gathering Information and Developing the Topic. Sam and Kara both decided on their respective topics within two days after they handed in the previous assignment. On Monday, the beginning of the sixth week of the semester, Kara browsed through some articles in the library on capital punishment. Although she was unsure of what her central argument might be at this point ("I'm not sure where I stand," she confessed while reading one article), she had decided that the subject of the essay would be capital punishment. On Tuesday, Sam, too, had decided on a possible topic: the establishment of a national board of education. But he was also unsure of what his argument would be. As he described his developing idea to me during class, he referred back to the rubric several times and wondered whether he should read some articles before he decided on a thesis, or decide on a thesis first and then
read several articles about it. At this point, even after choosing a general subject area about which to write, Sam's selection of a specific topic continued to be constrained by Mrs. Smith's rubric as well as by her consistent emphasis on precisely formulated "thesis statements."

During this time that they were selecting and narrowing the subjects for their essays, both Sam and Kara relied heavily on published material as they tried to formulate a specific topic, something that was encouraged by one of the parameters of the assignment: the required use of published sources. Although they had some general ideas about their respective subject areas, both students seemed somewhat unfamiliar with the details of those subjects, and both sought information about their subjects in published sources as they were trying to define their topics more precisely. This strategy seems to have had two implications. First, the students were ostensibly fulfilling one of the specific requirements of the assignment (the use of sources); by browsing through sources while they formulated their topics, the students were gathering material that they could include as their three required sources in the final essay. But second, in seeking information in such sources, the students were developing ideas for the content of their essays and collecting information that would shape that content. In
other words, their ideas about their topics were shaped by the information and arguments they were able to find in their sources.

Kara, for example, read several articles about capital punishment in newsmagazines as she tried to decide exactly what she wanted to say about her topic. Although she seemed rather confident from the outset that she wanted to argue in favor of the death penalty for minors, the specific points she made and the information she used to support those points seemed to grow out of the sources she located rather than out of her own ideas or recollection of facts regarding the issue. Indeed, the very first sentence of her first draft suggests the extent to which she relied on her sources:

Roach, Thompson, and Cooper all have more than brutal murders in common; they are all on Death Row waiting for execution. This brings up a moral question on whether or not capital punishment is the right solution for the crime. This is especially a big issue in dealing with the fact that none of the murderers were over eighteen when they committed their grisly act.

She found information about these three teenagers who were convicted of murder in an article from a 1987 issue of a journal called Scholastic Update as well as in several other articles she had located. Notice, too, how much she relies on information from her sources as she moves into the second paragraph of her rough draft:
Due to a significant rise in violent crimes being committed by today's youth, the states are looking for harsher punishment to deter young criminals. Currently, twenty-seven states allow the death penalty for minors, and others may follow in the near future. Angry citizens, enfuriated by the surge of violence, are in support of these harsher penalties (U.S. News and World Report p.6).

In addition, throughout the rest of the draft, each of the four main points she makes in favor of capital punishment for teenagers grew out of information she found in a specific published source (see Appendix E for the complete text of Kara's first draft). For example, her first main point about the possibility that young offenders might not understand the gravity of their actions, which she presents in paragraphs three and four, was gleaned from an article Kara found in *Time*:

Most nations, however, do not allow the execution of those under 18. In any murder situation, it is hard to judge whether or not the person was mentally capable of understanding his actions and the consequences they would have. This plea is especially prevalent when dealing with minors because their understanding of right and wrong must be fully grasped before a sentence can be handed down. Such was the case with Terry Roach. His lawyers claimed this illiterate child was incapable of making the distinction between right and wrong, claiming at an IQ of 80 he was mentally retarded.

According to James C. Anders, a Fifth Circuit Solicitor, about 40% of the population is dealing with less than that. He also states that Roach knew what was right and wrong, that he is just a mean person (Stengel p. 22).

It is impossible to determine the extent to which Kara's ideas and opinions about her topic were influenced by her
use of published sources, but it is clear that she relied heavily on those sources as she developed her topic into a complete draft and fleshed out her argument. At the very least, her sources provided her with information that in large part determined the content of her essay; it also seems clear that these sources provided her with ideas about how to support her main point about capital punishment.

Sam also seemed to be influenced by the use of sources as he put together his first draft, but unlike Kara, he seemed less sure of exactly what he wanted to argue in his essay, and his specific thesis seemed shaped by his use of one source in particular, Cultural Literacy, in which E. D. Hirsch discusses what he perceives to be the failings of the educational system and suggests a need for nationwide educational standards set by a national board of education. Sam knew he wanted to write about the establishment of a national board of education, but he wasn't sure if he should focus his argument specifically on the establishment of such a board, or if he should argue more generally that education in this country needed reform. Part of his problem here seems to be a function of his apparent lack of knowledge about complicated educational issues. His uncertainty seems evident in the three-paragraph rough
How important is education? What does it mean to the average American. Education has been around for a long time, but is it doing what it is so post to do? Over the years people have received various kinds of education according to where they are educated. For example, a school in Texas might have its educational system based around reading to a tenth-grade level while a school in New York only teaches reading to a seventh-grade level then goes to other aspects of what they might think is important. People in different areas of the United States are not all learning the same basic curriculum.

This creates a problem of how to make sure everyone has the same chance to learn all the basic curriculum need to be able to compete with everyone else. The idea can be see in a cycle. Children from poor and illiterate homes tend to remain poor and illiterate in an unacceptable failure of our schools, one which has occurred not because our teachers are inept but chiefly because they are compelled to teach a fragmented curriculum based on faulty educational theories (Cultural Literacy (the book) xiii).

The way in which this cycle could be broken is to create a national board of education. The board would find the basic curriculum needed for all public schools having any the grades first through twelfth. Any additional education would be up to the school or local or state education boards.

In this brief draft, Sam seems to know where he wants to get to (i.e. the assertion that a national board of education should be established), but he takes a rather circuitous route to get there, perhaps because he is not well-versed in such issues and perhaps because he is still uncertain about the focus of the essay. Notice, though, that he incorporates a key idea from Hirsch's book at the end of his second paragraph, immediately before he states his position in the first sentence of paragraph three. As
in Kara's case, Sam seems to have had a general opinion about this issue from the outset, but he remains uncertain about which points to make in support of that position. Here, one of his sources, Hirsch's Cultural Literacy, seems to have provided him with one of those points.

Thus, as Sam and Kara selected and narrowed their topics for their essays, and as they developed specific points about those topics, they did so in ways that were shaped by one of the parameters of the assignment, the use of published sources. It is impossible to say whether they would have used the same strategies for discovering and developing their ideas about their respective topics had not Mrs. Smith required the use of sources, but it seems clear that the requirement—a key parameter of the assignment—influenced their invention strategies as well as the contents of their essays.

At the same time, another set of parameters regarding the use of "pros" and "cons" in the persuasive essay also played a role in the discovery and development of Sam's and Kara's respective arguments in their essays. For example, as soon as he had written the first three paragraphs of his rough draft, Sam began to search for ideas and information that might be developed into the two "cons" and concomitant "pros" that Mrs. Smith required for this essay. In other words, given the parameters of the assignment regarding the
use of pros and cons, Sam knew what general kind of information he needed as he tried to flesh out his argument, even though at this point he lacked specific facts or ideas about his topic: he knew he needed two "cons," but he wasn't sure precisely what they might be. During Thursday's class Sam showed me his draft and asked about "cons": what, he wanted to know, would be some "cons" about a national board of education?

At this point, then, the requirement that two "cons" be discussed in the persuasive essay seems to have been driving Sam's efforts to "discover" further ideas about his topic. After discussing the matter with me and then reviewing the material he had already gathered from his sources, he decided to include two possible objections to a national board of education: first, that it would merely be a tool for the implementation of the views of the people appointed to it, and second, that it would have too much power in deciding what school curricula should include. These two main objections and Sam's accompanying refutation of them comprise the bulk of the rest of his rough draft:

How important is education? What does it mean to the average American. Education has been around for a long time, but is it doing what it is supposed to do? These questions are asked by many people and there are many different answers. Over the years people have received various kinds of education according to where they are educated. For example, a school in Texas might have its educational system based on reading to a tenth-grade level while a school in New
York only teaches reading to a seventh-grade level then goes to other aspects of what they might think is important. People in different areas of the United States are not all learning the same basic curriculum.

This creates a problem of how to make sure everyone has the same chance to learn all the basic curriculum needed to be able to compete with everyone else. The idea can be seen in a cycle. Children from poor and illiterate homes tend to remain poor and illiterate. This is an unacceptable failure of our schools, one which has occurred not because our teachers are inept, but chiefly because they are compelled to teach a fragmented curriculum based on faulty educational theories (Cultural Literacy (the book) xiii).

The way in which this cycle could be broken is to create a national board of education. The board would research and find the basic curriculum needed for all public schools teaching any grades, first through twelfth. Any additional education would be up to the school or local or state education boards.

The question is then who will run this board? People fear that the members elected might be biased toward one area of education when other subjects should be emphasized. But everyone will always have their own opinion of what they want the students to learn. Today the members of the government have their issues and opinions, but the people elect them by what they stand for. So, the national board of education would be made up of the people's popular vote.

Another question asked is what material will be considered "the basic curriculum" for all public schools. This of course will be decided by the board members which in turn will have to presented to other government committees for a system of checks and balances. This resolves one group from ruling the educational process.

The Secretary of Education, Bill Bennet, wants to put a stop to the schools from gobbling up tax money while students who are graduating can't read enough to get a job or fill out a job application (Reader's Digest 106). Instead, the money would be spent on education that the students would need to get a job. In addition a student should be able to survive in society after he or she is finished with school. Therefore, the money would not be carelessly spent by the school itself on other less important activities and unnecessary curriculum. This is not to deter students from studying other subjects and
participating in activities, but everyone must first
learn the basics to survive. They they can worry
about what else to learn.

This change in the educational process is needed
to put everyone at the same level of educational
understanding. This in turn, would cut down on
schools or teachers that do not teach the students all
of what they need to know to be literate in their
society. Students would not slip through the
educational system without even knowing how to read or
write their names. Society needs a broadly literate
culture that unites our cultural fragments enough to
allow everyone to write each other and read what our
fellow citizens have written (Cultural Literacy,  (the
article) 145-147).

In this instance, specific parameters of the assigned
writing task seem to have both constrained and propelled
Sam's invention strategies and consequently to have shaped
the content of his draft. As Sam searched for ideas and
information about his topic, he did so within the
constraints established by the required use of two cons; at
the same time, that requirement seems to have compelled him
to search for a specific kind of argument regarding his
topic, one that is focused on defending the idea of a
national board of education. Notice, too, that, like Kara,
Sam relies on the information he gathered from published
sources to develop this argument. Indeed, his second-to-
last paragraph seems somewhat out of place, even
superfluous to his central argument, but it incorporates
material he gathered from a published article. It seems
likely that once Sam found that information, he felt a need
to incorporate it into his developing argument, in part
because he was required to cite at least three sources in
his essay. In this case, the use of sources as required by
the assignment seems to have contributed to the content
that Sam included in this early draft. At this point,
then, invention for Sam seems largely to have been a
function of specific parameters of the writing task.

Arrangement. Mrs. Smith's parameters for the use of
pros and cons for the persuasive essay also influenced the
way students presented information and ideas in their
essays. In addition to her guidelines about the use of
sources and the need to discuss two cons in the essay, Mrs.
Smith also provided the students with a template of sorts
for the general structure of the essay. As noted above,
during the fourth week of the semester, Mrs. Smith spent
part of one class period reviewing the requirements for the
persuasive essay, pointing out that the two "cons" should
be discussed in the essay as soon as possible after the
introduction; she also stated that the "pros" should follow
the cons--that is, that each con should be refuted. Later,
during the sixth week of the semester, Mrs. Smith
reinforced and developed these statements about the
structure of the essay. On Friday of that week (the same
week that Sam and Kara had begun working on their first
drafts), Mrs. Smith devoted ten minutes of the class
meeting to "hints" about writing persuasive essays. On the
board, she wrote the following notes, discussing them as she wrote:

| Intro          | attention getter |
|               | narrow thesis    |
| Body          | 2 cons - accept  |
|               | (developed with |
|               | refute evidence, |
|               | examples,       |
|               | reasons)        |
| Conclusion    | refocus on thesis |
|               | summarize main ideas |
|               | narrative        |

With this presentation, Mrs. Smith made explicit the kind of structure she expected the students' essays to have. In effect, she provided a rough general outline for the persuasive essay.

By the time Mrs. Smith made this presentation, both Sam and Kara had been working on their persuasive essays for four days; Sam had already begun his rough draft, and Kara would begin hers during that following weekend. Both students came to class on the following Monday morning with completed drafts of the assignment.

Another look at those drafts suggests that both Sam and Kara tried to follow the outline provided by Mrs. Smith in her presentation on Friday. The first three paragraphs of Sam's essay seem to be an attempt to "narrow" his thesis (see above on pp. 217 and 218). In paragraph 4 Sam presents the first "con," the problem of who will run his proposed board of education. He quickly refutes that apparent objection to his proposal. In paragraph 5 he
presents the second "con," the question of what the board's "basic curriculum" might include; again, he quickly dismisses this objection. Paragraph 6 seems to be an attempt to present a "pro" argument: that the proposed national board would help solve the problem of wasted tax dollars. The final paragraph includes several other possible "pro" arguments (a national board might insure equality in education; it would help solve the problem of illiteracy; it would reduce educational failures) and also seems to be an attempt to summarize the essay in some fashion. In short, Sam seems to have roughly followed Mrs. Smith's guidelines for organizing his essay: an introduction followed by discussion of two cons, each immediately refuted.

The same was true of Kara's essay, despite some obvious differences between the her draft and Sam's (see Appendix E for Kara's essay). Although Kara's draft was substantially longer than Sam's and contained far more references to her sources, it nonetheless seems to have followed the rough outline Mrs. Smith provided for this assignment. Like Sam, Kara devotes the first two paragraphs to an introduction that begins to frame her topic (capital punishment for minors), though she does not explicitly reveal her position on the issue in these early paragraphs as Sam does. She does, however, quickly move to
a discussion of her first "con," just as Sam does: in paragraph 3 she presents a potential argument against capital punishment for minors, that is, their apparent inability to grasp the gravity of their crimes. She then devotes paragraphs 4 and 5 to refuting this argument, drawing heavily on sources to do so. In paragraph 6 she presents the second "con": a minor's lack of responsibility for his or her upbringing. Again, drawing on her sources, she refutes that claim in the two following paragraphs (7 and 8). Kara goes on to present a third "con" in paragraph 9, the argument that capital punishment is morally wrong, and she refutes that claim in paragraph 10. In paragraphs 11 and 12, she discusses what amounts to a "pro" argument: that capital punishment can deter juveniles from committing capital crimes. Finally, she states unequivocally her own position in her concluding paragraph. In short, while her draft is much more developed than Sam's, both loosely follow the same organizational pattern suggested by Mrs. Smith. Thus, in these two cases, specific parameters of the assigned task seem to have helped shape the very structure of the essays themselves.

The cases of Sam and Kara illustrate the powerful ways in which the nature of an assigned writing task, together with other contextual features, can shape students'
invention strategies. In these two cases it seems clear that elements of the writing task influenced the students' selection of their topics, their efforts to "discover" and gather pertinent information and ideas, the ways in which they developed those ideas, and the organization of their ideas and information in their drafts. Ultimately, these influences manifested themselves in the content and structure of the students' essays. In short, the essays themselves are in a profound sense products of the context within which they were created.

**Writing Task and Invention: Other Assignments**

Other writing tasks assigned by Mrs. Smith seemed to influence students' invention as profoundly as the parameters of the persuasive essay influenced Scott and Kara as they wrote their early drafts. For example, the requirement that students use all five senses in their descriptive essays clearly influenced the kinds of ideas and information students included in their essays. Similarly, the parameters of the editorial essay, especially the specific form of that essay (a letter to an editor) and the requirement that it be sent to a local publication, influenced the ways in which students discovered and presented their ideas in that essay. Each assigned writing task encompassed a number of parameters
that somehow shaped students' invention strategies for that assignment.

Clearly, though, different assignments influenced students in different ways. The specificity with which Mrs. Smith set requirements for particular assignments varied. She gave no specific guidelines for structuring the descriptive essay, for example, whereas her guidelines for structuring the persuasive essay were, as the preceding discussion indicates, rather detailed. Similarly, some assignments required the use of sources (the persuasive essay, literary analysis, and cause/effect), whereas others did not. And some assignments included two or three specific prompts from which students could choose (e.g. the narrative essay), while others were less stringent in their parameters regarding the subject matter of essay. All these parameters influenced students' invention strategies in slightly different ways.

Nevertheless, the point remains that whatever the specific parameters of an assignment, those parameters and the ways in which Mrs. Smith presented and reinforced them influenced the four aspects of students' invention processes listed at the beginning of this section. Thus, in order to understand how students selected topics, discovered information relevant to those topics, developed those topics, and presented their ideas in their drafts,
one must take into account the many factors associated with the assigned task and the context in which it was presented. As described here, then, the writing tasks the students completed cannot adequately be understood apart from the context of the course for which the students were writing; these tasks must be considered part of that overall context. In other words, invention with respect to a specific writing task might best be understood as a function of that context.

Although the discussion thus far in this chapter has focused on how the nature of an assigned writing task influenced students' invention strategies, myriad other contextual factors were at work in shaping these same strategies: deadlines, the students' personal situations at the time, the interactions between students regarding their developing ideas and texts, and even much broader, less obvious factors such as the students' previous experiences with school-based writing tasks, their sociocultural backgrounds, and so on. The dynamic ways in which such factors combine to create a complex web of contextual influences were revealed periodically, sometimes in seemingly minor events or remarks, as students worked through the assignments. One such instance occurred on the due date for the persuasive essay, which fell on the last
day of school before a ten-day spring vacation at the end of March. Kara had by then finished her essay about capital punishment, but she still had a few hours left before the deadline, and she asked me to read the essay and suggest final revisions. After reading her draft, I commented that she might strengthen the essay by adding some statistical evidence to support several of the points she made in the essay. When she replied that she didn't have such information, I suggested that she might find it in a nearby library. Kara nodded, paused, and then said, "Well, when it's 12:00 midnight--," cutting off her remark with a shrug. In this case, circumstances related to deadlines, Kara's personal situation, and perhaps her own sense—based on past experiences—of what was essential and what was adequate, seem to have combined to shape the ideas and information she included and developed in her essay. While such factors might seem obvious and even perhaps somewhat trivial, they nonetheless are part of the complicated and powerful contextual web that shapes how and what a student like Kara ultimately writes: such seemingly "minor" factors can significantly alter the content and shape of a text.

Context and Revision
If invention was shaped by context in the writing of the students in this study, so too was revision. In Chapter IV, some of the ways in which features of the context seemed to influence the students' revising practices in Mrs. Smith's class were described, and those descriptions illuminated the extent to which contextual features shaped revision among Mrs. Smith's students. The remainder of this chapter extends the discussion of revision from Chapter IV by looking more closely at the texts the students created. What revisions did students make to their drafts? And in what ways were those revisions connected to the context within which the students wrote? These questions constitute the focus of the following section of this chapter.

Unlike the discussion of invention, however, which focused on connections between the nature of the writing task and students' invention strategies, this section attempts to identify connections between the students' revisions and several key contextual features in addition to the nature of the writing task, including the teacher's procedures for responding to students' texts and the collaborative atmosphere of the classroom. The purpose of this discussion is to paint a more complete picture of the complex relationship between context and revision. By the describing the many ways in which context shaped students'
revisions, this section of the chapter reinforces the importance of considering revision within context--indeed, as part of context.

To review some of the literature on revision in writing is to appreciate the extent to which revision has preoccupied researchers in composition through the years. But as several scholars have recently pointed out (e.g. Butler-Nalin), much of the research on revision has ignored or downplayed the importance of the context in which writers revise. Indeed, a decade ago Lester Faigley and Stephen Witte, in their well-known study of revision, suggested that "perhaps what we need now are more observational studies of writers revising in nonexperimental situations rather than more studies of student writers in contrived situations" (412)--presumably so that we might begin to understand the role of context in revising.

The present study does indeed examine how students revised in "nonexperimental situations,"--that is, in the complicated context of a high school writing class--and the results of this study underscore the profound influence of that context on students' revision strategies. In many cases, the findings presented here corroborate the results of previous studies of revision; in some cases, however,
they contradict or shed new light on previous studies. Whatever the correlation of the findings of the present study to those of previous studies, the data collected for this study reveal intricate connections between context and revision and suggest that understanding revision ultimately means understanding revision in context.

Given the complex nature of the context of Mrs. Smith's class and the intricate ways in which various features seemed to interact in influencing the students' writing, it would be difficult and misleading to discuss each of these features separately with respect to their apparent role in the students' revising. For instance, to examine the role of writing task in revision requires also considering the procedures that Mrs. Smith used in responding to her students' drafts. The two are intimately and inextricably connected, for Mrs. Smith's methods and habits of responding to student writing were shaped by her sense of the parameters of the writing task she assigned, at the same time that those parameters were reinforced by her methods and habits. Indeed, the data gathered for this study suggest that her consistent, careful, and extensive written comments on her students' drafts constituted the most important influence on the revisions her students made.
Thus, in order to illuminate the powerful roles of these various features of the context of Mrs. Smith's class in the revision strategies of her students, and to represent the complex connections between these features of context as they combined to shape the students' revisions, this section will focus on one student, Mary, as she worked on a particular assignment, an essay of "creative description," tracing the development of Mary's essay through various stages of revision. While Mary's case was unique in ways that will shortly become clear, it nevertheless fairly represents the complicated nature of the relationship between context and revision.

The Case of Mary's Descriptive Essay

Mary began working on her descriptive essay early in the fifth week of the semester--approximately one week before the deadline for the assignment. Mrs. Smith's rubric for the "creative description" assignment stated that such an essay "focuses on sensory responses reflecting attitude, mood and emotional involvement beyond the straightforward objective description" (see Appendix B). The rubric stipulated that all senses be used in the essay and that the essay be written in such a way that it create "ONE dominant impression" on a reader (original emphasis). Students were given a choice of two brief prompts for the
assignment. The first asked for a description of a place, the second for a description of a school event. Both prompts ended with a reminder to "make sure that all of the details contribute to the mood or central impression." Mary chose to write an essay in response to the first prompt.

As she usually did, Mary wrote her rough draft quickly, then shared it with three other students in peer conferences, as required by Mrs. Smith. After the peer conferences, she revised the draft, making mostly superficial changes involving rephrasing or substituting one word for another in response to the comments of her peers. Of the 58 revisions Mary made, 54 (93.1%) involved matters of spelling punctuation, word choice, and the wording of sentences; only four (7.1%) of her revisions were "content-level," involving the adding or deleting of short passages (see Table 4).

