WRITING, REALITIES, AND DEVELOPING ETHOS:

LITERACY NARRATIVES IN THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

A Dissertation

by

JULIE ELIZABETH GROESCH

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2009

Major Subject: English

WRITING, REALITIES, AND DEVELOPING ETHOS:

LITERACY NARRATIVES IN THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

A Dissertation

by

JULIE ELIZABETH GROESCH

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Approved by:

Chair of Committee,	C. Jan Swearingen
Committee Members,	M. Jimmie Killingsworth
	Janet McCann
	James A. Aune
Head of Department,	M. Jimmie Killingsworth

August 2009

Major Subject: English

ABSTRACT

Writing, Realities, and Developing Ethos:

Literacy Narratives in the Composition Classroom. (August 2009)

Julie Elizabeth Groesch, B.A., St. Mary's University, San Antonio;

M.A., Our Lady of the Lake University

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. C. Jan Swearingen

The overall purpose of this study is to analyze how students talk and write about writing to understand why mainstream students struggle with writing when they are neither economically nor culturally marginalized. Composition scholars' literacy narratives have identified problems in education and literacy encountered by marginalized students, but they fall short in identifying and accounting for problems that mainstream students face. After examining literacy narratives by composition scholars, this study assesses interviews, questionnaires, and literacy narratives from 77 college students, ranging in ages from 18 to 26. These accounts indicate that mainstream students have had few opportunities to examine their literacy skills within the context of their developing sense of self. Because literacy narratives are stories about writers developing a voice to share with their community, ethos is central to this examination. Building upon classical and contemporary models, two aspects of ethos are developed in my analysis: ethos as it relates to students' character, identity, and self-awareness, and ethos as students'

sense of their relationship to the communities that shape their character and form their audience as writers.

My assessment of student accounts develops four conclusions. First, standardized testing and formulaic writing have done little to foster students' confidence or self-awareness. Second, as a result, exigence becomes a necessary addition to writing assignments to encourage students to learn from their writing and see themselves as writers. Third, having students write their own literacy narrative is a valuable exercise so that they may become aware of how literacy affects their identity. Fourth, students' self-assessments reveal that their perceptions of writing bear little resemblance to issues defined in recent debates in composition studies, particularly the rift between personal and academic writing and the debate concerning expressivist and social-epistemic pedagogies. I define an alternative, an ethos-based pedagogy, placed within the post-process theory paradigm as defined by Thomas Kent. An ethical pedagogy focuses on developing students' character and confidence and on moving students to examine the relationship between interior and exterior spaces they inhabit and on considering how these spaces influence them on a personal and a social level. An ethical pedagogy can move students to form stronger relationships with language and their literacy practices.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this project to Dad, Uncle Tom, Stephanie, and my beloved Harley. We lost them this past year, and I wish they could be here to help me celebrate the completion of my degree. They are and will always be missed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to begin by thanking those people whose input and direction helped to shape this project. First, I want to thank the students whom I have taught and who met with me for interviews. The students I have taught provided me with my research question, and I appreciate all those students who took time to meet with me to share their writing stories. I hope that as they finish their college education, they become more appreciative of the writing they do. Second, I'd like to offer a big "Thank you!" to my committee chair, Dr. Swearingen, who offered guidance, support, and patience throughout the entire research and writing process. My committee members, Dr. Killingsworth, Dr. McCann, and Dr. Aune, were extremely helpful during my defense by challenging my ideas and offering suggestions in how to improve my work. These four professors' classes influenced and solidified my decision to study rhetoric and composition, and they have provided me with strong examples of what it means to be a successful teacher and scholar.

Thanks also go to my friends and colleagues and the faculty and staff of the English Department who made my experience at A&M bearable. I specifically want to thank Dr. Joanna Gibson and Amelia Reid of the Writing Programs Office and Dr. Valerie Balester and Candace Schaeffer of the University Writing Center. They offered me support and opportunities to explore other areas of my field. And it was fun working with and for them.

I want to offer a huge “THANKS!” to my best buddies, Tom and Lindsay. I’m so grateful for going through this experience with them. They have been godsends and worthwhile distractions. I also must thank my friends at Fitz’s for making me laugh and providing me with moments when I wanted to forget about this project. I’ll remember Porch Nights, TMJ Tuesdays, Sunday-Fundays, and a few road trips – all too much fun! I’ve been blessed with many friends from St. Louis to San Antonio and all of them continue to be important people in my life.

Finally, thanks to Mom and the rest of my family. At times they didn’t understand what I was doing or why I was doing it, but they remained interested and offered constant encouragement, support, prayers, and love.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: LITERACY NARRATIVES AS STORIES OF IDENTIFICATION AND ETHOS

Every day, our local newspaper includes a small feature called "Today's Smile." The paper finds someone who is smiling and provides the explanation for the person's positive outlook. For the last year or so, I have been carrying one from early spring, 2008; in this "Today's Smile" a young, blonde woman is smiling broadly and says, "I'm smiling because 'I don't have to write any papers this semester.'" When I first read this sentiment, I sighed, wondering, how can a college student not have *any* papers to write in one semester? Then, I realized that her happiness serves as an excellent example of the major purpose of this project: to uncover the causes of college students' prejudices toward writing. After all, most college students – even those who have not struggled academically – wish they did not have to write any papers, like the young blonde woman in the newspaper.

Too often, composition research has assumed that mainstream students would not have difficulty with academic language. However, after teaching for almost 20 years, I have realized that many students enter high school writing and college composition classrooms with fear or anxiety. I have questioned the

---

This dissertation follows the style of *PMLA*.

source of this anxiety because most students I have taught have come from a solid educational background; they have lived without want of food or clothes; they have done well in high school (or else they would not have been admitted to a competitive, Research I university in the first place). So I wonder why these "normal," every day, middle-American students feel dread and fear about a composition course. Why do they lack a comfortable relationship with language that they use everyday, one that they have learned and have worked with for over 12 years?

In her book *Ways with Words* (1983), Shirley Brice Heath categorizes these middle/upper class students under the heading of "mainstreamers": students who are described as having "regional core values" and who "are strongly school-oriented, believing success in school, academically and socially, is a prerequisite for being successful as an adult" (236). "Mainstreamer" characterizes the students who are the subjects of this study. My purpose is to examine why these students struggle with writing when they are, according to most research models, neither economically nor culturally marginalized.

This introductory chapter examines four published literacy narratives written by academics who have been economically and culturally marginalized: Richard Rodriguez's *Hunger of Memory: the Autobiography of Richard Rodriguez* (1982), Victor Villanueva's *Bootstraps: From an American Academic of Color* (1993), Keith Gilyard's *Voices of the Self: A Study of Language Competence*

(1991), and Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundary: The Struggles and Achievements of America's Underprepared* (1989). These four stories detail how the writers believed their voices were silenced, mainly due to racial, cultural, and economic differences. Alienation becomes a theme in published narratives; the writers experience conflicts between their private, internal language (which they associate with their home or culture) and public language (which they must adapt to in order to succeed along side the majority).

These four narratives prompted me to question whether mainstream students, who have not faced serious challenges with learning how to read or write, are aware of how culture and society have influenced their literacy development. Chapters II, III and IV provide the answer to this question. Chapter II focuses on the places where students have learned to write: high school English classrooms. Students describe these spaces as restrictive mainly due to the import that is placed on standardized testing. Chapter III examines students' favorite and least favorite assignments in order to pinpoint moments when students see themselves as writers. Chapter IV analyzes excerpts from student reflective essays after they wrote a literacy narrative; their reflections indicate that writing a literacy narrative is a beneficial pedagogical exercise. Chapter V discusses students' perceptions of writing within the context of debates that are found in composition studies, such as the rift between personal and academic writing and the broader debate concerning expressivist and social-epistemic pedagogies. Students' perceptions of writing do not correspond with these theories. Therefore, I call for a pedagogy that is rooted

in both the personal and the social, a pedagogy centered on developing students' ethos since mainstream students' stories reveal that they, too, are alienated from language. They do not have a sense of how language is coupled with their identity, nor do they believe that their voices matter in a public sphere.

In most published scholarship, student voices are not heard at all (or heard minimally). When I read articles and books about how we should teach writing, I wonder how students react to their instructors' ideologies and approaches. Students are not aware of the theory behind the lessons they learn; we do a disservice to them when we (instructors) do not explain the purposes and the reasons for our pedagogical choices. Students' accounts make clear that they are not in tune with their teachers' motives. After all, even mainstream students – like the one featured in "Today's Smile" – associate writing with negativity; their stories demonstrate that even though they have lived within the dominant language, students still find discomfort with academic discourse or standard written English.

As a qualitative study, this project assesses interviews with over 30 students and excerpts from over 20 student-written literacy narratives to provide a clearer understanding of mainstream students' perceptions of writing.[1] I also see this project as a composite literacy narrative since it contains students' stories about learning how to write. As a genre, literacy narratives were defined in Janet

[1] The questions I asked students were based on three sources: the four published narratives, Deborah Brandt's questions found in the appendix of *Literacy in American Lives* (2001), and *St. Martin's Guide to Teaching Writing* by Cheryl Glenn, Robert Connors, and Melissa Goldthwaite (2003).

Eldred and Peter Mortensen's article "Reading Literacy Narratives," which appeared in *College English* (1992). Eldred and Mortensen analyze literacy events found in literature, specifically George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, from the perspective of understanding the "social processes of language acquisition" (512). Although Eldred and Mortensen, perhaps, did not intend to influence literacy studies, their article points to problems of literacy acquisition, such as the relationship between literacy skills and class, of the kind illustrated by Eliza Doolittle's experience. Economic and ethnic boundaries remain problems for some marginalized students because of their inexperience in using the language of the majority. However, few have examined, as I do here, the experiences of "mainstream" students.

Prior to the publication of Eldred and Mortensen's article, however, Rodriguez, Villanueva, Gilyard, and Rose had published or were in the process of publishing their autobiographies – all centering on their literacy development. These literacy narratives provide the basis for my definition of this genre: a literacy narrative is a story about the writer's relationship with language, the process of learning how to read and write, along with the political, social, and cultural influences that affect one's use and development of these literacy skills. According to these writers' depictions, public language emphasizes academic discourse, standard written English, the predominant dialect that white, middle-class people use. Private language is the language that one learns at home; it is personal, intimate, and it is the language that one uses with others who share a

similar cultural or ethnic background. The tension that results as these writers move from their home (private) language to school (public) language affects their sense of self: each writer develops a home identity and a school identity based on the language that he is called to use in these opposing environments. The tension also leads to a sense of alienation with their family, their peers, and with language itself. As these writers go through school, they feel disconnected with other students in their class and with learning "school" language. In addition, as they become acclimated with public/school language, they begin to feel disconnected with their family and/or their childhood friends.

Literacy narratives are also stories about writers developing a voice to share with their community. Hence, ethos is central to my discussion throughout this project. In the Aristotelian tradition, ethos is a rhetorical appeal and is connected with the speaker's or writer's character, one's authority and reputation. Ethos's original meaning, however, is of "a dwelling place" where people are brought together to learn and "where a person's ethics and moral character take form and develop" (Hyde xiii). While ethos relates to developing one's character and a confident voice, it also takes one's community into account as an influence on that development. Thus, ethos encompasses both the public and the private.

While literacy narratives describe the division between private and public language, they also recount how this division is mended since the writers' ethos evolves as they develop an identity based in public language. To examine the four narratives mentioned above, the first section begins with a discussion of Kenneth

Burke's theory of identification and consubstantiality in order to illustrate how the relationship between public and private language is reconciled in the narratives. Parts II through IV address each literacy narrative and its relation to Burke's rhetorical theory.

Burke's Rhetoric of Identification, Consubstantiality, and Ethos

In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke defines identification as a metaphorical "slaying of either self or another" (19). He explains this death as

> a special case of transformation, and transformation involves the ideas and imagery of *identification*. That is: the *killing* of something is the *changing* of it, and the statement of the thing's nature before and after the change is an *identifying* of it. (20, italics original)

Although each person is a separate entity, she strives to create a connection with others, to identify with them on some level, be it shared values, interests, or concerns (21). In order to do so, however, a person cannot remain completely individual or unique because she enters into the public realm and is influenced by her surroundings. This murderous act, according to Burke, is expected: in order for identification to be present, division must also be present, or else there would be no reason for rhetoric to exist (22). In the context of literacy narratives, the division emerges from the tension between public and private languages. These writers describe having to negotiate between the dominant discourse and their home discourse. Their negotiation is one that occurs internally because they work to identify with their past and present selves.

Burke extends his definition of identification in saying that identification is a step in the goal of consubstantiality: he writes, "To identify A with B is to make A 'consubstantial' with B" (21), meaning that A and B share something that is substantive or valuable. Continuing his description of substance, Burke writes,

> A doctrine of *consubstantiality*, either explicit or implicit, may be necessary to any way of life. For substance, in the old philosophies, was an *act*; and a way of life is an *acting-together*; and in acting together, men have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them *consubstantial*. (21, italics original)

Burke's notion of substance is associated with action and ethos. Through shared actions people come together to form communities. Communities influence each member's character development, and actions reveal one's character. This movement (or exchange) within the community, its people, and their actions is recursive, much like the movement (or exchange) between one's public and private languages. The issue of division between the public and private is constant throughout these four published narratives.

In each of the four literacy narratives, the division between public and private language causes the writer to have problems with his sense of identity – he is one person with family and friends and another in an academic setting. At first, not having learned how to negotiate between the two, they believe they must negate one for the other instead of accepting both – and in the process, they negate one part of themselves. It is this metaphorical process of identification, of changing, or killing that occurs within these narratives, specifically in the relationships between language and culture, language and race, and language and

class. Their narratives reveal that a division exists within their sense of self, so their stories are about identifying with their past selves, *not* with white, middle class society, so they learn to accept their private language as it is coupled with the public realm.

Richard Rodriguez's *Hunger of Memory* as Anti-Literacy Narrative

Burke's rhetorical theory allows us to read Rodriguez's autobiography as an anti-literacy narrative: neither identification nor consubstantiality occurs. For Rodriguez private and public language remains conflicted. In Rodriguez's mind, these two spheres must remain separate. The creation of this public versus private division is evident in the book's opening prologue. Rodriguez titles his prologue "Middle Class Pastoral." With the use of the word pastoral, he alludes to an unassuming life filled with contentment and harmony, an image that is further developed in the fourth line of the autobiography. Rodriguez writes, "Once upon a time, I was a 'socially disadvantaged' child. An enchanted happy child. Mine was a childhood of intense family closeness. And extreme public alienation" (3). While the opening alludes to a fairy tale, it alternates with a negative image, a "'socially disadvantaged' child." Rodriguez begins his story in this fashion leading readers to initially believe they will be reading a whimsical, perhaps idyllic, story, but then they realize that the author does not have such as life as the word pastoral might convey. Rodriguez creates a positive image of private enchantment and then closes with an image of public loneliness.

This conflicting image reflects the struggle that Rodriguez experiences, beginning in his childhood and continuing to his adulthood. The prologue builds itself on these struggles. After reminiscing briefly on his childhood, as enchanted, he reflects on his current position as a scholar, speaker, and writer; however, he knows that his audience – "White America" – sees him as a successful Mexican-American, one who is unaffected by his "social mobility, that [he] can claim unbroken ties with [his] past" (5). Rodriguez feels complete estrangement from the family of his childhood and from the public. These images set the tone for the remainder of the autobiography, and it is a tone of longing, resignation, and irony. He longs for the closeness he once felt with his family, yet he knows that the intimacy is lost due to his education. Public language and dwelling places do not enrich him but separate him from the private sense of self that he thought he knew.

The feeling of alienation is further emphasized with the title of the first chapter, introducing Rodriguez's childhood and his disagreement with bilingual education. He titles the chapter "Aria," a solo performance, because he describes his early memories of realizing the rift between Spanish (his home language) and English (his school language), and the rift causes alienation. Once his teachers visit his house and ask his parents if the family could practice their English, his family's closeness deteriorates. While Rodriguez and his siblings become more skilled in English, his parents continue primarily to speak Spanish. As time passes, Rodriguez realizes that a separation develops between him and his parents, between his sense of a public and a private identity due to language practices:

> rare was the experience of feeling myself individualized by family intimates. We remained a loving family, but one greatly changed. No longer so close; no longer bound tight by the pleasing and troubling knowledge of our public separateness. (23)

Because they spoke Spanish as a family, Rodriguez finds comfort in sharing that language yet feels isolated from the English-speaking public.

At the end of the chapter, Rodriguez returns to the metaphor surrounding an aria. Because he has a love for language, he feels peace when listening to songs and feels a connection with singers who "celebrate the human voice" (37). He then describes music's connection with poetry and reflects on the importance of poetry in his life. Rodriguez writes that poetry allows him to remember the past: "It forces remembrance. And refreshes. It reminds me of the possibility of escaping public words, the possibility that awaits me in meeting the intimate" (38). Rodriguez's commentary stresses his resignation: he finds no or little comfort in the public sphere; he wants to escape from the public's language and longs to return to what he once knew, intimate voices.

In the second chapter "Achievement of Desire" Rodriguez describes the additional distance he creates from his parents as he moves through elementary school. He alludes to Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) and his description of a "scholarship boy," a student who comes from a working class background. He "must move between environments, his home and the classroom, which are at cultural extremes, opposed" (Rodriguez 46). Rodriguez finds himself in Hoggart's depiction and knows first-hand of the tension between home and

school, and the loneliness that comes along with it. The loneliness results from the need to be sequestered from his family while he studies.

Because of Rodriguez's experience, the tension between his private and public individuality, he chastises people who support bilingual education. He says that learning the public language (English) was "a right" so he could establish a "public identity" (21). He continues,

> Today I hear bilingual educators say that children lose a degree of 'individuality' by becoming assimilated into public society [. . .] But the bilingualists simplistically scorn the value and necessity of assimilation. They do not seem to realize that there are two ways a person is individualized. So they do not realize that while one suffers a diminished sense of private individuality by becoming assimilated into public society, such assimilation makes possible the achievement of public individuality. (26)

Rodriguez supports assimilation so that students can avoid feeling different from their English-speaking counterparts. However, Rodriguez realizes that by gaining a public sense of self, students will lose a sense of themselves (as he did) that is connected with family. He also believes that bilingual educators ignore the tension that exists between the public and the private self (34). But he has learned through his own experience that tension always exists and that the move between the two worlds is not seamless. But because he loses the intimacy with his family while gaining a public identity, he never feels completely accepted by the public, meaning by white society. He believes his home, his dwelling place, falls apart, so his sense of self falls apart; he no longer identifies with his private self. He finds no comfort in either the public or private spheres.

Along with bilingual education, Rodriguez also takes on the issue of affirmative action in his chapter, "Profession," which details his experience of finding an academic position. He disagrees with proponents of affirmative action after he accepts the label of a minority student. He ends up feeling guilty for being offered jobs before his more qualified white peers; he "accepted its benefits" (152). The public looks upon him as "socially disadvantaged" – a label he lived with as a child. He does not want to accept labels that society places on him; however, ironically, he does not know who to be without them.

Although he assimilates, he is unable to truly be himself because he never believes that public language is his own, even when he writes. He tries to convince himself that he finds comfort in writing about his personal experiences and building a connection with his audience, whom he assumes are primarily Anglo, by using their language, "words that belong to the public, this Other" (187). Ironically, he uses a language that he does not believe to be his own and in doing so, creates a false identity. His attempt at assimilation fails.

In the prologue, Rodriguez calls himself "a comic victim of two cultures" (5). His opening proves to be ironic because he does not end up a hero in his own eyes or the reader's. His story does not support the goodness that should (or usually) accompanies literacy and education. His story illustrates that by becoming literate, a person loses a part of himself rather than enriching himself; his story becomes an anti-literacy narrative. He does not reconcile his past self with his present self. Instead of negotiating between his public and private languages, he

remains stagnant and simply resigns and wallows between them, not finding his sense of self in the public or the private. Thus, Rodriguez's narrative proves to be an ineffective model for students. Resignation and/or inaction is not the goal of education.

Villanueva's *Bootstraps* and Gilyard's *Voices of the Self*: Identifying and Reconciling Past Selves

Villanueva and Gilyard disagree with Rodriguez's opinion that sacrificing one's native, private language is in conflict with pursuing a white, middle-class ideal (Gilyard 160). Thinking of Rodriguez's story, Gilyard questions whether public education causes students to sacrifice part of their culture. Gilyard adamantly says, "No!" and continues by saying, "It would be tragic [. . .] to translate his [Rodriguez's] own appraisal of his pain into pedagogy" (160-61). Like Gilyard, Villanueva understands Rodriguez's story but is still bothered by it because of "the melancholy, the ideological resignation" that runs through his book; Rodriguez "remains the other while espousing the same" (39). Both Gilyard and Villanueva recognize the unresolved tension that Rodriguez experiences throughout his life and question why he chooses to keep himself divided by resigning to the division, rather than reconciling the separation. Without reconciliation, Rodriguez equates language and literacy with sorrow and loss, but also success as assimiliation.

In an interview I conducted with Villanueva in October of 2006, he stated that it was this motivation, of describing "the pains of literacy," that was one of the factors that prompted him to write his own memoir, *Bootstraps*. He described an "internal colonialism" in which a marginalized person or minority internalizes the notions of inferiority while being immersed in the dominant dialect. He stated that he wanted to examine the complexity of literacy, so he made a conscious rhetorical move to blend genres and "to focus on pathos." He believed that memoir could be a catalyst for this examination; so he moves from the personal to the academic, from past to present, not only between chapters but also within chapters. This rhetorical choice creates a highly fragmented style, illustrating the fragmentation he personally felt during his life, fragmentation caused by the division between public and private language. Villanueva's text is part memoir, part textbook, and part commentary, which was a conscious choice since he is not a fan of pure narrative (Interview). He shifts between first and third person to illustrate the movement between public and private selves, which is evident in Villanueva's "Prologue" when he says, "Thoughts. The I speaking to its me" (xi). His narrative functions as the liaison between his past and present selves.

Villanueva refers to himself in the third person as "Papi" while describing his childhood experiences in the classroom at a small Catholic grade school in New York City. Chapter 3, titled "Spic in English!" details his move to Los Angeles. He remembers his new neighbors in Watts and his attempts to fit in: "The blacks live in a world separate from him [. . .] And the white kids speak a

different language" (35). But Villanueva notices how the blacks and the whites see Victor as Mexican, not seeing him as "portorican" (35). When his family moves again, so he could attend a better high school, Villanueva continues to feel isolated and hears "Just loud silences" (36).

Villanueva remembers how some of his peers were being groomed to attend college, while he was being groomed for the vocational track, specifically in architecture. But his skills were honed in New York, so when he speaks with the school counselor, he learns that he doesn't have enough credits to graduate on time and chooses to get his GED (37-38). Villanueva enters the army, goes to Vietnam, and becomes Sergeant V. It is his years in the army that mold his future and provide the catalyst for entering college. Like Rodriguez, Villanueva recounts his struggles when he enters the academic world, always trying to find a niche, to find validity, in a white middle-class world, of which he believes he must become a part in order to escape his inferior status.

Villanueva remembers his past identities, fragments of who he used to be. His fragments illustrate the complexity of literacy and language because Villanueva finds no connection with the white students, nor the black; he is grouped in the category of Latino or Hispanic and neither label fits him. These labels, along with the feeling of isolation, are one of the similarities Villanueva shares with Richard Rodriguez. However, as stated earlier, Villanueva criticizes Rodriguez's belief in assimilation and instead argues for biculturalism, not "an equal ease with two cultures" but it "means the tensions within, which are caused

by being unable to deny the old or the new" (39). He describes how Rodriguez "struggles at denying the tension" (39) and because Rodriguez denies the tension, he never gives himself the opportunity to explore it or to learn from it. But Villanueva "resents" the tension; he resents the fact that Rodriguez is labeled (as he was), not simply as a writer but as "the Mexican American writer" and these epithets are "imposed on him even as he denies them" (39). As a result, Villanueva believes Rodriguez chooses "'racelessness,'" a term created by Signithia Fordham (39).