Although these revisions were mostly superficial, they seem to reflect the influence of the feedback Mary received from her peers. Of the 58 changes Mary made to her rough draft, fully 53 (91.3%) were in response to a specific comment written by one of the three students who read Mary's paper as part of the required peer conferences.

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4See Appendix G for a discussion and explanation of the coding schemes used in this study to classify students' revisions and readers' comments on student essays.
These numbers suggest that Mary's revisions were influenced from the very beginning by at least two important features of the context, the required peer conferences and the collaborative atmosphere of the class.

Table 4
Mary's Revisions on her Descriptive Essay

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>First Draft</th>
<th>Second Draft</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Stylistic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Surface-level</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Lexical</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Phrase-level</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Structural</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Content-level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Addition</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Deletion</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Refocus</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Clarify</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Revisions</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After revising her first draft, Mary shared it with a fourth student, Mark, before submitting it to Mrs. Smith—a step not required by Mrs. Smith. Mark read and commented on the revised draft, after which Mary revised the draft a second time. Again Mary incorporated her peer's comments into her revisions: of the sixteen revisions she made, fourteen (87.5%) were in response to Mark's written comments (see Table 5).
Mary's use of her peers' comments on her early drafts underscores the collaborative nature of much of the writing done in Mrs. Smith's class. In this case, the required peer conferences--one of the important features of the assignments in the class--seem to have substantially influenced Mary's revisions; moreover, Mary's decision to share her revised draft with Mark seems to have grown in part out of the collaborative atmosphere in the class. As Chapter IV and the preceding section of this chapter suggest, the way Mrs. Smith's classroom was organized and managed and the requirements she established for the assignments all contributed to an atmosphere in which collaboration at every stage of the composing process was
not only possible but encouraged. Here this collaborative atmosphere seems to have shaped Mary's earliest revisions.

The collaboration between Mary and her peers in this instance also seems to have been influenced by the social relationships she had established with these classmates. Two of the three students who completed the required peer conferences forms, Kara and Jon, were friends of Mary's; Mark, too, was a friend of hers. Mary always sat near these three students during class, and she often chatted with them about her work for the class as well as about matters unrelated to schoolwork. In addition, Mary apparently socialized with Jon and Mark outside of class. These social bonds between Mary, Mark, Kara, and Jon likely influenced Mary's attitude toward the comments her peers made on her drafts. Because she was socially comfortable with these students, she was more likely to view their comments as non-threatening--more likely to perceive their comments as intended to be helpful to her. That she sometimes incorporated her peers' suggestions almost verbatim into her revised drafts might be taken as a measure of the confidence she placed in her peers as readers of her writing. For instance, consider the changes Mary made to the following passage from the third paragraph of her rough draft:

Seconds later I felt an elbow jab into my side. I quickly turned around to see what June wanted. I
looked at her. She was staring off into space. My curiosity made me follow her glance. My eyes led me to a sight that turned my insides out. It was Spencer.

Jon crossed out the third and fourth sentences of this passage ("I looked at her. She was staring off into space.") and suggested changes to make the passage read as follows:

I quickly turned around to see what June wanted and noticed that she was staring intensely toward the front of the line. My curiosity made me follow her glance. My eyes led me to a sight that made my insides quiver: It was Spencer.

Mary's revised version of the passage, which appeared in the second draft (the one she shared with Mark), reads as follows:

Seconds later I felt an elbow jab into my side. I quickly turned around to see what June wanted. I looked at her. She was staring intensely toward the front of the line. My curiosity made me follow her glance. My eyes led me to a sight that made my insides quiver: . . . it was Spencer.

In this and several other instances, Mary's changes were influenced directly by the comments of her peers. In short, Mary's revisions of these early drafts of her descriptive essay were shaped by her collaborative interactions with her peers--interactions which were in turn encouraged and shaped by the atmosphere of Mrs. Smith's class, itself a product of Mrs. Smith's style, her requirements for her students, her techniques as a teacher,
and the social interactions of the students in the class: all these factors somehow figured into Mary's revisions.

The nature of Mary's revisions raise interesting questions regarding students' revision strategies in light of some earlier studies. Tables 4 and 5 above indicate that Mary's revisions were largely minor ones. On both drafts, most of her revisions were surface level changes involving punctuation and spelling: 26 of 55 (47.3%) on the first draft; 9 of 16 (56.3%) on the second. These numbers seem to suggest that students in this study tended to be even more concerned with surface matters when revising than students in other studies. Bridwell, for example, found that 24.83% of the revisions made by the twelfth-grade students in her study were at the surface-level (207). Indeed, the conclusion that students in the present study were preoccupied with surface matters would seem to be reinforced by an examination of the kinds of comments Mary's peers made on her drafts. For instance, eleven of Mark's seventeen written comments (64.7%) on Mary's second draft involved matters of punctuation, spelling, and the conventions of written English; only three (17.6%) had to do with content, and those three simply suggested clarification of existing material (e.g. "Show more, don't tell. Describe the shoes, the jeans."). In short, both as
readers of each other's prose and as writers, the students seemed most concerned with surface matters with respect to revision.

But other factors might help explain these revisions. In the first place, Mary's earliest revisions were made in response to the written comments of her peers, whereas the students in Bridwell's study were given no feedback on their drafts-in-progress. It's quite possible that Mary might not have made the number and kinds of revisions she did if she had not received this feedback. Indeed, in several instances, she retained spelling errors from one draft to another when those errors were not pointed out to her by her peers, whereas she corrected other errors that were pointed out to her. In other words, it's possible that Mary corrected surface errors noted by her peers that she would have missed on her own. Moreover, as George Hillocks has pointed out in a discussion of Bridwell's findings,

The high incidence of lower-level revisions does not necessarily demonstrate a preoccupation with the trivial [on the part of student writers]; there are simply more opportunities for revision at those levels than at the sentence or multi-sentence levels (Research 41-42).

But a closer look at how Mary's essay developed from this point suggests further that the students' own concerns when revising were shaped by those of Mrs. Smith and by the ways in which she reinforced specific attitudes toward
revision. In other words, the ways in which Mary revised her essay—and the ways in which her classmates typically read each other's essays and revised their own drafts for Mrs. Smith's class—were in large part a function of key features of the context of Mrs. Smith's class: Mrs. Smith's methods of responding to student writing, the nature of the assigned writing task and how the parameters of that task were reinforced by Mrs. Smith, and the workshop-style format of the class. Consider how these features of the context influenced the development of Mary's essay from this point.

When Mary submitted her descriptive essay to Mrs. Smith on Friday (three days before the deadline), she had already written three drafts. Her revisions to that point, based largely on the comments of her four peer readers, were mostly minor and did not alter the focus or basic narrative structure of the essay. Indeed, neither Mary nor her peers seemed to find any significant problems with the early drafts regarding the focus or structure of the piece. At first glance, the essay, which described a chance encounter at a local restaurant between Mary and a boy she was interested in, apparently struck Mary's readers as an appropriate response to Mrs. Smith's first prompt. On the peer conference forms, James commented that it was a "good
paper (interesting topic)," and Kara wrote, "It's really good . . . great job."

But although Mrs. Smith found the essay one "of real possibilities," as she noted in her written comment at the end of Mary's draft, she also felt that it was "more narrative than descriptive." In other words, Mary's third draft did not fit the form stipulated by the rubric. For Mrs. Smith, this was a serious problem, since the form of an essay was central to each writing task assigned in her class. Mrs. Smith's concern is evident in the comment she wrote at the end of Mary's third draft:

You must change the focus of this so that you establish a dominant impression. Describe Wendy's--where Spencer stands and sits in relation to you--what you see, feel, hear, taste, and smell. Don't focus on what happened, but rather pretend to snap a picture of the moment when you ask him and after--then describe what the camera would see. (original emphasis)

For Mrs. Smith, the central issue in evaluating Mary's essay seems to have been how closely the essay met the requirements of a particular essay form. Note that her comment refers directly to two important stipulations for the descriptive essay from the rubric: the need for a "dominant impression" and the use of five senses. It also warns Mary to avoid focusing on "what happened"--to avoid narrative structure--and to emphasize the impression that the scene made on her. In short, Mrs. Smith's comments
instruct Mary to rewrite the essay as a piece of creative
description, as defined by the rubric, not as a narrative.

Table 6

Mrs. Smith's Comments on Mary's Descriptive Essay

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Third Draft</th>
<th>Fourth Draft</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>I. Stylistic</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Surface-level</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Lexical</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Phrase-level</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>II. Structural</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>III. Content-level</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Addition</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Deletion</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Refocus</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Clarify</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Evaluate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mrs. Smith's other comments on Mary's third draft also
reveal her emphasis on what I have termed general
parameters (see Chapter III), that is, rules of language
use, style, and convention that must be adhered to in all
assignments, regardless of essay form and topic. Excluding
the comment she wrote at the end of Mary's draft, Mrs.
Smith made twenty-six marginal comments (see Table 6). Of
these, twenty-three (88.5%) concerned surface errors, word
choice, and phrasing; only three (11.5%) addressed content
specifically, and these focused on clarifying existing
material: "You were in line when you asked? Not exactly clear"; "Is he in line waiting?" Only in the final comment did Mrs. Smith address the content of the essay, and there she emphasized her assessment that the essay did not adhere to the requirements of the descriptive form. Without question, this is a major objection on Mrs. Smith's part to Mary's essay at this stage—and objection that would, if taken seriously by Mary, require substantial revision and in effect make many of her other comments on issues of usage and grammar irrelevant. Nevertheless, given the placement of the comment and the fact that none of the other marginal comments reinforce this last major comment, it is possible that Mary could have interpreted it as less important than other comments concerning local matters of usage and grammar.

Mrs. Smith's comments on Mary's draft shed light on the comments Mary's peers made on her earlier drafts. Like Mrs. Smith, Mary's peers also emphasized correctness, mechanics, and adherence to convention in their comments on her drafts; and like Mrs. Smith, they said more about these issues than about the content of the essay. (Interestingly, they also made more comments praising Mary's draft than did Mrs. Smith.) This pattern emerged in most of the students' drafts collected for this study: in their written comments on students' drafts, both Mrs. Smith
and her students made substantially more comments on matters of convention, correctness, and surface problems than on issues of the content and structure of the essays. Rarely did Mrs. Smith comment specifically on the quality or nature of the students' topics or the material they included in their essays, except in cases in which she perceived the content unsuitable given the task-specific parameters of an essay assignment. The students tended to comment somewhat more frequently on content, though usually in very general ways: "I liked it"; "Great job." In short, the students' concerns when revising and when reading their peers' drafts seem to reflect Mrs. Smith's concerns.

The apparent lack of attention to content on Mrs. Smith's part was noticeable early in the semester, when most of the students were writing their "contest" essays in commemoration of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. The rubric for this assignment gave students a choice of two prompts, one asking them to "write about any aspect of the topic 'I Have a Dream' as used by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in his famous speech which carries the same title" and the other asking them to "write on the theme of the 1989 Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration in Thompson, 'Lift Every Voice: A Community Celebration,' and what that theme means to you." In a few cases, students advanced ideas in their essays that were at best controversial and at worst racist.
One student, for instance, wrote an essay favorably comparing Alabama police chief Bull Connor with Martin Luther King, Jr. Despite the potential offensiveness of the viewpoint expressed in the essay, its content was never discussed in class, either by Mrs. Smith or by members of the class, and Mrs. Smith made no mention of it in her written comments on the student's drafts of the essay. Periodically, debates between students would arise about a controversial issue such as school busing. Sometimes Mrs. Smith would participate in these impromptu debates, but she rarely did so in a way that suggested that the discussion should be perceived as a central part of the class. The focus of discussion in class, both verbally and in written comments, was on matters of language use, convention, style, and on the specific requirements of assigned writing tasks.

Given these circumstances, the kinds of comments students made on their peers' essays and the kinds of revisions they made on their own essays make sense. It may be, as some studies have suggested, that students critique their peers' writing and revise their own writing in ways that are peculiar to their age groups: Bridwell, for example, asserts that the data from her study "support the notion that there are developmental differences in both the tendency to revise and the ability to revise successfully"
The present study suggests, however, that students' responses to writing and their own revisions are intimately connected to complex contextual factors.

Mary's subsequent revisions to her essay further reflect the influence of other key features of the context (see Appendix F for all Mary's drafts). Mrs. Smith took Mary's essay home with her on Friday, read it sometime over the weekend, and returned it to Mary sometime on Sunday, the day before the deadline. Mary took the essay through two more drafts on Sunday night. Her revisions suggest the extent to which she relied on Mrs. Smith's written comments as she revised. Many of her changes were minor ones made in response to specific comments by Mrs. Smith. For example, Mrs. Smith suggested that Mary "change some words and clarify" these sentences from the first paragraph:

Thompson High School, as well as other schools, have a traditional Valentine's Day Dance. What makes this dance different from any other dance is that this particular dance is a "Sadie Hawkins Dance".

Mary revised this passage to read as follows:

Thompson High School has a traditional Valentine's Day Dance. What makes this dance different from any other is that it is a "Sadie Hawkins Dance".

Similarly, in response to Mrs. Smith's comment, "wordy," about the following sentence, (and her "wc" [word choice] next to the word, "where"),
It's Valentine's Day a time of year where a person tells or shows the people they love or care for how he or she feels.

Mary revised the sentence accordingly:

It's a time of year when people tell their loved ones how they feel.

But Mary also addressed Mrs. Smith's concern about the focus of the essay. In trying to make the essay conform to Mrs. Smith's requirement that it create "one dominant impression," Mary added several descriptive details. For example, consider the revisions Mary made to the following three paragraphs, which, as noted above, she had already revised in response to her peers' comments:

My unbelievable story began when my friends and I casually walked into Wendy's. I smelled the greasy hamburgers cooking in the kitchen. My taste buds watered like fountains in anticipation of biting into a juicy Big Classic with Cheese, a side order of fries, and drinking a large frosty.

We quickly got into the food line. Seconds later, I felt an elbow jab into my side. I quickly turned around to see what June, my friend, wanted. I looked at her. She was staring intensely toward the front of the line. My curiosity made me follow her glance. My eyes led me to a sight that made my insides quiver . . . it was Spencer. He was standing ahead of us, wearing his usual dirty white high top court shoes, faded Levis jeans, tee-shirt, and his black and gray ski jacket. He casually flashed that provocative smile at us. In an instant, I felt my face heat up like a thermometer put on a hot stove.

Seconds passed by, but they felt like hours. I smiled back at him and, as fast as lightening, looked away. I turned toward Kim; she chuckled at how red my face had turned.

Next to these two paragraphs Mrs. Smith had written only, "vary word choice," but as she revised, Mary seemed to have
in mind Mrs. Smith's final comment about describing the
scene in order to create a "dominant impression":

My unbelievable story began when my friends and I
casually walked into Wendy's. We saw many of our
friends already waiting in line, so we hurried to
greet them. Seconds after rushing into line, I felt
an elbow jab into my side. I quickly turned around to
see what June, my friend, wanted. I looked at her.
She was staring intensely toward the front of the
line. My curiosity made me follow her glance. My
eyes led me to a sight that made my insides quiver . . .
it was Spencer. He was standing ahead of us,
wearing his usual dirty white high top court shoes,
faded Levis jeans, tee-shirt, and his black and gray
ski jacket.

Our eyes met and locked in an intense stare. The
sunlight peered softly through the brown tinted
windows and casted it's glow on the both of us. I
felt the room grow warm. An eerie silence hovered
over the restaurant. Everyone faded away and left the
two of us standing there alone. The distinct smell of
greasy hamburger cooking in the kitchen snapped me out
of my momentary daydream. I came to in time to see
Spencer flash a provocative smile at me. In an
instant, I felt my face heat up like a thermometer put
on a hot stove. I smiled back at him and, as fast as
lightening, looked away.

Note here that Mary's revisions "slow down" the moment she
is describing, effectively shifting the focus from what is
happening to how she felt and what she experienced at that
moment—which, on the surface at least, seems to be
precisely what Mrs. Smith suggested she do. Mary has added
several descriptive details that had not appeared in
previous drafts in order to accomplish this shift: she and
Spencer now lock eyes in "an intense stare"; she adds a
dreamlike quality in the "eerie silence" that "hovered"
over them and in her sense that "everyone faded away" at
that moment. She also reinforces the shift in focus with several seemingly small changes. For example, in the earlier version, Spencer "flashed a provocative smile at us"; in the revised version, he smiles at "me."

It's important to note here that the way Mrs. Smith structured and managed her class enabled Mary to continue her revising, with Mrs. Smith's feedback, through the weekend. In fact, after reading Mary's revised essay sometime on Saturday or Sunday, Mrs. Smith called Mary at home on Sunday afternoon to ask if Mary intended to pick up the essay that evening, which would allow her time for further revisions before Monday's deadline. These are extraordinary measures on Mrs. Smith's part, and few high school teachers go to such lengths, but they are part of the context within which Mary was writing. In another classroom, under different circumstances, Mary would likely not have revised as many times as she did or made the specific revisions she made at that point in the development of her essay.

Mary came to class on Monday morning with a new version of her essay--the fifth draft. In class that morning Mary admitted to a friend that she had stayed up until 2:00 a.m. revising the essay after picking it up from Mrs. Smith on Sunday evening. She handed the essay in to Mrs. Smith during class on Monday. Three days later
(Thursday), when Mrs. Smith returned the graded essays to her students, Mary found no grade on hers. At the end of the essay, Mrs. Smith had written simply "See me--today." Mrs. Smith had not graded the essay because she felt that it did not meet the requirements of the assignment. Rather than assign a grade of "unaccepted" to the essay, Mrs. Smith took into account the hard work Mary had done and decided to give her another chance to revise. She based that decision in part on her consultations with three other English teachers at the school, all of whom had read the essay at Mrs. Smith's request and concurred that it was not a descriptive essay as defined by the rubric for the assignment. Mrs. Smith informed Mary of all this in class on Thursday. In addition, her comments on the draft Mary had submitted that previous Monday laid out her criticisms of the essay.

Despite the changes Mary had made to that draft, which seemed to bring her essay closer in line with what Mrs. Smith defined as a descriptive essay, the narrative structure of the piece had not been significantly altered. And from Mrs. Smith's point of view, Mary's revisions did not address the central problem in the essay: that it was still more narrative than description. Indeed, next to the revised version of the passage which describes Mary's chance encounter with Spencer in Wendy's (see p. 248
above), Mrs. Smith wrote, "a good start at describing--
focus of your paper has to be on establishing a dominant
impression, not on a story. This is still a problem." And
at the end of the draft, Mrs. Smith reiterated this
assessment:

Mary, this is still too much of a narrative. I
thought you were going to be OK after the second
paragraph, but you continued to focus on the story
rather than on a dominant impression.

Characteristically, Mrs. Smith made far fewer comments
on Mary's latest draft than she had on the previous one,
eight as compared to twenty-six. One possible reason for
this is that by this point Mary had cleaned up most of the
surface errors and phrasing problems that Mrs. Smith tended
to mark on her students' drafts. Another reason is that
Mrs. Smith was concerned that Mary's essay would not earn a
grade of "accepted," for the reasons she noted earlier, and
she wanted to focus her comments on the issue of narration
vs. description. Four of her eight comments on the draft
addressed her concern that Mary needed to make the essay
conform to the requirements of the descriptive form, while
the other four addressed matters of phrasing and
correctness (see Table 5 above).

Because Mrs. Smith believed that Mary had worked hard
on this essay, she decided to give Mary until the following
day (Friday) to revise the essay one last time. This time,
Mary significantly changed her essay, revising in order to
make the essay fit Mrs. Smith's parameters for a
descriptive essay. In effect, Mary reorganized her essay
in a way that downplayed the event she had been trying to
describe and emphasized the experience of the moment she
encountered Spencer. While she retained many of the

\[\text{To quantify and categorize Molly's revisions according to the coding scheme employed thus far in this study would not only be difficult, given the nature and extent of her revisions, but it would also only partially represent the nature and extent of those revisions. The difficulty of coding the students' revisions and the written comments of Mrs. Smith and the peer readers is partly due to the fact that for this study I collected the students' drafts as they were written; that is, I did not ask the students to alter their habits and methods of writing and revising in order to accommodate my needs and interests as a researcher. As a result, many of the students' drafts contain voluminous handwritten emendations and markings, along with Mrs. Smith's comments. These are often difficult to read, and it is sometimes impossible to determine who has written what. Coding these according to the methods other researchers have used (e.g. Bridwell; Faigley and Witte) would yield results that would be not only misleading but also superficial, for it would oversimplify the complicated influence of the very contextual factors that I have been arguing shape these revisions. Indeed, the activity of coding comments and revisions points up this argument in an interesting way. For instance, next to the second paragraph of Molly's next-to-last draft, Mrs. Smith wrote, "See this is a narrative" [sic]. To code such a comment accurately would require not only that the coder have some familiarity with Mrs. Smith's habits as a responder to student texts, but also that the coder have read the two previous drafts, including Mrs. Smith's comments, and have some knowledge of how Mrs. Smith's class was run with respect to the submission of drafts and so on. In other words, this comment can be understood fully only within the context in which it was written; to be able to code such a comment usefully requires that the coder have some understanding of that context. All of which perhaps throws into question some of the methods researchers typically employ in quantitative studies of students' revisions and teachers' comments on student writing.}\]
Valentine's Day is a day of love and affection. It's a time of year when people tell their loved ones how they feel. Every year Thompson High School has a traditional Valentine's Day Dance. What makes this dance different from any other is that it is a "Sadie Hawkins Dance". The "Sadie Hawkins" tradition consists of the girls asking the guys to the dance. Some say that asking another person out is an easy task. For years, guys are made fun of for being afraid to ask a girl out on a date. The truth is, asking someone out is not as easy as it may seem. Pride, hope, and honor are held out on the line without a guarantee of a positive outcome and there is always the possibility of being humiliated and turned down. Yet, with all this in mind, some girls still jump at the chance of asking their heart thobs out. Then there are others, including myself, have trouble just talking to guys, let alone asking them out. This year I decided to put all of my pride aside and take a chance.

My unbelievable story began when my friends and I casually walked into Wendy's. We saw many of our friends already waiting in line, so we hurried to greet them. Seconds after rushing into line, I felt an elbow jab into my side. I quickly turned around to see what June, my friend, wanted. I looked at her. She was staring intensely toward the front of the line. My curiosity made me follow her glance. My eyes led me to a sight that made my insides quiver . . . it was Spencer. He was standing ahead of us, wearing his usual dirty white high top court shoes, faded Levis jeans, tee-shirt, and his black and gray ski jacket.

Our eyes met and locked in an intense stare. The sunlight peered softly through the brown tinted
windows and casted it's glow on the both of us. I felt the room grow warm. An eerie silence hovered over the restaurant. Everyone faded away and left the two of us standing there alone. The distinct smell of greasy hamburger cooking in the background snapped me out of my momentary daydream. I came to in time to see Spencer flash a provocative smile at me. In an instant, I felt my face heat up like a thermometer put on a hot stove. I smiled back at him and, as fast as lightning, looked away.

I tried so hard to muster up enough courage to look up from the floor. I felt like my eyes were permanently super-glued to the cream colored no-wax floor tiles. All I could hear was the thunderous beating of my heart: it was thumping like a runaway train. I felt my hands grow hot and sweaty, so I put them into my pockets. I felt the intense heat from my hands penetrate through my jeans. My stomach felt as if it were being clenched and pulled down by an immense gravitational force. I felt small pebbles of sweat forming on the back of my neck. I took short quick breaths so I wouldn't faint. By this time, the gum I had been chewing since third period was, completely stale.

I couldn't believe how petrified I was of asking a guy out. I took a deep breath to relieve some tension, and held onto the railing for added support. "Spencer," I asked as my voice cracked. "Yeah," he replied not noticing my obvious nervous state.

"Are um. Are you aaaaaa," I tried so hard to contain my anxiety. Finally I looked straight up at the ceiling and said, "Spencer, are you going to the Valentine's Dance?"

"No," he replied.

"Well, do you want to go?" I asked wiping my sweaty hands on my faded blue jeans.

"Sure," he said as a smile formed on his face. Momentarily deafened by my beating heart, I didn't hear him right away. His voice was a faint echo lost in the woods. Then all of the sudden it hit me, he said, "Yes."

"Do you want to go with ME?" I asked, still not relying one-hundred percent on my hearing. He looked at me as if I were crazy, weird, or just plain deaf.

"Yes, with you," he said nodding his head to reassure me that he would go with ME.

"Okay," I said trying to seem cool, calm, and collected about the whole ordeal.
Totally relieved by the outcome I turned toward the counter, picked up my food tray, and looked around for a table. I couldn't bring myself to eat all the food I had ordered since the butterflies that were in my stomach were fluttering violently. I still couldn't believe how extremely difficult it was to ask someone out on a date.

Looking back on that experience I realize what guys have to go through for a date with someone. They deserve a lot of credit for having so much guts, and my heart goes out to them. Next time, a guy asks me out on a date, I will look back on this experience and consider all the trouble he went through before I answer.

Here's the final version of the entire essay:

I tried so hard to muster up enough courage to look up from the floor. I felt like my eyes were permanently super-glued to the cream colored no-wax floor tiles. All I could hear was the thunderous beating of my heart: it was thumping like a runaway train. I felt my hands grow hot and sweaty, so I put them into my pockets. I felt the intense heat from my hands penetrate through my jeans. My stomach felt as if it were being clenched and pulled down by an immense gravitational force. I felt small pebbles of sweat forming on the back of my neck. I took short quick breaths so I wouldn't faint. By this time, the gum I had been chewing since third period was, completely stale.

I couldn't believe how petrified I was of asking a guy out. It was five days before the Thompson High School traditional "Sadie Hawkins" Valentine's Day Dance. This tradition consists of the girls asking the guys to the dance. The truth is, asking someone out is not as easy as it may seem. With this in mind, I decided to put all of my pride aside and take a chance, even though, I knew my nerves were going to be put to the test.

I had not expected to see Spencer at Wendy's that day. His presence always made me nervous. He was standing in line, approximately six people ahead of my three friends and me. He was wearing his usual dirty white high top court shoes, faded Levis jeans, tee-shirt, and his black and gray ski jacket. I was trying to keep from staring at him, but in an instant our eyes met and met in an intense stare. The
sunlight peered softly through the brown tinted windows and casted it's glow on the both of us. The room grew warm. An eerie silence hovered over the restaurant. I was afraid of saying a word in fear of my voice cracking. Everyone seemed to be looking at me, waiting to hear what I was going to say. I was a puppet on stage that didn't know the script. I could feel the heat from everyone's stare. Their eyes burned holes into my body. I wanted to run away, but my legs disregarded any orders that my mind was sending. The distinct smell of greasy hamburger cooking in the background snapped made my stomach churn uneasily.

Snapping out of my momentary daydream, I came to in time to see Spencer flash a provocative smile at me. In an instant, I felt my face heat up like a thermometer put on a hot stove. I smiled back at him and, as fast as lightning, looked away.

Finally looking up from the floor, I couldn't find anything to focus my eyes on. My sight jumped from the nearly empty Salad Bar to the people sitting in the small crowded dining room. I noticed that the air was still thick and hard to breath. My mouth was totally parched from the tasteless gum. The cotton fray of my left pocket was damp with the sweat of my hand. The excessive beeping of the cash register was beginning to annoy me. I hear an occasional lunch order shouted back in the kitchen. I sensed that the room was getting smaller. I looked around trying to rid myself of this feeling, but the thirty by forty-five foot dining room kept closing in on me. I was trapped like an animal in a cage. I began to feel my heart pounding again, as if it were going to leap out of my chest. My boiling blood raced, one-hundered miles per hour, through my thin veins. My legs were weak and my right hand clenched on to the railing until my knuckles turned white. My sense seemed to smear all together. I couldn't focus on anything around me. Everything blurred and I felt as if I was going to faint.

"This is it," I whispered to myself.

I took in a long breath of air and asked Spencer to the dance and he accepted my invitation. I was so surprised and elated, but I tried to seem cool, calm, and collected about the whole ordeal.

Totally relieved by the outcome, I turned toward the counter, picked up the food I had somehow ordered, and looked around for a table. I couldn't bring
myself to eat all the food I had ordered since the butterflies that were in my stomach were fluttering violently. I couldn't believe how extremely difficult it was to ask someone out on a date.

Looking back on that experience I realize what guys have to go through for a date with someone. They deserve a lot of credit for having so much guts, and my heart goes out to them. Next time, a guy asks me out on a date, I will look back on this experience and consider all the trouble he went through before I answer.

Clearly, although Mary has preserved her original subject matter, she has rewritten this essay in a way that makes it quite different from her earlier versions. No longer does the essay focus on Mary's difficulty in asking Spencer to the dance, nor does it describe the moment when she actually does ask Spencer and he accepts. Instead, the final version is much more descriptive of Mary's different sensations as she leads up to and then walks away from the moment of asking Spencer out. Indeed, these revisions significantly alter the focus, structure, and content of the essay in a way that the revision to the first four drafts did not. It seems quite clear that the nature and extensiveness of Mary's later revisions are to a great extent a function of Mrs. Smith's responses to Mary's developing essay.

At the end of the final version of Mary's essay, Mrs. Smith wrote,

This is so much better. I hope you see how you've changed the focus of your story from narration to description.
In her comment, Mrs. Smith also noted that the essay earned a grade of "accepted" rather than "qualified," largely because it still contained too many mechanical errors (On the final version, Mrs. Smith marked fifteen mechanical errors, of which seven were minor spelling errors--e.g. "destinct," "excessive"--and five were punctuation errors) and because Mary had been given extra time for the assignment. Nevertheless, from Mrs. Smith's point of view, Mary had now written an essay of creative description, which was required for the assignment.

The example of Mary's descriptive essay underscores the complex and powerful role of context in the revision strategies the students in Mrs. Smith's class employed as they completed their assigned writing tasks. As this discussion of the development of Mary's essay suggests, a number of features of the context within which she was working combined in intricate ways to shape her revisions and, ultimately, her text. Important among these features were the nature of the writing task, especially with respect to essay form as defined by Mrs. Smith's rubric; Mrs. Smith's methods of responding to her students' writing; her requirements for writing assignments; the collaborative atmosphere of her classroom; and the workshop-style format of the course. Given the profound
influence these features seemed to exert on the revisions Mary made and on the development of her descriptive essay, it would be difficult to imagine how her essay might have evolved had these aspects of context been different. For example, would Mary have made the number and kinds of revisions she made on her earliest drafts if she had not shared those drafts with her peers? Would she have even shared those drafts if Mrs. Smith had not established peer critique as a requirement for each essay in her class? And would Mary have sought Mark's response—which was technically not required according to Mrs. Smith's guidelines—if the atmosphere in the class had been different? And how might Mary have responded to the comments of her peers if she had not been socially comfortable with them—if, for example, she had been required to share her draft with students of Mrs. Smith's, rather than her own, choosing? It seems likely that at the very least Mary might have made different or fewer or perhaps more revisions if these factors had been different.

Furthermore, what revisions might Mary have made if Mrs. Smith's parameters for the descriptive essay had been different, or if Mrs. Smith did not tend to emphasize form over content? As the discussions in this chapter and in Chapter IV make clear, Mrs. Smith's parameters for the essays she assigned were usually quite specific with
respect to form, and these factors seem to have had great influence in shaping the students' writing. In Mary's case, it is easy to imagine her essay turning out differently if Mrs. Smith's parameters for the assignment had been different or if Mrs. Smith had not reinforced and emphasized those parameters through her responses to Mary's drafts. And considering the extent to which Mrs. Smith responded to Mary's essay as it developed through its third, fourth, fifth, and final drafts, it seems quite likely that Mary's revisions would have at least been somewhat different and perhaps less extensive if she had not had so many opportunities for feedback from Mrs. Smith. In short, these features of the context within which Mary wrote and revised her essay had great bearing upon the final shape and content of that essay.

But other, less obvious features of the context also had bearing on Mary's essay. When Mrs. Smith consulted with three other English teachers regarding a grade for Mary's essay, she was, in a sense, reinforcing her interpretation of the parameters for that assignment and validating her own assessment that Mary's essay did not meet the requirements of the assignment. In other words, the parameters that played such an important role in shaping the students' writing for each assignment were in an important sense a product of the social and professional
interactions of members of the English department at Thompson High School—interactions which were in turn shaped by characteristics of and procedures at Thompson and by attitudes and norms within the profession of English teaching more generally. Again, in a different department, with different teachers, these parameters—and the way they were interpreted and reinforced—might have been different, and consequently Mary's essay might have turned out very differently.

While such a statement might seem obvious, consider the implications of changes in certain elements of this broader context. For instance, imagine that the members of the English department at Thompson were a fractious lot, not given to informal collaboration or professional interaction. In such a case, Mrs. Smith might never have considered consulting with her colleagues about Mary's essay and might have decided simply to grade the next-to-last draft on the basis of the effort Mary put into it. Had that happened, Mary would almost certainly never have revised that draft again, and the final version would have been very different (that is, it would have been what turned out to be Molly's fifth draft). Or imagine that the English department at Thompson consisted of four or five closely associated colleagues, all of whom had recently attended the same professional seminars promoting a more
freeform, process-oriented approach than that which Mrs. Smith employed. In that case, Mrs. Smith's colleagues might have convinced her that the content of Mary's developing essay determined the form and that Mary should be encouraged to revise in a way that strengthened the narrative. Mary's final version would surely have been quite different from the one Mrs. Smith finally graded.

All this is conjecture, of course, but it highlights the complicated ways in which many different aspects of context figure into the creation of a text such as Mary's. And although we might not be able to trace a specific phrase or passage in her text to these broader aspects of context, as I have traced specific passages of her text to specific comments by Mrs. Smith or Mary's peers, these aspects are nevertheless just as intimately part of the context as Mrs. Smith's comments or the required peer conferences. As such, they too contributed to the creation of Mary's essay.

Although Mary's struggles with her descriptive essay were in some ways unusual, especially given the deadline extension Mrs. Smith allowed her, they were by no means unique. The revisions of other students' essays were similarly influenced by the same features of context that helped shape Mary's essay. For example, in Mary's case, her interactions with her peers seemed to shape the nature
and number of revisions she made on her earliest drafts. Similar interactions seem to have had even greater influence on the revisions of other students. Consider the example of Kate as she worked on her definition essay about love.

Like Mary, Kate struggled to revise her essay in ways that met Mrs. Smith's parameters for the assignment. And like Mary, Kate revised carefully and extensively in response to Mrs. Smith's comments on each of her drafts. Despite Kate's revisions, Mrs. Smith expressed concern that Kate's earliest drafts were too vague and superficial. She wrote at the end of Kate's second draft, for instance, "You must develop each main point completely." On the subsequent draft, she commented that Kate still needed to develop her paragraphs more fully and "use . . . illustrations to show."

During one class meeting, after she had received her essay back with further comments from Mrs. Smith, she sat at one of the worktables struggling to revise the final three or four paragraphs of the essay. One of her friends, Lori, sat nearby. At one point, she consulted with Lori about the following paragraph:

If a relationship is based only upon feelings, it may come and go. True love is a decision, a judgement, and a promise. If true love is just a feeling, there would be no basis for the promise to love each other forever.
Next to the original paragraph Mrs. Smith had written, "Develop this paragraph more." As Kate struggled to do so, Lori proposed some material that Kate might add to the paragraph; Kate wrote on her draft as Lori spoke. By this point midway through the semester, both students were mindful of Mrs. Smith's preference for careful definition of abstract terms; moreover, Lori, a good friend of Kate's, was familiar with the difficulties Kate had been having with the essay. The two discussed Lori's suggestions, Kate jotting down more ideas on her draft. The next day, Kate came to class with a revised version of her essay, which included the following paragraph:

However, if a relationship is based only upon feelings, it may come and go. True love is a decision, a judgement, and a promise. A decision is a choice of who to love. A judgement is the maturity to love someone for what they are, not what they appear to be. A promise is a commitment for a devotion to one person that will last forever. If true love is just a feeling, there would be no basis for the promise to love each other forever.

The underlined sentences represent Lori's suggestions for revision of the paragraph. In the end, Kate incorporated Lori's suggestions, even preserving Lori's phrasing, into the revised draft. Thus, Kate's revisions were in an important sense a product of her interaction with Lori. Of course, as always, many other factors shaped that interaction and, ultimately, the text: Mrs. Smith's specific suggestion to develop the paragraph; Kate's and
Lori's interpretations of that suggestion, based on their experience in Mrs. Smith's class; the parameters of the writing task; the rules and conventions governing writing in Mrs. Smith's class; the collaborative atmosphere of the class; and so on. All these contextual features combined to shape the very wording of Kate's text.

The key point here is that how Kate and Mary and their classmates revised their essays was profoundly influenced by these various features of the context of Mrs. Smith's class. In this sense, revision cannot be seen simply as a matter of individual choice, preference, and ability. Clearly, those factors have tremendous bearing on students' revisions; just as clearly, the issue is much more complicated: for Mary and for the other students I observed, revision was defined as profoundly by the context within which they wrote as by the individual choices each made and by the individual abilities each brought to bear on his or her writing.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the ways in which the invention and revision strategies employed by the students in Mrs. Smith's class were shaped by--indeed, were a function of--the context of that class. It has shown how
the texts those students created through the invention and revisions strategies they used might usefully be seen as products not only of individual student writers but of the context within which those writers wrote. The data presented in this chapter provide empirical support to one of the key underlying arguments of this study: that context and what we have come to call the "composing process" are inextricably bound up together, that the latter cannot be adequately defined or understood unless it is defined and understood with respect to the former. Further, the texts students create in school settings must also be seen as inextricably part of the contexts within which they are created. To understand Mary's descriptive essay, for example, and the processes by which she created that essay requires an understanding of the context within which she was writing and how that context shaped her composing processes and her text.

Such a view of composing and context is not entirely new. But it does reveal problems in the ways in which some researchers in composition have perceived the writing they were studying--and it illuminates the limitations of studies that were stripped of context. In addition, it has important implications for how teachers of English understand student writing. Some of those implications will be addressed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER VI

Implications: Teaching, Research, and Context

In an often-cited 1979 article, Elliot G. Mischler asked, "Meaning in context: Is there any other kind?" In one sense, all that has been said in the preceding five chapters is a rather longwinded "no" to a variation of that question: "Writing in context--is there any other kind?" Teachers of writing at all levels intuitively understand that all writing is done in context--even if their methods of assignment and response sometimes seem to contradict that understanding. And scholars in composition and other fields have been demonstrating for many years now that, at the very least, context influences the writer writing.

But if this study has reinforced the notion that writing is always contextualized, it has also shown how complicated the issue of context is and how profound the relationship between context and an act of writing can be. And it has raised important questions about context and writing for researchers and teachers. Foremost among these questions are two: How might researchers and teachers of
writing conceive of context so that the complex nature of context and its integral role in an act of writing are adequately understood? And what might such a conception of context mean for researchers and for teachers of writing? This chapter addresses these questions.

In addressing the first question, the discussion returns briefly to the theoretical issues raised by the first two chapters and informed by the data presented in Chapters IV and V. If, as those chapters suggest, context is not merely a setting for writing, what is it? As part of the answer to that question, a taxonomy of context is proposed. Next, the chapter turns to the implications of this reconception of context in writing. What might this view of context mean for researchers interested in understanding how writers—especially student writers—write? And how might this view of context affect the ways in which teachers approach writing in their classrooms?

1

Taxonomizing Context

Chapters I and II of this study present a broad conception of context in writing as an enormously complex array of factors that somehow figure into a particular act of writing; these factors include the writer—in the form
of his or her sociocultural background, history as a literate person, personality, and ideology—and the text as it develops in a particular situation. Context, then, might be defined as the matrix of factors that influence, constrain, shape, or determine in some way the decisions made by a writer and the writing-related activities of that writer as he or she engages in a particular act of writing. Such a definition implies a role for individual agency in an act of writing apart from context; at the same time, it assumes that individual agency functions only in a dialectical relationship with the context of an act of writing—that individual agency is profoundly a function of context. Moreover, this definition of context includes elements that have not traditionally been associated with context, such as the writer's sociocultural background and his or her previous experiences with literacy. As the discussion in Chapter II makes clear, such a conception of context challenges the traditional idea of writer as individual, as separate from the context within which he or she is writing. It suggests that the boundaries between what is "inside" a writer and what is "outside" him or her might best be thought of not as fixed or static but as fluid or indistinct. In this sense, the writer becomes part of the context, even while he or she remains separate from it.
Such a conception of context requires a good deal of fleshing out if it is to be useful in furthering our understanding of the context of a given act of writing and of the ways in which the context shapes that act of writing. What specifically does context include? Or perhaps more to the point, what does it exclude? Practically speaking, how can we make sense of the apparent paradox of a writer being simultaneously separate from and part of the context? How can we sort out the many factors that apparently constitute this intricate matrix of context?

One way to answer such questions is to devise a taxonomy that represents context in all its complex manifestations. Its categories can provide a means by which the matrix of context can be sorted into more manageable "pieces" or "layers," so that we might be able to understand how specific sets of factors figure into an act of writing. Such a taxonomy must not be seen simply as a set of categories of the many factors that influence writers, for that view oversimplifies the complexity of context and represents it in terms of the very metaphors (e.g. setting, stage) that I have suggested misrepresent it; rather, this taxonomy of context might best be seen as an attempt to describe metaphorically, from the theoretical perspective which assumes writing to be a social act, what
context in writing means in a given classroom situation with a specific group of students. It is also an attempt to construct a framework by which context in writing might be described and understood in other situations with other groups of writers.

On the surface, the taxonomy proposed in this chapter violates the theoretical conception of context for which I have argued in this study. This theoretical conception assumes that the "boundaries" between writer and context and between one aspect of context and another are never entirely fixed or clearly defined; writer, context, and text are all part of a complex, interwoven matrix. The proposed taxonomy, however, draws what at times seem to be clearly defined "boundaries" between one aspect of context and another. We can't have it both ways. No, but the theoretical boundaries implied by a taxonomy make it easier to discuss the various elements of the taxonomy. Deliberately isolating specific aspects of the context of the writing of a particular group of writers helps bring into clearer focus the roles those aspects play in the act of writing; it also helps identify the many different factors that comprise context.

At the same time, the categories of a taxonomy—indeed, the use of a taxonomy itself—underscore an important difficulty in understanding context: finding an
adequate set of terms and appropriate metaphors by which to discuss and describe context. I have already argued that the traditional metaphors of "stage" and "scene" and "setting" are inadequate. In place of those metaphors, which imply static "places" where writing occurs, we might more aptly conceive of context as comprised of layers of the many factors that shape writing. Think of the detailed illustrations of the human body that often appear in biology textbooks. Those illustrations consist of several overlapping pages or layers of acetate, each of which contains a representation of one of the major physiological systems within the human body. So, for example, the first or bottom layer of acetate might depict the human skeleton; the second might show the circulatory system; the third the musculature; the fourth the digestive tract; and so on. When all the acetate pages are placed one on top of the other, they form a representation of the entire human body. The usefulness of this kind of illustration lies in the flexibility it affords a reader in isolating and focusing on a particular anatomical system without completely separating that system from the others that make up the human body; at the same time, when viewed together, these acetate pages constitute a partial representation of the entire human body in all its complexity.
The categories of a taxonomy of context can be conceived of in a similar way. Each category represents a layer of contextual factors that are somehow part of the process of the writing of a particular text at a given time. By examining a particular category in isolation from the others, we can gain insight into the complex role of context in writing. At the same time, each category or "layer" must be conceived as part of the whole context. Taken together, these layers begin to reveal the whole context.

Of course, while this metaphor might offer a more appropriate way of viewing context than, say, conceiving of context as comprised of separate "factors" or as a "setting" for writing, it is still limited in several ways. For instance, layers might suggest separation, thus obscuring the very inter-relatedness of contextual factors that I have stressed thus far. In addition, layers suggest stasis, though it should be clear that many aspects of the context of a particular piece of writing can be in flux, such as the text itself. And there is the problem of the two-dimensional character of this metaphor: as defined in this study, context would best be understood as multi-dimensional, rather than two-dimensional. Still, it is useful to apply such a metaphor in order to challenge prevailing conceptions of context and to offer a
perspective from which the nature of context might be more fully understood. The point of using a metaphor such as this is to promote new ways of thinking about a complex concept like context in writing.

The Layers of Context

These, then, are eleven "layers" of context:

1. Task-related - parameters of assignment: length, format, mode, style, required intellectual skills, etc.
2. Course-related - structure of course; sequence of assignments; teaching methods; teacher's style, philosophy, personality, etc.
3. Personal - student's personality, values, etc; the student's gender; previous writing experiences; ethnic background; etc.
4. Interpersonal - student's social relations with peers, classmates, teacher; the social milieu of the class and school.
5. Situational - student's present situation in terms of his or her lifestyle, responsibilities, etc. (holds a part-time job, plays on athletic team, e.g.).
6. Immediate - actual time of writing; physical setting; writing tools used.
7. Community - community's socio-economic status, geographical location, ethnic composition, history, cultural values, etc.
8. Institutional - social, economic, ethnic atmosphere of school; administrative structure; funding; location; etc.
10. Linguistic - the language in which the writing is being done.
11. Textual - the text already produced.