Racelessness means "the denial of other-cultural affiliation, a denial of the collective, any collective; it is the embracing of America's dominant ideology, the ideology of individualism" (Villanueva 39-40). To be raceless involves choosing to speak the dominant language. But this leads to further isolation, as Villanueva points out, in regard to Rodriguez's experience. Even though Rodriguez speaks the correct dialect, he is not "fully adopted by the white community" (40). Villanueva contends that even though Rodriguez wants to assimilate by denying his Mexican heritage, he fails because he never is completely accepted by white, middle class society who places the labels on him.

The issue of labels ties in with Villanueva's lengthy discussion of hegemony that runs through his narrative. He emphasizes the issue of power because the dominant ideology determines the labels that people carry. Villanueva recognizes the several identities that he himself carries as an "American academic of color" (xv). Villanueva takes his personal experience of living within

contradictions and with labels and places it alongside theorists, such as Antonio Gramsci, Paulo Freire, and Karl Marx to understand how hegemony works. Villanueva closes his narrative with the following observation:

> We are – all of us – affected by the hegemonic and by its fragmenting ideology of individualism. With every man for himself only a few will win out. We are individuals, but that doesn't mean we must drive headlong into individualism. We need to cling to our various collectivities [. . .] and they need not be mutually exclusive if we consider them critically, and if accept that we carry contradictions. We all stand to gain by developing a critical consciousness. (143)

Villanueva favors examining how both private and public language affects hegemony, opposed to Rodriguez who resigns to the public, dominant language. While Villanueva sees the classroom as a convergence of languages, Rodriguez sees the classroom as a place for the individual student to master the public language. Literacy development is tied to accepting one's contradictions, not (like Rodriguez) by acquiescing to dominant ideologies.

Consequently, Villanueva argues for developing a critical consciousness within our students in order to counter hegemonic practices. In the chapter entitled "Coming to a Critical Consciousness" he remembers thinking that "there was a kind of education possible that had to do more than just getting good pay; education as a way of attempting to make sense out of the senseless, to become more, rather than to become other" (53). He advocates creating a curriculum that allows students to grow personally and collectively, to learn about the tensions within one's personal life and those that are shared inside a community.

Like Villanueva, Keith Gilyard's book *Voices of the Self* moves between personal history and public commentary. Gilyard's book relates the story of his growing up in Harlem and then in Queens during the 1950s and 1960s. Like Villanueva, Gilyard structures his book by alternating between the past and present. Chapters 2, 4, 6, and 8 offer autobiographical accounts of his successes and failures in school, while the odd-numbered chapters focus on "issues of language pedagogy," specifically in regard to African-American students (13). In his "Introduction" Gilyard writes that his focus is on Black children because he worries about "the psychic costs they have to pay" while learning the dominant discourse, which is a concern rooted in his personal experience (11). Gilyard states that his personal experiences lend themselves to what he calls "a transactional model, in which humans are viewed as continually negotiating with an evolving environment" (13), negotiating within and among dwelling places. Much like Rodriguez, Gilyard learns, early in his life, that he must negotiate his use of language depending on whether he is the student in a predominantly white classroom or whether he is the son and friend in his predominantly black neighborhood, his public and private communities.

This act of negotiation, of code-switching, affects Gilyard's developing sense of self. Rodriguez and Gilyard share an affinity for their home language. Gilyard closes Chapter 3 with a description of how he, at an early age, decided to maintain a public identity; he was always on a stage in order to be part of the crowd. Gilyard writes, "The curtain was always up for me" (41). However, he

adds that his home helped to develop him sociolinguistically because there was "*consistency* in that habitat" (41). He stresses the positive effects that his private, home language left on him as a child since "it is the apprehension of consistency that is the cognitive key to communicative development" (41). Consequently, while in the public or private spheres, he finds social gratification (41). Having a sense of purpose and/or gratification is necessary for effective learning to occur. Purpose and investment enable students to internalize what they learn, so what they learn becomes a part of them.

In "Semivoices," the next chapter, Gilyard describes how he manages his emerging identities when he moves to Queens as a child. He chooses to split his identity upon being introduced to his new classmates. He details the moment when he enters his first grade classroom and all he sees are unfamiliar, white faces and tries "to find some sign I could translate into friendliness" (43). The principal offers him a choice of what he'd like to be called, either Raymond (his first name) or Keith (his middle name). Gilyard remembers: "Uptown it was always Keith or Keithy or Little Gil. Raymond was like a fifth wheel. A spare. And that's what I decided to make these people call me"; and he concludes the paragraph by stating, "And from that day on, through all my years in public school, all White folks had to call me Raymond" (43). His use of the word "spare" indicates his feelings about having this new name, this new label. Just like a spare tire remains in one's trunk until an emergency comes along, Keith realizes that this new name is secondary and unused but needed in this anxious moment. He adds, "The point

was to have a plot. To keep a part of myself I could trust" (43). In creating a second identity, he proves that he is quite aware of the game that must be played in order to succeed in school: he must speak like Raymond, not like Keith, because Keith's home or private language is seen as inferior.

In Chapter 5, Gilyard builds on his opposition to Rodriguez by discussing how Black English has been handled and mishandled by schools and individual teachers. He titles this chapter "Getting over the Hump", citing the third grade as being a pivotal juncture in a student's education.[2] It is during this time when the eager students "typically fall behind academically by the end of the third grade, as they have found academic pursuit unfulfilling and have begun to retreat from the process" (61). Attributing this unnecessary failure to language barriers, Gilyard, at length, describes three approaches that have been used "concerning formal language instruction": eradicationism, pluralism, and bidialecticalism (70).

Gilyard obviously opposes the eradication of Black English from the classroom, and he is not in favor of bidialecticalism because "people don't become bidialectical just because someone thinks it's a good idea" (74). Gilyard recognizes that for someone to learn any language, he needs to become personally invested in the process; if he realizes the benefits of learning another dialect for himself, the process would not be a problem or a matter of contention (74). Children need to recognize the value in becoming bidialectical.

---

[2] Gilyard opens this chapter, on page 61, by citing case studies from Jonathan Kozol, Gerald Levy, and Daniel Fader to support his observations.

Gilyard concludes that pluralism is the best choice because it includes a complete acceptance and respect of one's dialect and one's sense of self (74). Gilyard states that it offers the best approach because it focuses on creating schools "in which language differences fail to have deleterious consequences for those whose language" has not been praised (73). Gilyard ends Chapter 5 with the following observation about the need for investment:

> Social relations are a far more vital factor for Black students in school than differences of language variety. Black children, like all people, make decisions based on vested interests. If they were to perceive that the social dialect were in their favor, learning another dialect could not be a major problem. In fact it would be extremely difficult to prevent them from learning Standard English. For most Blacks in school such perception can form only within a setting in which teachers genuinely accept them as they come and respect them enough not to sell them myths of simple assimilation. (74)

Even though Gilyard (at first) chooses to assimilate, he realizes that assimilation does not provide the answer because it is rooted in myth, in fantasy. Gilyard realizes, as he describes his past, that he did well in elementary school primarily because he chose this route, but being accepted would have been much easier. This lack of acceptance perhaps might have played a factor in the difficulties he encountered once he reached middle and high school.

Once Gilyard enters middle school, he begins to have problems. He chooses to pay more attention to his peers from the neighborhood than to his studies. Once he enters high school, his grades lower; he becomes involved in drugs, stealing, and is arrested several times. He loses a scholarship to the University of Notre Dame but resolves to attend college after reading in the

newspaper about a Jonathan Jackson who died in a shootout when he attempted to free his "prison writer brother" George Jackson, in a California courtroom (157). Gilyard writes, "Most poignant to me was that Jonathan was only seventeen years old. Here was a kid younger than I am [. . .] he still believed in dreams [. . .] I understood dreams, idealism. I understood living in the future. But the trick is to know when the future has arrived" (157). Gilyard consciously decides to turn his attention to his education to develop his linguistic ability by recognizing how his oral skills are connected with his written skills:

> It was largely through conversation that I was able to gauge how the self I expressed in writing was being received by others, thus enabling me to adjust my self-concept in ways I deemed appropriate, in essence, to create the self I would express in subsequent writing. (108)

Gilyard becomes consciously aware of the relationship between his public and private languages: "My proficiency in language use, therefore, was inextricably bound up with my emerging self" (105). Like Villanueva, Gilyard reconciles how his public and private languages work together to create his ethos and the self that he presents to those in his public and private worlds. Villanueva's and Gilyard's narratives offer strong examples of the process of identification that Burke describes.

By writing a literacy narrative, they address their past selves, ones that are rooted in a personal, private language, and recognize how the past has helped to develop their public voice. Their texts have a broken structure and non-linear style, depicting how they are identifying with their past selves and translating their past

voices to form a connection with who they are today. Even though Rodriguez also moves from past to present, he wants to forget his past, the boy he used to be. His past and present selves do not identify with one another.

Villanueva's and Gilyard's narrative reveal how important writing a personal narrative is because it forces the writer to have an internal conversation with himself. To explain how the self effectively functions as an audience, I again look to Burke:

> The individual person, striving to form himself in accordance with the communicative norms that match the cooperative ways of his society, is by the same token concerned with the rhetoric of identification [. . .] Education ("indoctrination") exerts such pressure upon him from without; he completes the process from within. If he does not somehow act to tell himself (as his own audience) what the various brands of rhetorician have told him, his persuasion is not complete. Only those voices from without are effective which can speak in the language of the voice within. (39)

Though Rodriguez was a professor and Gilyard, and Villanueva are professors at major universities today, the educational system they grew up with proved difficult and confining. If we look to Burke, the "voices from without" were only effective in the sense that they caused each man to recognize who he is not. Unlike Rodriguez, Gilyard and Villanueva find their own language, one rooted inside their histories.

Villanueva's and Gilyard's narratives provide students with examples regarding the importance of language. Mainstream students, like those presented in this project, rarely recognize the connection between language and their sense of self. They rarely take time to reflect and converse with themselves about their past

experiences. They rarely feel confident in what they have to say, and without confidence, the self *they* present in their writing is uncertain and/or fabricated. As a result, they do not develop a relationship with language, nor do they develop their sense of ethos.

Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundary* explores not only his literacy development but also those of his students who are the marginalized. Along with racial conflicts, economic and class factors play a role in Rose's story. The relationship between economy and education has been a repeated theme in these narratives because, many times, economic and class problems are related to racial issues. Moving from racial and cultural issues to economic and class issues, the next section focuses on Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundary*. His narrative is useful to this study because he argues for a pedagogy that moves students to become invested in their literacy development, and he addresses how that investment can be negatively affected by educational practices, like standardized testing. Investment and standardized testing are two issues that are relevant to mainstream students' literacy development.

Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundary*: Investing in Literacy

In "Articulation Theory and the Problem of Determination: A Reading of *Lives on the Boundary*" (1994) John Trimbur writes that Rose narrates his story "both to indict an educational system that wastes the intellectual curiosity of young people and adults and to demonstrate the possibilities of individual growth and

development within America's educational underclass" (245). Rose directly attacks the failure of the American educational system in preparing the underprivileged for college. His attack stems from his personal experiences and from his observations as an instructor. Early in his teaching career, Rose realizes the opportunities that he was afforded that the marginalized do not get to experience as often.

As a memoir, Rose describes his family background and his youth while growing up in a lower-income neighborhood in Los Angeles. Like Rodriguez and Villanueva, Rose attends Catholic schools, and it is at Our Lady of Mercy High School where he is placed in the vocational track during his freshman year due to a mix-up with test scores (24). Rose sees the vocational track as "a place for those who are just not making it, a dumping ground for the disaffected" (26). Rose believes that his teachers, though caring, did not know "how to engage the imaginations" of the students who were labeled as "vocational" (26). These students are pushed through the system, labeled, and resigned to fulfill their given identities as low-achievers. Fortunately, one of Rose's teachers checked his records and realized that he should be placed in the "College Prep program" which turned out to be a completely different world (30). But through this experience Rose learns quickly about the power of labels and how those labels shape a person's destiny.

As a critique, Rose describes how this high school experience gives shape to his adult life as he attends college, teaches for the Teacher Corps, and tutors

veterans. Based on his personal experience as a student and as a teacher, he recognizes that he was lucky to have a family and teachers who motivated him to learn, like Jack MacFarland, his high school English teacher, "who established a literacy club [. . .] and invited me – invited all of us – to join" (34). MacFarland proves to be integral in Rose's development by opening the door for him to get into college. Someone believed in Rose, and this belief fueled Rose to rise above economic barriers. Rose realizes that many of the under-prepared do not have such dramatic influences, so he has taken on that role of being their advocate. He writes,

> We live, in America, with so many platitudes about motivation and self-reliance and individualism – and myths spun from them [. . .] – that we find it hard to accept the fact that they are serious nonsense. To live your early life on the streets of South L.A. [. . .] or any one of hundreds of depressed communities – and to journey up through the top levels of the American educational system will call for support and guidance at many, many points along the way. (48)

Rose has become an avid spokesperson for those students who are under-prepared when they begin college, and many of the under-prepared are poor.

One of Rose's key points revolves around the need for investment and relationship; Rose speaks of "the power of invitation" (132) and the need to make the students a part of their own education and literacy development, much like the invitation MacFarland offers his students. Rose describes his experience while in the Teacher Corps, particularly the powerful effects that occur when someone is simply invited to participate when they "had traditionally been excluded from the schools" (132) or when working-class parents are invited to participate in their

child's education. Rose illustrates that many people with whom he worked were part of the working class and believed the academic world was too distant. However, once their teachers shifted their focus from correctness to ideas, they realized they are able to participate and succeed. He alludes to his students who write about dreams and goals in connection with the personal-ness of literacy: "literacy [. . .] is intimately connected with respect, with a sense that they are not beaten, the mastery of print revealing the deepest impulse to survive" (216). Literacy – as depicted in the previous three narratives – is linked to bettering oneself.

Rose emphasizes that developmental English classes, places where many of the working-class begin their academic careers, often are ineffective. One reason for their ineffectiveness deals with the label that goes along with taking a developmental course, and many times students who are not even in a remedial course are affected by labels: Rose astutely observes, "We set out to determine what a child knows in order to tailor instruction, but we frequently slot rather than shape, categorize rather than foster" (128). As teachers we make assumptions about our students' strengths and weaknesses before we ever meet them. We assume they have certain abilities without ever knowing if they have been taught the skills that we require them to have. Rose writes,

> Consider not only the economic and political barriers they [the under-prepared] face, but the fact, too, that judgments about their ability are made at a very young age, and those judgments, accurate or not, affect the curriculum they receive, their place in the school, the way they're defined institutionally. The insidious part of this

> drama is that, in the observance or the breach, students unwittingly play right into the assessments. (128)

Rose's observation reflects the conflict between public and private language. Our educational system obviously works to teach students acceptable, public literacy skills: academic discourse, Standard English, etc. Many people believe that being economically disadvantaged equates to being (potentially) intellectually disadvantaged. Public judgments or assumptions are made regarding the under-prepared's readiness to succeed in using public language. If the disadvantaged have difficulties, they internalize the public's version of themselves rather than creating a version of themselves that prove the assumptions wrong.

Rose chastises instructors who focus too much on grammatical errors, as if these errors indicate "some fundamental mental barrier to engaging in higher-level cognitive pursuits" (141). He states that the focus on grammar is one reason why developmental classes are ineffective; they are "about grammatical correctness, not the communication of something meaningful, or the generative struggle with ideas" (211). As a result, all types of students do not become invested in their education because they are too worried about making mistakes. Many students – like those in this study who never took a developmental class – also have been taught that there is a right and wrong way to write. His point supports my findings in that students rarely have opportunities to use their creativity in English classrooms because schools and teachers are too concerned with state mandates and test scores. Unfortunately, in many English classrooms "literacy […] is severed from imagination" (212).

Rose also takes issue with the SAT with its emphasis on quantifying a student's potential (200). Education focuses on numbers and percentages, rather than on people: "What began troubling me about the policy documents and the crisis reports was that they focused too narrowly on test scores and tallies of error and other such errors" (187). Much of the emphasis on standardized testing results from literacy crises that seem to occur every 15 to 20 years.[3] Early in his first chapter "Our Schools and Our Children," Rose responds to those who panic about news of failing test scores and then call for a return to the back-to-basics movement. Even though Rose's book was written almost 20 years ago, similar discussions swirl around education circles today.[4] Rose reminds his readers that unfulfilled expectations about college freshmen abilities have been a concern since the mid-nineteenth century and have obviously remained a part of writing instruction throughout the 20th and into the 21st centuries: "that our schools have always been populated with students who don't meet some academic standard" (7). The focus on test scores and error mirrors many of the students' experiences in this study, indicating that not much has changed in the last twenty years, unfortunately.

Rose's criticisms of our education system and my analysis of how students describe their educational histories illustrate that both underprivileged and

---

[3] Villanueva also makes the observation that "The current great interest in literacy coincides with the economy's shift from industry to service, which also coincides with economic crisis" (136).

[4] The desire to again focus on grammatical correctness will be discussed in Chapter II and Texas Education Agency approving a back-to-basics approach to language arts: textbooks are being revised to suit a back-to-basics curriculum.

mainstream students can benefit from Rose's recommendations. Like Villanueva who advocates developing a critical consciousness in our students, Rose advocates teaching critical literacy. Rose states, "My students needed to be immersed in talking, reading, and writing, they needed to further develop their ability to think critically, and they needed to gain confidence in themselves as systematic inquirers. They had to be let into the "academic club" (141). He calls for students to immerse themselves in writing, reading, and talking about their writing and reading because he believes students have little exposure to "critical literacy," of tearing an argument apart or creating an effective argument (187-88).

Rose writes in the "Preface" that his book "concerns language and human connection, literacy and culture, and it focuses on those who have trouble reading and writing in the schools and in the workplace [. . .] And it is a book about movement" (xi). Movement, in relation to Burke, is associated with substance – of finding something valuable – and that something valuable is tapping into students' confidence and making sure they are invested in the development of their own literacy skills, of *moving* students toward a conscious understanding of the relationship between their language and their sense of self.

A definite separation exists between these four writers' cultural, racial, economic, and language backgrounds when compared to middle-class society's expectations and standards. Each writer reflects on his experiences of living in the margins, outside white and/or middle-class society. They focus on moments when they find no validity in their personal experiences with language, when they try to

conform to society's standards. They narrate how they learned how to identify with their past selves in order to deal with the tension that is involved in choosing which words work best for a specific context and purpose; they learn to negotiate their use of language and to deal with the tension between public and private language. In making choices, they shape and reshape their selves.

Even though the mainstream students presented in this project have not had to face ethnic, cultural, or economic boundaries as they have developed linguistically, these students share one aspect with the marginalized: an alienation from language. However, what will be illustrated is that these students are not consciously aware of this alienation. Their histories reveal that they have little to no relationship with their language skills. They consider writing to be an externalized, separate skill, not a skill that reflects and forms their identity. Student stories indicate they have had little, if any, opportunity to examine their literacy skills within the context of their developing sense of self.[5]

---

[5] The following description outlines my process of recruiting students, along with basic biographical information of the students who took part in this study: After receiving IRB approval, my first step was to ask my colleagues if I could visit their classrooms to recruit students for the study. Most of my colleagues were teaching introductory writing and literature courses. When I visited these classrooms, I described my project to the students and simply asked if they could sacrifice about 30 minutes for an interview in which I ask questions about their experiences with writing. Interested students provided their name and email address. I then sent each interested student an email that included the required IRB contract and my questionnaire, which can be found in Appendix A. Thirty-six students volunteered. I conducted 29 face-to-face interviews, which were audio-taped, and seven students responded to the same list of questions in written form. I then transcribed and analyzed the interviews, looking for patterns, and these patterns comprise the data in Chapters II and III. Of these 36 students, 20 are female, and 16 are male. Their ages break down accordingly: 14 were 18 years old; 12 were 19 years old; four students were 20 years old; and three were 21 years old. Lastly, one student was 22, one was 23, and one was 26. Relating their ages to their classification, freshman made up the largest group at 23. Six students were sophomores; three were juniors, and four were seniors. Their majors were varied, with General Studies making up the largest group at eight, mainly because most of the participants were freshman, and they had not yet declared a major. Five students were English majors. Political science, history, meteorology, and

Chapters II, III, and IV move from published literacy narratives to students' stories about their literacy histories. Chapter II, "Ethos as Place: Writing Classrooms as Sites of Standardization," opens with a discussion about ethos as it pertains to place. I base the discussion on Michael Hyde's introduction to the anthology *The Ethos of Rhetoric* and to Nedra Reynold's article "Ethos as Location: New sites for Understanding Discursive Authority." Hyde's and Reynolds's definitions for ethos establish a connection between writers' ethical or moral character and the spaces they inhabit. To draw a connection with the spaces where students have resided (high school English classrooms) and their sense of ethos, I present portions from student interviews and student literacy narratives in which they describe lessons they have learned about writing. They describe classrooms that revolve around grammar, MLA citations – not on developing ideas or using their creativity. Their responses also reveal that a discrepancy exists between state education agencies' goals about writing and what students actually learn about writing while in high school. For example, one of Texas Education

---

computer science each had two majors in the study. Other majors included physics, philosophy, chemistry, education, nutrition sciences, engineering, and math. Thirty-one students are from Texas with seven from the Houston area, six from the Dallas/Ft. Worth area, and five from the San Antonio area. The rest of the Texans came from medium-sized cities, like Wichita Falls and Lubbock, along with small towns, like The Grove and Coleman, Texas. Students from outside Texas came from Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, Connecticut, and one student was from Saudi Arabia. I also asked how big their high school was, and most students graduated from large, public high schools. For example, sixteen students graduated from high schools of at least 2,000 students. Ten students graduated in classes with less than 200 students. Only one student was home-schooled. In addition to these 36 students, I also gathered 40 literacy narratives that my students wrote in three sections of my Advanced Composition course. At the conclusion of each semester, I asked my students if they would allow me to copy their literacy narratives and the reflection pieces they wrote after writing the literacy narrative. This data is presented in Chapter IV. (Those students also signed a permission form per IRB requirements.)

Agency's goals is for students to internalize their writing, but that goal is seldom realized. Students see their writing classrooms as restrictive sites, places where writing is either done right or wrong.

Chapter III, "Exigence and Ethos: The Private Vision of the Self," discusses ethos as it is commonly related to a person's character and the role that exigence plays when writing. The chapter begins with a review of Aristotle's definition of ethos and Lloyd Bitzer's article, "The Rhetorical Situation." The chapter presents students' responses to two questions: "What do you associate with the word 'writing'?" and "What have been your favorite assignments and least favorite assignments?" The responses are organized around three themes that are linked to exigence and ethos: feeling, movement, and identity. Students' responses suggest that in order to see themselves as writers, they first must be motivated to write. Their narratives also indicate that they need opportunities to write about subjects that interest them, so they gain confidence, authority, and their writerly ethos. Exigence becomes a necessary component for any assignment the student is asked to complete if we want our students to learn from their writing and to internalize their language skills.

Chapter IV, "Literacy Narratives: Reflections of Pedagogies and Processes," focuses on the benefits of assigning literacy narratives in composition classrooms. I analyze the verbs students used in reflection-essays that they wrote after writing a literacy narrative in my Advanced Composition class. I apply M.A.K. Halliday's functional grammar. He classifies verbs, which he calls

processes, into five categories. I focus on three of his categories: mental, material, and relational processes. I emphasize verbs because verbs are actions; writing is an action, and actions affect our sense of self. They reveal who we are. Thus, I focus on verbs in order to uncover how the literacy narrative affects mainstream students' identities. The verbs students used in their reflective essays suggest that the assignment is a valuable exercise because they are able to reflect on their personal experiences with writing. In doing so, they identified positive and negative external influences that have affected their writing abilities.