Clearly, each of these layers includes a large and complex set of possible influences on a particular act of writing. As the data presented in Chapters IV and V indicate, a single layer such as "course context" encompasses many significant and complicated influences on the writing of the students enrolled in that course. Those same data also demonstrate that the elements of the "course context" are intimately related to elements of other layers of context, such as "task" and "personal." Like John Muir's universe, each layer of context is connected to every other layer.

It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to place these layers of context into a static hierarchy, in part because of the complex interconnectedness of the layers and in part because in a given situation one layer might have more influence on the writer writing than another. For example, it might be that in the case of Sam's literary essay his personal situation (situational context) played a greater role in shaping that essay than, say, his interactions with his peers (interpersonal context). In addition, the layers of context represent different kinds of influences on a writer writing at a given time: Sam's need to complete a portfolio for his college influences his writing somewhat differently than the feedback he receives from his peers.
In this sense, the layers of context do not necessarily represent equivalent sets of influences on a writer as he or she writes.

This taxonomy of the layers of context might be represented schematically as a series of connections between sets of factors (see Figure 3).

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Figure 3. The Layers of Context

The value of this taxonomy is that it implies an understanding of context that preserves the connectedness inherent in context while at the same time that it highlights individual sets of contextual factors. In addition, since it is based on a broad theoretical
conception of context as well as on empirical observations, it is inclusive rather than exclusive in a way that begins to suggest the integral place of context in an act of writing.

This "inclusiveness," though, raises a central question about how this taxonomy represents context: What isn't context? If the writer himself or herself is part of the matrix of context, is everything simply context? In the sense that the writer's sociocultural background, educational experiences, etc., are part of what influences the writing he or she engages in, the answer is yes. But it is possible to distinguish between what in a writer's background--here termed the "personal" layer of context--is "individual" and what might better be seen as "social."

Consider, first, the many factors that might be viewed as part of the "personal" context: sociocultural background; socioeconomic status; previous educational experiences; history as a literate person; and so on. Each of these is "social" to the extent that every person has a "sociocultural background," a "socioeconomic status," etc.; large numbers of individuals share similar sociocultural backgrounds; most of Mrs. Smith's students were white, middle-class midwesterners, for example. At the same time, each person's experiences within a particular sociocultural or socioeconomic classification differ from every other
person's. Thus, one person's sociocultural and socioeconomic "background" includes influences that are similar to others of similar sociocultural and socioeconomic classifications--they have "shared" backgrounds; at the same time, each person's background includes influences that are unique to that person. These latter influences, which clearly affect that person's writing, might best be seen not as part of the matrix of context but as part of that person's individual identity.

To illustrate this distinction, consider Sam and Brian, both students in Mrs. Smith's class. Both are white, both are middle-class, and both reside in the same moderately affluent suburban community in the midwest, where they have spent virtually all of their lives. In short, both share important sociocultural and socioeconomic factors as part of their "backgrounds." Both, for example, have very similar attitudes toward literacy, especially school-based literacy; they view education as important for future economic success, and they consider good writing and reading skills to be part of that success. Like the residents of Maintown in Shirley Brice Heath's study, Sam and Brian learned to "take" meaning from literary texts in certain ways. Moreover, both have had literate experiences in schools that are typical of financially secure schools in predominantly white, middle-class communities, and the
financial stability of their families has meant that they've had ready access to books, computers, and other materials that would support—and influence—the learning of reading and writing. All these similarities can be seen as functions of their similar sociocultural and socioeconomic backgrounds and thus are part of the context within which these two students write.

Despite these similarities, though, Sam and Brian have had very different experiences as literate persons. For most of his adolescent years, Sam has lived in a home influenced profoundly by the divorce of his parents. He lives with his father and step-mother, but still regularly sees his natural mother. All three adults are professionals, with whom Sam consults periodically about his writing. Sam's step-mother sells specialized computer systems for health-care professionals, a job which involves a good deal of writing and speaking. His natural mother has no professional career but spends much of her free time reading novels for pleasure. And Sam's father is a dentist, whose reading and writing revolves almost exclusively around scientific and medical issues related to his work. Like his father and step-mother, Sam almost never reads for pleasure, except occasional articles about scientific subjects in a newspapers or magazines. For him, reading—and writing—seem to be very functional
activities, and he approaches them apparently much as his parents do: as tasks to be completed.

Brian's father is also involved in a profession concerned with health care: he is a professor of optometry at a large public university. For Brian's father, though, reading and writing are not just activities that support his work; they are absolutely integral to it and in many ways the focus of it. It's likely that although Brian's father would value literacy as highly as Sam's parents, he also has slightly different attitudes about literacy, attitudes that might have influenced the way he presented writing and reading to Brian. Brian, too, lives at home with his parents, but not, like Sam, with a step-parent. It is impossible to say how these different factors might have contributed to the ways in which Sam and Brian have learned to read and write or how these factors have shaped Sam and Brian's respective composing processes; to explore those connections explicitly would require the kind of long-term study Shirley Brice Heath conducted with families in the Carolina Piedmont. At the same time, it is clear that, although Sam's home and Brian's are the homes of white, middle-class professional parents, they are very different in several important respects.

These differences in background mean that Sam's and Brian's respective experiences with literacy--and with
learning generally—are also different. Although they have been taught to read and write in somewhat similar ways, having attended elementary schools in the same district and having adopted many of the same values regarding reading and writing and education, both students have had experiences as learners that the other hasn't had. Those experiences give a uniqueness to their respective "backgrounds." In that respect, important parts of their "backgrounds," which surely influence Sam's and Brian's writing, are separate from context as presented here.

Furthermore, each of these students brings to his writing different intellectual strategies which are at once a function of his sociocultural and socioeconomic backgrounds and of his respective intellectual experiences within those backgrounds. In other words, while these students may have developed certain intellectual or cognitive strategies in part as a result of their similar sociocultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, each will have a unique set of intellectual skills. These skills will in part determine the ways in which elements of the context will influence their writing.

This taxonomy, then, while it blurs the line between individual writer and "external" contextual factors, preserves a space for the individual within the complex matrix of context. Everything is not context, but context
is undoubtedly bigger in this model than in previous models which focused more narrowly on the cognitive aspects of writing. Moreover, this model reflects the complicated ways in which cognition is related to "external" social and cultural factors.¹

2

Implications

The theoretical view of context set forth here has important implications for how researchers and teachers understand context in writing. As the first chapter makes clear, it requires a shift in how writing itself is viewed, from an activity that is predominantly individual to one which emphasizes the social nature of writing and the integral role of context in any act of writing. This shift requires a reconsideration of how the composing process itself is understood, for it isn't only texts and the meanings of texts that are shaped by context, but the very

¹Indeed, this taxonomy rests in part on a definition of cognition in social terms, which harks back to the "internal-external" distinction discussed above. That is, what are often called "cognitive skills" are not simply general intellectual abilities that can be universally applied but highly specific intellectual skills dependent upon the existence of particular "external" social and cultural factors. Jack Goody offers insight into this issue in his book, The Interface Between the Written and the Oral. See especially pages 253-257.
process of writing as well. As Deborah Brandt has pointed out,

Although it is easy to see how finished texts are related to the contexts in which they occur, it is also necessary to see writing strategies, such as revising and planning, as themselves functional reflections of the contexts in which they occur. ("Toward" 154)

What this means for researchers is becoming clear in many recent studies that employ or borrow from ethnography (e.g. Michaels). What it means for teachers is less clear. I now turn to each of these areas, research and teaching, to examine what the conception of context—and writing—presented in this study might mean for them.

**Context and Research**

Context, as defined and described in the present study, presents two broad challenges for researchers interested in writing. First, if context does indeed play the integral role in writing that this study suggests it does, previous studies of writing must be scrutinized for the possible influence of context on the results of those studies. To put it rather more bluntly, do we really know what we think we know about writing from previous research? Second, the notion that context is integral to any act of writing challenges researchers to investigate more fully than in the past just what context means in a variety of situations and how it shapes writing in various situations.
The first of these issues has already been implicitly addressed in preceding chapters of this study. In Chapter I, the influential research of Linda Flower and her colleagues was examined in an attempt to demonstrate that such studies inadequately account for the role of context in writing. Although Flower's research was designed to contribute to the formulation of a theoretical cognitive model of writing, not to arrive at explanations of students' writing, it offers a good example of how the issue of context can complicate research.

Flower's conclusions about how writers write are based on the analyses she and her colleagues conducted on numerous think-aloud protocols gathered for their studies. This method of gathering data requires that the participants in the studies write in a highly controlled and rather specialized environment. Usually, these participants are given carefully devised prompts for their writing, are asked to write at specific times chosen by the researcher and in specific places provided by the researcher, and must do so in an unusual manner--that is, they must talk about what they're thinking as they write. Accomplishing all these tasks requires some training by the researchers. Presumably, the training makes the participants more comfortable with the method and as a result leads to more accurate data.
But given the role of context in the writing of the students who participated in the present study, it's reasonable to ask how these research conditions might have influenced the ways in which the participants in Flowers' studies wrote. If the elements of the context of Mrs. Smith's class figured into the writing of the students in that class, might not elements of the context of Flowers' studies have figured into the writing of her subjects? If context is an integral part of the matrix of writer, text, and context, then it is part of any act of writing done in any situation for any reason. The writing completed for Flower's studies, then, was part of the context of those studies and was shaped as profoundly by that context as the writing of Mrs. Smith's students was shaped by the context in which they were working.

Thus, the results of Flower's studies must be examined in light of our growing understanding of context. How were the participants' invention and revision strategies influenced by the context of the study? How did the physical environment, the presence of the researchers, the time limitations affect the writing of those participants? Moreover, how might sociocultural factors associated with the participants have influenced their responses to these elements of the study? And how might such factors have figured into their writing for the study? And perhaps most
important, how would the participants' writing have differed in other contexts? Such questions should prompt careful scrutiny of the conclusions of studies such as Flower's.

One objection that might be raised to such scrutiny is that Flower's studies were not designed to explore student writing. True. Yet her methods and many of her conclusions—not to mention her cognitive theoretical perspective—have been adopted by other researchers interested primarily in student writing. And the same scrutiny can be brought to bear on those studies.

For example, consider Lillian Bridwell's widely cited study of revision, which is cited several times in Chapter V. In that study, Bridwell analyzed the writing of several hundred high school students. Unlike Flower, Bridwell was not interested specifically in developing cognitive theories of writing, but in addressing several broad questions about how student writers revise:

The behavioral question is, what do twelfth graders do when they revise? The cognitive/developmental question is are there any differences between the patterns of more successful and less successful twelfth grade writers? A remaining theoretical question is, do these patterns reveal evidence which might be useful for an evolving theory of composing processes? (197)

In order to address these questions, Bridwell gathered essays written by most of the twelfth graders enrolled in a Georgia high school (171 out of 195 total twelfth graders).
These essays, which were written in response to an elaborate prompt designed to elicit "explanatory discourse" (202), were completed in school during one class period and revised during a second session on a later day. The essays were then coded for revisions by the researchers according to a coding scheme developed for the study.

Bridwell's study raises some of the same questions about the role of context that Flower's studies raise. In the first place, how did the prompt influence what students wrote? More importantly, how did students respond to a prompt provided them by outside researchers, as compared to a prompt provided by their teachers? How did the specific constraints of the study's design influence students' invention, drafting, and revising? And how did the timing and physical environment affect the students' writing?

These are questions that any careful reader might ask of a study such as Bridwell's, even if that reader has no particular interest in context per se. And yet such questions underscore the important place of context in any act of writing—and suggest why context must be accounted for in any study of writing. Indeed, Bridwell herself acknowledges the possible effects of the context of the study, even though these effects are not specifically addressed in her analysis and conclusions. For instance, she included in the design of the study time for pre-
writing because some previous researchers "report that student involvement with the writing assignment influences writing behaviors" (202). Further, she adds, other studies "suggest that students might do more revising if they were allowed to think about the assignment and reflect on revisions for a longer period of time than the standard class period (55 minutes in this case)" (202). Moreover, the writing sessions from which Bridwell gathered her essays "were held early in the school year to avoid instructional influence or accommodations to individual teachers' preferences" (202). Finally, every effort was made to reduce anxiety accompanying a testing situation. No grades were given to the essays although they were considered a regular class assignment, and the possibility of publication in the study was presented as an option for those who expressed an interest and consented to publication. (203)

All these measures on Bridwell's part represent her tacit acknowledgment of the importance of these various contextual features in shaping students' writing. Many of the features she refers to are the very features examined in the present study: time for invention, drafting, and revision; the teacher's methods of instruction and "preferences"; the grading of essays. But the connections between these features of the context and the writing the students in Bridwell's study did are never explored. Moreover, certain features of a classroom context are
purposely "stripped" away: the teacher's feedback to student writing, grades, and so on.

As a result, one might reasonably wonder to what extent Bridwell's findings about how students revise are a function of the particular context she created for her study. In short, while her findings might certainly have validity for other groups of students in other situations, and while those findings might illuminate particular aspects of students' revisions, those findings are also limited by the context of the study. And they tell us little about how that context figured into the writing of those students.

Studies like those of Flower and Bridwell have much to tell us about writing and writers. But given the nature of context, what they can tell us is limited in important ways. The point here is that previous studies of writing must be considered in light of our growing understanding of what context is and how writing and context are inextricably linked. Furthermore, new studies must be designed with context specifically in mind.

Such new studies, of course, are being designed and carried out by a growing number of researchers whose interest in the social aspects of writing have helped focus attention on qualitative and ethnographic research
methodologies. The challenge for these researchers, and for the field of composition studies in general, is to engage in research that furthers our understanding of context and the connections between context and writing. As researchers and scholars shift their attentions away from an exclusive focus on the writer as individual "mind" and develop a broader social view that places the writer in a complex social context, understanding context becomes all the more important.

There is a great deal we need to learn about context. The present study raises many questions, particularly with respect to the contexts of school-sponsored writing. In the first place, we need fuller naturalistic descriptions of the contexts of school-sponsored writing. What specifically are these contexts? And how might we describe them? Although many naturalistic studies of discourse in classrooms, particularly elementary classrooms, have been conducted in recent years, few such studies have focused primarily on providing rich descriptions of the contexts within which discourse occurs in these classrooms. At the secondary level, such descriptions are especially needed, since many of the studies of high school writing have typically focused either on the kinds of writing done in high schools (e.g. Applebee, Secondary; Applebee and
Langer) or the processes by which high school students write (e.g. Applebee, Contexts; Emig; Mischel).

Studies intended to describe the contexts of school-sponsored writing can begin to illuminate the similarities and differences between these contexts. The present study describes one such context in detail, but it cannot begin to suggest how that context might compare to others. To do so requires similar studies of different classrooms. In what ways, for instance, might a senior composition class in a large urban high school or a small rural high school in a different region of the country be similar to or different from Mrs. Smith's class? Which features of the contexts of those classrooms will be the same, and which will be different? Furthermore, in what other contexts does school-sponsored writing occur? What do those contexts look like, and how might they be described? How, for example, would the context of Mrs. Smith's Advanced Composition class compare to the context of, say, a history class or a biology class? Studies might examine the relationship of course structure to students' invention or revision strategies in several different classrooms in order to provide a fuller sense of the ways in which context manifests itself in students' writing in various classrooms. The possibilities for such studies seems endless. But all these studies would be addressing the
same broad question that drives the present study: How does context figure into students' writing?

Studies that address such broad questions can break ground for other research that is more narrowly focused on specific aspects of the contexts of school-sponsored writing. Once we have broader knowledge of the kinds of contexts students write in, we can begin to look more carefully at salient features of those contexts and how they seem to influence students' writing. For example, ethnographies can be conducted to describe the kinds and uses of literacy in the homes of particular school districts. Other studies might explore the place of interpersonal relationships among adolescents in their school-sponsored writing. Still other studies might examine the nature of specific teaching methods and styles in different schools and how these might affect student writing. These kinds of studies could add to our growing body of knowledge about the contexts of school-sponsored writing.

Ultimately, studies of context and its role in students' writing might lead to a re-examination of prevailing views of the composing process. If the composing processes of the students in Mrs. Smith's class were so profoundly shaped by the context of that class, it seems likely that the same will be true of students in
other classes. If so, theories of the composing process must account more fully for context. It may be that the "stage" model of composing, with its seemingly monolithic "stages" of planning, drafting, and revising, which has for so long dominated thinking about composing (and has profoundly influenced the discussions of writing in the present study), needs to be reconsidered. At the same time, further research into the connections between the composing processes of students and the contexts of school-sponsored writing might well lend support to the concept of "stages" of the composing process. The point is that an adequate understanding of composing requires greater knowledge of the relationship between context and writing.

Some of the research proposed here has already begun. Researchers like Glynda Hull and Mike Rose have been exploring connections between the school-sponsored writing of community college students and characteristics of the urban communities in which they live. Marilyn Cooper and Michael Holzman have enhanced our understanding of the social nature of writing. The recent work by Linda Flower and her colleagues attempts to place the writing of their students at Carnegie-Mellon university in a broader social, cultural, and institutional context.

Although such research adds to a growing understanding of context in writing, it also underscores some of the
methodological problems associated with studying context. The Reading-to-Write project by Flower et al. provides a good example of the nature of these problems. One study in that project attempts to explore the ways in which the students' reading and writing in that study "can be seen as more culturally motivated, directed, and constrained than we might have initially thought" (McCormick 1). To restate that in terms of the taxonomy proposed in the present study, Flower and her team were attempting to find connections between their students' reading and writing and the "super-context." But to do so required that the researchers abandon, at least temporarily, the quantitative methods for which they have become so well-known:

It is primarily in [Mike] Rose's realm of inference that this chapter will necessarily be working, attempting to tease out of students' comments more broadly-based cultural and institutional factors that are silently but powerfully influencing their reading and writing behaviors. As such, most of these inferences are subject to being interpreted by rival hypotheses. (McCormick 1; emphasis added)

To be sure, inference is part of any research. But this example demonstrates the difficulty of getting at some of the aspects of context that apparently exert powerful influence on students' writing. Indeed, many questions raised in the present study simply could not be addressed given the methods employed for the study. The best example, perhaps, is similar to the example just cited from Flower et al.'s study: it is suggested in several places in
the present study that the students' sociocultural backgrounds influenced their invention and revision strategies, yet given the limitations of the methodology used in the study, those influences could only be inferred; they could not be examined directly.

Even when features of the context are seemingly more accessible to the researcher, the sheer volume of data and its inherent complexity create difficulties. Frederick Erickson addressed these difficulties in attempting to define "school ethnography" ("School Ethnography"). Erickson lists some of the many influences on school classrooms, in effect describing some of the features of the context within which students do schoolwork: a school, he writes,

is located in a limited geographic-demographic setting, with relationships of rights and obligations between the school and that place and its people. The school also is linked by a network of communication, rights, and obligations to larger social units--the school system and school board (which in the United States is a governmental entity), with city, state, and federal government. The school is linked by the formal and informal political process to the economic, ethnic, and religious group interests that activate the political process. (60)

For Erickson, all this "is far too much information available to ethnographers. They must . . . have strategies for eliminating some of the welter of information, for sorting into categories the behavior and rules for behavior that confront them" (60). Patricia
Stock and Jay L. Robinson state the problem somewhat differently:

The problem of context for the analyst is essentially one of identifying among the myriad features that may be isolated those that in fact function to shape a unit and render it meaningful and significant (183).

One approach to this problem is to devise a framework within which context can be defined and categorized more manageably. The taxonomy of context proposed above is one such framework. In effect, the taxonomy can be used as tool with which researchers can begin to sort and analyze the enormous amount of data they gather as they investigate context in writing. Meanwhile, studies such as this one demonstrate the necessity of developing adequate research methodologies to answer the questions that our growing knowledge of context will continue to pose.

Context and Teaching Writing

What, then, are teachers of writing to make of context?

In a graduate seminar on the teaching of writing that I once attended at the Ohio State University, the professor was discussing what she perceived to be the irrelevance of most school-sponsored writing assignments. Much of the writing assigned in schools, she argued, was "decontextualized." Her point was that writing tasks typically assigned to students bear little resemblance to
the "real world" writing tasks that students are likely to be faced with after they leave school. From this point of view, a business report was more "real" than, say, an English class assignment to write an essay on Hamlet.

In fact, an essay on Hamlet, while it differs in several important respects from a business report--or any other kind of writing outside the schools--is every bit as "real" as the various kinds of texts produced in what Lee Odell and Dixie Goswami have called "non-academic settings." Students writing such an essay must negotiate the constraints of their particular rhetorical situation just as the writer of a business report does; and the essay on Hamlet--or any other assigned text--may affect the life of a student writer as deeply than a business report can affect the life of its writer. Moreover, as the present study demonstrates, school-sponsored writing is a highly contextualized, often specialized, form of writing, notwithstanding any perceived lack of resemblance it might have to business reports. The sooner teachers of writing understand this point, the better, I think, they will be able to address a host of longstanding and difficult issues associated with teaching writing, from assignments to assessment.

What this study suggests above all for teachers, I believe, is the need to understand the inherently social
nature of writing and the complexity and importance of the contexts within which school-sponsored writing occurs. Such an understanding challenges a number of deeply held beliefs about writing among teachers, particularly at the secondary level. Any positive pedagogical implications of this study must, in my view, grow out of a challenge to these beliefs.

Two beliefs about writing in particular need to be challenged: first, that writing is primarily, or even exclusively, an individual, cognitive activity; and second, that the writing done in schools is somehow "unnatural," "artificial," or decontextualized. Each of these beliefs is based on a number of broader assumptions about education, culture, language, and literacy that are beyond the scope of this study. But let me briefly address these beliefs in order to suggest how they can inhibit any benefits that research into context in writing can offer teachers.

Much of the discussion in Chapters I and II revolves around a critique of the notion that writing is an individual, cognitive activity. Those chapters suggest that a cognitive-individualist perspective on writing inadequately accounts for how and what students write. Although the cognitive-individualist view of writing has
been significantly weakened by research and scholarship into the social and cultural nature of literacy, teachers at all levels—and I think especially in the high schools—continue to understand writing primarily as an individual, cognitive activity. Indeed, many of the features of Mrs. Smith's class reflect that view. For example, her grading system, her methods of response to her students' drafts, her use of the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory, and her oft-repeated admonition that each student can do as well as he or she wants to do as a writer—all these place emphasis on the student as individual thinker. It is not coincidental that when Mrs. Smith graded Kate's essay on love, for instance, she graded it as if it were solely a product of Kate's efforts and ideas, despite the profoundly social influences on that essay and the collaborative way in which Kate revised it.