Chapter V, "Literacy Narratives: Moving Toward an Ethical Pedagogy," discusses literacy narratives within the context of composition's current pedagogical theories and practices. I assess two debates in particular: 1) personal versus academic writing models; and, 2) social-epistemic versus expressivist rhetoric. I argue that literacy narratives are important pedagogical tools because they illustrate that none of these pedagogies identified in compositionists' debates have helped students become better writers. Students' descriptions collapse the personal/academic binary because students find an academic assignment to be personal when they are invested and care about the assignment, no matter the topic of the paper. Expressivist and social-epistemic approaches are not effective in the way that James Berlin defines them. Expressivist pedagogy places too much attention on the individual, while social-epistemic pedagogy places too much attention the social. I call for an ethical pedagogy that blends the personal and the social. Our attention should be on developing students' confidence by helping

them investigate the relationship between the spaces they inhabit and how those spaces influence them on a *personal* level. I place literacy narratives and an ethical pedagogy within the post-process theory paradigm; post-process theory allows for a consideration of the writer (the personal) and the writer's spaces (the social). By creating a pedagogy based on ethos, students can become more confident and form relationships with language and their literacy practices.

CHAPTER II

ETHOS AS PLACE:

WRITING CLASSROOMS AS SITES OF STANDARDIZATION

One of Kenneth Burke's most famous passages is the metaphor of the continuous conversation that comes from *The Philosophy of Literary Form* (1941). He writes,

> Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress. (110-11)

Burke's metaphor depicts what occurs when a writer researches a topic, issue, or debate and attempts to understand its various sides in order to add his (proverbial) two cents to the conversation. Cathy Birkenstein and Charles Graff use this metaphor in their textbook *They Say, I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing* (2006) for first year writers to illustrate the anxiety, and possible embarrassment, associated with crashing a party, and the anxiety associated with taking that initial, daunting step to enter an academic conversation. In order to communicate effectively, having confidence to even enter the parlor becomes just

as important as having knowledge about the topic, issue, or debate. Confidence, unfortunately, is one characteristic that young adult writers have not fostered by the time they begin college.

Burke's metaphor of entering an academic, intellectual dialogue demonstrates the movement between private and public language: a person takes private thoughts or ideas to share them in a public forum, the parlor. Furthermore, Burke's view of an academic, intellectual dialogue is a metaphor for ethos that calls for a confident and knowledgeable "you" who enters the discussion. The confidence that is requisite parallels the Aristotelian notion of ethos. Speakers and writers should believe in their communicative ability so that their audience will want to listen or to read what they have to say: In *On Rhetoric*, for example, Aristotle states, "…character is almost, so to speak, the controlling factor in persuasion" (I. 2. 4). In addition, Burke's metaphor emphasizes a setting, a parlor. Place is part of the "primordial meaning" (Hyde xiii) of the word ethos, as a "'dwelling place'" (xviii).

Concentrating on the original definition of ethos, this chapter presents findings from student interviews and literacy narratives. Students' quotes and excerpts provide strong evidence that the "dwelling places" students have come from (like high school English classrooms) are confining spaces, mainly due to the strictures of standardized testing and the emphasis that is placed on correctness, not on ideas or creativity. For instance, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) provides an "Information Booklet" regarding its rationale for the exit test in

language arts that students must pass their junior year; it stresses the importance of writing practice in order for students to

> internalize the skills they need to become confident and competent writers. Students' writing skills can be strengthened in many ways: by keeping a journal or portfolio, by writing in response to reading or in response to a movie or other viewing experience, by writing the procedures for and results of a science experiment, by writing an essay for history or art class, etc. Valuable writing experiences do not have to be, and should not always be, prompt-driven. (4)

On paper, TEA's objectives are appropriate and sound, but it will be made clear that these provisions are not met. Most of the lessons that students remember revolve around prompt-driven assignments. My research on students' attitudes towards writing shows that students, by the time they have finished high school, have not "internalized the skills they need to become confident and competent writers." They do not see writing as a skill that evinces their sense of self, nor have they realized that their language conveys their sense of the world. Students do not have opportunities to develop ideas, so they do not feel confident when writing; their sense of ethos suffers as does their literacy development.

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of ethos as it pertains to place. The chapter then analyzes excerpts from student interviews and student written literacy narratives in response to Question 8: "What points have your teachers stressed or repeated about writing and which points do you still adhere to and why?" These responses make up Group A. Students mention general writing lessons, including thesis statements, MLA format, punctuation, and the five-

paragraph essay. Teaching formulaic writing to young writers, like those in early high school, is a good way to *introduce* students to writing longer papers. However, based on student responses and descriptions, it appears that very little – if anything – is done to move students into more complex forms.

Many composition scholars have suggested that formulaic writing has become an epidemic of sorts in secondary level English classrooms. However, we have not heard directly from students who are affected by standardized testing. Thus, the second part consists of responses from students regarding their experiences with standardized testing and writing. Group B is comprised of responses to Question 9: "In high school how much time per week did you spend in class preparing for standardized writing tests, either state mandated or for the SAT?" Students' answers convey feelings of frustration, and they uncover students' lack of engagement with writing.

Ethos as Place: Lessons Students Have Learned

In Aristotelian tradition, ethos is one of the three appeals, or proofs, along with logos (the logic/reason behind the argument) and pathos (the audience's emotional reaction to the argument). Although ethos is most commonly defined as the speaker's or writer's character, rhetorical scholars have examined ethos in relation to its original definition. Michael Hyde and Nedra Reynolds return to ethos's original meaning that is rooted in place or location. In "Rhetorically we Dwell," the introduction to the collection *The Ethos of Rhetoric* (2006), Hyde

writes, "The ethical practice of rhetoric entails the construction of a speaker's *ethos* as well as the construction of a 'dwelling place' (*ethos*) for collaborative and moral deliberation" (xviii) indicating that one's surroundings, the habits of a society or culture, affect one's sense of self. Hyde returns to ethos's etymology to

> refer to the way discourse is used to transform space and time into 'dwelling places' (*ethos*; pl. *ethea*) where people can deliberate about and 'know together' (*con-scientia*) some matter of interest. Such dwelling places define the grounds, the abodes or habitats, where a person's ethics and moral character take form and develop. (xiii)

Similarly, Nedra Reynolds in her article "Ethos as Location" (1993) writes that the word's etymology, "its connections to space, place, or location – helps to reestablish as a social act and as a product of community's character" (327). In both Hyde's and Reynolds's definition, a relationship is established between one's ethical or moral character and the space she inhabits, the community where she resides. By connecting identity and location, we form a relationship between the personal (one's sense of self) and the public (one's community), a relationship based on language, calling to mind postmodern theories associated with discourse communities.

Reynolds focuses on "the potential of ethos to open up more spaces in which to study writers' subject positions or identity formations, especially to examine how writers establish authority and enact responsibility from positions not traditionally considered authoritative" (326). It is these spaces (writing classrooms) and the writers (students who have resided in them) that are the subjects of this chapter. The writing classrooms where students resided prior to

coming to college have not "open[ed] up more spaces" for students. As a result, students do not have opportunities to "establish authority" so their "positions" are as subjects – not as agents – in their own development as writers. Without opportunities to establish authority over their writing and ideas, students do not develop their ethos: they see the spaces where they write as confining, and they do not have faith in themselves as writers. To build confidence, students must invest themselves in what they are writing, whether it is a topic of their own choosing or one that they are assigned. Authority results from ownership. But the main theme that arises from students' comments is the lack of ownership.

Group A consists of 39 descriptions of what students remember learning about writing in high school. The parts of students' answers that are most relevant to the issue of authority, confidence, or ethos are in bold print. Some additional questions were asked to clarify ideas or to gather additional information, and these questions are paraphrased; however, the responses themselves are not paraphrased or summarized (even those that are rather lengthy) since the importance of this project lies in what students say or write about writing in order to understand why they lack confidence in their writing skills. I am certain that these students' teachers taught more than what students describe below, but what is significant is that these lessons are what students have remembered; in other words, these lessons are the most prominent in their minds and what has stayed with them.

Group A

Student 1

"*I remember […] I don't really know. I really can't stop doing it is even though it's I not even think it's not even appropriate enough for college level papers is* ***writing an introduction that has like the second to last sentence is the thesis sentence, and the last sentence is what she called the guide sentence, which lay[s] out my three points, and then I write my three points, and then I have a conclusion. I mean it's really hard for me to get away from that."***

I asked if he was describing a five-paragraph essay. He replied, "***Yeah, yeah except the five paragraph essay isn't really long enough for college level papers****, so instead of writing one paragraph, I still usually have three points, [but] instead of writing one paragraph on three points, I write two or three, so it's like, it's a, it's a introduction, three paragraphs on the first point, two pars of the second point, three paragraphs on the third point, and the conclusion. But it's still that the three main point. . . ."*

"Do you consider that a negative part of your writing?" I asked, and he said, ***"It makes things a little easier, but a lot of times it looks, to me it's sorta contrived,*** *and I mean I wish I could sort of expand beyond that to because, I mean, it's, I feel that the paper doesn't flow as well if if it's really really clear [. . .] like 'moving on to my second point,' I don't feel like, you just sort of,* ***it's just sort of juvenile looking****."*

I asked if he learned this structure in middle school or high school: "*Yeah, yeah […]* ***because I think that cause I took AP English****, and I think that's what really worked for an AP English test 'cause you have for AP English, you have X amount of time to write an essay […] and* ***so it helps to think, 'Okay, I've gotta write have a thesis and a write three points' and all and so that's pretty much what the teachers taught us."***

He continued after being asked if he wanted to add anything else: ***"Well one teacher taught us a whole lot about transition sentences*** *and different, and so now [. . .] anytime I write a paragraph, and I remember she taught us like, I* ***there was like, there were three or four different ways you can use to write a transition sentence****. I don't remember what they are, but now like, whenever I'm transitioning from paragraph to paragraph, I always have to make sure that it flows well [. . .] For some reason, that's one thing I remember being really stressed in high school. [. . .]* ***I feel like high school as far as creative writing went, I did very little. I remember we were assigned very little creative writing. I***

don't know if I was taught this, but I feel like what was encouraged was sort of dramatic, descriptive like somewhat flowery language."

I asked, "And you didn't like that?" and he replied, "*No, not really*."

I then asked he would prefer he had more opportunities to write creatively. He said, "***Yeah, I would always get so excited whenever we had a creative writing assignment. It was very very rare [because] I guess in AP English there's no [. . .] for AP tests there's no need for creative writing***. *And I don't know, we read a lot of books, and I guess we were focused way more on like the literature part at my high school at least than on creative writing. I wrote um, let's see, I wrote one short story. I had to write one short story my junior year that I can remember, and I think I had to write one poem my junior year too, and then I wrote like one short story my senior year and that's it."*

I asked, *"Looking back do you think that by having more opportunities to write creatively would have helped essay writing? Do you see any connections?"* He replied, "***Well, I feel like me and a lot of other students was [sic] more excited about creative writing than essay writing. I mean just way more excited about it, and ah, I think we were all, I mean I'm sure some people didn't like it, but I guess that it would have at least made us more, just sort of have a better view toward writing in general if we were able to do more creative writing to make writing a little fun***, *and I noticed that sort of when I would read other people's stuff in high school, they were still trying to bring creative writing into, just like research papers, or essays, and things where it really didn't fit, but in their introductions and conclusions, I think that's where they thought they could bring it out, and so they sort of try to make it make it, sort of more, I guess, dramatic even though it was just a research paper, so I think that was us trying to take what we really liked about writing and incorporating into like research writing which was [. . .] not as enjoyable."*

Student 2

"*In 8th grade [I] had this teacher and more than anything,* ***her papers she stressed never using the same word twice***. *Excluding 'the,' 'a,' but like descriptive words and stuff we couldn't ever use the same word twice****. It was hard, but I think it's helped me be a better writer than I would have had she not done that. It helps me be more descriptive in what I would want to say and stuff****."*

Student 3

"*There's no right or wrong answer [. . .]* ***Good grammar, spelling*** *[…]* ***The E-word elaboration elaborate, elaborate, elaborate that was always really stressed****. Don't just state it you know, elaborate on it, expand."*

I asked him if his teachers stressed the five-paragraph model, also. He answered, *"****It [the five-paragraph essay] was just kind of like a muscle memory type thing – you almost automatically assume that's what it would be . . . ."***

I then followed up by asking if it was difficult to break out of the five-paragraph mold, and he said, *"Not really* ***it was kind of a relief '****cause you not, you know 'First I will tell you about this, secondly…'* ***It was nice to deviate from****."*

Student 4

"*Um… probably* ***transitioning from paragraph to paragraph*** *and then like* ***punctuational errors and stuff like that*** *and then whether we're doing MLA usually we have to do MLA,* ***but they're always stressing the MLA format over and over and over."***

Student 6

"***Introduction and conclusion****.* ***Tell me what you're gonna tell me and then tell me it and then tell me what you told me****. I don't always necessarily agree with it all the time, but I think it's good […]* ***Capitalizing and punctuation and good mechanics".***

Student 7

"***I remember being told to cite everything****. [That's] about all I remember."*

Student 8

"***Don't start a sentence with 'and,' which never made sense to me, why that had to be a rule****.* ***One point per paragraph****. I never got transitioning sentences really well. I never get those paragraphs. I could never get the concluding paragraphs either or introductions. I don't understand while they're necessary. I've never been good at introductions [. . .]* ***Don't use "that," always use a noun."***

Student 9

"***I definitely think that your thesis is always at the end of the introduction.*** *Like I know there are some teachers out there that'll say at the end of your paper, but*

I've always been taught at the end of the introduction and that that is the most important part. ***The conclusion basically repeats the thesis & highlights the important parts of your writing****. [. . .]*

Student 10

"***I think definitely the introduction, three sentences, you know, [the five-paragraph essay], and I think it was stressed so much that it's almost hard to get out that little rut especially, now I understand that it doesn't have to be like that, the topic and the two supporting and so forth.*** *I know now it doesn't really have to be like that but that was just a way for them back then to get us to support our ideas. I think that was hard to get out of at first. And also they always* ***in high school they always stressed pre-writing, and I never prewriting, never really helped me as much because I could never really get my ideas, and my best way to get ideas is to just start writing and then to afterwards try to organize it,*** *but just start try to write a rough draft and* ***then see my ideas*** *and see if I want to add anything else and then organize it so you know it flows right."*

I asked him if it was difficult to give up the five-paragraph format. He replied, ***"relieved because then I could write the paper how I wanted to and not have to try to fit it into some structure****."*

Student 11

"After talking about standardized testing,] she said, "*When I got into junior senior year, I had excellent English teachers, um, they probably, I don't know if it was one specific thing they pushed, but just the general like, kind of being,* ***I guess, just being creative with the way you write things, um, and there was like certain things, like don't stop using 'you' like don't put 'you' in your paper, so I guess that is one thing they did stress****, but it's easy to fall into, but with****, just the idea of being and using a higher vocabulary****."***

Student 12

"***For my school the ah, the ah concrete detail, commentary, commentary set up or like the chunk paragraphs. Like we had to do everything in the same exact format all throughout school like we'd have an introductory paragraph and then a body paragraph and like a topic sentence concrete detail, commentary, commentary and just repeat that pattern like exactly like that***."

I asked Student 12 if he continues to adhere to that pattern in his current writing course, and he said, "*Well this is the first real paper I have to write for my English class,* ***but I try not to do that*** *[. . .] because, um, for one,* ***Miss M said it's not the only thing to do like you can do other stuff too, and I never really liked that form***

or pattern or whatever [. . .] Probably because it was engrained into my head, and like we weren't allowed to do anything else*. And I think like one topic, if you just talk like one thing and the different parts of it can be better than like sticking to like three separate things and like not talking about any of the and not overlapping or anything and just having to talk about in those specified places, and you can describe something better if your whole paper like goes together for like the one topic."*

Student 13

"***I think they, always doing outlines was one of the most important things,*** *and I like I used to hate it hate it because I just didn't find the point. I just wanted to write, but now that I don't have someone telling me how to write, I actually do outlines because you're just like, how do I start this paper? [. . .]* ***Like minor things like contractions and stuff."***

Student 14

"*I guess,* ***like grammar****. They talked about* ***run-ons and fragments*** *you know, and stuff like that is that like* ***punctuation. Don't use words like thing. Don't use such basic words like 'good' and 'very.'"***

Student 16

"***You always had to have five paragraph structure. You always had to start out broad and then add and get detailed. Your thesis statement was always at the beginning of your ???. You always had to have a maximum and a minimum of three details or um three supporting [ideas].*** *Just I don't know, um."*

I asked him if he was following this pattern for his first paper, a rhetorical analysis, in his freshman English class. He said, "*Yes… it was kind of in that same format as well. Um, I know we're going to get into more creative things that we can do what you want but right now it's still in that format."*

Student 17

"***Being more detailed, using strong vocabulary something like that."***

Student 18

"***Clear thesis statement. Back up your facts. Um, bring examples. Other big things were don't use 'I,' 'you,' always write in the third person****. They weren't too strict on how to quote things, that they really didn't get too strict on that till senior year.* ***They always wanted us to have five paragraphs with at least five***

sentences each. *[I still follow] part of it.* ***One thing I still hold onto is I still try not to use the 'I' and the 'you.' I always try to write in the third person unless it's a personal experience paper.*** *But I always try to get around four paragraphs, four to five paragraphs so you can be decent enough that way I have an introduction, a conclusion and so I have some sort of body in the middle where I have some sort of facts and examples.* ***I still try to stay by it but not entirely completely [. . . I] use it as a guideline but not a structure."***

Student 19

"***Always having a strong introduction to draw people in****…. um…* ***really evaluating and describing in your body paragraphs****.* ***Being very descriptive and having a good thesis****, which I've always had trouble with […] 'Cause I always have trouble starting a paper. I kind of just start and then I go back."*

Student 20

"*My high school all four English classes were very different from each other because of the teachers, but my, I could say that most of my learning came from my senior year because she used to be a professor. It was pretty difficult, and we would actually write every Friday before the SATs.* ***And she would just stress that we need to focus on our thesis statements, such as to like create a much powerful statement that involves, she would stress three points at least because that was her focus on our writing that it would have a three body paragraphs. And also correct use of tenses, correct use of arguments, and she just wanted a paper that made sense*** *[. . .] We had to write papers that were on like the college freshman level. Also MLA format. [. . .] Actually, I didn't mind [following the structure] because it was actually a good way to structuring my paper that I was supposed to write because at least it gives me some sort of roadmap of where I'll be going per paragraph I mean, then writing, it it becomes somewhat difficult to make it flow together but at least that gave me like something to start with better than just like a paper inside my head and just write at least some new information that's very helpful."*

Student 21

"Um, throughout high school they said, "Jane Schaeffer." Jane Schaeffer everything. ***You have the topic sentence, and then you have the concrete detail, and then the commentary, commentary, and then it keeps going from there. Um, they really really stressed that****. I mean freshman year we had the little handouts where we had the blocks, and it would say topic sentence, and we would have to write it, and then it'd say concrete detail, and we'd have to write it, and then there's a big box for commentary* ***so then ever since freshman year we were expected to know that that style of writing and write like that ever since."***

I asked if she liked that method, and she responded positively: *"**I find it very beneficial now. It really really organizes my paper into a really good manner […] I followed that completely. It's stuck in my brain."***

Student 22

"***Good thesis, um don't forget to use quotes. Like use other sources and get quotes from passages and a good conclusion**. […]*

I asked Student 22 if he feels that he was prepared well for college. He replied, "*Right now I'm not really struggling but our education from my high school wasn't that great. A lot of my teachers did do their best in trying to teach me how to write, and I just kind of kept what they told me to do."*

Student 23

"*Probably **like MLA format has been stressed a lot. Like sentence structure has been stressed a lot** […] **Like having variety, different kinds of sentences. Grammar has been stressed a lot.**"*

I asked her if she carried over these lessons to college, and she said, "*I try to as much as I can."*

Student 24

"*All my teachers have been pretty different. **But a lot them have really stressed like the mechanics of writing, like getting your punctuation right and where to like how to place your thoughts. They stressed mechanics**. I think that's important, but it seems like quite a bit of emphasis was put on that, and not so much like what you actually are trying to say what you're trying to write about. **They're just worried about getting your punctuation right."*** I asked this student if she wished that the emphasis was different. She replied, *"Well, sometimes, I think that's important, too. It's part of you know like learning to write. **Yeah, I guess sometimes maybe it'd be nice to be able to like write something that you want to write and not have like 20 guidelines of what you aren't and are supposed to do.** But I also like learning styles of writing, writing arguments. There's good ideas in that like learning how to present a good argument. I like learning stuff like that…."*

She then she described her experience with writing an argument for her first year writing class. I asked her if she continues to remember and use the rules she has learned. She replied, *"Basic writing skills, yeah just basic mechanics."*

Student 25

"*Um,* ***to your thesis to be like [. . .] to pretty much explain what you're writing about and to have like a strong introduction, so the reader will even want to continue to read the paper. And multiple rough drafts to like 'cause your paper won't ever be perfect you can always fix up [. . .] That and like proofreading from other people not just yourself because like peers tend to catch things that I might think is right."***

Student 26

The ***"emphasis***" was placed on ***"structure and grammar."*** She remembers her teachers telling her, *"This is how you* ***have to write***."

Students 27

She remembers teachers stressing ***"good sentences, opening and closing paragraphs."***

Student 28

She mentioned that her teachers focused on ***"stating a thesis, citing work, and to put feelings into it."***

Student 29

She learned to ***"fall back on structure" by establishing "a thesis and sticking to it."***[6]

Students 30 through 37 chose to respond to the same questions in written format instead of meeting me for an interview. Their responses below are copied below.

Student 30

"*My teachers* ***consistently stressed a good thesis*** *in writing. I typically have no difficulty in this area, though this semester seems to prove a little harder…"*

[6] Students 2 through 25 are those I interviewed. Unfortunately, during the interviews with Students 26 through 29, the tape recorded ran out of battery life, so parts of their answers are quoted directly and parts are summarized based on notes taken during the interviews.

Student 31

"*Write what you know and take risks.* ***As students we always feel that we are writing about the wrong things, but most of the time we actually do know what we are talking about. I feel that we are always second guessing ourselves."***

Student 32

"***Organization, keeping the readers' attention, and transitioning smoothly from topic to another***."

Student 33

"The standard thesis, three main ideas, conclusion format is often stressed by teachers even at the college level*. Sometimes this is predictable and boring to read, unless I'm grading papers and need a nice easy rubric so I don't have to engage deeply in each piece of writing.* ***But then there are some professors who nearly revel in ambiguity, giving the student seemingly unlimited methods of expression only to grade by a specific standard. I suspect these teachers of being unable to verbally express what they want from students****, assuming that those students will inevitably come near to the same conclusions and in same ways as they themselves did by reading the same texts, neglecting that a totally different framework is involved with each student's unique presuppositions and experiences.* ***Ideally a professor would reveal their prejudices [. . .] Ideally a professor would say, 'This is how you will be expected to write hence this is how you should write for this class unless you can come up with something I judge to be better and chances are I won't so please don't try unless you're a virtuoso.' The point here is that most professors don't stress concepts about writing. For as long as I can remember it has just been assumed that you know how to write because you can string words together to form sentences, and beyond that point the learning process is your own. Reading good writing helps.***

Student 34

"***To have a good thesis, humor, to elaborate and explain your argument.*** *They are all good points to be stressed."*

Student 35

"***Throughout high school it was always stressed that my papers needed to be more cohesive and that a good paper has rhythm****. Since then I have tried to make sure my paper flows to the best of my ability.* ***I'll often move sentences around so it sounds just right. I also try to use strong vocabulary****, I know if my vocabulary sounds*

good the paper itself will sound better."

Student 36

*"**All of my teachers have stressed proper format** for papers and it is the only one I can remember and actually follow. I follow the format because I can remember it due to taking a formatting class that taught MLA, business and personal letters, and a bunch of other ways to format."*

Student 37

*"Points that teachers stressed that I remember are **to never use the word "a lot" and to try a different word."***

The next three excerpts come from students who wrote literacy narratives. They describe their experiences in their high school English classes. To differentiate excerpts from literacy narratives, I have labeled these students with letters instead of numbers.