Perhaps less obvious but more significant are the ways in which this view is entrenched in the structure and organization of schools. Again, the grading system is a good example. A student's academic records typically contain lists of courses that the student has taken, the grades he or she earned in those courses, his or her scores on national standardized tests such as the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test), and references to academic awards the student might have received. Such information is regarded
by educators and administrators not only as a record of how the student has already performed in school, but also as an indication of how the student is likely to perform in school in the future.

Significantly, these records rarely contain information about the nature of instruction the student might have received--other than titles of courses and (less often) teacher's names. The record for one of Mrs. Smith's students, for example, would indicate simply that the student completed an English course entitled "Advanced Composition" during the second semester of the 1989-1990 academic year and list that student's final grade for the course. It would not indicate that the course was conducted as a writing workshop, that much of the writing done for the course was collaborative in nature, that students were required to share drafts-in-progress with their peers, that they wrote multiple drafts for each assignment, and so on. In short, it would not describe any of the many key factors that contributed to the performance of the student who took that course; it would not reflect the complex and inherently social negotiations in which that student participated as he or she engaged in the discourse of the class. It would simply indicate that the student earned a "B" or a "C" for the course. And that line in the student's record would look the same as the
line in the record of a high school student in, say, rural Idaho who happened to take a very different kind of English course that was also called "Advanced Composition," one on which there was no peer response, multi-draft submissions, or word processors. In other words, what matters in the current grading system used in American schools is the student's individual grade in the course, not the nature of the experience the student might have had in the course or the kind of learning the student engaged in in the course. The grade reflects an assessment of how that student performed as an individual, not as part of an intricate network of social relationships.

Even more important than the difficulties associated with traditional grading policies in schools are the implications of a cognitive-individualist view of writing for classroom instruction. From a cognitive-individualist perspective, writing tends to be reduced to a series of choices that reflect individual cognitive ability and innate talent, the result either of hard work or inspiration or both; it becomes an exercise in intellectual problem-solving rather than an engagement in complex discourse. As a result, important rhetorical elements of any writing situation are de-emphasized or over-simplified or perhaps idealized, and the vital issue of how discourse functions in a social sense is ignored. For example,
audience as a significant part of written discourse rarely figured into discussions of drafts-in-progress in Mrs. Smith's class, despite the fact that the students were writing for "real" audiences comprised of Mrs. Smith, of their peers, and in a few instances of people outside the classroom community. Mrs. Smith's written comments on her student's drafts implied an idealized audience, for whom a sentence might be "wordy" or who might find a particular passage "confusing," without addressing the possibility that different audiences might react differently to the same passage; moreover, they did not suggest why a reader might find the passage "wordy" or "confusing" or otherwise. In a few instances, such as the argument and editorial assignments, audiences were defined for the assignment, but even in these cases, little emphasis was placed on the specific nature of a group of readers and how they might respond to particular stylistic flourishes or to the content of an essay. And in any case, Mrs. Smith tended to make the same kinds of written responses to the students' drafts on assignments for which an audience was specified as she did on assignments for which no audience was specified; she typically responded to the students' drafts as if they were intended for an idealized but undefined audience.
This kind of treatment of audience might imply to students that all audiences are pretty much the same. More seriously, it might imply that writing as an activity has little use outside the classroom except perhaps to convey information. Presented in this way, the complicated rhetoric of any act of writing and the inherently social nature of all writing are overlooked, or at least deemphasized.

Mrs. Smith's class was by no means unique in this respect. Indeed, her course goes well beyond most high school English classrooms in presenting writing as something more than a tool for assessment and the product of rules of usage and grammar. Her use of techniques associated with the process approach to teaching writing and her emphasis on revision gave her class a much more progressive character than seems typical of many high school writing classes. And yet the very features of her course that might be called progressive--including routine teacher-student conferences and peer critique--helped create a tension that highlighted rather than challenged the traditional cognitive-individualist view of writing. For instance, as the preceding chapters indicate, the atmosphere in Mrs. Smith's class was highly social, which contributed to a collaborative environment within which students interacted at all phases of the composing process.
The kinds of collaborative interactions in which students engaged profoundly shaped their writing for the course. At the same time, however, little overt attention was paid to the role of collaboration in the students' writing, and the students' work was always evaluated as exclusively their own. Consequently, collaboration among the students seemed driven by their sense of what was valued by Mrs. Smith, and students tended to read each other's writing as they believed Mrs. Smith would read it. In other words, from the students' point of view, the primary purpose of the collaboration in the class seemed to be to help them earn higher grades for themselves, not to convey any sense of the social nature of writing or to help foster a sense of a discourse community. Paradoxically, then, the way Mrs. Smith structured and managed her course helped create an active and complicated discourse community, in which students became active readers of each other's writing, at the same time that the written discourse produced by this community was perceived and evaluated in very traditional ways that tended to ignore the influence of the community. In this sense, the cognitive-individualist perspective on writing prevented the course from becoming one in which writing was perceived as inherently social discourse; it prevented writing as discourse from becoming a focus of the course.
The second belief that often drives writing instruction in schools is that school-based writing is less "real" than writing in other settings, that it is artificial or decontextualized. This belief is based in part on the assumption that school-based writing instruction is intended primarily to prepare students to write for and to function successfully in future academic courses and, ultimately, in a corporate culture. Thus, many of the perceived characteristics of writing in corporate settings seem to find their way into classroom writing instruction. Two of the most obvious are an emphasis on correctness and an emphasis on form. Both these characteristics were key features of the way writing was presented and evaluated in Mrs. Smith's class.

One of the difficulties associated with these emphases on correctness and form is that they tend to shape writing instruction, though the reasons for these emphases themselves are never examined. In Mrs. Smith's class, for example, the forms of writing were at the center of the assignments around which the class was structured. As the discussions in chapters III, IV, and V make clear, emphasis____________________________________

2 A number of scholars have addressed this issue. See especially James Berlin, Rhetoric and Reality (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988) and "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class" (College English 50 [September 1988]: 477-494); and Richard Ohmann, English in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).
on form influenced virtually every aspect of the writing done in the course, from the nature of Mrs. Smith's assignments to the students' revision strategies. At the same time, no attention was paid to the nature of the forms themselves, except in terms of understanding how to write in those forms. Students were never asked to consider how the forms influenced their writing or how they might have affected readers; moreover, students were never encouraged to address the broader issues of what purposes such forms as argument, literary analysis, and cause-effect might serve and where these forms might have come from. The essay forms themselves were never examined in light of their function as written discourse; they simply existed and had to be learned in order to complete the assignments for the course.

Thus, like the belief that writing is primarily an individual, cognitive activity, the belief that school-based writing is decontextualized helped prevent Mrs. Smith's course from focusing on writing as complex, inherently social discourse. These two beliefs helped reinforce the notion that writing is largely a neutral skill to be mastered rather than a social and cultural activity that takes a variety of forms and serves many purposes. Again, I must stress that Mrs. Smith's class was not unique in this respect, for these beliefs about writing
and teaching writing pervade writing instruction at the secondary level.

If nothing else, the present study should challenge both these beliefs. But what pedagogical implications arise from this challenge to traditional beliefs among teachers of writing? There are many, I think, but two especially are worth noting here.

First, the focus of a writing course should be on writing as discourse. All else—including grammar, convention, style, content, audience, etc.—flows from this assumption. If writing is inherently social, and if it always occurs in a complex context, then it must be presented as such to students.

What this shift in focus might mean in practice will vary significantly from one classroom to the next, because each classroom exists in a complex contextual matrix, which includes many complicated social, cultural, and political factors that influence the kind of writing instruction the students there will receive. But such a shift in focus will mean at least one thing for all writing classrooms: writing as discourse will become both the content and focus of activity in the writing course. Consider how this shift might affect Mrs. Smith's course.
On the surface, little would need to be changed about how Mrs. Smith structured and managed her course, since, as we have seen, her class became an active and highly social discourse community. Her use of deadlines, peer critique, computers, multiple drafts, and conferences would all be appropriate in the kind of class I am proposing here. In such a class, students must actively engage in writing, as they did in Mrs. Smith's class, and they must interact regularly with respect to their writing, again as they did in Mrs. Smith's class.

What would change, however, is how the writing itself was presented and discussed by Mrs. Smith and by the members of the class. Instead of simply presenting assignments with specific requirements, which the students then had to meet in order to earn high grades, Mrs. Smith would present the assignments themselves for discussion and analysis. For example, the rubric for the argument essay might be examined in order to reveal the assumptions it implies about writing generally, about audiences, about argumentative discourse specifically. The students' topic choices might be analyzed in terms of what they imply about what is "controversial." These implications could in turn be examined in order to explore their social, political, and cultural sources. For example, why are "drugs" considered an important and controversial topic? What
might this topic choice say about the social and cultural backgrounds of the students who choose to write about it? How do those factors affect the way a student writes about a topic such as drugs? And so on. In short, the assignment becomes more than another of the required activities in the course; it becomes part of the subject matter of the course as well.

In addition, the argument assignment would be presented and examined from an inherently rhetorical perspective, and students would be encouraged to ask questions that were never raised in Mrs. Smith's class: Who might write about drugs? For what purpose? What can writing about drugs accomplish? In what forums might such writing appear? How will it be used? How might all these considerations affect the writer's choices and the readers' reactions? And so on. In this way, the specific parameters of the assignment are examined by the students from the perspective of writing as discourse, not only so that the students can meet those parameters in their own essays, but also so that they might understand the social and cultural foundations of these parameters--and begin to appreciate the social, cultural, and political nature of all written discourse.

Obviously, to accomplish this shift in focus, Mrs. Smith would have to make some changes in her rubrics. She
would also have to organize some of her class meetings to accommodate the kinds of discussion I am proposing, and she would need to develop some group activities to support these discussions. But she would not have to change the open-ended, workshop-style format of her class. Indeed, this, too, would become part of the "content" of the course. For example, Mrs. Smith might ask students to examine their own writing practices in light of what they are learning about written language. She might, for instance, share with the class the collaboration between Kate and Lisa and focus discussion on how their collaboration helped shape Kate's text (see Chapter V). Furthermore, she could ask students to explore how their own texts are produced collaboratively in order to highlight the social nature of discourse. In short, the focus of the course would begin to include how the writing was produced and why, rather than focusing exclusively on the writing itself.

This shift in emphasis would require one other change in Mrs. Smith's course: she would have to include more reading--of student writing and of writing done outside the class. Since reading is integral to the community she created in her class, it too would have to become a focus of discussion as well as an activity more openly valued and encouraged in the class.
The changes I am proposing here would also require changes in the way students' writing is assessed. This is the second broad implication of this study for teaching writing. Obviously, how writing is assessed in a particular classroom and school would continue to be partly a function of the way the teacher has organized the course, of that teacher's style and philosophy of teaching, and of certain institutional and political factors. But shifting the focus of a writing course from skills to discourse would require teachers to view their students' writing differently than I think teachers traditionally have done.

In a broad sense, teachers would have to consider their students' writing in light of the complex context in which the students work. In practical terms, such a perspective might mean simply adjusting habits and methods of evaluation. For example, a teacher might focus assessment of a student's essay on how appropriate that essay seems for a particular audience, rather than on how closely that essay conforms to conventions of style and grammar. Or a teacher might try to involve a particular audience in the process of evaluation, so that, for instance, groups of students or even groups of adults from outside the class could help evaluate student essays. Surely portfolios would lend themselves to such methods of assessment as readily as individual papers.
But considering context in writing requires more than finding new methods of evaluation for student essays; it requires a profound shift in the way teachers understand student writing. First of all, teachers must perceive their students' writing as a function of the complex contextual matrix that is the classroom. They must begin to understand the influence of a range of factors that shape their students' writing, including such seemingly obvious factors as the nature of an essay prompt as well as more subtle factors such as the social dynamics of peer editing groups. In order to understand how a student text came to be, teachers need to understand the powerful role such factors play in student writing.

Such an understanding is not simply a theoretical position, for it constitutes a framework within which a teacher can read a student text. Within this framework, a teacher would perceive difficulties or problems in a student's text not necessarily as manifestations of some difficiency on the student's part, but as related to contextual factors as well. For example, Sam's troubles in developing his argument for a national board of education seem to have stemmed from his use of sources and the way he tried to organize his essay according to guidelines Mrs. Smith had set for that essay (see Chapter V); those troubles do not necessarily reflect an inability to reason
logically on Sam's part, but they do reflect his attempts to participate in the complicated discourse of the class. Similarly, Mary's interpretation of the descriptive essay assignment seems to have been influenced in part by her peers' assessment that her early narrative version of her essay was suitable for that assignment; in other words, her classmates' collective assessment that her essay was acceptable for the assignment seems to have reinforced her perception of what a descriptive essay is (see Chapter V). Notice here too that the label, "description," for a piece of written discourse is defined by several factors, including Mrs. Smith's rubric, the way she reinforced the parameters set forth in that rubric, the students' interpretation of the rubric and of Mrs. Smith's statements about it, the way the students reinforced or contradicted each other's interpretations, and so on—in other words, it was socially defined within the community of that classroom. Seen from this perspective, Mary's essay is less likely to be evaluated as a reflection of her individual lack of understanding of a particular genre or of some intellectual shortcoming on her part.

Reading a student essay within this framework would enable a teacher to devise strategies for responding to that essay that a cognitive-individualist perspective would discourage or dismiss. For example, while Mrs. Smith might
still want to point out to Mary that her early drafts of her essay were more narrative than descriptive, as she did, she might also ask Mary to identify elements in her drafts that make it fit one genre or another. She might further encourage Mary—and her classmates—to examine the genres of description and narration and to analyze the apparent divergence between her peers' assessment of her essay and Mrs. Smith's assessment. That analysis, in turn, could lead to a discussion about how parameters for a genre come to be and what purposes they might serve. In this way, the assessment of Mary's essay reinforces the notion that writing is discourse and underscores the complexity of the various factors that influence discourse.

Such an approach to an essay like Mary's hinges on a teacher's understanding of writing as socially defined discourse, which of course affects the teacher's role in the classroom. As Patricia Stock and Jay Robinson have put it,

Educators who . . . believe that individuals build bodies of generally valued knowledge as they communicate their personally constructed meanings to one another in language they share . . . generally do not believe a teacher's most fruitful functions are to examine, monitor, and evaluate a pupil's command of information. Rather, they believe with Ann Berthoff—who borrows from I. A. Richards—that a teacher's most fruitful functions are realized when she [or he] offers her [or his] students "assisted invitations" to learning. (174)
Thus, assessment becomes part of the discourse of the class instead of a separate process from which students are generally excluded.

Such a view might seem to be a rehash of what scholars like Donald Murray and Peter Elbow have called for in arguing for a process-oriented approach to teaching. There's a difference. For Murray and Elbow and others who advocate a student-centered, process approach to teaching writing, the teacher "must not inhibit the students from finding their own subjects, their own forms, and their own language" (Murray, "Writing as Process" 26). I am suggesting that students must also come to understand that their subjects, forms, and language are not unique, that their individual voices are inherently social as well: they shape and are shaped by the discourse in which they participate--they make and are made by that discourse. In short, the kind of course I am proposing here borrows from Murray and Elbow the notion that students must find their own voices, but it also emphasizes the social nature of those voices. Again, Stock and Robinson state it well:

In an obvious sense, acts of text building--when they are literate acts, actions with letters--are "solo performances." But solo performance does not seem possible unless the internal actions that enable it have been enacted--have been practiced and modified--in society with others, in attempts to establish communication, in community, with others. The constitutive hermeneutics of an interpretive community must be made public, not remain hidden; and they seem
only to be able to be made public in interactions among others in a learning social group. (215)

Thus, teachers, like researchers and theorists who study writing, must find ways to understand their students' writing as individual and social. They must come to see the writing of students like Kara and Kate and Sam and Mark as individual manifestations of many complicated social factors, for it is only within social networks that Kara and Kate and Sam and Mark will be able to participate effectively in the discourse that writing is.
POSTSCRIPT:

On the Context of Writing This Dissertation

On an early draft of the third chapter of this dissertation, one of the members of my dissertation committee wrote next to a passage, "The I, my, and me are overpowering here. It worries me that I notice it so much, that it seems distracting to me. What to do?" The comment frustrated me, in part because none of the other professors or graduate students who had read the draft seemed concerned about my use of the first person; it also frustrated me because at the time I was struggling with my voice in the dissertation, trying at once to maintain what I hoped to be a genuine voice in the writing while conforming to the conventions of an academic dissertation in the field of English—a form seemingly designed to snuff out the writer's voice. Now, some five months later, as I am finishing this penultimate requirement of my doctoral studies, my frustration remains. I have revised the troublesome passage, along with many other similar passages, but the dissertation which bears my name as sole author, feels like—and indeed is—very much a co-authored work. And the comment about "the I, my, and me"
underscores the complex social nature of the process by which this text has been created and raises interesting questions about my own role in its creation.

In the past few years, as ethnography has begun to emerge as an accepted research methodology in composition studies, it has become fashionable for researchers to include passages in their reports about themselves. Such passages strike me as declarations of authorial identity: "I approached this project as a middle-class, white, male academic who subscribes to the following assumptions about language . . ." Sometimes these statements are less overt, like the introduction to Andrea Lunsford and Lis Ede's book, *Singular Texts, Plural Authors*, in which those authors describe some of their own struggles as collaborative writers in an academic discipline that values individual authorship. The effect of such statements, though, is similar: to alert a reader to the author's or authors' perspective(s) -- or to as much of that perspective as a reader can infer from the authors' explicit and implicit statements or from a category as broad as "middle-class, white, male." Presumably, these statements help a reader understand more fully the analysis and conclusions set forth in the research report, for they provide that
reader with some sense of the "filter" through which the researcher viewed his or her data.

I have sometimes wondered what I might include in such a statement in my own work. Would I note that I am indeed white, male, and middle-class (a category that is quickly becoming a pejorative)? Would I note further that I am the descendant of Polish immigrants who came to this country only four generations ago and that both my grandfathers were coal miners in the anthracite fields of northeastern Pennsylvania, where bloody union struggles made possible the progressively more comfortable lives of their children and grandchildren? Would I mention that I was raised in a conservative Catholic household in a conservative, working class, ethnic neighborhood, and that my grandmother, who still speaks Polish as fluently as her native Polish cousins, is convinced that I lost my faith as a result of my education at the hands of the Jesuit priests who ran the high school I attended? Should I mention that "socialist" is a pejorative term for my parents but not for me? Or should I reveal that some of my favorite books as a child were war stories, but that as a Masters degree candidate years later, I found Richard Ohmann's English in America compelling, while my own teaching was influenced by the works of so-called "cognitivists" like Janet Emig, especially her article, "Writing as a Mode of Learning"?
All these aspects of my background have important bearing on the way I designed, carried out, and reported the research that is the basis for this dissertation. These are part of the "I" that is the "author" of this dissertation.

At the same time, the conventions governing academic dissertations seem to force this authorial "I" out of the text, to make it disappear in clumsy verbal gymnastics of passive verbs, pronomial constructions, and chapters that anthropomorphically "examine," "discuss," "describe," "argue," and "make clear." The reader's comment about my use of the first person was in part an expression of that reader's interpretation of those conventions and the failure of my text to conform to them. "Exactly!" Foucault would say: we are written by the discourse in which we participate. If he is right, I can think of few better examples to illustrate his point than the writing of an academic dissertation.

In a recent article in College English, Peter Elbow examined "academic discourse" and the implications of teaching it, and all its conventions, to our students. In analyzing a passage from a work by Jame Berlin, Elbow asserts that "we can see academic discourse leading him [Berlin] into locutions of indirectness and detachment, even vestigial objectivity--when he is clearly taking the
opposite intellectual stance" (146). That statement rang true, especially since I read it as I was grappling with a particularly difficult chapter of my own bit of academic discourse. What struck me even harder about Elbow's article, though, was his own voice. I envied him the ability to retain his strong, unique voice in an article that was itself ostensibly a piece of "academic discourse." How had Elbow avoided "locutions of indirectness and detachment"? How had he avoided the clumsy verbal gymnastics that seemed to characterize my own writing?

Such questions led me to wonder about the similarities between the process by which Elbow wrote his essay and the process of writing a dissertation, which I found to be paradoxically a very solitary experience and a profoundly collaborative endeavor. Elbow implies, but doesn't explicitly express, the view that writing "academic discourse" involves such a paradox. My own experience suggests that the lonely struggles that characterize the writing of a dissertation occur in a highly social context.

Like many graduate students working toward their Ph.D.'s in English, I participated in an "ABD study group" during the year in which I wrote this dissertation. The group was organized in the fall of that year by Andrea for the purpose of providing a forum for her advisees to receive response to their work, whether it be research
grant proposals, dissertation prospecti, or drafts of their dissertation. We met approximately every two weeks, and each meeting was devoted to discussion of one or two members' work-in-progress. Often the discussions revolved around some difficulty one member was having with a portion of his or her dissertation or prospectus. Usually, the group discussed the problem, attempted to identify its sources, and suggested possible solutions. (It was at one of these meetings that my troublesome first-person passages were discussed.)

What was interesting to me about participating in this group was that although I consciously resisted full participation at times, partly because I feared that too much feedback would only make the writing more difficult, I nevertheless helped reinforce during our group's discussions the very conventions with which I was struggling in my writing. Moreover, the response of the group members to the few drafts I shared with them substantially influenced my revisions. Perhaps because I knew that they were well-versed in "academic discourse," I accepted their comments as valid. As a result, their responses to my drafts shaped the development of my text in much the same way that Mary's peers' comments influenced her revisions of her descriptive essay, which I describe in Chapter V of this dissertation.
My fellow ABDer's comments, however, did not carry the same weight as those made by the three professors on my dissertation committee. They were my primary audience, and their responses profoundly shaped the text of this dissertation. To trace their influence would be a monumental undertaking, especially given the complicated and delicate nature of the social and institutional relationships between them and me and between them and each other. For now it's enough to say that this dissertation is very much a product of their responses to it, their views of the research reported here, their relationships with me and with each other, and so on. Furthermore, their roles in the creation of this dissertation were governed to a great extent by institutional forces and by the traditions and attitudes that continue to shape the discipline of English studies--and higher education generally. In a way, they were three Mrs. Smiths to me.