Student N

*"**When I entered junior high, I began to learn a new kind of writing. We learned to write comparative, persuasive, how-to and other forms of papers. With these new, very structured papers, I found myself doing the minimum when writing**. Even though the assignments were not hard on the surface, **they were made difficult because the subjects were uninteresting.** I particularly despised writing some of the how-to essays. Who wants to write about how to wash a car? [. . .] **Fictional writing gives me the freedom I need to be able to write about my own experiences or use my imagination to write. I think my declining interest in writing through high school was due to assignments that did not interest me."***

Student R

*"...**Writing, however, became my new interest in high school. After I submitted a poem I wrote for English to Poetry.com during my freshman year and they asked to publish it in their annual poetry book, I considered writing more frequently and found that I truly enjoyed it.** After trying my hand at poetry, my attention began turning to song lyrics as my interest in music and ability to play guitar increased."*

Student S

"For example, the ***Jane Shaffer method of writing was introduced my freshman year of high school. The sentence pattern had to be one sentence with concrete information, then two sentences followed by commentary thoughts. The essay consisted of five paragraphs, including an introduction, three body paragraphs and a conclusion. The restrictive writing style made me see writing as more of a rule system in what I could and couldn't do, rather than a way of expressing my thoughts and feelings*** *[. . .] Nevertheless, my interest in English class transferred to math. Math made sense to me because it was black and white, right or wrong. English, on the other hand, was all shades of gray [. . .] Although my high school reflections on English class are unpleasant memories, my middle and elementary school days were exciting!"*

Student V

*"****During high school, I developed in my writing. Most of this development came in my senior year when I began writing more and more essays, typically personal narratives****. During this time, I learned more about my writing habits and I began to notice my voice and how I used it in my writing. Even in non-personal essays, I began to notice a trend in the way I would write and present ideas on paper.* ***Writing no longer took the role of schoolwork in my life, but as a way to express myself as artists do while painting****."*

Overall, these students convey a tone of resignation as they describe their past experiences in writing classrooms. Several students see writing as a system of rules or as a fill-in-the-blank process, a process that does not require complex ideas or thought. Because they see writing as fill-in-the-blank, students simply go through the motions and remain disconnected and uninvested in the papers they have been asked to write. A lack of investment does not promote authenticity, which in turn does not promote a writerly ethos.

Eleven students describe lessons that revolve around adhering to a specified structure, the five-paragraph essay. At the beginning of his response, Student 1 describes (almost shamefully) his experience with the five-paragraph

structure that he was taught because he has learned that college writing goes beyond that simple structure, a structure that he calls "juvenile looking." He acknowledges that the five-paragraph structure worked well while he was taking Advanced Placement English, but he has learned that college writing is not as "contrived" or as standardized. Although Student 1 continues to write papers with three main points, consisting of several paragraphs each, he says that he wishes he "could sort of expand beyond that" pointing to a need to move out of a predictable pattern. He has realized that it is difficult "to get away from that," as if the pattern continues to pull him in or that applying a three-point format has become automatic. Student 3 shares similar thoughts about the five-paragraph essay in that it was "a muscle-memory type thing," and little thought went into writing a paper. The content of the paper was secondary to its structure; he adds, "It [the structure] was nice to deviate from" once he came to college.

Students use metaphors of immobility to reveal how restricted they feel when writing in a formulaic fashion. Student 10 describes the five-paragraph essay as writing in "a rut," something he could not get out of until he left high school. Now he feels "relieved" that he does not have to follow that structure, and he can write a "paper how [he] wanted to." Like Student 10, Student 12 recalls, "Like we had to do everything in the same exact format all throughout school," and that "it was engrained into my head, and like we weren't allowed to do anything else." This format was etched, like a ditch, into his thought process, and considering that

his "chunk paragraphs" were required while he was in high school, he had little, if no opportunity to expand the structure, and in turn, to expand his thoughts.

Student 33, the oldest participant in this study, says that his college professors also expect the five-paragraph essay: "The standard thesis, three main ideas, conclusion format is often stressed by teachers even at the college level," and he believes that this structure is "predictable and boring to read…." The fact that college instructors expect this structure is distressing; it indicates that either professors are not doing enough to teach their students about writing (in other disciplines than English), that they believe the best writing comes from a five-paragraph structure, or that they accept this structure because it is easy to grade – an observation Student 33 notes himself. No matter the reason, students' writing abilities are negatively affected when they are forced to adhere to a five-paragraph model.

Continuing on this theme of requirements, Students 16, 21, and 26 remember "having to" write in a specified form. For example, Student 16 says, "You always *had to have* five paragraph structure," and Student 20 recalls that their writing "would *have* a three paragraphs" [sic]. Student 18 remembers that her teachers "wanted us *to have* five paragraphs with at least five sentences each." Student 21 offers details about the Jane Schaeffer method, in which the writer needs "a topic sentence, and then you have the concrete detail, and the commentary, commentary. . . ." Once Student 21 learned this method, he states, "we were *expected to* [. . .] write like that ever since." However, unlike most of his

peers who took part in this project, he believes the method has been beneficial because "It's stuck in [his] brain," so he falls back on the structure, like a crutch. Student 24 admits that it would be "nice to be able to write something that you want to write and not have 20 guidelines" that dictate what is supposed to be included or not included.

What is evident in these examples is that none of these students had opportunities to make choices about the structure of their writing. Limiting or maximizing the number of sentences in each paragraph confines students to fit into a mold. As a result, their ideas suffer because they cannot expand them beyond five sentences. Student S astutely describes the guidelines she had to follow and the consequence of following it: "The restrictive writing style made me see writing as more of a rule system [. . .] rather than a way of expressing my thoughts and feelings." Her description provides a primary reason why students dislike writing: most have been bombarded with guidelines, requirements, and "do not's" rather than what they want to do or given freedom to do. Because they believe writing to be a stringent set of rules, their sense of ethos has suffered. They perceive writing as a means of expression, but that perception is countered by "the rules" that they must learn in school.

Perceiving writing as fill-in-the-blank also reinforces students' belief that writing is done in a right or wrong way. Students learn that writing is about correctness; they avoid writing because they worry about making mistakes. While writing grammatically correct papers also develops one's ethos (because it shows

readers that the writer is careful and deliberate), these young adults have been taught that grammatically correct papers mean more than the ideas that create the content of the paper. Basically, students have learned more about editing and *not* writing.

I use the word "editing" to refer to lessons that occur during the latter stages of the writing process: correct spelling and contractions (each mentioned once), punctuation errors (mentioned four times), mechanics (mentioned twice), and grammar (mentioned four times). These concerns are surface issues that most composition instructors tell their students to attend to as they prepare to "publish" or turn in their papers. However, several students mention that they remember correcting surface errors in their writing classes. Their responses point to the importance of the finished product looking correct or flawless, not to the ideas that make up the finished product. Ideas obviously originate with the student, so when ideas become secondary or are ignored, a student's confidence fades in his ability or his desire to generate thoughtful, interesting ideas. Motivation to develop ideas – to contribute to the conversation in the parlor – diminishes. Ideas and the language that he uses to express himself help to create his identity because they are *his* ideas. He becomes the creator, the agent, and the owner of the ideas.

Unfortunately, students seldom feel as if they own their writing, and in not owning their papers, they see language as something that happens "out there," not as a reflection of or as a part of themselves. Writing remains an externalized skill, something done for a grade. Students do not invest themselves in the language

they use or in their papers. Without investment there is no ownership, a theme that will be discussed in the next few paragraphs.

Nine students remember learning which words to use and which words not to use. While Students 18 and 35 try to use "strong vocabulary," Student 1 says, "…what was encouraged was sort of dramatic, descriptive like somewhat flowery language." His statement conveys a lack of ownership through its construction; the sentence is constructed in the passive voice, indicating that he was a passive (almost unwilling) participant in this type of lesson because he goes on to say that he did not like using "flowery language," and not being allowed to use words that he wanted illustrates his lack of ownership. While Student 2 found the challenge of not using the same word twice as beneficial, Student 8 never understood her teacher's mandate of not beginning a sentence with "and." Similar to the "and" rule, Student 14 says that her teacher, like many other teachers, suggested that students should not use common, vague terms, like "thing. Don't use basic words like 'good' and 'very.'" Using concrete terms and avoiding "a lot" make papers better, and these suggestions are ones that teachers make repeatedly. However, students use these vague expressions because they are not invested enough in their writing to find a better word to express their ideas.

Students also associate owning ideas to the use of sources, of depending (almost too much) on what other people have said about a topic. Using sources is necessary when entering an academic conversation, Burke's parlor. Student 22 sounds as if he is quoting his teachers' instructions directly in his answer: "Don't

forget to use quotes. Like use other sources and get quotes from passages." These imperatives constitute the lessons Student 22 remembers, and like Student 7, these lesson of obtaining sources are the *only* lessons he remembers. Citing sources is mentioned often within the context of MLA format. For instance, Student 4 stresses the importance his instructors have placed on MLA with his repetition of how often he was reminded of that convention: "over and over and over." Student 23 states that MLA format "has been stressed a lot." Knowing how to cite sources correctly and effectively is extremely important in the context of an academic conversation, so the writer has knowledge about the topic and understands the concept of intellectual property. These students' answers imply that their former teachers emphasized ideas from other sources, instead of teaching students how their ideas can work *alongside* sources.

Possessive pronouns are another obvious example of ownership. Student 2, while explaining how he learned never to use the same word twice, identifies explicitly the papers he wrote as "*her* papers" as if his teacher owned the work he completed; he did not. This answer is a strong example of the disconnection that students feel with their writing; they believe that assignments are written for their instructor's benefit, not for their personal benefit. Student 10 says that prewriting caused him difficulties because he "could never get *my* ideas, and *my* best way to get ideas is to just start writing and then to afterwards try to organize it. . . ." He could not control or gather his ideas during the early stages of the writing process. The prewriting that the teacher put in place did not work for him. Instead, he

wanted to use *his* "best way" or process; unfortunately, this response also implies that the early writing he preferred to do was not seen as prewriting because it was not accepted by his teacher.

The next set of examples focus on misconceptions of writing. Student 19 admits that she has difficulty in writing thesis statements because she believes she is not following the correct method, the rules. For example, she says, "…'cause I always have trouble starting a paper. I kind of just start and then I go back." One can assume that she has not learned – or has not been taught – that sometimes a thesis develops *after* writing the body of the paper. Student 9 explains a conclusion's purpose: "[it] repeats the thesis and highlights the important parts of your writing." While this description is a fairly solid understanding of how conclusions function, the definition focuses mainly on summarizing, not on the implications of the writer's ideas presented in the paper. Student 25 defines the purpose of the thesis statement: "to pretty much explain what you're writing about." Not that this definition is incorrect, but she misses the purpose of a thesis statement in that it does not simply explain the paper's topic. The student does not understand that a thesis statement contains the argument, not an explanation.

These definitions are grouped together because they each point to a lack of understanding about the writing process itself, a common characteristic in students' descriptions. A lack of knowledge is connected to a lack of ownership and confidence. Students have been taught that writing is a linear, not a recursive process, a process that *does not* resolve itself in a brainstorming – prewriting –

drafting – revising – publishing format. Unfortunately, teachers teach writing in this way, as a one-time production due to time constraints and due to the pressure of preparing students for standardized tests.

This lack of understanding is further demonstrated in the way students use English jargon. Students 6 and 24 mention the word "mechanics," but only Student 24 provides some kind of context as to how she defines it; she links it to "getting your punctuation right." Student 14 blends punctuation with syntactical issues when she says, "run-ons and fragments, you know, and stuff like that is that like punctuation." Syntax is equated to "stuff" like punctuation. In English classrooms, teachers use words like "mechanics" and "grammar" and "usage," so it is not surprising that students also use these words. What is questionable is whether students really understand the differences among these terms, and it can be assumed that students' perceptions and understandings of writing jargon differ from their actual meaning. I find this misunderstanding a problem since students talk about writing but do not have the vocabulary to talk about it in a meaningful way, furthering the distance students feel between themselves and writing classrooms.

The last example dealing with ownership and understanding is exemplified in students' statements that contain the verb phrase "never get/got." For instance, Student 8 says some form of "I never got" three times in her answer. She "never got transitioning," "those paragraphs," "concluding paragraphs" or "introductions." She obviously has a negative reaction to writing since she either

did not understand how the elements fit together in a conclusion or introduction, or she simply did not feel confident when writing these sections. If she "never gets" or masters the skill, she lacks an understanding of how to do the act, so her discomfort and uneasiness grow, not her writerly ethos.

With all the negative experiences and restrictive spaces, a few students offer glimpses of positive lessons learned. The first set is grouped together around the verb "be." Student 2 says that one of his high school teachers challenged her students by not repeating words in their writing, and she believes, "It helps me *be* more descriptive." Student 11 remembers his "excellent English teachers" and learning that "just *being* creative with the way you write things" is the most important part of writing. Student 17 remembers "*being* more detailed," and Student 19 responds with "*being* very descriptive." These replies connect the writers with their writing because they associate themselves, not the paper, with *being* creative, detailed, and descriptive. Students identify themselves with qualities of their writing, qualities that make their writing better. They also have created a relationship with their writing in the sense of internalizing the task; they see the writing as part of themselves, a step in a positive direction.

The second set of positive experiences is taken from two student literacy narratives. Student V says that she "developed in my writing" during her last year of high school when she wrote personal narratives, and Student R says that writing became important when he began writing poetry and got a poem published. In these two contexts, both of these students felt as if they owned their writing:

Student V had opportunities to write about topics that were relevant to her personally, and because Student R was being creative, he felt connected with poetry. Students R and V were the exception rather than the rule, unfortunately. These positive recollections reveal the importance of connecting with the writing that is assigned or is done of one's own choosing. Unlike the many negative experiences presented above, these students do not feel alienated from their writing or from language.

The rigid standards, molds, and specific structures that students have described are a direct result of standardized testing. Lessons students have learned about writing are not all negative, obviously; but when young adults begin college, they have to unlearn what they have believed or perceived to be effective writing, like the five-paragraph essay. The next section of this chapter evaluates students' comments on the amount of time they spent preparing for writing portions of standardized tests while in high school.

The history of standardized testing in America, and specifically, in Texas is relevant to this study. All but six of the students whom I interviewed have grown up in Texas schools, so most of these students' educational lives have been influenced by standardized tests. Part II begins with a description of the general objectives for writing found in the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test. (Most of the references students in this study make are in reference to the TAKS or to the TAAS which the TAKS replaced.)

Standardized Classrooms and Teaching to the Test

Standardized testing has been a common element in American education for over 100 years. In their article "Retrospective on Educational Testing and Assessment in the 20th Century" (2000) Marguerite Clarke and her colleagues examine the growth of standardized testing as it relates to technical developments that occurred within American society (160). The writers state that in the early 1900s both the IQ test and the multiple choice format became elements of education (161). For example, when the United States entered World War I, the army needed a proficient method to segregate soldiers as either being literate or illiterate; with the use of multiple choice tests, more people could be tested, and the tests could be graded quickly (161). The College Board, established in 1900, began administering written exams in 1901 to provide a standard by which students could be evaluated upon entering college. But by the time the first SAT was administered in 1926, a majority of the test consisted of multiple choice questions, and by the 1940s, no essay questions were part of the SAT (163). By the early 1930s "75% of 150 school systems in the USA used intelligence tests to track students into ability groups," and colleges also used these tests for admissions (162).

Prior to the establishment of the College Board, Harvard University had been administering its own college entrance exam, and in 1874 the exam began to include a writing portion (Connors 11). As Robert Connors points out in his book

Composition-Rhetoric: Background, Theory, and Pedagogy (1997), these writing exams revealed error-filled papers, and over "half the students taking these early examinations failed to pass" (128).[7] Consequently, a literacy crisis ensued as word spread that so many students did not do well on Harvard's writing exam (11). Because of this (so-called) literacy crisis, administrators at Harvard, along with the public, blamed high school English teachers for not preparing students well enough for college writing. James Berlin writes,

> This vilification of high school English teachers has since become a common practice as college English teachers have tried to shift the entire responsibility for writing instruction – a responsibility that throughout Anglo-American history has been shared by the college – to the lower schools. (*Rhetoric and Reality*, 24)

Dissatisfaction with secondary schools, as Berlin states, has become pervasive. College instructors today continue to wonder why their students do not learn enough about punctuation, grammar, or thesis statements from their high school English classes. I have taught high school English. My objective is not to "vilify" my former colleagues; public high school teachers, I believe, do the best they can considering the pressure that is placed upon them by state regulations. However, given the fact that criticism continues, it appears that little significant change has occurred. In addition, as Clarke et al. discuss, this continuing criticism – along with other literacy crises – has been a catalyst that has influenced the growth of the

---

[7]Adam S. Hill, Harvard's exam administrator, created a remedial course labeled as "English A, which moved the required sophomore writing course down to freshman year and simplified it" (Connors 129). Other schools followed Harvard's lead, and "Freshman Composition was born" (129).

testing industry since World War II; Clarke et al. allude to four such crises or "reform waves." They write, "Witness the Sputnik uproar of the 1950s, followed by the 'basic skills' movement of the 1970s, the release of the National Commission on Excellence in Education's *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, and the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* in the 1990s" (164). As the public feels dissatisfied with the educational system, education becomes enveloped in government and its bureaucracy, which then has "made the technology of multiple-choice, standardized, commercial tests an attractive tool" (164). Since the 1990s, standardized testing has reached its highest intensity since its inception (164). Administrators and politicians call for more testing, assuming that testing will cure students' punctuation errors and will help them write a better paragraph.

The most recent reform wave has been No Child Left Behind (NCLB), which was signed into law in 2002. According to the U.S. Department of Education's website, NCLB's goals, which they label as "Four Pillars," include "stronger accountability for results, more freedom for states and communities, proven education methods, and more choices for parents." These "Four Pillars" are dependent on state mandated tests, and the importance of these standardized tests has gone beyond the measurement of young students' attrition of facts and skills. School districts and their schools receive funding that is dependent on how well students perform on the tests; teachers are also evaluated by how well their students perform. Even though school funding and teacher accountability are serious issues and matters of contention among politicians, school boards, and

educators, these aspects of NCLB will not be addressed at length. However, it should be noted that NCLB has received much criticism from all of these groups.

For example, in 2004 the *Washington Post* reported that "23 states have lodged some kind of formal protest against No Child Left Behind" from both sides of the political aisle (Dobbs). Problems ensued as schools failed in meeting "rigid rates of student participation in standardized tests that thousands of schools were unable to meet" and consequently, these schools were placed on "watch lists" (Dobbs). The requirements penalized schools because disabled students and students with limited knowledge of English have performed poorly on the test, and since schools had to have at least 95% student participation to avoid penalties, these poor scores are included in the schools' overall performance (Dobbs). Additional problems concerning NCLB were reported in a *USA Today* article in 2006 detailing the problems states were having with obtaining permission to administer their tests: only ten states had received full approval from the government ("Most States"). Without approval, states could not receive federal funding.

In March, 2007 two articles described the dissonance that lawmakers have expressed regarding NCLB. The first article from the *Washington Post* reported that several Republican members of Congress were preparing "to introduce legislation [. . .] that could severely undercut [. . .] the No Child Left Behind Act, by allowing states to opt out of its testing mandates" (Paley and Weisman). The move seemed to have been prompted by "voters in affluent suburban and exurban

districts" who had grown disgruntled with their children's schools – similar settings to the mainstream students who took part in my study. According to the article, these voters believe that the schools "have increasingly become captive to federal testing mandates, jettisoning education programs not covered by those tests, siphoning funds from programs for the talented and gifted, and discouraging creativity" (Paley and Weisman). The verbs in this short passage – "captive," "jettisoning," and "siphoning" – identify the negative effects associated with testing. States, school districts, and ultimately, children feel bound and imprisoned by federal rules. Discarding or stealing from important programs only to reach federal rules hurts education programs because the power is not placed in the state's hands.

The second article, from *The Christian Science Monitor,* echoes the concern reported in the *Washington Post* about the problems NCLB was facing as it was preparing to be reauthorized. Gail Russell Chaddock reports that "problems in implementing NCLB have spawned criticism from principals, teachers, parents, education groups, and across the political spectrum." Its implementation depends on funding; Democrats, who regained control of Congress in 2006, have been calling for more federal funding, while Republicans were moving to offer legislation "that allows states to opt out of most of the law's requirements while keeping federal funding" (Chaddock). In addition, Democrats and Republicans were arguing about families using federal dollars in order for their children to

attend a different public, charter, or private school if their child has been attending a "chronically low-performing school" (Chaddock).

It is obvious that NCLB leaves much to be desired and needs to be completely revised. However, my argument against state standardized tests *and* the revised SAT lies in the way these tests force teachers to teach writing in a formulaic fashion. As a result, students' perceptions of writing become stilted. Students report that they learn little from taking standardized tests apart from the tricks that are needed to pass the test, and these tricks are based on fulfilling the rubrics. Linda Mabry writes in her article "Writing to the Rubric: Lingering Effects of Traditional Standardized Testing on Direct Writing Assessment" (1999) that standardized tests ignore students' authenticity (674) mainly because students do not write about topics that they are interested in. But administrators and politicians like statistics and believe that people's potential can be quantified. Assessment companies, including the College Board which administers the SAT, are not testing content but form and correctness. In other words, students must write essays that mirror a set pattern and/or achieve a certain length in order to receive a passing score; priority is not placed on ideas. Consequently, a young adult's writerly ethos is not developed.

The College Board's decision to change the format of the SAT by deleting the analogies and adding a writing portion was not motivated by the same concerns as NCLB, of "working to close the achievement gap" ("Four Pillars"). Instead the College Board felt pressure from the University of California system that was

thinking about dropping the SAT requirement from their admission's process because it [the test] "does not reflect enough of what is actually learned in the classroom" (Lewin). The UC system wanted to move toward subject tests. In a *New York Times* article, dated March 23, 2002, Tamar Lewin reports that the University of California system (whose president at the time was Dr. Richard C. Atkinson) admitted that it did not want to use the SAT during their review of incoming freshman; Lewin writes,

> The nine campus, 178,000-student University of California is the biggest user of the SAT I. Earlier this month, a U.C. faculty committee recommended that the school replace the test, beginning in 2006, with a new core test, supplemented by subject-matter tests, along the lines of the SAT II's, concrete knowledge tests offered in 22 subjects from world history and physics to Japanese.

The president of the College Board was then motivated to examine more seriously the implementation of a writing portion that mimicked the SAT II's prompt, and by July 13, 2002, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that the College Board decided to include a writing section and warned that "members of the class of 2006 will have the added torment of cranking out a short essay."

In the remainder of this *L.A. Times*'s editorial, titled "Write Up a Better Idea," its use of the word "torment" in their predilections does not only concern those students taking the test, but also those who must score the written responses. The article questions whether the College Board is prepared to evaluate over two million essays and whether human subjectivity "could also prove counterproductive" even though a rubric was established. The article says, "Like

it or not, students will try to write to it [the rubric]. The template will value variety of sentence structure and range of vocabulary, for example. This could lead to vivid and clear writing – or verbose, pretentious writing with too many commas and adverbs." Even though one of the reasons for including writing is to force schools to pay more attention to it, formulaic writing is not the type of writing that should be taught as students prepare to enter college, nor is a five-paragraph essay expected in the work place.

Charles McGrath's *New York Times* article "Writing to the Test" (2004) describes what the SAT is intended to accomplish and its probable unintended consequences, namely with writing. McGrath quotes a University of Texas professor and a high school English teacher who served on the test development committee that created the writing portion. Each says that he/she is aware that students only have 25 minutes, but the test's objective is for students to produce a first draft. These two instructors mentioned that they worked to create prompts that would move students beyond a five paragraph response. So, the committee *hopes* that students avoid a formulaic response even though such a response has become a staple in middle and high school curriculum. However, when anyone is taking a writing test in a timed situation, she almost automatically reverts to a structure that she knows best and that is the easiest to complete: a five-paragraph essay. In the end, the committee's hope, however well-intentioned, will not provide a reliable indicator of a young adult's writing ability. Instead, the student will use the standard that they have been taught throughout middle and high school.