The point, of course, is that this dissertation is as much a function of the context within which it was written as the essays by Kara and Sam and Mary were functions of the contexts within which they were written. What it contains and how it makes its arguments can be traced to the same kinds of factors that shaped those essays. Indeed, there are passages in this dissertation that were profoundly and directly influenced by specific comments
from my committee members, in the same way that Mary's
descriptive essay was profoundly and directly shaped by
Mrs. Smith's feedback (see Chapter V).

It is fascinating--and troubling--that this document,
which will be (and already has been) integral to my
academic identity, is the product of such a social and
collaborative process.
First Draft

She stood there quietly, all alone, watching the world go by. Isolated, she hovered shyly in the corner, blue eyes shifting back and forth nervously. She didn't want to stare. Her face was frozen in a smile that did not reach her eyes, for they held a sadness masked only by people's wish to deny it. Her full lips were a scarlet imprint on her pale features. Her slight summer tan had faded back to its normal pallid self. Her long, dusty-blonde hair cascaded around her shoulders, adding a finishing touch. One could have said she was pretty, but she would have denied it.

As she stood there, silent, trying to blend into the walls, anyone who glanced her way would have noticed her fingers twisting nervously around a strand of hair. Her oval face rested in a solemn pose, her smile fading for no one saw it. Her teeth, now straight after years of braces, hid behind her lips. She hated to smile because she didn't like the effect it had upon her face. Her eyes, no longer framed by glasses, were filled with tears. A few stragglers slipped down her rosy cheek, streaking a line of pale behind them. What good was improvement if no one noticed? She had no one she could call a true friend, for no one knew the real her. She kept her personality hidden, deep in the recesses of her mind where no one could see it. They might not like the real her. Acceptance was all she wanted, to be accepted and like, even if that meant wearing a mask. To be rejected was to be lonely, and loneliness scared her. She did not mind being alone by choice, because that was only temporary, whereas having no friends meant constant loneliness.

Standing alone in the corner, watching life pass her by, a thoughtful look spread across her melancholy face. She watched others as they flung bits and pieces of their lives in her face, like splashes of color upon a white canvas. She longed to join in, to blend her colors in with the others, but she was afraid, afraid of what the others might say. So she kept watching as life slipped away.
She was overwhelmed by her faults, and blind to her good points, seeing only the negative. She ignored the fact that she was always there as a shoulder for anyone who needed one, even if they didn't offer one back. She was always willing to offer a helping hand to anyone who needed one, and never forgot a birthday. Any thanks were shrugged off as she retreated to the prison of her mind. Her genuine caring and concerned had earned her a place as a shadow on the wall.

In a burst of light she was illuminated, the light casting away the shadows like thieves in the night. At first she tried to dodge it, but then stood in the spotlight, enjoying the warmth. It touched and caressed her skin, dancing off it like butterflies in a lily field. She had found the Lord, and was immersed in light forever. Suddenly, everywhere she looked was a friend, a brother or sister to share her joys, her triumphs and even her losses. They picked her up and carried her along when times became rough, and helped her cope when things looked dim. As long as her heart remained open to the Lord, she would have friends, people to laugh with her and cry with her, people to share life with.

They helped her become aware of her good points, and suddenly her faults didn't seem so overwhelming. She appreciated who she was and her confidence swelled within her. Her personality escaped the deep crevices of her mind and bloomed forth like flowers in the spring. A real smile perched on her face, giving the impression of the sun coming out after a long, cold winter.

As I look in the mirror I see who I am now, and who I used to be. I see where I have been, and where I want to go. I dream of what the future holds, knowing as long as I hold the Lord in my heart, I will get through the bad times and live for the good ones. I will not hide in the shadows anymore.

Second Draft

She stood there quietly, all alone, watching the world go by. Isolated, she hovered shyly in the corner, blue eyes shifting back and forth nervously. She didn't want to stare. Her face was frozen in a smile that did not reach her eyes, for they held a sadness masked only by people's wish to deny it. Her full lips were a scarlet print on her pale features. Her slight summer tan had faded back to its normal pallid self. Her long, dusty blonde hair cascaded around her shoulders, adding a finishing touch. One could have said she was pretty, but she would have denied it.
As she stood there, silent, trying to blend into the walls, anyone who glanced her way would have noticed her fingers twisting nervously around a strand of hair. Her oval face rested in a solemn pose, her smile fading, for no one saw it. Her teeth, now straight after years of braces, hid behind her lips. She hated to smile because she didn't like the effect it had upon her face. Her eyes, no longer framed by glasses, were filled with tears. A few stragglers slipped down her rosy cheek, streaking a line of pale behind them. What good was improvement if no one noticed?

She had no one she could call a true friend, for no one knew the real her. She kept her personality hidden, deep in the recesses of her mind where no one could see it. They might not like the real her. Acceptance was all she wanted; to be accepted and like, even if that meant wearing mask. To be rejected was to be lonely, and loneliness scared her. She did not mind being alone by choice, because that was only temporary, whereas having no friends meant constant loneliness.

Standing alone in the corner, watching life pass her by, a thoughtful look spread across her melancholy face. She watched others as they flung bits and pieces of their lives in her face, like splashes of color upon a white canvas. She longed to join in, to blend her colors in with the others, but she was afraid, afraid of what the others might say. So she kept watching as life slipped away.

She was overwhelmed by her faults and blind to her good points, seeing only the negative. She ignored the fact that she was always there as a shoulder for anyone who needed one, even if they didn't offer one back. She was always willing to offer a helping hand to anyone who needed one, and never forgot a birthday. Any thanks were shrugged off as she retreated to the prison of her mind. Her genuine caring and concerned had earned her a place as a shadow on the wall.

In a burst of light she was illuminated, the light casting away the shadows like thieves in the night. At first she tried to dodge it, but then stood in the spotlight, enjoying the warmth. It touched and caressed her skin, dancing off it like butterflies in a lily field. She had found the Lord, and was immersed in light forever. Suddenly, everywhere she looked was a friend, a brother or sister to share her joys, her triumphs and even her losses. They picked her up and carried her along when times became rough, and helped her cope when things looked dim. As long as her heart remained open to the Lord, she would have friends; people to laugh with her and cry with her, people to share life with.
They helped her become aware of her good points, and suddenly her faults didn't seem so overwhelming. She appreciated who she was and her confidence swelled within her. Her personality escaped the deep crevices of her mind and bloomed forth like flowers in the spring. A real smile perched on her face, giving the impression of the sun coming out after a long, cold winter.

As I look in the mirror I see who I am now, and who I used to be. I see where I have been, and where I want to go. I dream of what the future holds, knowing as long as I hold the Lord in my heart, I will get through the bad times and live for the good ones. I will not hide in the shadows anymore.

Third Draft

She stood there quietly, all alone, watching the world go by. Isolated, she hovered shyly in the corner, blue eyes shifting back and forth nervously. She didn't want to stare. Her face was frozen in a smile that did not reach her eyes, for they held a sadness hidden only because people pretended not to see it. Her full lips were a scarlet print on her pale features. Her slight summer tan had faded back to its normal pallid self. Her long, dusty blonde hair cascaded around her shoulders, adding a finishing touch. An admirer could have said she was pretty, but she would have denied it.

As she stood there, silent, trying to blend into the walls, anyone who glanced her way would have noticed her fingers twisting nervously around a strand of hair. Her oval face rested in a solemn pose, her smile fading for no one saw it. Her teeth, now straight after years of braces, hid behind her lips. She hated to smile because she didn't like the effect it had upon her face. Her eyes, no longer framed by glasses, were filled with tears. A few stragglers slipped down her rosy cheeks, tracing a path to her chin. What good was improvement if no one noticed?

She had no one she could call a true friend, for no one knew the real her. She kept her personality hidden, deep in the recesses of her mind where no one could see it. Other people might not like the real her. Acceptance was all she wanted. She longed to be part of the "in crowd." She wanted to laugh and play games with the others, to be surrounded by people who liked her. She would do anything for this acceptance, even if it meant wearing mask and hiding her real self, because to be rejected was to be lonely, and loneliness scared her. She did not mind being alone by choice, because that was only temporary whereas having no friends meant constant loneliness.
Standing alone in the corner, she watched as a flock of the "in crowd" passed her by. An envious look spread across her melancholy face as she saw them laughing and having fun, sharing secrets and tales about their boyfriends. She watched jealously as they flung bits and pieces of their lives in her face like splashes of color upon a white canvas. She longed to join in, to blend her colors in with the others, but she was afraid, afraid of what the others might say. She watched as they slipped away.

Overwhelmed by her faults, she was blind to her good points and saw only the negative. She ignored the fact that she was always there as a shoulder for anyone who needed one, even if one wasn't offered back. She was always willing to offer a helping hand to anyone who needed one and never forgot a birthday. She shrugged off any thanks she received, retreating again to the prison of her mind.

Suddenly, a burst of light illuminated her, the light casting away the shadows like thieves in the night. At first she tried to dodge it, but then stood in the spotlight, enjoying the warmth. It touched and caressed her skin, dancing off it like butterflies in a lily field. She had found the Lord and was immersed in light forever. Everywhere she looked was a friend, a brother or sister to share her joys, her triumphs and even her losses. Her newfound friends picked her up and carried her along when times became rough and helped her cope when things looked dim. As long as her heart remained open to the Lord, she would have friends: people to laugh with her and cry with her, people to accept her for who she was, not who she pretended to be.

They helped her become aware of her good points and suddenly her faults didn't seem so overwhelming. She appreciated who she was and her confidence swelled within her. Her personality escaped the deep crevices of her mind and bloomed forth like flowers in the spring. A real smile perched on her face, giving the impression of the sun coming out after a long, cold winter.

As I look in the mirror I see who I am now and who I used to be. I see where I have been and where I want to go. I dream of what the future holds, knowing as long as I hold the Lord in my heart, I will get through the bad times and live for the good ones. I will not hide in the shadows anymore.
APPENDIX B

Rubrics for Mrs. Smith's Advanced Composition Class
Creative Description

CREATIVE DESCRIPTION focuses on sensory responses reflecting attitude, mood and emotional involvement beyond the straightforward objective description.

You choose your details to support ONE dominant impression.

Provide enough detail to form a realistic image.

Use ALL means.

Be precise. Use lean, vivid description. Remember that carefully chosen nouns and verbs are more effective than adverbs and adjectives. In description, word choice is very important.

YOU MAY CHOOSE BETWEEN THESE TWO ASSIGNMENTS FOR THE DESCRIPTIVE PAPER:

1) Write a detailed descriptive paper about a place that leaves you with a feeling of sadness, joy, loneliness, or contentment. Make sure that all of the details contribute to the mood or central impression.

2) Write a detailed descriptive essay about a school event such as a basketball game, wrestling meet, school assembly, school dance (Homecoming, Prom, etc.), a Friday night football game (or the Saturday afternoon rain-swept Central High football game two years ago), etc. Make sure that all of the details contribute to the mood or central impression.

STEPS--
1. Choose the place or event
2. List impressions.
3. From the list decide on the dominant impression.
4. Eliminate those details that don't support this impression.
5. Add any new details you can think of to support this impression.
6. Check that you have used all five senses.
7. Now write.
8. When revising check:
   Do you have one dominant impression?
   Do all details support this?
   Have you used all senses?
   Have you chosen appropriate and clear nouns and verbs?
   Is your description precise and vivid?
SCORING GUIDE FOR DESCRIPTION

QUALIFIED
This description uses many sensory details contributing to one dominant impression. It uses lean, vivid description with carefully chosen nouns and verbs. This paper creates a certain emotional response in the reader's mind that causes him or her to feel as if he or she has actually experienced what you are describing. It is virtually free of errors in spelling, mechanics, usage and sentence structure.

ACCEPTED
This paper does not use all the senses. The dominant impression may not be clear. It may concentrate more on adjectives and adverbs than on nouns and verbs. It may contain a few errors in spelling, mechanics, usage and structure.

UNACCEPTED
This paper fails to describe this event or place in any detail. It may use only one sense to describe and may contain no dominant impression. The writer has not included enough details to give the reader a clear picture. Serious errors in spelling, mechanics, usage, sentence structure, and word choice give the impression of inferior writing.
1. Write about any aspect of the topic "I Have a Dream" as used by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in his famous speech which carries the same title. In other words, write about any aspect of the life, hopes, or work of Dr. King. Consider how his quest for social and economic justice affects us today. What challenges still face us?

2. Write on the theme of the 1989 Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration in Thompson, "Lift Every Voice: A Community Celebration," and what the theme means to you. Dr. King was interested in improving the quality of life for all people. How far have we come? Why is it a time for celebration?

You may write in any form except poetry: drama, narrative, etc.

QUALIFIED
This paper concentrates on either the celebration or Martin Luther King, Jr. himself. It has an effective introduction and conclusion which clearly establish the purpose of the paper. The word choice is appropriate and enhances the writing. The paper contains effective transitions and is virtually free of errors in spelling, mechanics, usage, and sentence structure. It demonstrates superior control of language.

ACCEPTED
The paper concentrates on one of the two purposes, but the purpose may not be totally clear. The word choice may be of a less sophisticated style, and some paragraphs may lack transitions. The paper may contain a few errors in spelling, mechanics, usage, and structure.

UNACCEPTED
The paper does not have a clear focus, or the organization may not be clear. The paper may contain elementary word choice or be informal in style. Serious errors in mechanics, usage, and structure give the impression of inferior writing.
Cause and Effect Assignment

You may choose between these two assignments for your cause and effect essay:

1) How do you account for the popularity of one of the following phenomena: shopping malls, rock videos, romance novels, sensationalist tabloids like the National Enquirer? Write an essay in which you consider remote as well as immediate causes for the success of the phenomenon you choose and analyze the effects of the phenomenon on society. Use formal essay style.

2) Between 1946 and 1964, the birth rate increased considerably. Some of the effects attributed to this "baby boom" include the 1960's antiwar movement, the increase in the crime rate, and the development of feminism. Write an essay in which you explore some possible effects of the baby boom generations growing older. What trends would you expect to find in the 1990's as the bulk of the baby boomers reach middle age? When they reach retirement? Be certain you consider all the causes and effects, not just the main ones. Use formal essay style.

SCORING GUIDE

QUALIFIED
This paper considers all of the complex causes and effects of the issue you have chosen to discuss. It is logical. It uses a clear method of organization. It is written in a formal style. It is virtually free of errors in spelling, mechanics, usage, and sentence structure.

ACCEPTED
This paper may omit one of the major causes or events surrounding this topic. It may not be organized in a clear fashion, and it may not use a formal style throughout. It may contain a few errors in spelling, mechanics, usage, and structure.

UNACCEPTED
This paper may omit several of the contributory or may omit, or may not make clear, the main cause or effect. It may have some faulty reasoning. It may be informal in style. Serious errors in mechanics, usage, and sentence structure give the impression of inferior writing.
Narrative

This narrative assignment involves communicating with your parents. You will be interviewing one of your parents (or legal guardian or both of your parents if they grew up in the same town) about his/her life as it was when he/she was your age.

1) Find out where they lived. Describe the town. This includes the name of the town, the size (approximate population), social activities of the town, unique facets of the area, and any other fun or neat information you can find.

2) Discuss the school they attended. Include the name of the school, the size, a general description of the school (campus style, open classrooms, one room school house), teachers, student-teacher relationships, and any other information (unusual course, etc.). What types of extra-curricular activities were available? Were they involved in any sports or clubs?

3) Describe the "typical weekend." Just what was the weekend like? What did they do for fun? What places did they frequent? Describe the "local hangouts." What were some of the socially acceptable "rules"? Going steady? Single car dates? Double dating? Curfews?

4) What current events of the times shaped and influenced their lives? For example, for me the election of John Kennedy set the "Camelot" atmosphere which was then shattered by the Cuban Missile Crisis and Civil Rights demonstrations. Peoples' awareness of our country's tenuous position, both foreign and domestic, grew. Then the onslaught of Vietnam once again changed the public's attitude. What was the social force that influenced them?

5) In any of the above you may be able to include clothing styles, hair styles, and names of hair styles; types of music and names of groups (Do they remember the first appearance of the Beatles on "The Ed Sullivan Show"?); names of dances; prices vs. today's prices of specific items; "lingo."

Drawing from one or more of these four areas, relate an anecdote from the life of one of your parents. Make sure you show the incident rather than just tell about it. Use dialogue and narrate the anecdote with great detail. Good luck and have fun! Perhaps you will find out some details you did not know!
QUALIFIED
A superior response will not just recall the experience but will describe the event in detail using elements of narration. The narration is clear through the showing, not telling. It is virtually free of errors in spelling, mechanics, usage, and sentence structure. The paper illustrates superior control of language.

ACCEPTED
This paper recals an experience but not in as much detail. The elements of narration are not used as effectively as they could be. It may need more showing and less telling. It may contain a few errors in spelling, mechanics, usage, and sentence structure, but not so frequently as to cause concern over the writer's ability to use standard English conventions.

UNACCEPTED
This paper may fail to make clear the significance of the anecdote or may recall the experience without any detail. It may also demonstrate little command over the elements of narration. The response may contain serious errors in spelling, mechanics, usage, and sentence structure, giving the impression of inferior writing.
Definition

A considerable amount of modern knowledge is devoted simply to identifying reality. We are constantly defining and redefining. As a writer you cannot afford to operate with unexamined or naive concepts. The dictionary is not very helpful, for it is too brief or too general.

Choose one:
1) Write an essay in which you define an American hero.
2) Write an essay on the idea that prejudice is more than just a vague feeling or dislike for a group of people.
3) Using a series of examples to support your thesis, define a term that has some disagreement or confusion.

Use specific concrete examples. Be certain to approach the term from every conceivable angle; in other words use a variety of methods to define it.

QUALIFIED
The writer uses a variety of methods to concretely define a word that needs clarification. It has accuracy, vivid details, and interest. The paper is well organized and has smooth transitions between paragraphs. All paragraphs relate to the definition of the word. It is virtually free of errors in spelling, mechanics, usage, and sentence structure and shows evidence of superior control of language.

ACCEPTED
This paper defines a word, but may only use a couple of methods of development to define this term. It has accuracy, some vivid details, and some interest. The term chosen may not need much clarification. This paper's organization may not be completely clear and it may need more transitions between paragraphs. It may contain a few errors in spelling, mechanics, usage, and sentence structure, but not so frequently as to cause concern over the writer's ability to use standard English conventions.

UNACCEPTED
This paper fails to make clear the definition of the word. It may lack accuracy, vivid details, and/or interest. It may use only one method of development. The term chosen may need no clarification. The paper's organization may not be clear and it may not have any transitions between paragraphs. It may have some serious errors in spelling, mechanics, usage, and sentence structure, giving the impression of inferior writing.
Comparison and Contrast Essay

You may choose from one of these three assignments for this paper:

1) The list below is made up of pairs of words that are clearly related in meaning but differ in connotation. Select one or more pairs; then write an essay in which you discuss and elaborate on the distinction between the words in each pair you have chosen. Include in your discussion such consideration as how, when, where, why, and by whom each word is likely to be used. You should write a single, unified essay, even if you choose more than one pair: Art/Craft; Faith/Creed; Gang/Club; Imaginative/Fanciful; Instrument/Tool; Intelligent/Smart; Labor/Work; Lady/Woman; Recreation/Play; Religion/Cult; Terrorist/Revolutionary.

2) Watch a local television news show and then a national news broadcast. Write an essay in which you compare the two television shows, paying particular attention to the news content and to the broadcasting styles of the journalists.

3) Choose two different sports, and write an essay in which you discuss how the players are similar and different.

QUALIFIED
This paper considers all of the comparisons and contrasts of the topics you have chosen to discuss. It is logical. It uses a clear method of organization. It is written in formal style throughout. It is virtually free of errors in spelling, mechanics, usage, and sentence structure.

ACCEPTED
This paper may omit one obvious or one lesser comparison or contrast concerning this topic. It may not be organized in a clear fashion, and it may not use formal style throughout. It may contain a few errors in spelling, mechanics, usage, and sentence structure.

UNACCEPTED
This paper may omit several of the comparisons or contrasts concerning this topic. It is not organized in a clear fashion and may have faulty reasoning. It may be too informal in style. Serious errors in spelling, mechanics, usage, and sentence structure give the impression of inferior writing.
**Persuasion essay**

Select a controversial topic that interests you (and has not been overused), and write an essay. Direct your essay to readers who do not share your views and try to convince them that your position is reasonable. Be sure to acknowledge the views your audience holds and to refute any criticisms of your argument that you can anticipate. Try to appeal both to reason and to emotion to be effective. Clear your specific topic with the teacher.

**QUALIFIED**
This paper uses logical arguments to successfully defend a point of view. It has an interesting introduction and effective conclusion. All major points are addressed. Arguments against the writer's position are mentioned and well-refuted. All pertinent information is correctly cited with correct footnotes or endnotes. A correct bibliography is included. It is virtually free of errors in spelling, mechanics, usage, and sentence structure. There is evidence of superior control of language.

**ACCEPTED**
This paper uses mainly logical arguments to defend a point of view. It has a fairly interesting introduction and an effective conclusion. It may omit one major point. It may have one argument against the writer's position. All necessary information may not be cited. Footnotes or endnotes may not be completely correct. Bibliography is included but may not be fully correct. It may contain errors in spelling, mechanics, usage, and sentence structure, but not enough to interfere with the meaning of the essay.

**UNACCEPTED**
This paper does not use logical arguments to defend a point of view. The introduction and conclusion may not be effective. It may omit several major points. It may have no arguments against the writer's position to refute. Footnotes or endnotes are not utilized correctly, or are missing. A bibliography may not be included. It may contain many errors in spelling, mechanics, usage, and sentence structure.
Editorial Assignment

A good reporter attempts to write a news story factually and as unbiased as humanly possible. This is not the case on the editorial page. The editorial page exists for the purpose of presenting opinions about the issues. Editorials are written in conventional essay form and are generally of the following types: informative; explanatory; laudatory; humorous; interpretive; and controversial.

Choose one of the following:

1) You may research an issue facing the school district, the local community, or the city and write an editorial for the school paper, the local paper, or the city paper. Be sure to focus on one of the purposes of editorials listed above.

2) You may choose instead to react to an editorial printed in one of these publications (include a copy of the editorial) and write a letter to the editor that accomplishes one of the suggested purposes.

3) Based on your shadowing experience, you may write a letter for the public forum on what you learned, how your ideas may or may not have changed, and/or how grateful you are to your host or hostess.

4) Based on your interview with the superintendent of the school district, you may write a letter for the public forum on what you have learned, how your ideas may or may not have changed, and/or what you view as the major issue facing our school district.

QUALIFIED
This paper has a thesis with both facts that support it and lively details to add interest. It achieves completely at least one of the purposes listed above. It is organized with transitions tying ideas together. It is virtually free of errors in spelling, mechanics, usage, and sentence structure, thus illustrating superior control of language.