McGrath also refers to John Katzman, the founder of the *Princeton Review*. He writes that Katzman has been critical of the new writing test even though his company has benefited monetarily from the additional writing portion. Katzman says,

> Rather than improving the teaching of writing, it [the writing test] will dumb it down. The new test is going to work a lot like the old SAT II writing test, and that's a bad test. The scoring correlates mostly with just simple essay length and number of paragraphs. State your thesis, give three paragraphs of examples, and sum up. It's a boilerplate, and kids applying to selective schools shouldn't be pushed to this. They should have learned it in the seventh grade. Fundamentally, the whole SAT is a middle-school test, and this new version is not going to make college-bound students better writers or better thinkers.

McGrath states that students obviously need to write more while in middle and high school, but the emphasis on prompt-driven writing that is found on state standardized tests and on the SAT does not foster critical thinking, only regurgitation; an observation several students recognize and mention in their responses.

The National Council Teachers of English (NCTE) shares these concerns about high stakes testing, and in 2005 the NCTE published a report, "The Impact of the SAT and ACT Timed Writing Tests: Report from the NCTE Task Force on SAT and ACT Writing Tests." NCTE cites four areas of concern regarding "the potential impact" of the SAT's writing test:

1) Concerns about the validity and reliability of the test as an indication of writing ability.

2) Concerns about the impact of the test on curriculum and classroom instruction as well as attitudes about writing and writing instruction.

3) Concerns about the unintended consequences of the uses of the writing tests.

4) Concerns about equity and diversity. (2)

In the questionnaires I examined, student accounts of the SAT work to support NCTE's second concern regarding classroom instruction and student *attitudes* toward writing. In the Report's "Introduction," it states,

> …the message this test sends about the nature of writing and specific writing skills and knowledge to be valued are problematic at best and potentially damaging to the best efforts to implement effective writing pedagogies in the nation's schools. (1)

NCTE's report describes the "detrimental" effects that the SAT can have on students because the writing is done in a timed fashion without priority given to "careful, in-depth inquiry into a topic, attention to stylistic or structural features […] creativity and innovation" which are neglected since the test only allows 25 minutes for students to respond to a prompt they may have no connection with (5). In addition, the report cites research studies that have proven that formulaic writing becomes the accepted and acceptable form in writing classrooms that emphasize passing the big test (6). In other words, teaching how to respond to a prompt in 25, 30, or 40 minutes goes against all the principles about writing that

we know – namely, that it takes time and constant self-reflection/revision to produce quality work.

NCTE's concerns about ACT and SAT timed writing exams also hold true for state standardized tests, and even though several students in this study graduated before the writing portion was a part of the SAT, most of them withstood many years of standardized testing while attending Texas public schools. According the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) website, Texas students have been taking standardized exit tests for over 20 years.

During the 1985-1986 school year the Texas Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS) was first administered. By 1990 a revised version called the TAAS, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills, was implemented, and before the federal government mandated NCLB, the Texas legislature began working on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills test in 1999, and "as of spring 2003, all eligible grade 10 students [were] required to take the TAKS test" ("Texas Assessment: TAAS" 213). Most students who took part in this project either took the TAAS and/or the current version, the TAKS. For public school students to graduate, they must pass the exit level tests in math, science, social studies, and English language arts, which, like its predecessor, includes a writing portion ("Texas Assessment: TAKS" 13), and all students between grades 7 to 11 take the test each year (20).

The "TAKS Information Booklet: Exit Level English Language Arts," found on TEA's website, provides a description of TEA's rationale for testing

students in the latter part of their secondary education; their goals sound reasonable (and somewhat obvious): "Because good writing requires good thinking, the act of writing actually helps students learn to clarify thoughts and focus their ideas" (4). It goes on to say that the curriculum, called Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), is supposed "to ensure that at each grade level students acquire the reading and writing skills they will need for success in the next grade. That is, these skills are addressed in a systematic, 'building block' manner from grade to grade" (4).

Furthermore, the Exit Level TAKS test for English Language Arts (ELA) contains six objectives, three for reading and three for writing. Reading is not a separate skill from writing, but I will not address reading since my main focus is on writing instruction; therefore, the three writing objectives are:

> Objective 4: The student will, within a given context, produce an effective composition for a specific purpose.
>
> Objective 5: The student will produce a piece of writing that demonstrates a command of the conventions of spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, usage, and sentence structure.
>
> Objective 6: The student will demonstrate the ability to revise and proofread to improve clarity and effectiveness of a piece of writing. (5)

ELA's "Introduction" states that Objectives 4 and 5 are fulfilled when students write an essay in a timed environment. To reach Objective 4, students must write an essay that is focused, organized, coherent, and that includes developed ideas and voice (45). "A given context" is created through a "triplet"; prior to the

prompt, students answer multiple choice questions regarding two reading selections and a visual piece. These three selections are related to the essay's prompt (7). The fifth objective primarily is centered on making sure students do not commit "disruptive" errors that cause a lack of clarity (48). The sixth objective is fulfilled when the students read an essay and are given several multiple choice questions regarding syntax, word choice and order, usage, grammar, etc. (5). This objective calls for students to peer review an essay and answer questions regarding superficial concerns; some multiple choice questions focus on sentence arrangement within paragraphs in order to identify logical ideas or to note sentences that need to be combined (55). The essays are graded holistically on a scale from 1 to 4. The information booklet also provides samples and the rubric descriptions so students and/or parents are aware of expectations.

I completely agree with the TEA's observations regarding how students can and should practice writing by clarifying thoughts and developing ideas. Moving students from simple to more complex forms of writing, such as writing sentences, then paragraphs, then longer papers in order to write arguments, for example, is expected. However, students' stories provide ample evidence that TEA's goals are *not* being fulfilled. What students learn and what teachers teach is the five paragraph essay even though I found no rule or suggestion that the essay is supposed to be five paragraphs. Throughout a young person's English classes in high school, this formula is taught and solidified in such a way that, as Student 3 says, it becomes "a muscle memory type thing." Writing becomes an act of

placing ideas in a mold and not thinking about how those ideas can be communicated effectively in, perhaps, another structure. What becomes evident in the data below is that TEA's objectives for the exit ELA exam *counters* much of what I have observed and heard from students (and public high school teachers) regarding their experiences with writing in high school. The way the students whom I interviewed have learned to write does not coincide with the goals of writing instruction found in the TAKS's "Information Booklet."

As in the first part, I have quoted all of the students' responses and their answers are grouped together. Their responses are not separated by the three different tests (TAAS/TAKS, SAT, and AP) students take because most students have taken more than one of these exams. A few students' answers are not included because they either attended private schools, which are exempt from administering the TAAS/TAKS, graduated before the SAT was changed, or did not take the AP exam. I have also specified the question number from which the response comes because many students described their experiences with standardized or formulaic writing before I asked them Question 9, "How much time do you remember spending preparing for standardized tests in high school?" The other three questions that are answered are Question 1, "When you hear the word 'writing' what other words/ideas come to mind?"; Question 3, "What have been your favorite and least favorite assignments?" and Question 8, "What points have your teachers stressed or repeated about writing? Which ones do you

continue to adhere to and why?" Highlighted sections will be discussed in my analysis.

Group B

Student 2

Question 9: ***"I took something. I remember writing something for some standardized test but I don't remember if it was."***

I asked him if he remember spending any time preparing for the test. He responded, "*Well, my high school is kind of strange.* ***All like the upper level kids, they didn't pay a lot of attention to us a lot,*** *so much as just keeping the other kids from killing each other."*

Student 3

Question 3: *"****Up until my senior year in high school, it was always TAKS prep or the Texas state assessment test****. It was always, you know, as far as that goes, it was* ***eight years of straight persuasive papers*** *so that was kind of definitely not a favorite thing.* ***I just got tired of it****."*

Student 4

Question 9: ***"We did, probably. My junior year in my English class we were constantly going over, um, like she'd time us on writing assignments, and we'd have to do short writings like just paragraphs, and we'd turn them in, and then we would practice long paragraphs, and we would practice just like vocabulary, and that would enhance our writing. My junior year we did that a lot."***

I asked her if this type of practice was beneficial, and she replied, *"Yes, very. […] Well, just because I use it today, and I think back, and I still even email that teacher if I have questions about about my papers. She's really been helpful."*

I asked if this teacher was strict about the five paragraph structure, and she said, *"She was probably more looser, but the people didn't understand, who were weak writers, she guided them."*

Student 5

Question 9: "*We spent, yeah, I remember in middle school and high school we spent a lot time especially well, in math and yeah and writing**. It was like a big, like get ready for the TAAS test. Yeah, it was like half of the year was getting ready for this test."***

I asked if him if he learned to follow a specific formula and if he continues to follow the formula. He replied, "*Yeah, **there was always like a good way, I guess, like the standard way as far as writing an essay.** Kinda just like they do in seminary, like three points in a poem, like intro, three paragraphs, and conclusion. Compare contrast, you do compare, contrast, and conclusion, and so I was taught that in middle school and high school [. . .] **I felt like, I stuck to it if I needed to for like the grade sake, but if it was allowed to break away from that like in philosophy papers, unless it was like something that had to do with logic and analytic I was real structured** I guess, like […] the formula of the paper was going to be something I already learned depending on the subject, I would break off and pretty much [. . .] do a certain structure…."*

Student 6

Question 9: "***I hate that [standardized testing]** and one of my goals, I'm going into elementary education and eventually, I'd like to get into public policy, and I think that **there's got to be something done about standardized. testing because I think it's ridiculous [. . .] I think that's the dumbest thing in the world**. One multiple choice test does tell you what I know and how competent I am [. . .] The ridiculousness that it is. . ."*

I asked her if she remembers practicing for the test in school. She answered, ***"Like once a week, and I guess that's where the introduction, three body paragraphs and conclusion 'cause if you had that you'll get at least a five."***

I then asked her if she continues to follow the same structure, and she said, "***Not so much anymore. I think doing news writing I kind of got away from that** and so it really, I guess, it depends on the teacher and what kind of assignment it is. **But definitely for the SAT, I wrote a five paragraph paper and didn't do very well.**"*

Student 7

Question 9: "*Yeah we had a standardized test. It was the MEEPs test [in Michigan]. We took English in 11th grade in high school. **We may have taken like one practice test but other than that, there was no time spent with the test [. . .]** I'm pretty sure it was pretty easy."*

Student 8

Question 9: *"Not much [time was spent on standardized tests].* ***My school was a really good school, and I think they looked at the TAAS test, down on the TAAS as being beneath them.*** *I remember we would spend some time on it like some practice essays [. . .] You had the whole class period to write an essay about it."*

I asked Student 8 if the practice essays helped her, but she said, "***No, 'cause, I mean, it was TAAS, and that was that kind of essay that they would ask you, 'Are school uniforms a good or bad idea? Explain why.'*** *I remember working on the different, I remember going through like in fifth grade all the different kinds of papers they could ask you."*

I then asked if these different papers helped in her writing; she replied, ***"It was such a different, writing a paper for your TAAS test, and then writing a paper for your 300 level history class is a lot different, and I never really looked it at as the same kind of writing 'cause I always look at it as more topic writing than as I'm actually writing."***

Student 9

Question 8: *"****Through high school I did all AP classes. So that' basically been college English since junior year. We probably did ten [practice timed writings] or so a year before the AP Test, and we also did different assignments, writing assignments outside of class."***

Question 9: "*Not really at all.* ***Like we'd touch on it [TAKS testing]. I was in AP classes. I don't know about regular classes, but in AP classes we'd touch on it and then move on."***

I asked him if the TAKS writing prompts were different than the prompts he encountered on the AP exam. He responded, "*Yes,* ***like I know the TAKS focused on like personal narrative, I think they're called, like where you just focused on a life event and how it was significant to you.*** *In AP test you never wanted to use 'I believe' and 'This happened to me' and stuff like that. You always wanted to keep it in the third person. [. . .]* ***My teacher said, 'Don't use life events, use literature. You'll get more points.'***"

I then asked if he thought AP classes affected his writing, and he said, *"****I think it played a little bit, but I never liked writing. I never kept a journal or anything. I definitely didn't like AP writing at all. It was timed, you only had 10 minutes to develop or to do a outline, and then you only had 30 minutes to write. It was very stressful and never got what I wanted to say [out] because for me, I like to sit down and think about it for a while, and you can't do that on an AP test."***

Student 10

Question 9: ***"I think, well, we had about an hour or an hour and a half a day. I think every other day we practiced our English*** *[and on opposing days, we practiced math]. Three hours a week. I think you took it every year, freshman through junior year. [. . .] I think our school handled it bad because it put everybody in the same boat. It didn't, there was definitely people, if you're in AP English, I think it needs to be more of an individual basis and less of a widespread scale. It probably didn't helped me… ."*

I asked him for his opinion about the writing portion of the SAT. He said, ***"I didn't think it was that bad. I think it was very open. It didn't have to have, [you could] write about anything you wanted to. [*** *I think] TAKS trying to figure out if you can write if you're not literate almost."*

Student 11

Question 8: "***Probably the five-paragraph TAKS papers. Those were, those were gross.*** *Sometimes I do like the structure of things. It's like I used to have to write DBQs. They were actually for history, and it was very like, and we had like three points like intro, conclusion, and then you got that right then bam, like 100 [. . .]* ***You got like shoved into the TAKS mold****…."*

I asked her if she used that structure to write for her English class, and she replied, *"She didn't…* ***sometimes I found myself doing it. I think kind of like as of it's naturally what I do. It's a very logical set up,*** *but sometimes like if I would paragraph things differently???.* ***It depended on like what they wanted*** *because some teachers would be like, please do this, or like please don't do this,* ***so I guess if I didn't most of the time if they didn't ask for me to write like that I don't think that I really pushed to do that."***

I asked her if she liked the structure; she responded, "***I think, it's kind of confining, I guess, and it kind of cuts off like the chance to be creative almost, and I don't know […] but I don't know. I really feel like this is this mold, and you have to like fit into this mold."***

Question 9: "***We had to do the TAKS****. The response questions. There's like three of them, and you had to get at least 2s or 3s on them. I don't remember what they were called specifically,* ***but we did those like all the time, and it was like it almost became hard because like we kept doing it*** *because like I have a horrible time with like over-thinking things, and so like the repetition of that, like when I got to the test, I was like, this is scary because I don't know for sure like if what I was doing [. . .] but it's like the three questions."*

I also asked if she had extensive AP preparation, and she said, "*Junior year, we like went over a couple things because I think that she maybe made us write one [essay].*

Student 12

Question 9: *"I was in a private school.* ***[For the SAT] I used a five paragraph format for test because it's the easiest thing."***

Student 13

Question 9: *"****We did for my English test, and we also prepared for our AP exams [. . .] at least maybe two classes a week****. [. . .] It [the practice] was helpful but when you got to the actual test, it was like, I think like with writing as much as you practiced, you can't really,* ***I mean every topic is different and every style is different, but I guess it was kind of helpful in a way****."*

I asked her, "Do you think the practice helped your writing ability?" She responded, "*I think it did but like, you can never be like a really great writer like because there's always room for improvement but I did think it did help*."

Student 14

Question 1: *"****I think of the TAKS test, and I mean, I enjoy writing, but it's I just don't like it when I'm given a specific prompt, like, so like you have do this [. . .]***

Question 9: "***I don't like I don't like how like when we took the TAKS test like it has to be certain length you know they give you like two pages and don't go over the line. I think that's retarded [...] I don't think a paper has to be a certain length to be good, like I said before, they give you write the conclusion, the intro and the three body paragraphs. I think that it's overdone. It's overkill, and everybody uses that, and I don't think that it should be like how it has to be.***"

I then asked her if she is glad this structure is not enforced in college, and she answered, *"That's not really like a bad thing because like three points is good, but if you want to extend on it you can. That's not the way it has to be."*

Student 15

Question 8: *"****They always stressed thesis and introductory stuff. See it's really hard because they teach us to the TAKS in P- - and that's all I learned, like for the first for, ninth and tenth grade, we learned how to write for the TAKS test. I think that's part of the reason why some essays I just cannot do because of***

standards you have to write like this. *If you don't, you fail, and that's part of the reason why. They really want us sometimes during the year, they want us to be really,* ***you have to use evidence and everything, and then you get to the TAKS, and you have to write a personal essay, and just like, what?*** *And it was hard going from one thought to another.* ***In 11th grade it wasn't as intense. At least in P- - all they cared about was TAKS. They did not care about kids enjoying English class because like the teachers would get so worked up about it.*** *Like I remember when we got the scores back; everybody, all the teachers were so worried, and teachers would give us incentives to do well on the TAKS.* ***And that's all we learned, and that's why I think in 12th grade we got to write a little bit more freely because in the previous years, we had no other way to write. We don't want you to write like TAKS we want you to just like spill all out. It was really nice not to have a standard form*** *and then like have the highlight numbers, just like comment on the whole paper and not have that set criteria."*

I asked her if she had any preparation for the SAT, and she answered, *"Not really in English. We wrote a couple essays. [They were] just starting to add the essay portion."*

Student 16

Question 3: "***Usually it has to be this way or it has to be that way, and I've never enjoyed that type of writing, the same in every class. Every teacher had some sort form they had to go by, so it was all standardized, you know testing and stuff like that they had to prepare you for*** *[. . .]* ***which I think it was the worst idea ever, you know. Standardized testing only prepares you for the test. It doesn't prepare you for actual college work or actually other work."***

I asked him if he felt prepared for his first year writing course, and replied, *"****Not particularly. I was taking AP classes or courses in high school, and they kinda branched away from this doing standardized testing but other than that, you know, every other class focused mainly on that [standardized testing] so every other writing we had to do had to be standardized writing."***

I asked him if he thinks standardized testing has had negative effect on his writing. He replied, "*Oh no, I think it did. Oh, actually it might have had a positive effect because now it's like, you know, I get to have an option of what I want to do. I get some sort of choice [. . .]* ***It's like, I've been under this, you know, structure for so long now, I know exactly what I don't want to do and what I can do."***

I also asked if he remembered how much time was spent on test preparation: *"Except for my senior year because we didn't take it, but other than that,* ***it was everyday we worked on some sort of TAKS, even in AP classes. Usually it was the TAKS test they prepared you for."***

Student 17

Question 4: "***Usually the SAT when they give you a persuasive topic and lots of the time you have about like a limited amount of time."***

I wondered what aspect of the prompt he disliked most, and he said, "***Usually the subject 'cause most of the time when I write for the SAT and stuff like that or like TAAS, they usually give me a writing prompt that I don't feel like writing about. If it's an interesting topic to write about, then I'll be okay with that, but most of the time it's never [interesting].***

Question 9: "*Yeah, elementary we usually, before like Stanford, we would take like or* ***like for any standardized test out a whole week just to go over a small portion of the class over the test.*** *In high school was a little more of the same, but it was more focused on math because our school was a little low on math.* ***And ah, every once in a while, there would be the AP testing. They would give us some practice on that."***

I asked him if he thought the practice was helpful: *"Somewhat. Usually when I write write or before when I write, I would like most of the time, I wouldn't be able to write the introduction or the conclusion. I like get straight down to the body that was like usually the best part of my essays, right. And ah, like when I write something, if I don't really like the topic, I'll kind of like have to write [. . .] I will have to kind of bullshit on the essays sort of. And I guess high school kinda helped me get through that part, so you know instead of writing, you know repeating the same sentence over and over, I try to find another way, how, you know, another sentence, how I can develop my introduction better and my conclusion a whole lot better. Because usually when I wrote the conclusion, it turned out to be one sentence."*

I also asked him if he practiced for the SAT, and he said, ***"[For the] writing portion, didn't like the topic.*** *When I wrote it, I remember I had to take a standardized test on computer, right, and they give you a limited amount of time, so when I wrote the essay, I wrote the body down, right, and while I had just to remind myself, I had like in parentheses 'write intro' [...] before time was up."*

Student 18

Question 9: ***"No, I was mainly in AP classes, and they always thought, 'Well, it's TAKS. You guys shouldn't have to worry about it.' They would spend a day on it, but they would expect us to do well because we were in advanced classes."***

I asked her if she prepared much for the AP exam and if it was helpful, and she emphatically answered, *"Oh yeah. We would spend a good month or two doing that [. . .] Well, some of it was a pain, but a lot of it was helpful. I could see exactly how they test and how they grade and what kind of questions they would ask. That way I could get my mind gear towards how they do it.* ***Because my biggest concern when I go into test is how do they test. [. . .]That AP test prep really helped."***

I then asked, "Were your teachers picky?" And she said, *"It was more as just answer the question well, and you could put it in any structure you want."*

Student 19

Question 9: ***"Teachers didn't stress it so much because my high school. We had exemplary grades every year, and you can't really teach the same thing every year for four years. We generally get the general idea of it after doing it for [. . .] years. Probably generally out of the whole year we did about a whole week full of stuff."***

I asked her if her teachers stressed the five paragraph structure on every paper, and she replied that they did, so I then asked if it was difficult to break away from that structure; she answered, ***"No, um, I when I was writing in high school, I didn't really stick to that. I would always have more body paragraphs. I would always have the introduction and conclusion and then [. . .] They would always tell us that if we didn't know how to write the paper then just do the five paragraph thing."***

Student 21

Question 9: [She did not have to take TAKS but did some SAT prep] "*We, not on my own. We did some my senior year for entrance exams for college.* ***So she just kind of taught us to make a list. Like if there's a prompt, and it tells you are, you for or against this and why, then to make a list and then put all the 'for's' and 'not for's,' and then, um, like whichever one was longer, and you could explain better, then to use that one. So that was the only preparation we did [. . .] Just one or two days for that."***

Student 22

Question 9: "***I remember when I was a sophomore we had like TAKS Tuesdays.*** *It was like you went to a like a certain class [. . .] I remember going to a math one because I was struggling in math. And yes our English classes we would do lots of essays and just do practice tests as well [. . .]"*

I asked him if the practice was helpful, and he said that it was. I then I asked if his teachers stressed the five paragraph structure during the practice sessions. He replied, ***"No, they kind of wanted you to like reach both sides of the page. They wanted you to hit that mark where it says stop […] As long as you got to that second page you were doing good."***

I then asked if he received any preparation prior to taking the SAT; he said, "***Yes, I did. It was in school and outside of school***." I followed up and asked if the practice was beneficial, but he said, ***"[I'll] probably go with a no… it's really just the same thing just a lot more advanced."***

Student 23

Question 9: *"Yeah. I was actually the first class to take the new one [Ohio's standardized test] 'cause there wasn't a writing previously.* ***We, actually, it was huge how much they did because they didn't know how we were going to do."***

I asked Student 9 if he remembers what kind of prompt they had to respond to on the test: ***"You had one question, and it was kind of like, what is your feelings on this idea. They were all school-related. It was about student government or open lunches or there were all kind of just general topics. They'd give you like six pages to write, but everyone I know only used like two pages to write."***

I asked if the practice his teachers assigned was helpful, and he replied, "*I guess it was helpful, but I think they were kind of anticipating that the question would be much more harder than it was [. . .] For our year they only did it [practiced] for half a year, but I know they had other classes like behind me preparing more."*

Student 24

Question 9: "*Yeah my junior year.* ***Well, actually my teacher didn't like it. She said that she didn't like to teach to the test [SAT], but I know a lot of teachers at my high school did. We had an SAT prep book that we kept in the front of the classroom, and we would like go through some samples of what the essays could be like. I took an SAT prep class outside of school."***

Again, I asked if the practice was helpful, and she admitted, *"When I paid attention, but yes, it was useful."*

I also asked if she applied what she learned from SAT preparation for TAKS, but she replied, ***"I don't ever remember having like having to get ready for the TAKS test. I just remember a lot of those SAT, and she was always like, this will help you with the TAKS test*** *[. . .] I was fine on the TAKS test. So, I mean I don't know if it is helpful for some students or not."*

Student 25

Question 9: ***"They like stressed it more like after we took it 'cause like so many people in our class like failed it****. Like I didn't fail it, but like so many people in our school failed it. Like our school is actually really bad. They're like not even like accepted by like Texas [schools] or something like that.* ***So you know they started to like stress it like our senior year after we had already taken it, so like, I guess so, but it was just at the wrong timing.*** *We took it all like freshman, sophomore, and junior year but the junior year counts."*

I asked her if her teachers prepared the students, and she said they did, ***"Like maybe once a month like maybe like a random like question."***

I wondered if she wished they had spent more time on preparation, but she said, ***"[It] didn't really matter."***

Student 26 (paraphrase)

Question 8: TAKS is "so annoying" because emphasis was placed on structure; senior year was spent moving beyond five-paragraph structure to theme papers from several works.

Student 29

Question 4: *"I* ***hated*** *TAAS writing*."

Student 30

Question 9: "*My high school typically had higher grades in tests like TAKS or TAAS tests, so preparation for those was minimal. However****, in my advanced placement English courses, we prepared at least once a week for the AP tests. Closer to the test date, however, we spent nearly all of our time in my English classes working on practice tests and practice writing portions****."*

Student 31

Question 9: *"We probably spent about two months on writing for test and about twice a week****. So it was a lot at one time, we did not spread it out throughout the whole year."***

Student 32

Question 9: *"I don't remember exactly, but I do remember that it was a lot of time.* ***I feel like most of the writing I did early on in high school was geared specifically towards those standardized tests.*****"**

Student 33

Question 9: "*I took the test before there was a writing section, and never studied for any other standardized writing assignments.* ***I don't recall losing a single point throughout the standardized testing process on English or on writing sections – perhaps stronger evidence of the low standards of the test and not the prowess of the test taker.*****"**

Student 35

Question 9: "***We didn't spend any time in class preparing for the SAT. The only tests were ever prepared for were the AP exams and even with that we didn't spend that much time with it****. We would go over multiple-choice questions. In Psychology we wrote example essay questions,* ***otherwise no action was taken for preparation for SAT or any sort of testing."***

Student 36

Question 9: *"****I would say about 5 hours a week between all of my classes to get ready for the SATs****. Junior year we spend more time on it because a lot of people were taking the SATs then and starting to apply for college."*

Student 37

Question 9: *"In high school I honestly believe that* ***every week I heard something about doing well on the TAKS test."***

Student A

"When I started high school writing changed. ***Learning structure became the main purpose of writing as to prepare us for the TAKS test and later the AP test. I lost my voice in writing. My writing no longer had the same imagination it once possessed. My papers became boring to read and annoying to write****. I wrote many papers on summer reading novels that I hadn't read. There were so many timed writings that I began to get cramps in every finger of my right hand caused by having to write so fast in order to get down all my ideas. My mind couldn't contain all the thoughts in my head, but my hand couldn't keep up. How could I sound more intellectual? What words could I use to replace the simple*

ones? Was that sentence creative enough? ***Exhaustion grew due to thinking about what I was writing. My writing no longer came from the heart, I wrote according to the directions of my teachers."***

Student I

"Freshman year was over, and I knew I had improved drastically since my first day there. I could write better, and follow the TAAS strategies that teachers taught us, and moved on to sophomore year. This year was make or break for me, and any other else. If we failed the test, we wouldn't graduate, so the pressure was on. ***Sophomore English was no different than freshman English, up until after the TAAS. The preparation got more intense as February drew by. All we could think about was the damn test, if you didn't see TAAS practice questions on the blackboard of your science, math, and key-boarding class, your teacher was in for it - - why?*** *I have no idea; it's just the way it was in the early start of spring semester in 10th grade [. . .] We took the test; and as ready as we already were, we knew we were going to fly by this test with bright colors; and it proved to be so. That same year, our school got recognized [. . .]* ***After the test, we didn't learn anything else, the reading was minimal, and the writing just got more - - unnecessary. This was because the teachers stopped caring, all that was expected from them after the test, was to give us a passing grade, and get rid of us. The only writing you ever did after TAAS was the final research paper in your English class*** *- - which most of the cases was just copy and paste of words put on to a paper."*

Student K

"Not only were my English teachers focused on English and grammar, but this was where the major emphasis came on the world famous TAAS test. It seemed like my entire school career from that point on was about the TAAS and nothing else [. . .] I think the TAAS test is where everyone's writing ability was affected. Starting in junior high all that is drilled in your head is to make sure you can pass a test that you take when you are a junior high school [sic]. So for four years I never really was able to practice my writing and therefore never became as strong as the writer I wanted to become. Instead of having writing assignments over books or over something we read, we would go over packets of boring paragraphs and answer multiple choice questions that a sixth grader could answer*. Therefore, I was a halt [sic] in my reading and writing career.*

[. . .] ***After finishing up with the TAAS my junior year, I didn't really do a whole lot for the remainder of my high school career. I only had a year and a half left in school and this was when the whole issue of the standard five paragraph essay was drilled over and over into my head****. My senior year, I had a teacher who loved poetry, (not that there anything wrong with that) so a majority of our*

work was Shakespeare and Hamlet, and once again that meant watching a whole lot of movies and doing very little writing. I guess you could say we all had senioritis with our teacher [. . .] ***The focus on the TAAS test really made things worse when I was only writing a couple of papers a year."***

Student S

*"**Timed writings became my worst nightmare**. 'Answer the prompt considering the literary techniques used by the author in this writing sample. . . one essay. . . 40 minutes. Good luck!' I thought to myself, 'thanks, I'm going to need it' and hastily got to work. I thought only literary geniuses understood how to succeed at this difficult task and have fun doing it."*

Student T

*". . . **Living in Texas all of my life, I grew up having to take standardized tests, but it seemed like the teachers began to take it to a whole new level, as I was getting older. Our writing quickly became consumed with trivial topics that I had no desire to research, much less write about. We learned an entirely tedious procedure of writing a paper that was completely technical and left little room for personal expression. Writing became a monotonous process that I despised a little more with every meaningless paper I was forced to write against my will.** First we were given a topic; never did we get to choose, because that would be unheard of. After getting the topic, we had to make a formal outline of the paper, and a ridiculous amount of points were taken off for the smallest mistakes such as slightly incorrect roman numerals. I could not have cared less about the correctness of my roman numerals. Next, we made draft after draft, correcting each one until our red pens had completely run out of ink. Finally, we were able to turn in the final draft! When the papers were graded and returned, the score sheets seemed to revolve around everything we had done wrong in our papers, never mentioning what we did right. As time passed ever so slowly, reading and writing drained me until I reached a literary drought. **My teachers had turned writing into a desensitizing process, so any passion that I had before slowly seeped away** [. . .] As my passion slipped away, I stopped reading and writing outside of the classroom completely. [. . .] As high school progressed, my reading and writing digressed. I was not upset in the least."*

Students convey a sense of weariness and disgust in these answers, directed at the restrictions placed on them and the amount of time they spent in classroom preparing for the standardized tests, like the TAKS. A few students felt

similarly when talking about the AP exam and the SAT. Some students employed intriguing language to describe their opinions and feelings after taking the TAKS throughout most of their education. For example, Student 3, who remembers only writing persuasive essays, admits, "I just got tired of it." A similar jadedness was expressed by Student 17 toward both the TAKS and the SAT because of the prompts and their topics. He explained that he did not care for

> the subject 'cause most of the time when I write for the SAT and stuff like that or like TAAS, they usually give me a writing prompt that I don't feel like writing about. If it's an interesting topic to write about, then I'll be okay with that, but most of the time it's never [interesting].

His answer builds on the problem identified in Student 21's answer regarding uninteresting topics, and that if he does not "feel like" he can write about the topic in an effective manner, it is more difficult to do well. In some way, he has to feel connected with the prompt, but, unfortunately, for him (and one can assume for many others) the questions do not pique any interest in him.

Student 6 shares her feelings of disgust toward standardized testing. She uses the word "hate" and "ridiculous" and believes "it's the *dumbest* thing in the world" because the test does not prove what she (or any student) knows or how competent she (or any student) is. Student 11, when answering what lessons her teachers stressed, replied, "Probably, the five-paragraph TAKS papers. Those were, those were *gross*." Her use of the word "gross" was surprising, since it relates to something repulsive and nasty. She explains that she finds the test "gross" because "You got shoved like into the TAKS mold," being forced to write

in a strict structure. She says that when her teachers "didn't ask for me to write like that" she chose not to; otherwise, her essays took on the form that "*they* wanted" – the vague and unknown "they" dictated how she should write. Student A reflects on the "exhaustion" she felt as she took standardized tests also due to "the direction of my teachers" rather than from her own choice. Student T offers a detailed depiction of the process she learned, which she calls "tedious"; they wrote about "tedious topics" and produced "meaningless" papers. She closes her description with a distressing image, one that opposes TEA's goal:

> …reading and writing drained me until I reached a literary drought. My teachers had turned writing into a desensitizing process, so any passion that I had before slowly seeped away [. . .] As high school progressed, my reading and writing digressed. I was not upset in the least.

Student T's language makes it clear that she has no relationship with writing and has no inclination of developing one, all caused by the emphasis placed on standardized testing.

Student 11's comment regarding "the TAKS mold" is echoed in Student 14's response who does not like responding to "a specific prompt, like, so like, you have to do this," and she goes on to say that she believes that the two-page length requirement on the TAKS is "retarded" because length does not indicate quality. Student 14 closes her response by saying that the five paragraph format is "overdone" and is "overkill" because "everybody uses that, and I don't think that it should be like, how it has to be." She is quite adamant about her dislike in becoming standardized and/or feeling restricted because of the type of writing she

is assigned to do. She admits that she likes to write except for when TAKS is involved because of the required format.

Student 16 realizes that the TAKS does nothing to prepare students for college level work: "Standardized testing only prepares you for the test." The only benefit he has received from taking TAKS and from being in classes that forced him to write five paragraph essays is that he has learned that other forms of writing exist. He says that he has "*been under this*, you know, *structure* for so long now, I know exactly what I don't want to do and what I can do." With his use of "been under," it sounds as if he has been under a dictatorship or a tyrannical leader but has escaped and now has the ability to choose the format and structure of his own writing.

Student 15 provides a lengthy response about her school's handling of TAKS. She says that her school, "…teaches to the TAKS [. . .] and that's all we learned." It seems that her teachers stressed argumentation or persuasion about their lessons did not coincide with what was presented on the test: "They [her teachers] really want us [. . .] you have to use evidence and everything, and then you get to the TAKS, and you have to write a personal essay, and just like, what?" At the end of her response, Student 15 said that in her senior year, her teachers attempted to move students away from TAKS writing, "to write a little bit more freely [. . .] It was really nice not to have a standard form."

Nine students provide exact amounts of the time they remember preparing for the TAAS or the TAKS. Student 3 admits that he had "eight years of straight

persuasive papers" until he became a senior (since the exit exam is administered in a student's junior year). While Student 5 remembers spending half a school year preparing for the exam, Student 10 describes the way his school divided time between English and math preparation. He approximates that they spent at least three hours per week, or every other day, preparing for the English exam. Students 11 and 16 remember practicing for TAKS constantly, and Student 22 says that his school sponsored "TAKS Tuesdays" to get their students ready for the test; one can assume that every Tuesday throughout the fall and early spring semesters were devoted to practice drills or practice tests. For these seven students, it appears that their schools and/or school districts approached the exam with fervor, knowing that student scores would dictate funding.

Student 19 proves to be the exception because she vaguely remembers spending a week preparing for the exam. But she says that preparation was not needed because, "We generally get the general idea of it [TAKS] after doing it for [. . .] years." Similarly, Students 32 and 37 were not specific about the exact amount of time they spent preparing but Student 32 says, "a lot of time" and Student 37 remembers hearing constantly to do "well on the TAKS test.

Eleven students remember spending very little time preparing for the state's standardized test. For example, Student 7, one of two students who is from out-of-state, said that he does not remember spending *any* time preparing for his state's test, and although I find it in the students' favor that their teachers did not constantly teach-to-the-test, the vagueness in how they respond indicates the lack

of interest and seriousness they had when they took the test. Similarly, Student 2 remembers taking some test and "writing *something* for some standardized test" indicating that the test is not worth remembering, that it was so inconsequential it made no impact on him. Student 4 said she "probably" spent some time preparing for the test, which conveys uncertainty, as if she assumes that she and her classmates practiced. Student 4's answer also reads as if she is describing some normal, everyday writing lessons about writing paragraphs but not practicing specifically for TAKS, and since she is not certain about how or if her teachers used class time for the TAKS test, it is assumed that little time was spent on the test itself. Similarly, Student 8 states that her high school believed the TAAS was not worthwhile: "…I think they looked at the TAAS [. . .] as being beneath them." She mentions reviewing possible questions when she was in elementary school, not in high school. In addition, she states that she has realized that writing for a standardized test is nothing like writing a college paper: "…writing a paper for your TAAS test, and then writing a paper for your 300 level history class is a lot different…." Even though college instructors work to de-program students to avoid formulaic writing, administrators who create and/or evaluate state exams need to make substantial changes to the test to better prepare students to write on the college level. Student 25's answer of "it [practice] didn't matter" adds to the tone regarding the test, one of apathy. The apathetic tone that these three students share makes clear that the test is not important to them because the exam does not indicated a students' intellectual ability or potential to do well in college.

Students 2, 9, 16, 18 and 30 admit that they spent little time on the TAAS or the TAKS *because* they took Advanced Placement classes. The mentality was that these students were prepared for the AP exam, so little, or nothing, needed to be done for the state test. For example, Student 2 alludes to being grouped with "the upper level kids" and teachers paid little attention to that group. Instead, teachers focused their attention on "regular kids" (a label that several students used regarding those who did not take AP classes) who perhaps needed to be pushed into performing well on the state exam.

Students 9 and 18 say that their teachers would perhaps "touch on it [TAKS]" or "spend a day on it" but then move on, believing that students, who are advanced students, would not struggle with the test. However, Student 9 remembers responding to approximately ten AP practice tests throughout the school year. Unlike students who found the practice for the TAKS annoying, Student 18 found the AP practice helpful (though she does not say how often they practiced) because she learned what to expect on the test. Lastly, Student 30 says that her school performed well on the TAKS or TAAS so focus on those tests was "minimal" but remembers spending "nearly all of our time in my English classes" preparing for the AP exam.

Student 13 remembers the teacher setting aside two classes per week to prepare for the AP exam but did not specify if those class periods were spent on writing or answering the multiple choice questions. Student 17 does not remember exactly how often they practiced, but he remembers *"some"* practice, and Student

16 had a slightly different experience in that his AP classes "kinda branched away from this doing standardized testing" but in his other classes, TAKS writing was stressed, so "every other writing we had to do had to be standardized writing."

Students 24's and 36's experience differed from every other student because their teachers spent more time on the SAT rather than the TAKS. Student 24 replies, "I don't ever remember having like having to get ready for the TAKS test. I just remember a lot of those SAT, and she [his teacher] was always like, 'This will help you with the TAKS test.'" Similarly, Student 22 said that the practice he did for the SAT was not helpful simply because it was slightly more advanced than the TAKS, so he knew that if he could pass the TAKS, the SAT essay would not be difficult, and Student 36 mentions that they spent "about five hours a week" to get ready for the SAT.

Another indication of the apathy and the lack of seriousness with which most students approach these tests is expressed in how they treat the test-taking process like a game. Since students need to pass the test as juniors, teachers shift their pedagogical approaches when students become seniors. It appears that students either were un-taught how to write the five-paragraph essay as seniors or they did little writing as seniors, evident in the excerpts from Students I and K. Student 15 says that her teachers did not want their students "to write like TAKS we want you to just like spill [it] all out. It was really nice not to have a standard form. . . ." Student 3 wrote persuasive papers until his senior year. These descriptions demonstrate that teaching writing in these schools is not built on a

continuum – as it should be, according to the "TAKS Information Booklet." It appears that once students have proven they can fulfill the TAKS's requirements, they are then – in their senior year – to venture out of the five paragraph structure. These answers indicate that students' teachers worked to make certain that their students would pass the test, and then relinquished the students from that mode "standard form."

The shift between students' junior and senior years also points to how some teachers approach standardized testing like a game. Student 21 learned how to play the game as she describes the process her teacher suggested when they prepared for the SAT. Her teacher said that if the prompt asks the writer to argue for a position, he/she should list pros and cons – an organizational technique that is logical; however, Student 21 learned to choose the position based on "whichever one was longer, and you could explain better…." The point of the lesson was to fill the pages, to write from a position of ease, not to write from a position of belief. Student 21's response is indicative of a major problem in the teaching of writing, and that is students write about topics that mean nothing to them. Student 5 also followed the rules and standards when a grade was involved, and he admits to knowing the "standard way as far as writing an essay…" but chooses to avoid it when he believes he is "allowed to."

As discussed above, the United States Congress has been re-visioning NCLB, and in 2008 the Texas legislature met to discuss the changes that need to be made regarding the TAKS because lawmakers found that students do not know

how to "write and speak good English." They call the problem a "dreadful disease requiring aggressive treatment" (Scharrer, "Texas"). This metaphor of relating illiteracy to a physical ailment is not new. However, the supposed cure for this disease will probably cause more damage to students' literacy development.

Because of this "disease" Texas lawmakers decided to return to a "back-to-basics" approach, so the teaching of grammar will be separated from writing. Grammar will be taught by completing worksheets and doing drills. Scharrer demonstrates that teaching grammar separately from writing is ineffective, a belief that has been a mainstay in English classrooms for over 20 years; however, these standards ignore the research that has been done, emphasizing the importance of teaching grammar and writing together (Scharrer, "Texas"). Those who support the "back-to-basics" movement are not English educators, and they do not realize that literacy demands of the 21st century are much different than those 30 or more years ago (Scharrer "Texas"). Unfortunately, in May of 2008 the Texas State Board of Education voted in favor of returning to the basics (Scharrer, "English"). As a result, for the next *decade* textbooks will be revised to include the new provisions that include little, if any, input from teachers (Scharrer, "English").

During the Texas legislature's process, NCTE published a memo, written by Kent Williamson, that was sent to the Texas State Board of Education prompting the Board to reconsider the Substitute Amendment that called for the above said changes in the teaching of reading and writing. Through Williamson, NCTE calls the amendment "a deeply flawed document" because it ignores

teachers' pedagogical expertise, and it emphasizes "top-down models" that must be enforced in every classroom across the state, not taking into account "students' prior knowledge or interests." The memo continues by saying,

> Of particular concern in the Substitute Amendment is its lack of attention to reading comprehension and the development of incisive writing abilities and critical thinking. In short, the Substitute Amendment is both too inflexible and too narrow in scope to guide a system that will produce world-class learners and communicators. (Williamson)

Unfortunately, the State Board not only ignored NCTE, but also ignored teachers within the state who provided recommendations to the Board. What this action says to me is that the teaching of writing in the state of Texas will continue to be taught in a formulaic, unimaginative way when the use of language is not a standardized, one-size-fits-all entity.

The NCTE, the nation's advocate for strong writing skills, says that timed writing tests are detrimental and do not indicate a student's success or failure in college; however, the College Board continues to support the writing section of the SAT, mainly due to economic factors, even though the College Board says that it does so because they want more attention paid to writing instruction. Few of the students whom I interviewed and taught had to take the revised SAT during their junior or senior years of high school. However, based on the negative effects of state testing on these students – evident in their disregard and disgust of state testing – one can assume the revised version of the SAT will only build more negative attitudes about writing, as predicted in NCTE's report. The type of

writing that the SAT and the ACT demand is not the beneficial or thoughtful kind; instead, it is formulaic, boring, and unpolished.

If, after five years of implementation, students are leaving high school without achieving TAKS's objectives, the approach, method, process, and/or teaching strategies must be changed, and the most effective action that can be taken is to do away with standardized writing tests. Yes, there are conventions; yes, there are rhetorical principles that underlie our Western tradition (like having a thesis); however, continuing the inane tradition of rewarding students who can basically fill-in-the-blank when they are given a prompt by writing a five-paragraph essay is detrimental to students' critical thinking skills, their creativity, and their sense of confidence, of having something important to say.

Conclusion

Nedra Reynold's discussion of ethos alludes to Karen LeFevre's research on the "between" places "at intersections of various communities" where writers build "authority for themselves and their claims" (330). Most students have experienced few moments in their writing careers that help to establish their ethos, to "establish authority," that is required especially when engaging in academic discourse. They have had little opportunity to negotiate within academic spaces. Consequently, the academic discourse community – Burke's parlor – is not an inviting "dwelling place" where students can construct their authority (or themselves). Establishing one's authority is necessary before entering "the parlor"

to take part in the conversation, and developing one's ethos proves to be relevant in students' language; as young adults, they are trying to find a place (or space) to express themselves. The language they use and learn becomes integral in the formation of their perceptions of an academic community.

Students have had little opportunity to use language in such a way as to exhibit their knowledge and sincerity. Students have learned the "tricks" in order to simply get through a writing class: they regurgitate facts, adopt or steal someone else's words, or fill their paper with ideas they assume the teacher wants to hear. By the time students reach their junior and senior years of high school, they need to be given the freedom and the authority to experiment with ways to construct their thoughts. When so much focus is placed on standardized, formulaic writing, writing classrooms become confining and restrictive spaces. A standard is placed on students, and they do not have opportunities to develop their own personal sense of ethos. Writing is not a standardized act; placing young people in a mold is detrimental to their development as students and as thinkers. Preparing students for a test only matters for the test, not for the writing they do in college or in their daily lives. Published and/or professional writers do not adhere to a five paragraph model, so why are we treating students as if they are not writers, but automatons in the assembly line of education that this country has created? And by the time these students enter their first college composition course, we have to deprogram

them to undo the misperceptions about writing that have been mandated by agencies such as the TEA.[8]

Investment, ownership, and ethos will continue to be explored in the next chapter as important characteristics for students to develop as writers. Chapter III, like Chapter II, presents data from student interviews and literacy narratives to illustrate that investment, like ownership, is necessary for students to see themselves as writers. Investment will be discussed from the vantage point of exigence, of feeling motivated, moved to write. Motivation, like ownership, leads students to want to write, even when the motivation begins with a prompt, a teacher's assignment, or a piece of the student's own choosing. Student accounts reveal how much exigence directly affects their sense of ethos in moving them from a blank page, to creating ideas, to finding a place in Burke's parlor.

[8]During the interviews, I also asked students to describe if they have learned anything about writing since they began college. Only five students mentioned that they had not learned anything new, but the majority mentioned a few things, such as learning how to write a rhetorical analysis, how to cite sources correctly, and how to write a paper for a history class versus a philosophy class. I have included students' responses to this question in Appendix B.

CHAPTER III

EXIGENCE AND ETHOS:

STUDENTS' PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH WRITING

Moving from the Burkean parlor as a metaphor for ethos and place, this chapter shifts attention to the notion of ethos as it pertains to character, particularly whether students see themselves as writers. As was made clear in Chapter II, most students are unsure about their ideas and their abilities to communicate effectively. The relationship between confidence and ethos is tied to one's character, to the Aristotelian understanding of ethos.

Aristotle, Bitzer, and Ethos

Robert Connors and Edward P.J. Corbett write in *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* (1999), one hopes that reason is enough to successfully persuade one's audience; however, "Aristotle recognized [. . .] the persuasive value of the speaker's or writer's character" (72). After all, an audience will be more inclined to read/listen if they find the writers/speakers worthy of their time. For Aristotle the speech/argument should convey that the speaker is of "sound sense, high moral character, and benevolence" (72). The focus is placed on the "discourse" which sustains the writers'/speakers' reputation (72). George Kennedy writes, "In Aristotle's view, ethos should be established by what is said and should not be a

matter of authority or the previous reputation of the orator" (82). In other words, it is language and the speaker's/writer's sincerity that helps to create a strong ethos (Connors and Corbett 72-73). Thus, it becomes imperative for young writers to recognize the significance of language and how it subsequently builds their ethos and their projected sense of self.