ACCEPTED
This paper has a thesis with a few facts and lively details supporting it. It may need more of these. It only partially achieves one of the purposes listed above. It is organized in terms of relevance with transitions between paragraphs. It may contain several errors in spelling,
mechanics, usage, and sentence structure, but not enough to interfere with the meaning of the essay.

UNACCEPTED
This paper may lack a thesis and/or offer few facts and/or lively details. It does not achieve one of the purposes listed above. It may lack depth. It may be unorganized and/or without transitions. It may have many errors in spelling, mechanics, usage, and sentence structure.

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Profile Assignment

Write a profile about the most unusual person you know. You need one dominant impression (his unusualness). Be certain to give a well-rounded portrait through showing, not telling.

QUALIFIED
This paper shows, not merely tells, a well-rounded portrait of an individual. There is clearly one dominant impression. It is virtually free of errors in spelling, mechanics, usage, and sentence structure. There is evidence of superior control of language.

ACCEPTED
This paper does not do as much showing as telling. The portrait may not be well-rounded and there may not be a clear dominant impression. It may not be long enough to give us a clear picture. There may be a few errors in spelling, mechanics, usage, and sentence structure.

UNACCEPTED
This paper does much more telling than showing. There is not one dominant impression and/or there is not a well-rounded picture of the person. There may be serious errors in spelling, mechanics, usage, and sentence structure, giving the impression of inferior writing.
APPENDIX C

Sample Peer Conference Form

Cause/Effect Assignment
CAUSE AND EFFECT CHECKLIST

1. What is the thesis? Is it correctly placed?
2. What are the contributory causes mentioned?
3. What is the main cause? Is it immediate or remote?
4. Are any causes omitted? What are they?
5. What are the immediate effects?
6. What are the long-term effects?
7. Is there any faulty logic?
8. Is a formal tone used throughout?
9. Are transitions used effectively?
FINDAL EVALUATION FOR CAUSE-EFFECT

(title of paper)

WRITER ___________________________ EVALUATOR ________________

CIRCLE THE COMMENT ABOUT EACH TRAIT THAT FITS YOUR PERSONAL RESPONSE. ADD OR DELETE COMMENTS IF NECESSARY, THEN ASSIGN A NUMERICAL VALUE.

1 2 3 4 5

Personal Voice
Use your own words. Did you write the first draft quickly?
I hear your voice at times. Read your draft aloud and make it smooth to read.
Great! I hear a distinct voice. It fits your writing.

1 2 3 4 5

Beginning
Your beginning does not move me. Try again.
Pretty good beginning. Try some other beginnings.
Good opening. I was drawn into your writing.

1 2 3 4 5

First Aspect of the Situation
Too much/too little attention to the problem/solution/cause/effect. Try again
Your description of problem/solution/cause/effect is taking shape. Keep at it
You develop the problem/solution/cause/effect remarkably well.

1 2 3 4 5

Second Aspect of the Situation
Too much/too little attention to the problem/solution/cause/effect. Try again
Your description of problem/solution/cause/effect is taking shape. Keep at it
You develop the problem/solution/cause/effect remarkably well.

1 2 3 4 5

Proofreading
Spend more time here. Slow down and use a handbook/dictionary.
Still some noticeable errors. Did you move all corrections from the editing strip?
I had to search for the error or two I found. Bravo for you!

1 2 3 4 5

Effectiveness of your Problem-Solution-Cause-Effect Writing
I'm unconvinced. Not bad. A little The two aspects take time.
Do more prewriting. more time in revision/proofreading will pro-
Convincing ideas described. You take time. produce a solid paper. convince me.
EDITING FORM

Writer ________________________________

Name of Editor ________________________

Self-evaluation with help from one other person.

1. Does the writer use weak words like, "you, one, things, nice, great, there, a lot, very, etc."? Circle these words on the rough draft and make suggestions for improved word choice here.

2. Does the paper include any sentences fragments or run-ons? Mark them on the rough draft.

3. Any subject/verb agreement errors? Mark them on the rough draft.

4. Any pronoun/antecedent errors? Mark them on the rough draft.

5. Any punctuation and spelling errors? Mark them on the rough draft.

6. Does the writer use too many "to-be" verbs rather than picture words? Mark them on the rough draft and make suggestions for improved word choice.

7. Are the verbs in passive rather than active voice? Correct them if possible.

8. Is the entire paper in the same tense? Mark tense changes on the rough draft.

9. Is the paper written in first person or third person? On the rough draft mark any use of second person.

The final copy should reflect editing revisions based on this evaluation.
APPENDIX D

Syllabus for Mrs. Smith's Advanced Composition Course
OUTLINE FOR AN INDIVIDUALIZED COMPOSITION COURSE

Course Content:
Nonfiction prose in the form of short essays make up the content of this course.

GOOD WRITING IS REWRITING

Definitions of the status of compositions after evaluation:

UNACCEPTED = A paper submitted for evaluation which shows little evidence of drafting, or which is obviously incomplete, or which has multiple major composition flaws, or which is not properly edited into standard, edited, American English will be judged to be Unaccepted. Unaccepted papers do not count as one of the ten compositions required by the course.

ACCEPTED = A paper submitted for evaluation which shows a good and fairly successful effort on composition, drafting, and editing to the point that it contains only one or two major or minor composition flaws and very few minor editing errors will be judged to be Accepted. Accepted papers count as one of the ten assignments required by the course. Only Accepted papers will be evaluated in depth.

QUALIFIED = A paper submitted for evaluation about which the evaluator has no reservations regarding content completeness, development, presentation, standard stylistic features such as paragraphing, transitions, clarity of thesis, unity, etc., and mechanical editing features will be judged to be Qualified. Qualified papers count as one of the ten required by the course.

Requirements and Activities:

1. Students will write 10 ACCEPTED compositions (5 each nine weeks) over the course of the semester.

2. First nine weeks the student will write 1 NARRATIVE, 1 PERSUASION PAPER, 1 CAUSE AND EFFECT ESSAY, 1 DESCRIPTIVE ESSAY, and 1 CONTEST PAPER.

3. Second nine weeks the student will write 1 DEFINITION PAPER, 1 COMPARISON AND CONTRAST ESSAY, 1 PROFILE, 1 EDITORIAL (USING RESEARCHED INFORMATION), and 1 LITERARY ESSAY.
4. Students will have at least 2 compositions Accepted by Interim time (Feb. 21 and April 25) for both grading periods. For the first nine-week grading period, FIRST PAPER due Feb. 9, SECOND PAPER due Feb. 21, THIRD PAPER due March 2, FOURTH PAPER (PERSUASION PAPER if not previously submitted) due March 14, and FIFTH PAPER due March 30. For the second nine-week grading period, FIRST PAPER due April 16, SECOND PAPER due April 24, THIRD PAPER (Literary Analysis) due May 10, FOURTH PAPER due May 18, and FIFTH PAPER due May 29. These essays must be completed by the due dates and may not be worked on after the final turn-in.

5. If a student completes a Qualified paper before the due date, he/she will earn extra credit points of one per day which will be banked for the exam. If no formal exam is given, these extra credit points will be used to adjust the final grade.

6. To pass the course, students must write one Qualified paper each grading period.

7. Students must schedule conferences with the instructor for the verbal evaluation of each composition. Some of these conferences may be outside of class time.

8. Students must allow their peers to read their papers and allow their work to be duplicated for class discussion. An occasional work of a sensitive nature may be exempted.

9. Students must keep one edited copy of each composition in a folder for final review. These are to be kept by the teacher.

Class Procedure:

The instructor's class time will be divided between presenting paper ideas and examples and making general comments about technique and style, usually in the opening and closing minutes of class; coaching conferences with individuals about papers in progress; and evaluation conferences.

Students' class time will be divided between lectures, writing, conferences, reading other students' work, and going to the library.

When students have compositions they judge ready to be evaluated, they attach peer evaluation sheets to their papers. They find they of their classmates to read their paper, and, in writing on a form provided by the teacher,
they comment on its strengths and weaknesses, and recommend the paper to the instructor for Accepted status.

Grading:

At the end of the nine weeks the following grades will be assigned:

A grade of "A" will be assigned to students who have met all of the requirements and have written four Qualified papers each nine weeks.

A grade of "B" will be assigned to students who have met all of the requirements and have written three Qualified papers each nine weeks.

A grade of "C" will be assigned to students who have met all of the requirements and have written two Qualified papers each nine weeks.

A grade of "D" will be assigned to students who have met all of the requirements and have written a Qualified paper each nine weeks.

The final grade will be lowered one letter grade for each missing composition (with the exception of the literary analysis which, if missing, will lower the student's grade two letter grades.)

At the end of the semester students may complete a theory-based examination which will include points earned on quizzes and extra credit.

Plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses. One way to avoid being accused of them is to work in class on the various assignments. "Working in class" entails typing on the computer, editing a hard copy of the paper, reviewing another student's writing, discussing writing problems/concerns with another student or the teacher, etc.

While the emphasis of the course is on the writing process and especially the revision step, one of the significant goals of the writing process is the publication step. Students must attend class during the final exam period to participate in the final reading of one of their best papers. Students must be in class not only to read their papers but also to support their classmates in their reading and to offer comments to the writers.
I understand the requirements and expectations of this course. Furthermore, I understand that if I am absent from class on the day that my papers are due, I am still responsible for handing in these assignments on the specified due-dates. I also understand that if this class has only a "participation final," I must be present for the entire test period or I will receive one grade lower for the semester.

______________________________
Student's signature

______________________________
Parent's signature

Return by Friday, January 26. Failure to return this form by the due date will result in a reduction of five (5) points per day from the Exam grade.
APPENDIX E

First Draft of Kara's Persuasive Essay, "Major Punishment For Minors"

Roach, Thompson, and Cooper all have more than brutal murders in common; they are all on Death Row waiting for execution. This brings up a moral question on whether or not capital punishment is the right solution for the crime. This is especially a big issue in dealing with the fact that none of the murderers were over eighteen when they committed their grisly act.

Due to a significant rise in violent crimes being committed by today's youth, the states are looking for harsher punishment to deter young criminals. Currently, twenty-seven states allow the death penalty for minors, and others may follow in the near future. Angry citizens, enfluoriated by the surge in violence, are in support of these harsher penalties (U.S. News and World Report p.6).

Most nations, however, do not allow the execution of those under 18. In any murder situation, it is hard to judge whether or not the person was mentally capable of understanding his actions and the consequences they would have. This plea is especially prevalent when dealing with minors because their understanding of right and wrong must be fully grasped before a sentence can be handed down. Such was the case with Terry Roach. His lawyers claimed this illiterate child was incapable of making the distinction between right and wrong, claiming at an IQ of 80 he was mentally retarded.

According to James C. Anders, a Fifth Circuit Solicitor, about 40% of the population is dealing with less than that. He also states that Roach knew what was right and wrong, that his is just a mean person (Stengel p. 22).

Anyone above the age of five can clearly understand the difference between what is acceptable behavior and what is not. A moral code is installed into young children, one which outlines which behaviors are acceptable and which are not. No one in their teens, even if they were under 16, could brutally murder someone and not know that it was a serious crime. The consequences may not be understood, but a murder could not be committed due to ignorance.

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What of their parents didn't teach them the proper morals? What if the parents beat and abuse the children, teaching them voilence is okay? Certainly the children can't be blamed then for their crime, but the parents must be the ones to accept the guilt.

It is true the vast majority of death row populations, both adult and juvenile, come from poor and deprived homes. Some say this is reason enough to commit the horrendous murders that they do. As in Paula Cooper's case, abuse from her parents caused a tremendous build up of hatred and anger that finally boiled over and inspired her to kill Mrs. Pelke.

This does not make the murder any less gruesome, however. Just knowing she had a broken homelife does not excuse her from the fact that she viciously attacked and murdered an old, defenseless woman. Abuse is an ugly chain, one that is hard to break, but it does not give the victims a right to inflict pain upon others, nor does it excuse them when they do so.

Not only is capital punishment in bold violation of the constitution by cruel and unusual punishment, but it is also hypocritical. If it is wrong to kill, then why is the state allowed to take a young life? This person, through rehabilitation and time in jail, could ultimately be cultured into an honest citizen. Instead, the courts are blatantly stating that they have power over God to decide who lives and who dies.

The sad fact is that ultimately jail has a negative, instead of positive, reaction on juveniles. Being cooped up with other hard-core criminals, increased jail time makes them come out worse than at first. Rehabilitating only works in a select few, most of the cold-blooded murderers beyond any help the centers can offer. In such cases the death penalty is the only solution.

True, the life of the criminal has not yet reached maturity, but if they are old enough to kill than they are old enough to accept the maximum penalty available. Why should the age of the criminal excuse the full penalty of the law? Isn't this a form of prejudice against an older person who may have committed the same crime at a different age? Juveniles basically feel safe to do anything they want, including rape and murder, for up until recently the punishment was fairly lenient. After a few years in Juvenile Detention Hall, the child would be back on the streets again, free to commit the same crime. By ensuring capital punishment for the worst offenders, maybe other potential delinquents would think twice before acting upon violent impulses.

Two wrongs don't make a right, and by executing the juvenile killer the life of the victim won't be restored, but consider the effect an execution would have on
prospective criminals. Roach, before his execution in January of '86 was quoted as saying, "I pray that my fate will someday save another kid that ends up on the wrong side of the track."

By installing harsher punishment, I believe the juveniles will realize that by committing serious crimes, they receive serious punishment. It has to be considered which is more important, the age of the criminal, or the crime itself. When dealing with cold-blooded killers, the answer must be the crime itself, regardless of age.
APPENDIX F

Mary's Descriptive Essay, "Nerves"

First Draft (shared with three peers)

Valentine's Day is a day of love and affection. It's a time of year where a person tells or shows the people they love or care for how they feel about them. Thompson High School as well as other schools have a traditional Valentines Day Dance. What makes this dance different from any other dance is that this particular dance is a Sadey Hawkins dance. The Sadey Hawkins dance tradition consists mostly of the girls asking the guys out. Some say that asking another person out is a piece of cake. For years guys have been made fun of for being afraid of asking a girl out. The truth is that asking someone out is a difficult thing to do. Pride, hope, and honor are held out on the line. There is never a guarantee of a positive answer and there is always a possibility of humiliation and a heart being broken. Yet, with all this in mind, there are still girls that jump at the chance of asking their heartthrob out, but others, including me, have trouble just talking to guys, let alone asking them out. This year I decided to put all of my pride aside and take a chance.

My unbelievable story all began when my friends and I casually walked into Wendy's. I smelled the greasy hamburgers cooking back in the kitchen. My taste buds watered like fountains at the soon to be taste of a juice Big Classic with Cheese, a side order of fries, and a large frosty. My stomach went wild with anticipation of getting some food into it.

We quickly got into the food line. Seconds later I felt an elbow jab into my side. I quickly turned around to see what June wanted. I looked at her. She was staring off into space. My curiosity made me follow her glance. My eyes led me to a sight that turned my insides out. It was Spencer. He was standing ahead of us in line and wearing his usual high tops, Levis jeans, tee-shirt, and ski jacket. He casually flashed that provocative smile at us. In an instant, I felt my face heat up like a thermometer put on a hot stove.
Seconds past by but they felt like hours. I smiled back at him and as fast as lightening looked away. I turned toward Kim; she chuckled at how my face had turned so red.

"Do you think he knows?" I asked her nervously.

"No way. He can't know, you haven't even asked him yet," she responded, rolling her eyes in disbelief.

I tried hard to muster up enough courage to look up from the floor. I swear I felt like they were permanently super-glued there. All I could hear was the thunderous beating of my heart. It was thumping like a runaway train. My hands shook like tremors so I put them in my pockets. My stomach felt as if were being clenched and pulled down by an immense gravitational force. I felt small pebbles of sweat forming on the back of my neck. I took short quick breaths so I wouldn't faint. By this time the gum I had been chewing on since third period was completely stale.

"Go ahead. You can do this. It's not that hard," was what I saying to psych myself up. I took a deep breath looked up and gave the cashier my order. I couldn't believe it. I was totally petrified of asking a guy out. "O.K. this is it." I took a deep breath to relieve some tension.

"Spencer," I asked as my voice cracked.

"Yeah," he replied not noticing my obvious nervous state.

"Are um. Are you aaaaaa," I tried so hard to contain my anxiety. Finally I looked straight up at the ceiling and said, "Spencer, are you going to the Valentines Dance?"

"No," he replied putting a frie in his mouth.

"Well, do you want to go?" I asked wipping my sweaty hands on my faded blue jeans.

"Sure," he said as a smile formed on his face.

Momently deafened by my beating heart, I didn't hear him right away. It was like hearing a faint voice echo when you're lost in the woods. Then all of the sudden it hit me, he said, "Yes." Well, actually it was a sure. But that is a type of yes, right? Or did he mean sure he would go, if the right person asked him. Oh, I had to know or I would drive myself crazy.

"Do you want to go with me?" I asked anxiously for the second time.

He looked at me as if I were crazy, weird, or just plain deaf.

"Yes, with you," he said knodding his head to reasure me that he would go with ME.

"O.K." I said trying to seem cool, calm, and collected about the whole ordeal.

Totally relieved by the outcome I turned to face the counter, picked up my food tray, and looked around for a table. I couldn't bring myself to eat all the food I had
ordered because butterflies that were in my stomache were fluttering so violently. I still couldn't believe how extremely difficult it was to ask someone out on a date.

Looking back on that experience I realize what guys have to go through for a date with someone. They deserve a lot of credit for having so much guts, and my heart goes out to them.

Second Draft (shared with Mark)

Valentine's Day is a day of love and affection. It's a time of year where a person tells or shows the people they love or care for how they feel. Thompson High School, as well as other schools, have a traditional Valentine's Day Dance. What makes this dance different from any other dances is that this particular dance is a "Sadey Hawkins Dance". The "Sadey Hawkins" tradition consists mostly of the girls asking the guys to the dance. Some say that asking another person out is an easy task. For years, guys have been made fun of for being afraid to ask a girl out on a date. The truth is, asking someone out is not as easy as it may seem. Pride, hope, and honor are on the line without a guarantee of a positive outcome and there is always the possibility of being humiliated and turned down. Yet, with all this in mind some girls still jump at the chance of asking their heart throbs out; while others, including myself, have trouble just talking to guys, let alone asking them out. This year I decided to put all of my pride aside and take a chance.

My unbelievable story began when my friends and I casually walked into Wendy's. I smelled the greasy hamburgers cooking in the kitchen. My taste buds watered like fountains in anticipation of biting into a juice Big Classic with Cheese, a side order of fries, and drinking up a large frosty.

We quickly got into the food line. Seconds later, I felt an elbow jab into my side. I quickly turned around to see what June wanted. I looked at her. She was staring intensely toward the front of the line. My curiosity made me follow her glance. My eyes led me to a sight that made my insides quiver: it was Spencer. He was standing ahead of us, wearing his usual high tops, Levis jeans, tee-shirt, and ski jacket. He casually flashed that provocative smile at us. In an instant, I felt my face heat up like a thermometer put on a hot stove.

Seconds passed by, but they felt like hours. I smiled back at him and as fast as lightening looked away. I turned toward Kim. She chuckled at how red my face had become.

"Do you think he knows?" I asked her nervously.
"No way. He can't know, you haven't even asked him yet," she responded, rolling her eyes in disbelief.

I tried hard to muster up enough courage to look up from the floor. I felt like my eyes were permanently super-glued there. All I could hear was the thunderous beating of my heart: it was thumping like a runaway train. My hands shook like tremors, so I put them in my pockets. I felt the intense heat from my hands penetrate thru my jeans. My stomache felt as if it were being clenched and pulled down by an immense gravitational force. I felt small pebbles of sweat forming on the back of my neck. I took short quick breaths so I wouldn't faint. By this time, the gum I had been chewing since third period was, completely stale.

"Go ahead. You can do this. It's not that hard," was what I was saying to psych myself up. I took a deep breath, looked up and gave the cashier my order. I couldn't believe it. I was totally petrified of asking a guy out. "O.K. this is it." I took a deep breath to relieve some tension.


"Are um. Are you aaaaa," I tried so hard to contain my anxiety. Finally I looked straight up at the ceiling and said, "Spencer, are you going to the Valentines Dance?"

"No," he replied putting a fry in his mouth. "Well, do you want to go?" I asked wiping my sweaty hands on my faded blue jeans.

"Sure," he said as a smile formed on his face. Momentarily deafened by my beating heart, I didn't hear him right away. It was like hearing a faint voice echo when lost in the woods. Then all of the sudden it hit me, he said, "Yes." Well, actually it was a "Sure". Or did he mean sure he would go, if the right person asked him. Oh, I had to know or I would drive myself crazy.

"Do you want to go with me?" I asked anxiously for the second time.

He looked at me as if I were crazy, weird, or just plain deaf.

"Yes, with you," he said nodding his head to reassure me that he would go with ME.

"O.K." I said trying to seem cool, calm, and collected about the whole ordeal.

Totally relieved by the outcome I turned toward the counter, picked up my food tray, and looked around for a table. I couldn't bring myself to eat all the food I had ordered since the butterflies that were in my stomach were fluttering violently. I still couldn't believe how extremely difficult it was to ask someone out on a date.
Looking back on that experience I realize what guys have to go through for a date with someone. They deserve a lot of credit for having so much guts, and my heart goes out to them. Next time, a guy asks me out on a date, I will look back on this experience and consider all the trouble he went through before I answer.

Third Draft (This an all subsequent drafts were submitted to Mrs. Smith for her comment.)

Valentine's Day is a day of love and affection. It's a time of year where a person tells or shows the people they love or care for how he or she feels. Thompson High School, as well as other schools, have a traditional Valentine's Day Dance. What makes this dance different from any other dances is that this particular dance is a "Sadey Hawkins Dance". The "Sadey Hawkins" tradition consists of the girls asking the guys to the dance. Some say that asking another person out is an easy task. For years, guys have been made fun of for being afraid to ask a girl out on a date. The truth is, asking someone out is not as easy as it may seem. Pride, hope, and honor are held out on the line without a guarantee of a positive outcome and there is always the possibility of being humiliated and turned down. Yet, with all this in mind, some girls still jump at the chance of asking their heart throbs out; while others, including myself, have trouble just talking to guys, let alone asking them out. This year I decided to put all of my pride aside and take a chance.

My unbelievable story began when my friends and I casually walked into Wendy's. I smelled the greasy hamburgers cooking in the kitchen. My taste buds watered like fountains in anticipation of biting into a grease Big Classic with Cheese, a side order of fries, and drinking up a large frosty.

We quickly got into the food line. Seconds later, I felt an elbow jab into my side. I quickly turned around to see what June, my friend, wanted. I looked at her. She was staring intensely toward the front of the line. My curiosity made me follow her glance. My eyes led me to a sight that made my insides quiver...it was Spencer. He was standing ahead of us, wearing his usual dirty white high tops, faded Levis jeans, tee-shirt, and his black and gray ski jacket. He casually flashed that provocative smile at us. In an instant, I felt my face heat up like a thermometer put on a hot stove.

Seconds passed by, but they felt like hours. I smiled back at him and, as fast as lightening, looked away. I turned toward Kim. She chuckled at how red my face had turned.
"Do you think he knows?" I asked her nervously.
"No way. He can't know, you haven't even asked him yet," she responded, rolling her eyes in disbelief.

I tried hard to muster up enough courage to look up from the floor. I felt like my eyes were permanently super-glued there. All I could hear was the thunderous beating of my heart: it was thumping like a runaway train. My hands shook like tremors, so I put them in my pockets. I felt the intense heat from my hands penetrate thru my jeans. My stomach felt as if it were being clenched and pulled down by an immense gravitational force. I felt small pebbles of sweat forming on the back of my neck. I took short quick breaths so I wouldn't faint. By this time, the gum I had been chewing since third period was, completely stale.

"Go ahead. You can do this. It's not that hard," I was said to psyche myself up. I took a deep breath, looked up, and gave the cashier my order. I couldn't believe it. I was totally petrified of asking a guy out. "O.K. this is it." I took a deep breath to relieve some tension.
"Spencer," I asked as my voice cracked.
"Yeah," he replied not noticing my obvious nervous state.

"Are um. Are you aaaaaa," I tried so hard to contain my anxiety. Finally I looked straight up at the ceiling and said, "Spencer, are you going to the Valentine's Dance?"

"No," he replied putting a fry in his mouth.
"Well, do you want to go?" I asked wipping my sweaty hands on my faded blue jeans.
"Sure," he said as a smile formed on his face.
Momenterily deafened by my beating heart, I didn't hear him right away. It was like hearing a faint voice echo when lost in the woods. Then all of the sudden it hit me, he said, "Yes." Well, actually it was a "Sure". Or did he mean sure he would go, if the right person asked him. Oh, I had to know or I would drive myself crazy.
"Do you want to go with me?" I asked anxiously for the second time.

He looked at me as if I were crazy, weird, or just plain deaf.
"Yes, with you," he said nodding his head to reassure me that he would go with ME.
"Okay," I said trying to seem cool, calm, and collected about the whole ordeal.

Totally relieved by the outcome I turned toward the counter, picked up my food tray, and looked around for a table. I couldn't bring myself to eat all the food I had ordered since the butterflies that were in my stomach were fluttering violently. I still couldn't believe how extremely difficult it was to ask someone out on a date.
Looking back on that experience I realize what guys have to go through for a date with someone. They deserve a lot of credit for having so much guts, and my heart goes out to them. Next time, a guy asks me out on a date, I will look back on this experience and consider all the trouble he went through before I answer.

Fourth Draft (first revision after Mrs. Smith's comments)

Valentine's Day is a day of love and affection. It's a time of year when people tell their loved ones how they feel. Every year Thompson High School has a traditional Valentine's Day Dance. What makes this dance different from any other is that it is a "Sadie Hawkins Dance". The "Sadie Hawkins" tradition consists of the girls asking the guys to the dance. Some say that asking another person out is an easy task. For years, guys are made fun of for being afraid to ask a girl out on a date. The truth is, asking someone out is not as easy as it may seem. Pride, hope, and honor are held out on the line without a guarantee of a positive outcome and there is always the possibility of being humiliated and turned down. Yet, with all this in mind, some girls still jump at the chance of asking their heart thobs out. Then there are others, including myself, have trouble just talking to guys, let alone asking them out. This year I decided to put all of my pride aside and take a chance.

My unbelievable story began when my friends and I casually walked into Wendy's. We saw many of our friends already waiting in line, so we hurried to greet them. Seconds after rushing into line, I felt an elbow jab into my side. I quickly turned around to see what June, my friend, wanted. I looked at her. She was staring intensely toward the front of the line. My curiosity made me follow her glance. My eyes led me to a sight that made my insides quiver... it was Spencer. He was standing ahead of us, wearing his usual dirty white high top court shoes, faded Levis jeans, tee-shirt, and his black and gray ski jacket. Our eyes met and locked in an intense stare. I felt the room grow warm. The sunlight peered softly through the brown tinted windows and casted it's glow on the both of us. Everyone's conversation faded away as if in a weird dream. The distinct smell of greasy hamburger cooking in the background snapped me out of my momentary daydream. I came to in time to see Spencer flash a provocative smile at me. In an instant, I felt my face heat up like a thermometer put on a hot stove. I smiled back at him and, as fast as lightning, looked away.

I tried so hard to muster up enough courage to look up from the floor. I felt like my eyes were permanently
super-glued to the cream colored no-wax floor tiles. All I could hear was the thunderous beating of my heart: it was thumping like a runaway train. I felt my hands grow hot and sweaty, so I put them into my pockets. I felt the intense heat from my hands penetrate through my jeans. My stomach felt as if it were being clenched and pulled down by an immense gravitational force. I felt small pebbles of sweat forming on the back of my neck. I took short quick breaths so I wouldn't faint. By this time, the gum I had been chewing since third period was, completely stale. 
I couldn't believe how petrified I was of asking a guy out. I took a deep breath to relieve some tension, and held onto the railing for added support.
"Spencer," I asked as my voice cracked.
"Yeah," he replied not noticing my obvious nervous state.
"Are um. Are you aaaaaa," I tried so hard to contain my anxiety. Finally I looked straight up at the ceiling and said, "Spencer, are you going to the Valentine's Dance?"
"No," he replied.
"Well, do you want to go?" I asked wipping my sweaty hands on my faded blue jeans.
"Sure," he said as a smile formed on his face. Momentarily deafened by my beating heart, I didn't hear him right away. His voice was a faint echo lost in the woods. Then all of the sudden it hit me, he said, "Yes."
"Do you want to go with ME?" I asked, still not relying one-hundered percent on my hearing.
He looked at me as if I were crazy, weird, or just plain deaf.
"Yes, with you," he said nodding his head to reassure me that he would go with ME.
"Okay," I said trying to seem cool, calm, and collected about the whole ordeal. 
Totally relieved by the outcome I turned toward the counter, picked up my food tray, and looked around for a table. I couldn't bring myself to eat all the food I had ordered since the butterflies that were in my stomach were fluttering violently. I still couldn't believe how extremely difficult it was to ask someone out on a date. 
Looking back on that experience I realize what guys have to go through for a date with someone. They deserve a lot of credit for having so much guts, and my heart goes out to them. Next time, a guy asks me out on a date, I will look back on this experience and consider all the trouble he went through before I answer.
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My unbelievable story began when my friends and I casually walked into Wendy's. We saw many of our friends already waiting in line, so we hurried to greet them. Seconds after rushing into line, I felt an elbow jab into my side. I quickly turned around to see what June, my friend, wanted. I looked at her. She was staring intensely toward the front of the line. My curiosity made me follow her glance. My eyes led me to a sight that made my insides quiver... it was Spencer. He was standing ahead of us, wearing his usual dirty white high top court shoes, faded Levis jeans, tee-shirt, and his black and gray ski jacket.

Our eyes met and locked in an intense stare. The sunlight peered softly through the brown tinted windows and casted it's glow on the both of us. I felt the room grow warm. An eerie silence hovered over the restaurant. Everyone faded away and left the two of us standing there alone. The distinct smell of greasy hamburger cooking in the background snapped me out of my momentary daydream. I came to in time to see Spencer flash a provocative smile at me. In an instant, I felt my face heat up like a thermometer put on a hot stove. I smiled back at him and, as fast as lightning, looked away.

I tried so hard to muster up enough courage to look up from the floor. I felt like my eyes were permenantly super-glued to the cream colored no-wax floor tiles. All I could hear was the thunderous beating of my heart: it was thumping like a runaway train. I felt my hands grow hot and sweaty, so I put them into my pockets. I felt the intense heat from my hands penetrate through my jeans. My stomach felt as if it were being clenched and pulled down
by an immense gravitational force. I felt small pebbles of sweat forming on the back of my neck. I took short quick breaths so I wouldn't faint. By this time, the gum I had been chewing since third period was, completely stale. I couldn't believe how petrified I was of asking a guy out. I took a deep breath to relieve some tension, and held onto the railing for added support.


"Are um. Are you aaaaaa," I tried so hard to contain my anxiety. Finally I looked straight up at the ceiling and said, "Spencer, are you going to the Valentine's Dance?"

"No," he replied. "Well, do you want to go?" I asked wipping my sweaty hands on my faded blue jeans.

"Sure," he said as a smile formed on his face. Momenterily deafened by my beating heart, I didn't hear him right away. His voice was a faint echo lost in the woods. Then all of the sudden it hit me, he said, "Yes."

"Do you want to go with ME?" I asked, still not relying one-hundered percent on my hearing. He looked at me as if I were crazy, weird, or just plain deaf.

"Yes, with you," he said nodding his head to reassure me that he would go with ME.

"Okay," I said trying to seem cool, calm, and collected about the whole ordeal. Totally relieved by the outcome I turned toward the counter, picked up my food tray, and looked around for a table. I couldn't bring myself to eat all the food I had ordered since the butterflies that were in my stomach were fluttering violently. I still couldn't believe how extremely difficult it was to ask someone out on a date.

Looking back on that experience I realize what guys have to go through for a date with someone. They deserve a lot of credit for having so much guts, and my heart goes out to them. Next time, a guy asks me out on a date, I will look back on this experience and consider all the trouble he went through before I answer.

Sixth Draft (Mary's first revision after Mrs. Smith's deadline extension)

It was five days before the THS traditional "Sadie Hawkins" Valentine's Day Dance. This tradition consists of the girls asking the guys to the dance. The truth is, asking someone out is not as easy as it may seem.
With this in mind, I decided to put all of my pride aside and take a chance, even though, I knew my nerves were going to be put to the test.

I had not expected to see Spencer at Wendy's that day. His presence always made me nervous. He was standing in line, approximately six people ahead of my three friends and me. He was wearing his usual dirty white high top court shoes, faded Levis jeans, tee-shirt, and his black and gray ski jacket. I was trying to keep from staring at him, but in an instant our eyes met and locked in an intense stare. The sunlight peered softly through the brown tinted windows and casted it's glow on the both of us. The room grew warm. An eerie silence hovered over the restaurant. I was afraid of saying a word in fear of my voice cracking. Everyone seemed to be looking at me, waiting to hear what I was going to say. I was a puppet on stage that didn't know the script. I could feel the heat from everyone's stare. Their eyes burned holes into my body. I wanted to run away, but my legs disregarded any orders that my mind was sending. The distinct smell of greasy hamburger cooking in the backround snapped me out of my momentary daydream. I came to in time to see Spencer flash a provocative smile at me. In an instant, I felt my face heat up like a thermometer put on a hot stove. I smiled back at him and, as fast as lightning, looked away.

I noticed that the air was still thick and hard to breath. My mouth was totally parched from the tasteless gum. The cotton fray of my left pocket was damp with the sweat of my hand. The excessive beeping of the cash register was beginning to annoy me. I heard an occasional lunch order shouted back in the kitchen. Finally looking up from the floor, I couldn't find anything to focus my eyes on. My sight jumped from the nearly empty salad bar to the people sitting in the small crowded dinning room. The 30 by 45 foot dinning room kept closing in on me. I was trapped like an animal in a cage. Again, I felt my heart pound as if it were going to leap out of my chest. My boiling blood raced one-hundred miles per hour and my right hand clenched on to the railing until my knuckles turned white. My sense seemed to smear all together. I couldn't focus on anything around me. Everything blured and I felt as if I was going to faint.

"This is it," I wispered to myself.

I took in a long breath of air and asked Spencer to the dance and he accepted my invitation. I was so surprised and elated, but I tried to seem cool, calm, and collected about the whole ordeal.
I tried so hard to muster up enough courage to look up from the floor. I felt like my eyes were permanently super-glued to the cream colored no-wax floor tiles. All I could hear was the thunderous beating of my heart: it was thumping like a runaway train. I felt my hands grow hot and sweaty, so I put them into my pockets. I felt the intense heat from my hands penetrate through my jeans. My stomach felt as if it were being clenched and pulled down by an immense gravitational force. I felt small pebbles of sweat forming on the back of my neck. I took short quick breaths so I wouldn't faint. By this time, the gum I had been chewing since third period was, completely stale.

I couldn't believe how petrified I was of asking a guy out. It was five days before the Thompson High School traditional "Sadie Hawkins" Valentine's Day Dance. This tradition consists of the girls asking the guys to the dance. The truth is, asking someone out is not as easy as it may seem. With this in mind, I decided to put all of my pride aside and take a chance, even though, I knew my nerves were going to be put to the test.

I had not expected to see Spencer at Wendy's that day. His presence always made me nervous. He was standing in line, approximately six people ahead of my three friends and me. He was wearing his usual dirty white high top court shoes, faded Levis jeans, tee-shirt, and his black and gray ski jacket. I was trying to keep from staring at him, but in an instant our eyes met and met in an intense stare. The sunlight peered softly through the brown tinted windows and casted it's glow on the both of us. The room grew warm. An eerie silence hovered over the restaurant. I was afraid of saying a word in fear of my voice cracking. Everyone seemed to be looking at me, waiting to hear what I was going to say. I was a puppet on stage that didn't know the script. I could feel the heat from everyone's stare. Their eyes burned holes into my body. I wanted to run away, but my legs disregarded any orders that my mind was sending. The distinct smell of greasy hamburger cooking in the background snapped made my stomach curm uneasily.

Snapping out of my momentary daydream, I came to in time to see Spencer flash a provocative smile at me. In an instant, I felt my face heat up like a thermometer put on a hot stove. I smiled back at him and, as fast as lightning, looked away.

Finally looking up from the floor, I couldn't find anything to focus my eyes on. My sight jumped from the nearly empty Salad Bar to the people sitting in the small crowded dinning room. I noticed that the air was still thick and hard to breath. My mouth was totally parched from the tasteless gum. The cotton fray of my left pocket
was damp with the sweat of my hand. The excessive beeping
of the cash register was beginning to annoy me. I hear an
occasional lunch order shouted back in the kitchen. I
sensed that the room was getting smaller. I looked around
trying to rid myself of this feeling, but the thirty by
forty-five foot dinning room kept closing in on me. I was
traped like an animal in a cage. I began to feel my heart
pounding again, as if it were going to leap out of my
chest. My boiling blood raced, one-hundered miles per
hour, through my thin veins. My legs were weak and my
right hand clenched on to the railing until my nuckels
turned white. My sense seemed to smeer all together. I
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I took in a long breath of air and asked Spencer to
to the dance and he accepted my invitation. I was so
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Totally relieved by the outcome, I turned toward the
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trouble he went through before I answer.
APPENDIX G

Coding Schemes for Revisions and Readers' Comments

The coding schemes used to classify revisions and readers' comments for this study were adapted from classification schemes developed by Lillian Bridwell and by Stephen Witte and Lester Faigley for their respective studies of student revisions (Bridwell, "Revising Strategies"; Witte and Faigley "Analyzing Revision"). Essentially, the scheme used here is a stripped down version of Bridwell's scheme, altered slightly to incorporate a few of Witte and Faigley's ideas about coding revisions.

Several considerations influenced the development of a scheme for the present study. First, the focus of the study was not revision itself but how revision was shaped by contextual factors; therefore, the scheme need only provide numbers that might show possible connections between students' revisions and specific features of the context. Second, the naturalistic character of the study prevented the use of methods that might alter in any way the student's writing for the course. Therefore, the
students were not asked to alter their writing in ways that might make coding their revisions easier or even possible in some cases. As a result, many of the students' drafts were so marked up by their own and their peers' pens that it was sometimes impossible to determine precisely which revisions were made when and by whom; the use of word processing also made it difficult at times to determine when and by whom revisions were made. Finally, a coding scheme for readers' comments was needed that would be essentially the same as the coding scheme used for revisions. These considerations required that a simpler version of previously developed schemes, such as Bridwell's, was needed for the present study.

The scheme developed for the study included three broad categories: (1) revisions or comments concerning style, at the surface, word, and sentence levels; (2) revisions or comments concerning the organization or structure of the essay; and (3) revisions or comments concerning the content of the essay. These broad categories, and their sub-categories, break down as follows:

I. Stylistic
   a. Surface-level: mechanics (spelling, punctuation, capitalization); usage; grammar.
   b. Lexical (word-level): word choice; diction.
c. Phrase-level: meaning-preserving rephrasings; awkward or confusing phrasings.

II. Structural
Organization or structure of the essay; order of paragraphs; introduction; conclusion.

III. Content-level
a. Addition: addition of new material; more information; new ideas.
b. Deletion: deletion of existing material
c. Refocus: changes in the focus of the essay or in the main argument of the essay.
d. Clarify: clarification of specific issues, ideas, points, or arguments made in the essay which involves adding, deleting, or changing material in the essay.
e. Evaluate: evaluation of specific aspects of the essay (e.g. "This is a good point." "Your conclusion is flat.").

Except for the final category (IIIe: "Evaluate"), the schemes used for coding revisions and for coding readers' comments were identical. (The addition of the category "Evaluate" was necessary to classify the comments made by readers that were clearly evaluative [e.g. "This is good writing"; "Very nice description here." ] and did not fall into any of the other categories.) The use of the same scheme for both types of coding enabled the researcher to compare students' revisions with the kinds of comments the teacher and the students made on students' drafts.

Because the number of drafts that were actually coded for the study was small (approximately 20), no outside raters were used to code essays; all drafts were coded by the researcher. Training outside raters to code drafts for
the study, as is typical of studies which employ coding schemes, would have been difficult given the methods of gathering data used for the study. As footnote 4 in Chapter V makes clear, to classify a particular revision or reader comment required rather intimate knowledge of the workings of Mrs. Smith's class. Ideally, outside raters would have spent time in Mrs. Smith's class with the researcher, something that was not feasible given the time limitations and financial constraints of the study. Moreover, the few numerical analyses conducted in Chapters IV and V were devised only after data-gathering had been completed—a circumstance that is typical of naturalistic and ethnographic research. In short, given the nature of the present study and the small role statistical analysis played in the study, the use of outside raters to code large numbers of student drafts did not seem warranted.
APPENDIX H

Consent Forms and Explanatory Materials
Provided to Participants in the Study
A Request for Your Participation in a Research Project

Submitted by Robert Yagelski
Department of English
Ohio State University
January 23, 1990

For the next 18 weeks I will be observing and assisting in Mrs. Smith's Advanced Composition class at Thompson High School, in which your son or daughter is enrolled for the second semester of the 1989-90 school year. My observations are part of a research project, which I am conducting as part of my doctoral work at the Ohio State University. The project is designed to enable me to learn more about the factors that might influence the writing high school students do for their classes. Through this project I hope to learn more about how those factors affect students' writing; ultimately, what I learn might help teachers improve the way they teach their students to write.

In order to explore as fully as I can how students write in Mrs. Smith's class, I would like to interview various students during the semester about their work in her class. These interviews will generally be brief (approximately 30-40 minutes) and will be scheduled at the students' convenience so that they will not conflict with any other commitments the students might have. During these interviews, I will ask the students about their writing for the class, how they go about doing it, and how they feel about it. My purpose is to learn about how they write, NOT to make judgments about either their own work or the way Mrs. Smith conducts her class. I hope to interview each student in the class at least once during the semester.

I may also ask during the semester to interview parents of the students in Mrs. Smith's class. These interviews will also be brief and will focus on parents' perspectives on the writing and reading they and their son or daughter do at home. I do not expect to request interviews with all the parents of the students in the class.

This project has the support of Mrs. Smith and the official approval of the Thompson School District; it has also been approved by the Human Subjects Review Board at the Ohio State University. However, in order to conduct these interviews and to complete my project, I must ask for
your permission as well. If you consent to participating in
the project as it is described above, please sign both
copies of this consent form. Return one copy to Mrs. Smith
as soon as possible and keep the second copy for yourself.
Before you sign the consent form, be sure to read the
following section of this document carefully. KEEP IN MIND
THAT SIGNING THE CONSENT DOES NOT MEAN THAT YOU HAVE
NECESSARILY GIVEN ME PERMISSION TO CONDUCT AN INTERVIEW
WITH YOU OR YOUR SON OR DAUGHTER; IT MERELY GIVES ME
PERMISSION TO OBSERVE YOUR SON OR DAUGHTER IN MRS. SMITH'S
CLASS. Should you have any questions about anything on
this document or on the consent form, please contact me at
my home at [telephone number] or at the university at
[telephone number]. You may also contact Mrs. Smith.
Thank you for your time and consideration. I hope to be
working with you soon.

PLEASE READ THIS SECTION CAREFULLY: As a participant in the
project described on this document during the second
semester of the 1989-90 school year, please understand that

(1) You may refuse an interview at any time for any reason.

(2) The interviews will be recorded on audiotape. These
tapes will be available only to the researcher, Robert
Yagelski, and his adviser, Keith Walters, and will be used
in complete confidence exclusively for the project
described above.

(3) You may request, for any reason, that any audiotape
used to record an interview in which you or your son or
daughter participated be destroyed.

(4) The researcher, Robert Yagelski, may use information
gathered during these interviews for published articles
reporting his research.

(5) The researcher, Robert Yagelski, will guarantee
complete anonymity for all participants in his project.

(6) The researcher, Robert Yagelski, may need to review the
student files that are kept by the Thompson High School as
part of this project. You may refuse him access to these
files for any reason at any time.

(7) If you agree to an interview, you are expected to
answer questions as honestly as you can.
Consent Form for A Study of Context in Writing and Reading
to be conducted at Thompson High School
Second Semester, 1989

I consent to participating in, and to my child's participation in, a research project entitled:

A Study of Context in Writing and Reading

Professor Keith Walters (Principal Investigator) or his authorized representative, Robert Yagelski, both of the Ohio State University, has explained the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and the expected duration of my and/or my child's participation. Possible benefits of the study have been described as have alternative procedures, if such procedures are applicable and available.

I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information regarding the study and that questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. Further, I understand that I am, and my child is, free to withdraw consent at any time and to discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me or my child.

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date: __________________________

Signed: __________________________ __________________________
(parent or guardian) (student)

Signed: __________________________
(Principal Investigator)

Signed: __________________________
(Authorized Representative)

Witness: __________________________
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