Like Chapter II, this chapter analyzes answers from student interviews and literacy narratives in response to two questions: Question 1, "What do you associate with the word 'writing'?" and Question 3, "What have been your favorite and least favorite assignments?" These two questions focus on moments when students have experienced literacy events, which Shirley Brice Heath defines as "any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes" ("Protean" 445). I examine students' past assignments as literacy events in order to uncover the writing tasks that were "integral" in developing their relationship ("interactions") with language and to identify moments when students see themselves as writers.

The first set of student responses, Group A, includes positive experiences students have had with writing, and Group B focuses on their negative experiences. Both sets revolve around three inter-related themes. The first theme is identity, of seeing oneself as a writer; the second is feeling, of building a relationship with an assignment; and the third is movement, of having freedom when completing an assignment. What will be made clear is that more attention needs to be placed on what *moves* or *motivates* students to write. Emphasizing

motivations turns our attention to the first essential element in the communication triangle – exigence, having a purpose to write. If exigence does not exist, communication fails. Along with having a *lack* of ownership (as discussed in Chapter II), it is not surprising that students' negative attitudes about writing are directly linked to having a *lack* of exigence. Thus, exigence plays a key role in developing one's ethos.

Lloyd Bitzer's "The Rhetorical Situation" (1968) introduced the importance of exigence. Bitzer defines the rhetorical situation

> as a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence. (6)

Bitzer's definition centers on the value of discourse or language to remedy an urgent situation by inciting or dissuading further action to bring about a (positive) change (7). His definition calls attention to the idea that relationship is necessary element for rhetoric to work effectively. Group A reveals that relationship is necessary at all levels of communication: the speaker/writer must first have a relationship with the topic, and then work to build a relationship with the audience to affect action or movement.

Group A

Student 1

Question 1: *"Um, well, **I'm creative writing track in the English program**, so I tend to more **think of art um when I think of writing.** Um, a lot of times I think of something I would read that someone else would write, just like fiction and poetry and things like that. If I think of writing a little bit more, I think about, I guess about writing papers and five paragraph essays and things like that …um but **when I think of writing, I think of personal response probably just art and as art form."***

Question 3: *"…Well one of my favorite writing assignments was in high school when we **got to write** what was, **what she called an I-search paper**. **It was like research**. It was part actual book research; it was part, I think, personal, like opinion, and it was part interview, like interviewing people who are in the field and it was part like, like first hand experience, like say you're writing your paper on, I don't know. Like I wrote my paper on the commercialization of religion, so I went to a like a Christian music festival, where there was a lot of like, you know, like things being sold at the same time, **and that was just really interesting than just so different than going to the library and checking out a lot of books, and it was more firsthand, and you could write about something that you're really interested** [. . .] Um, it's been one of my favorite writing assignments since I was high school."*

Student 2
Question 1: *"Creativity, **liberal,** thought."*

Student 3

Question 3: This student described an assignment about an athlete: "*But in high school my senior year we had to write kind of just a thesis paper. **We picked a person** and draw a thesis question from their life and then prove it, right or wrong." The student chose Roger Staubach and wrote about "Why he was famous, what made him the icon he was." **I asked if he liked the assignment because he liked the athlete or because he was able to choose topic. The student replied, "A little of both***."

Student 4

Question 3: "*My favorite was applying for scholarships. We **had to talk** about like a memorable moment in your life, and **I just like talking about stuff like how I've overcome [. . .] how it's made me a stronger person**." In high school "**we had a***

list of authors we could choose from. I chose 'Sense and Sensibility' by Jane Austen*, and we had to write a book report over it, and then give a presentation to the class. I liked that one."*

Student 5

Question 1: "[Writing is] *the action of putting your thoughts and ideas on paper [. . .] Other than that****, thoughts and ideas in a way that that can be understood, that can be known by others."***

Student 6

Question 1: *"****I love to write*** *so like in high school I was editor of the newspaper."* I asked if her love of writing is dependent on the assignment. She replied, "***It matters on the assignment. If something that I'm not interested in like if it's science stuff I really could really care less.*** *I like writing about people, or I like to journal like at night, so I write all my thoughts.* ***I like to write what I'm thinking not necessarily what other people think, or I don't like to have to be factual so the whole parenthetical citing and stuff drives me crazy."***

Question 3: "*Actually, Ms. C.* ***had us write*** *a paper at the very beginning of the semester that said* ***who we were and why we were in the major that we were in****. And I had just changed majors so* ***it was an opportunity for me to really show myself like why I changed majors, and like I really enjoyed writing that paper,*** *and like I had forgotten about it, and I found it the other day and went back and read it, and I was like* ***it was a really good paper.****"*

Student 7

Question 3: *"Um, things that are like* ***I guess like creative, freewriting stuff just where you're told just go off and write whatever*** *for a set amount of time."*

Student 8

Question 1: "*…for the most part* ***I write about stuff that I'm interested in*** *so I'm junior [history major] so I really don't have to write about I'm not in classes that I don't like anymore*

Question 3: *"I didn't write that much in high school. I did, I wrote an essay for a scholarship I was trying to get. It was like an essay from like the National Holocaust Museum, and* ***when I wrote that, it got me really interested in history, little bit of the reason why I'm majoring in it****. It was my senior year."*

"*I know last year in* ***class we wrote about whatever you want to write about, and***

so I wrote about Sidney Poitier, and I really liked that. Reading all those books were [sic] really interesting to me, and it was really easy to write about. *It was a really good topic. And also it was the first long paper I wrote like it was 12 pages so now this semester when someone says turn in a paper that's four pages it's not as scary."*

Student 9

Question 3: When asked about his favorite assignments, both were written for his composition class; the first was tied to his major (meteorology) and the second was tied to his interest in wars. He said, "*The hurricane one. [. . .]* ***It was a free choice assignment. You had to pick whatever you want,*** *and* ***you had to pick*** *a current issue and produce two counterarguments, and [I] wrote on how hurricanes are not affected that we can tell right now affected by global warming."* He began describing the second assignment with, "*The essay we did before that I really liked.* ***You had to choose an event*** *between the time period 1945 and 1955 that was significant, and you had to tell why it was significant and elaborate on that****. I chose Victory in Europe Day [. . .] I just like history, especially wars [. . .] it's just warfare that interests me and the different weapons."***
He loved Edith Wharton's *Ethan Frome* and said, "***That was probably one of the best essays I've ever written."***

Student 11

Question 1: *"Times when we have like research papers, and* ***a lot of times my teacher will let me pick our own topics and stuff like that, and I love being able to go through and research because you get to learn cool things.***"
Question 3: *"I don't know if I technically have a favorite but a lot of times in my sophomore and junior year of high school, I would be asked to write in kinda like it's really like analyzing like of characters and things like that like in novels, and* ***I liked doing that because of the fact that it [is] from the book, and it was interesting in depicting the little details and stuff like that."***
"[We] ***got to pick****. It had to be like something beneficial to the world, and I did my research over the mistreatment of workers in Costa Rica typically on the banana plantations [. . .]* ***I like learning lots of information, so the research gives me an excuse, and I can reap the benefits of it through the grade just to learn."***

"I like remember specifically in eighth grade we would do, just I guess one of the reasons ***I like to journal cause we would just like open up our books, and it was a free-write kinda thing, and so we would just have to write about really whatever you wanted****, which I really enjoyed."*

Student 12

Question 1: *"I think freshman or sophomore year,* ***like we got to pick a topic to write about in history, and I wrote about something like World War II, and I liked that.*** *I haven't gotten to write any* ***like theoretical physics papers yet but I'd think I might enjoy those****, but other than that, I don't like to write.* ***I usually just like to write about what I'm interested in [military history and science]."***

Student 13

Question 1*: "...****if it's [the assignment] more a freestyle paper then if it's something about personal, then it's easier*** *but when it's something that you have to read or something then, yeah, it's kinda like, yeah****, it does cause anxiety*** *because you don't know what she's actually looking for in your paper."*

Question 3: "***I think my favorite would have to be like personal like like it is easier for me because there's not a right or wrong answer***, and you just have so many thoughts and just it's very easy."

Student 14

Question 1: *"****I like creative writing****. Like I took a creative writing class. I like that when they just tell you, 'Okay, you have a paper due.* ***Write whatever you want," and I like writing poetry, you know, like free-writes. I don't like it when it's so structured,*** *and you know you have to have the introduction and three-body and the conclusion. I don't like that."*

Question 3: *"I guess it was just I liked the subject [her aunt's influence].* ***It was something I like felt strongly about I guess because, you know, she like really affected my life."***

Student 15

Question 1: *"Some [associations to writing] are positive and some are negative. A lot of times I think of research papers, and really I hate doing those.* ***But I love getting to do like free-writing kind of things****. Like my favorite paper that we got to write last year was a satire, and we got to like pick whatever we wanted, and just like make fun of it, and that was fun to do."*
Question 3: *"...****and it just made me feel better like writing it down and everything."***

Student 16

Question 1: *"Strict, um,* ***a lot of things teacher make you do um kinda restrict everything*** *[. . .]* ***When they give you a free-write****, you know [. . .]* ***my senior paper was a free-write. You could write whatever you wanted to write about and that was a great time.*** The student added, however, that they had to choose a poem. ***"I like free-writing. It gives you time. It gives you something to be creative about. You're not restricted by all these guidelines. You're not forced to do what with what the teacher actually wants you to do****."*
Question 3: *"I got to do a writing assignment in history and that was my favorite assignment, um,* ***it was also a freewrite****. Basically any time period and you pick a topic and you get to write about it [. . .] It was the best writing project I've ever done…. As I've said, I'm thinking about going into history for a major,* ***and I love history, and I love WWII so I had the opportunity to write about something I really liked."***

Student 17

Question 3: *"They're [favorite assignments] mostly journals where you write* ***what you think, what you feel or like****. . . ."*

Student 18

Question 1: *". . .I usually think of is like* ***English papers or research papers*** *or something like that or sometimes I've noticed sometimes whenever I get in a mood or something I love to write myself [. . .]* ***It's a way I can like express myself, sometimes when I have no other way out [. . .] Usually, if I don't talk to friends, I write."***

Question 3: "*Actually, one of my favorites to do was my entry exam to A&M.* ***Describe a difficulty that you've had in life and how you've grown from it. I love those types of things where it actually like relates to me at first and then I can cause that subject I can actually expand on*** *so much as opposed to like what we're doing now [. . .] I mean, like it's [a rhetorical analysis] nice*, ***but you can't put much of what you can into it."*** To clarify this student's response, I asked, "***You can't put yourself into it?" and he emphatically replied, "Exactly***." He added, "***I'm not a big reader and I'm not a huge writer, but I like to write about things that I like and things that intrigue me,***" and he mentioned texts like *Julius Caesar* and *The Odyssey*.

Student 19

Question 1: *"I think of outlining, um I think of drafting.* ***I think of putting all my thoughts into one piece of writing [. . .] It doesn't cause anxiety because I actually enjoy writing once I'm able to start. . ."***

Question 3: *"I like writing narratives.* ***I like writing stories about my life. My sister passed away when I was ten and so that's something that I've really loved to write about****. And I've used that in my college essay. I used that in my final exam essays in high school and different ways like of how that affected me, and I've just found that I really like to write about that."* I asked her if it was therapeutic, and she replied, "*I guess so, I* ***mean I was only ten when she passed away, but she was eight years older than me, so I really didn't have a connection with her,*** *but I guess you could say it was therapeutic. I enjoy writing about it. I don't know why."* She also admitted, *"I like research papers. Kind of a long drawn out process* ***but I do like writing because I like to research. I like to learn****,"* and the student placed a small stipulation on the type of research she prefers – history more than political science.

Student 20

Question 1: *"Most of the time when I hear writing,* ***it's usually involved in some kind of assignment for some kind of English class, and um I don't mind as long it interests me*** *[. . .] but when I'm not, it's just like something I just still have to do [. . .] It gives me a challenge, and sometimes I like to write on stuff that I'm interested in."* I asked how he feels when he is not interested in the topic, and he replied, ***"Then I just do it for the grade."***

Question 3: *"Well, I could say that my favorite kind of writing assignments are* ***those that are like are more like creative than technical so you know you can take the story wherever you want*** *and if there's like humor involved, I can write better stories like when there's humor and comedy involved [. . .] But I don't mind writing you know literature based or article based. It's just as long as there's enough information to present to [. . .]* ***As long as I get the idea of what's going on in the novel 'cause there have been two or three books before like last year senior English AP that I was totally lost but managed to write the essay, but I could have done better had I understood the book…"***

Student 21

Question 1: *"I think about* ***getting like the prompt across to people****, you know, really sticking to the thesis, and* ***the paper's obviously putting your point across****..."*

Student 22

Question 1: *"**I think of an assignment for some course**. Writing to me means like storybooks [. . .] **like maybe creating some sort of story**." I asked her how she feels when she has to write a paper for class. She said, "It's just that you have to put time and effort to try to do the paper [. . .] **It's not always a negative type thing. For some reason I like to write."***
Question 3: *"**Like one of the free-writes where you can just write about anything** [. . .] remember I wrote an essay about like knights and stuff like that and **mainly things that interest me, that gives me more interest than just writing a paper."***

Student 23

Question 3: *"We did a poetry project [. . .] **I really liked the freedom of it. I was really creative, and it was kind of like you could present it however you want**. It didn't have to be like a paper."*

Student 24

Question 3: "***We had a research paper on Shakespeare my senior year. It's the most recent one I can think about. It was interesting**. We had to compare his plays and the modern adaptations to his plays, and I thought that was interesting [. . .] Um, **I like Shakespeare. I've been to England, and I went to the Globe Theatre.** I just like Shakespeare…."*

Student 27

Question 1: "*Schoolwork, papers, **a fun way of expressing myself. I love to write."***

Student 30

Question 1: *". . . I usually think of expression. **Writing has always been an excellent way, and one of the only ways, of expression for me. I love to write**, and have been praised for the works I've written."*

Student 31

Question 1: *"My favorite writing assignments are usually **the ones where you can write about what you want."***

Student 32

Question 3: "*Assignments that **allow me to be creative**."*

Student 33

Question 3: "***The assignments I've received poor grades in but gotten good feedback from professors have been my favorites, because I feel they are actually helping me progress towards becoming a better writer** [. . .] Topically, I have no favorites – I enjoy the exercise of writing and enjoy it in many different ways. I don't love academic writing or historical writing all the time, especially when it is assigned to me. If I have enough time, however, these are two of my favorites, as **the process of researching piques my academic curiosity and my writing gains credibility and a stronger voice in the process."***

Student 34

Question 3: "*My favorite writing assignments is **when we choose the topics or when we make up a fictional story. No teachers let you write fictionally anymore!"***

Student 35

Question 3: "*I wrote an assignment my senior year about the history of narrative through dance. **It was very challenging but I loved doing the research** and finding out how dance really does influence different cultures."*

Student 36

Question 3: "*My favorite writing assignment was when I got to write a paper on anything I wanted to as long as it pertained to history in America. **I chose to write about the history of archery in America because archery is my favorite sport and I compete nationally in it. This allowed me to connect with the paper more and I had a good time doing it and even got a good grade on it."***

Student 37

Question 3: "*My favorite writing assignments were **in grade school**. When I was in 3rd grade I wrote about a fishing trip that I really enjoyed. Also, when I was a senior in high school, **I wrote a really good research paper about James Joyce and I was proud of that."***

Student H

"When I think about writing, ***I think about writing what I feel****."*

Student L

"When it came time to write a paper over the book, the words just seemed to come so easily. ***I realized then that I could possibly become a successful writer if I am passionate about what I am writing about. . . .****"*

Student M

"Writing now [his senior year] meant ***an exploration into the unknown****."*

Student N

"*Fictional writing gives me the freedom I need to be able to write about my own experiences or use my imagination to write**."***

Student Q

*"****I feel a sense of freedom when writing for personal pleasure*** *because I can say precisely what I want to express in any manner I choose."*

Student R

"First grade was also the time I had to write stories, my favorite part of class. The teacher would tell us to write a short story about whatever we wanted. Of course, back then, a short story was about two paragraphs long. However, it was still an opportunity to express myself and share my interests with my classmates. My friends and I usually wrote about our favorite television shows at the time, or some cool action figure we just got. ***Being able to write about things that interested us allowed us to do what we normally did at recess and at home, making stories as we play, and apply it to something school related. At the time I did not think much of it; it was just something fun to do, but now looking back on what we did, I think it helped to encourage my interest in writing."***

Student V

"*By the time I reached high school, the amount of time I read decreased while the amount of time I wrote increased [. . .] During high school, I developed in my writing. Most of this development came in my senior year when I began writing more and more essays, typically personal narratives.* ***During this time, I learned more about my writing habits and I began to notice my voice and how I used it in my writing. Even in non-personal essays, I began to notice a trend in the way I would write and present ideas on paper. Writing no longer took the role of***

schoolwork in my life, but as a way to express myself as artists do while painting."

Student Y
"Using a pen and a spiral notebook, ***I was able to express what I really felt****."*

The first theme that emerges in these responses is identity, including students' perceptions of themselves as writers and the topics/genres that uncover students' interests. It is not surprising that students learn best when they have a vested interest in the paper's topic and/or its structure. Only five students explicitly state that they "liked" or "loved" to write, and of these five, only two, Students 27 and 30, did not include any stipulations. The other three students (6, 18, and 19) like to write when they are interested or "intrigued" by the topic. A student's interests reflect his identity because the topic that draws or moves him into the writing process develops his ethos. He is given the opportunity to write about what he knows. He, not the teacher, becomes the authority figure or the expert.

Nine other students describe moments when they do not mind writing when they were "interested in" the topic, like Students 6, 12, 18, and 20. For instance, Student 1 describes, at length, his senior research project, an I-search paper, which did not only involve library research, which made the project "really interesting." Students 8 and 9 associate interesting topics that are tied to their majors, history and meteorology respectively. Student 22 says that writing about topics that he likes, "gives [him] more interest than just writing a paper." His answer indicates that finding an interesting topic holds his focus, unlike moments when he simply, nonchalantly puts words on a page. Even though Student 35

found her research project "challenging," she realized that she "loved doing the research." She proves that some students do not mind the work – of researching and writing – as long as they have a connection with the topic. Similarly, Student L realizes that she has the potential to be "a successful writer" if she is "passionate" about her topic.

Six students recall positive experiences when the writing assignments allowed them to reveal a part of their identity to their reader. Students 4 and 6 refer to autobiographical essays. Student 4 says that she wrote an essay for a scholarship in which she recounted a challenge she overcame and how she grew from that challenge. She enjoyed analyzing what has made her "stronger" or a better person, and her use of the verb "overcome" reflects the strength that she gained. Student 6 was assigned to write an introductory essay that explained "who we were and why we were in the major that we were in [. . .] It was an opportunity for me to really show myself. . . ." Both students' quotes depict not only the importance of personal reflection, but also the importance of the connection between writer and reader, as seen in Student 6's claim of wanting to "show" who she is. Students 18 and 27 like to "express" themselves – allowing language to shape their identity on the page. These students' responses illustrate points that Thomas Newkirk makes in his book *The Performance of Self in Student Writing* (1997). Newkirk discusses the value of this type of reflective essay for students: "There is also a strong moralistic dimension to this form, as there is to any confessional act. The writer emerges (or appears to emerge – or constructs an

image of a self that emerges) from the essay as a more admirable, more self-aware, often more moral person" (22). These reflections act as proof for the writer that they are changing, becoming more mature, and developing their sense of self.

Student V benefited from writing personal narratives during her senior year of high school because she "began to notice [her] voice," and she subsequently began to view writing as an effective method "to express" herself. Lastly, like Student 4, Student 18 liked the topic he had to write about for his college application; he had to explain how he has "grown" from a difficulty. He explains that he likes topics when he believes that he is creating something important, as seen in his sentence, "then I can *cause* that subject. I can actually *expand* on [it]." His use of the word "cause" is important because he is bringing the topic into existence; he controls it. Topics that relate to him are more meaningful. At the end of his response, Student 18 identifies himself by what he is not – a reader nor a writer – unless the topic interests him, as the college essay did.

Closely associated with students' sense of self and their interests is feeling. When teaching academic writing, instructors focus on reasoning, so their students' papers are logically coherent; however, feeling becomes a significant factor for students when they write. Students 15 and Y found that writing helped therapeutically; simply by writing, they felt better on an emotional level. Student 17 and Student H like to see their thoughts and feelings on paper. Although Student 37 does not use the word "feel" directly, he admits to feeling "proud" of a

paper he wrote about James Joyce, and in feeling pride, the writer takes ownership of the work he completed.

Feelings and feeling connected with a reader are important to these students. Six responses allude to building a relationship with their readers and/or with a topic. When providing associations to the word "writing," Student 5 thinks of putting ideas on paper that "can be known by others," and Student 21 sees writing as "getting like the prompt across to people." Both students link writing to using their ideas in order to develop a connection with an audience. Students 11, 24, and 36 recall assignments they liked because they had history with the topic. Student 11 describes a paper in which she wrote about workers in Costa Rica, a paper motivated by her sister's experiences when she visited the country. Similarly, Student 24 liked an assignment about Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* because she had been to the Globe Theatre in London. Student 36's favorite assignment was about archery, one of his interests, and he openly recognizes that because he chose a topic that interested him, it "allowed [him] to connect with the paper more and I had a good time doing it." His observation offers a comment writing teachers do not hear very often – that he had a "good time" writing the paper. Student 19 says that she has written about her deceased sister several times and admits that she did not have a "connection with her" when she was eight at the

time of her sister's death, but by writing about her sister, she has created a relationship with her, one developed through language and paper.[9]

In most of these excerpts, a common element is the use of the verbs "choose," "pick," and "want." For several students, their favorite assignments are those in which they are able to select their topics, whether the assignment revolves around a research project, like Student 8, or a literary analysis, like Student 4. Twelve students use one or more of these verbs in their responses, proving that students want to take ownership over their writing. In writing about topics they *choose,* they build their authority, and consequently, their writerly ethos. Having the ability to choose leads to students taking a greater interest in their papers, and this interest leads to a greater personal investment in the paper.

Students' desire to choose is directly linked to another prevalent idea, found in 11 responses: freedom. Most of the allusions to freedom are associated with journaling and creativity. For example, Student 11 recalls times in eighth grade when they were asked to journal, and the students could write about anything they wanted: "it was a free-write kinda thing…." Student 14 associates poetry with "free-writing" and writing that is not "so structured," and Student 23 remembers being assigned a poetry project and liking "the freedom of it." Even when Student 15 was assigned to write a satire, she looked at it as a "free-write kind of thing" because she chose the topic of the satire. Student 22 prefers free-

[9] These examples that center on feeling and emotion run counter to contemporary composition theory. Feeling, authority, and ownership are associated with expressivist pedagogical models. Expressivism and its opposite, social-epistemic rhetoric, is addressed in Chapter V.

writing, "that gives me more interest than *just* writing a paper," indicating that writing a paper can be mundane so having a connection with the subject helps him during the process. Student 13 discusses how structured writing, unlike "freestyle writing," causes her "anxiety." These answers reveal that free-writing is coupled with choice, not to brainstorming. In students' points of view, a free-write is an actual type of assignment, while instructors see free-writing as a brainstorming exercise done early in the writing process in order to get ideas onto a page. Students' descriptions indicate that a structured or restricted text, unlike a free-write, does not allow them to feel as if they are creating something because parameters – or form – are set before they ever begin to write.

Besides freedom as creativity, another pattern that emerges is freedom as movement. Students enthusiastically describe their preference for assignments in which they are given opportunities to explore. Student 7 says that he likes "freewriting stuff [. . .] where you're told just go off…." He see writing as an opportunity to wander, which is similar to Student M's account of writing as "an exploration into the unknown." Student 20 prefers creative assignments because he can "take the story wherever you want." Student 18 sees writing as "a way out," or as an escape, when he feels stressed.

As a whole, students' interests, emotional connections with the topic, and personal choice all work together in shaping their positive perceptions of writing because exigence is a factor. Assignments that allow for choice and connection become literacy events because students are able to strengthen their "interactions"

with the writing, with themselves as writers, and with their readers. Subsequently, students' develop their ethos. However, most of the assignments described in Group B do not become literacy events because exigence is not a factor.

Group B

Student 2
Question 3: *"Definitely not research*. ***Just the amount of detail and analysis that you have to go into.*** *"The whole analysis aspect of reading and writing and everything.* ***I just don't think I have the kind of brain that can look analytically into what the intent of what the author means beyond his words.***"

Student 3
Question 1: *". . .* ***not so much anxiety, just a sigh****, 'Oh, it's another paper we have to write."*"
Question 3: *"Maybe just things that I feel aren't [. . .]* ***things that try to disprove my convictions, my Christianity.*** *I've heard about people having to write papers. I I it's not really a fear, but* ***I would hate to have to write something that write that, I would be trying disproving something I believe in.*** *Maybe not disprove but having to write on something that's contradictory…"*

Student 6
Question 3: "*I* ***hated*** *research papers, which I guess is kind of weird* ***because I like really hate research papers, but I love interviewing people to write stories.***"

Student 7
Question 1: "*A lot more work than I want to do. Yeah, just general work that I don't want to do.*" I asked him if the overall response he has to writing is positive or negative. He replied, "*Yeah… generally negative****, just the fact it's never usually writing about stuff that I'm interested in.***" I asked the student if he has ever written about a topic that he did like. He responded, "*I think chemistry. The only one I ever actually written anything in was my seminar class and* ***that was actually really interesting the whole class we individually focused on our own topic the whole semester that we picked and we wrote on that for the whole semester***."
Question 3: *"Just in general,* ***like papers where we're very limited,*** *and we like have to focus just on this one topic, and we can't do anything about it,* ***especially with topics I just don't care about."***

Student 8
Question 1: *"I guess it depends.* ***If I hear it like in a class, and then it's 'crap.'*** *I'm a history major so I like a lot of papers and* ***typically I don't get much time*** *to do them."*

Question 3: ***"If I'm not interested in it, I can't write it****. I just* ***wasn't feeling*** *it [when writing a paper for English class about a movie]. I couldn't get it out. I* ***wasn't feeling writing the paper,*** *and I put it off [. . .] But most if I don't like writing the paper, it's because I'm not interested in it.* ***I feel I'm just getting it out*** *just to get it out. It's not doing me any good, it's just a grade."*

Student 9
Question 1: *". . . I think of long essays, take long amounts of time to complete. I think personally, it's hard* [. . .] ***Writing is definitely the worst of my skills, so it doesn't make me happy at all."***
Question 3: "*Definitely* ***like reading a novel and then analyzing*** *[. . .] I think there was one that we had to do on [. . .]* The Awakening *[. . .]* ***I did not like writing on that one. I did not like the book."***

Student 10
Question 1: "*Geez, we have to write a paper [. . .]* ***It seems like such a small thing but then it ends up being a bit more work than just writing the paper****. Finding sources, making sure the flow's correct, the prewriting."*

Student 11
Question 1: "*Research comes to mind, and any kind of research, really, and sometimes* ***depending on like what's going on like in my life, sometimes it's a negative thing*** *[. . .] because it's [writing] is a time consuming thing."*
Question 3: *"...And then sometimes if my teacher well like* ***if a teacher would give a topic over something that I'm not interested in like at all*** *sometimes I don't so much like doing that or something that seems very boring or bland to me then I'm like why do I have to write this [. . .]* ***I had to write one time about plagiarism and um it just wasn't that appealing to me****...luckily it wasn't a very long paper...* ***but still like where can I go with that****?*

Student 12
Question 1: *"****Work, stress, not fun****. It depends on what it's like on like the subject. And like the what it's for like if it's for a grade rather than just writing something down.*

Student 15
Question 3: ***"I can't do research papers do that are supposed to be structured but are free…."***

Student 16
Question 1: *"**Long, tedious, boring** [. . .] strict, a lot of the things teachers make you do um kinda restrict everything [. . .] **As soon as they say we're going to do a writing project it never works out well."***

Student 17
Question 1: *"I kind of **cringe at the thought of writing** [. . .] **I'm not very articulate when it comes to writing** and most of the time when I write, I tend to skip the details and go right to the point, so I'm left with like one page when I'm supposed to write three."*

Question 3: " '*cause most of the time when I write for the SAT and stuff like that or like TAAS [former Texas state standardized test] they usually give me a writing prompt **that I don't feel like writing about…**"*

Student 19
Question 1: *[In philosophy class] **I felt that the topics were so vague** and there were so many different options that you could do to write.*
Question 3: *"I really don't like persuasive essays. '**Cause I think it's hard to sway someone's mind if you don't know [. . .]** Like it's always been hard for me to figure out what I'm talking about in a persuasive essay."*

Student 21
Question 3: *"I dislike research papers. It's just so overwhelming that **you have to go get a whole bunch of sources and make sure that they're the correct sources like knowledgeable sources** and then the citations and [. . .] just gathering all the information. We had a couple of those in high school and they stressed me out very bad [. . .] I mean, even the word is scary."*

Student 22
Question 3: *"**Probably like researching people** because sometimes they give you some like people you don't even know who they are, so you have to take time and effort to research them, and sometimes they may be like boring people. **Like, you don't have an interest in them, and that's just like really a drag** when you have to write like a biography about a person, **you're like UGH!** I don't even like them or know them."*

Student 23
Question 1: "***Pretty much research papers**. I take the writing classes, and **all I've ever done are the five-paragraph essay and the research papers, and the MLA format,** so pretty much that."*

Question 3: *"I think they're [research papers] boring. I actually like the research of it. I love learning stuff [. . .] **At the same time I hate it at some point because***

like you don't really have much freedom in it. I always got, you know, a bunch of stuff wrong because of like grammatical stuff or because of format stuff *'cause* ***I felt like the content wasn't as important as actually what I was supposed to look like****."*
"Um, I don't like writing now. ***I definitely think I stopped like writing like eighth grade, ninth grade year when it stopped being like creative fun writing like stories and then it turned into like papers."***

Student 24
Question 1: *"****I really don't mind writing that much****. It depends again on if it's something I want to write about.* ***If I'm not interested in it then it's kind of a pain."***

Student 25
Question 1: *[My perceptions are] "normally negative.* ***I'm just not a strong writer*** *[. . .]* ***cause I feel like I can't put all my ideas into like, into like a well written sentence on paper.***"

Question 3: "*I don't really like reading, like* ***I don't like having to write about books that you read like what you thought about it, the characters, and all that stuff*** *[. . .] I don't really like to read and I don't really grasp like like a lot of the stuff doesn't stand out,* ***like some of the books you have to read in high school are just not interesting****, and they they want you to write all this stuff about and you don't even pay attention well enough to do it*." I asked her if she had ever read a book she liked, and she replied, ***"I don't think I've ever gotten the chance to write about a book I liked*** *[…] 'cause I* ***feel*** *like I can't put all my ideas into like into like a well written sentence on paper."*

Student 26

Question 1: *"****Nervous*** *with topics. I'm not good with expanding."*

Student 27

Question 3: "***Boring. Topics that are picked for me****."*

Student 29

Question 1: "*I think of* ***pain****."*

Student 31

Question 1: *"When I hear the word 'writing,'* ***I think of it being something for school. I feel that people usually only write if they are doing some kind of paper for school."***

Question 3: "*My least favorite writing assignments were when we had to write papers over books that I did not like.* ***It is difficult to write a paper over a book that was not enjoyable."***

Student 32
Question 1: "*Brainstorming,* ***don't know where to start****, research, reading*."

Student 34
Question 1: "*Long, format, topics* ***I don't care about***."

Student 35
Question 1: "*Research, paper, thesis, citation, MLA*."

Question 3: "*My least favorite writing assignment was my sophomore year when we had to read a book from the banned book list, then highlight the vulgar language and racist comments within the book.* ***It was very time consuming, and while I enjoyed the book I chose it was hard to enjoy the book when you were highlighting every 5 minutes."***

Student 36

Question 1: "*When I hear this, I generally think* ***that we will have a large assignment worth a lot of points,*** *and that you have to do a lot of work and time to get a good grade."*

Question 3: "*My least favorite paper was when I had to write about carbon dating for rocks to see how old they were and it had to be 15 pages long.* ***I wasn't interested in this at all*** *so I waited until the day before it was due to start it. I managed to write 13 pages and get a B- on it,* ***but the subject was terrible and I hated it."***

Student 37

Question 1: "*Other words that come to mind when I hear the word writing is usually words like* ***shoot, crap, dang it, or man, I don't want to do this."***

Question 3: "*My least favorite writing assignment was my sophomore year of high school; I had to write my research paper and* ***I had no clue what I was doing***

until the teacher helped me."

Student C

*"**I want to be able to feel comfortable** with my writing, to develop some confidence in my message and have a strong voice."*

Student L

*"**Since I do not feel like I am an impressive writer**, I do not want to do so. If I do, I usually do not want to share it…"*

Student N

"*I think my declining interest in writing through high school was due to assignments that did not interest me. [. . .]* ***I have been hindered by the confines of the assignments in some of my classes from junior high to college."***

Student O

*"Now, **I feel like I can't produce anything noteworthy**. All I hear in my head is can't. All I hear are self-defeating thoughts [. . .]* ***I want to feel connected to the writing*** *as the writer and be able to convey that connection to the reader."*

Student S

"Writing started out exhilarating and became, like reading, a chore in high school that ended in frustration. ***I felt I was no longer able to express myself and was constricted by certain requirements*** *and a particular way that I must write."*

Like Group A, Group B consists of responses that revolve around the themes of identity, feeling, and movement; however, these themes are depicted negatively: students describe *not* having writing skills, *not* feeling connected with assignments, and *not* having any freedom when completing an assignment. Six students explicitly do not identify themselves as writers or as having the skills necessary to be a writer. For example, Student 9 believes that "writing is definitely the worst of my skills," and Student 17 associates his poor writing skills

to not being "articulate." Student 26 has difficulty with "expanding" what, I assume, are her ideas.

Three of these students pair their lack of ability with a feeling, not to an actual fact (as if someone in their past told them directly that they could not write). Student 25 does not think that she is "a strong writer" because she "feels" she cannot put her thoughts together coherently. Student L also "feels" or believes she is not "an impressive writer." Student O does not "feel" she can "produce anything noteworthy," and later says that she wants "to feel connected to the writing." Similarly, Student C wishes "to feel comfortable" with the writing she does. The way in which these students perceive their skills is based on emotion, and as was illustrated above, emotion plays a large role in the composing process. Thus, it is not surprising that students do not like certain assignments, or writing in general, because they do not feel connected with the paper or with language.

Additional examples demonstrate the importance of feelings. Student 19 "felt" her assignments in philosophy class were ambiguous, which led to her having difficulty in the course. Student 8, like Students O and C, adamantly describes her need for connection with her writing; she explains that one assignment caused her stress because she "wasn't feeling it" – the topic or the process itself; she does not remember the assignment with fondness. Student 17 dislikes standardized tests *because* the prompts are not topics that he "feels like writing about." Students 8 and 17's dissatisfaction is directly connected with a lack of exigence; they do not feel disconnected with the topic that they are asked to

write about. These comments point to students' goals of wanting a relationship with writing, of wanting to improve their language abilities, of wanting to feel certain in their writing skills but not having had opportunities to do so.

Too often students are faced with topics or issues they find mundane or impersonal. Five students state that they do not like writing due to a lack of interest in the topics that are assigned. When Student 7 replied to Question 1, he says that writing conjures "negative" thoughts because "it's never usually writing about stuff that I'm interested in" and remembers only *one* assignment (from a chemistry class) that interested him. Student 11 wonders why she has to write about topics that "seem very boring or bland." Student 24 associates "pain" to boring topics, and Student 34 recalls topics she does not "care about." Not having interest in the assignment negates exigence and leads to further alienation students sometimes feel when they write.

Together, a lack of feeling, a lack of interest, and a lack of freedom foster students' dislike of writing. For Students 21 and 23 limitations ensue when faced with writing research papers due to the *possibility* of making mistakes. In each answer the student realizes that research papers call for more structure or rules, which then does not allow the student to freely maneuver while writing. Form becomes more important that content. Student 21 feels inhibited when writing research papers because she is worried about finding "correct sources." In fact, she admits that "gathering all the information [. . .] stressed me out very bad" and feels scared when having to a research paper. Student 23 says that she likes research,

but "hate[s] it [the paper]" because of grammatical errors, and she has learned that "the content wasn't as important as actually what I was supposed to look like." Student 23 serves as an example of a student who actually likes research but the experience is ruined because of *possible* errors. It is this thought of possibly making mistakes that moves students to feel anxiety. Consequently, the anxiety causes feelings of inhibitions, so the writing becomes stunted and formalized. The student chooses to play it safe.

Limitations also cause students to feel disconnected from their work. Restrictions prohibit movement, which in turn, negates exigence. For example, Student 7 and Student 22 provide evidence of building a relationship with, and simply liking, the topic one has to write about. Student 7 states that not caring about the topic can be limiting, and in not caring about a topic, the student feels confined. Student 22 describes the frustration that occurs when he has had to write biographies about a person with whom he has no connection, and these un-interesting topics are "just like really a drag," which weighs heavily, prohibiting movement. Such assignments become a burden. Students 16, N, and S address the relationship between feeling restricted and having no interest in the topics that are assigned. Student 16 associates the word "strict" when thinking about writing because teachers "kinda restrict everything." Student N writes that in college he continues to "feel hindered" and continues to have difficulty with writing, and Student S describes how restricted she felt because of "requirements" that "made

[her] see writing as more of a rule system," not as a way to communicate or to express oneself.

Students allude to movement that is required during the writing process itself. For example, Student 2 explains that he does not like research projects because you "have to go into" the research and that process takes time. To write a research paper well, the writer needs to work inside the information. This concept relates to the necessity of students having or developing a strong relationship with the papers they are assigned to write, and when they are told to research topics that are not interesting, students resist "going into" the topic/paper, as if they do not want to become a part of the paper, like a place they do not want to explore. Student 11 describes an assignment about plagiarism that she did not like, and because she had no connection with the topic, she did not know how to approach it; she wonders, "like where can I go with that?" Her rhetorical question pinpoints the lack of direction some topics create when they do not provoke a student's curiosity. Student 32 associates writing to not knowing "where to start," and knowing where to begin is an important step in building confidence because a strong beginning fuels the writer's willingness to continue the writing.

The quotes that follow uncover additional reasons as to the cause of students' unfavorable reactions with writing. Initial reactions to the word "writing" produce some interesting connotations, such as "long, tedious," "stress, not fun," and "pain." Boredom also was a common response, like for Student 3 who illustrates his reaction with, "Just a sigh, 'Oh, it's another paper we have to

write.'" He resigns to the requirement rather looking at the assignment as a challenge or as an opportunity to develop his writing skills. Student 17 "cringes at the thought of writing" as if an assignment will cause discomfort or suffering. When Student 8 hears about a writing assignment, she thinks, "Crap!" because she worries about time constraints. Student 8 is not the only student who dislikes writing because of time. Three other students state that they do not like to write because of the amount of time and work it takes to write a good paper.

The language students use to characterize writing is not unexpected. It is also not surprising to see that five-paragraph essays, research papers and literary analyses are the three specific assignments that are named most often in these accounts of least favorite assignments (outside of the practice writings students do for standardized tests that were mentioned in Chapter II). After all, research papers have been part of the curriculum for over 80 years: "The first article in *English Journal* to discuss the teaching of the research paper appeared in 1930" (Berlin, *Rhetoric and Reality* 70). According to Robert Connnors, one reason for the research paper becoming a part of the composition classroom was due to "the growing concern with intellectual property" that had begun in the late nineteenth century" (321). Students learned how to conduct library research. Secondly, research papers allowed teachers to shift "from personal to impersonal writing" (322). Five paragraph essays and research papers fit into the current-traditional paradigm, a pedagogical approach in which the writer becomes an "observer," not an active participant in the creation of knowledge (Berlin, *Rhetoric and Reality* 8).

Such a writing class focuses on empiricism and rationality, not on emotions (8). Research papers allow for objectivity since writing a research paper primarily involves "a simply transcription process" (70). The writer simply gathers information, writes a report, and remains distant from the subject matter. Along with description and narration, expository writing becomes a common assignment because it negates the student's voice (Connors 14).

It is obvious that contemporary pedagogy continues to adhere to developing research skills, such as citing and using sources correctly. By the time college students begin their first-year writing course, they have written several research papers and not just for their English classes. Yet, the research paper, even in some college courses, remains a text of regurgitated facts, not a purposeful learning tool that allows students to be engaged in the *search* itself. Students also provide evidence that Connors's observations, regarding the import of citing sources, are true. Plagiarism continues to be an issue in college classrooms, but students struggle with the rules and because of this struggle, their dislike for research and writing grows.

Similarly, literature has been an element in composition classrooms for over 100 years. However, until the early twentieth century literature mainly was used in a belletristic fashion "in terms of illustrations, examples, and short exercises" (Connors 323). Students were given opportunities to mimic the authors they were studying. Once literary criticism was "recognized as a definite genre of writing" students began writing about pieces of literature (323-24). The use of

literature in composition courses on the college level has been a matter of contention for several years; however, most of the students in this study had experience in writing about literature while in high school.[10] Like research papers, literary assignment also forced teachers to avoid or ignore the personal (325). Interpretation calls for the writer's logical interpretation of the text, but it does not call for the writer to include personal experiences within the interpretation. Thus, a literary analysis, as an assignment, keeps writers from basing their interpretation on feelings or emotion. The text itself becomes the source of the analysis.

While some composition teachers continue to shun personal writing, it becomes clear that students dislike research papers and literary analyses alike because these assignments are *not* personal. Students feel little connection with the subjects they are asked to research or with the texts they are asked to analyze. As stated above, students do not separate writing into personal and academic assignments; research projects become highly personal, for example, when

[10] Gary Tate and Erika Lindemann have debated the use of literature in the writing classroom, and their discussion was published in the March, 1993 of *College English*. Lindemann, in her article "Freshman Composition: No Place for Literature" posits five reasons why literature should not be part of a freshman writing course. Her first reason is that reading literature takes away from students "producing" texts; instead they are only "consuming" them (313). She believes that asking students to respond to literature "silences students' voices in the conversation literature is intended to promote" (314). Lindemann does not believe literature helps in teaching style because literature is taught for appreciation, not emulation (314). She challenges those who believe "critical theory offers new reasons to teach literature" but counters this stance because reading literature does not help the writing teacher who deals with "nonliterary texts" (314). Lastly, she states that teaching literature will not help in developing graduate students' skills as teachers and developing teachers is not a focus of English departments (315). In "A Place for Literature in Freshman Composition" Tate argues that composition courses have become "service courses" to prepare students to succeed in the academy, and he looks to the larger "community" that students will enter after college (319-20). He writes, "… I am far more interested in my interested in my students as individual human beings who will have private and maybe public lives that transcend whatever disciplines they associate themselves with while in college" (321). Thus, he believes literature develops students as people, and this kind of development is necessary as they become members of a non-collegiate community.

students invest themselves in the subject. Wendy Bishop discusses how students need to shift their approach when thinking about research papers, but I believe that her suggestions need to be absorbed by writing teachers as well.

In *On Writing: a Process Reader* (2004), Bishop describes research in a way that is foreign to most students: "a process of finding out; that is, learning, as well as finding support for your ideas and presenting your thinking and arguments in the company of the thinking and arguments of others" (398). She places research between private and public realms, and she emphasizes that students should choose to research an interesting topic and then integrate their findings and interpretations with others. Bishop admits that research papers usually are taught in a "tedious" way because they are "presented as a static way to teach a certain limited kind of inquiry: go to the library, look up three sources, cite these to support your argument by paraphrasing or quoting accurately, beware of plagiarizing, and so on" (340). Most students' negative experiences with research mimic this exact pattern; they see research as a series of separated, required steps, not as a fluid process of finding information and translating that information into the their own language. Bishop explains the importance of ownership:

> In my experience, writers have to make the research assignment *their own* to see the possibilities of research. If you feel research is something done *to* you, it's certain that you'll conceive of research as dry as dust, formulaic, and no fun. (emphasis original 401)

Bishop's recommendations are confirmed in the responses of Group A and Group B. Students' accounts demonstrate that the most effective writing assignment is

one that allows the student to control her own search, so she becomes the authority figure, the one responsible for the text's creation. However, if exigence is absent, if students are not *moved* or *motivated* to write, the import of ownership and authority becomes moot. Consequently, the assignment does not become a literacy event, but an empty, meaningless exercise that has no effect on a student's literacy development or on their identities as writers.

Conclusion

Two significant conclusions can be made based on these students' reports of their experiences with writing. The first is that the way students talk about writing differs from the way composition instructors talk about writing. Composition teachers divide assignments into categories like creative writing, personal writing, and academic writing. While differences obviously exist among genres, it is evident that what students like to write about in *academic* situations is what they find important and/or interesting on a *personal* level. [11] This point leads to the second conclusion: a shift in our pedagogical approach is warranted. Composition instructors should shift their thinking about what is considered personal or academic, and begin to think of *why* students write instead of *what* students write.

By focusing on the "why," we focus on exigence and moving our students towards a stronger relationship with their literacy skills. M. Jimmie Killingsworth

[11] The debate between academic and personal writing is addressed more fully in Chapter V.

writes about the need for movement in his book *Appeals in Modern Rhetoric* (2005). He looks to Lloyd Bitzer's discussion of exigence as it relates to modern rhetoric and describes it as having

> to do with what prompts the author to write in the first place, a sense of urgency, a problem that requires attention right now, a need that must be met, a concept that must be understood before the audience can move to a next step. In classroom terms, an exigence is like the 'prompt' that the composition teacher gives in a writing assignment. It is what moves a person to write and what defines the topic. (26-27)

The problem, however, is that exigence is lacking in many students' reasons to write. Students have described being inundated with inconsequential writing exercises, so students continue to see writing as an external act that is completed for the benefit of the instructor. Students' stories reveal that they rarely feel *moved* to write; instead, they are *told* to write. Prompts may induce a nudge, but they rarely propel students to respond thoughtfully and meaningfully to assigned topics.

One writing assignment that moves students to examine the personal in relation to the academic is the literacy narrative. Chapter IV turns to the value of teaching literacy narratives in a composition classroom. Literacy narratives, as described in the Chapter I, recount the writer's history with reading and writing. The genre can benefit students because they reflect on how they relate to language and begin to recognize how language reflects their sense of self. Chapter IV examines students' reflections after having written a literacy narrative. Throughout Chapter II and Chapter III, the focus has been placed on

students' interview responses. Chapter IV centers on students who wrote literacy narratives in my Advanced Composition class. Instead of presenting an analysis based on close readings of students' reflective essays, I conduct a discourse analysis rooted in M. A. K. Halliday's functional grammar. Attention will be placed on the verbs students use in their writing because verbs reflect the *action* of writing. The analysis uncovers how the literacy narrative becomes a meaningful, purposeful assignment for mainstream students because they are moved to examine their past experiences in classrooms and how these experiences reflect their present sense of self. The assignment becomes one that is centered on ethos – of examining how external influences have affected the internal voices that they use in their writing.

CHAPTER IV

LITERACY NARRATIVES:

REFLECTIONS OF PEDAGOGIES AND PROCESSES

This chapter builds on my analysis and conclusions from Chapter II and Chapter III regarding students' experiences with past writing lessons and assignments: Chapter II described the classroom "public" places where students have learned to write as confining due to the emphasis on formulaic writing; Chapter III illustrated that exigence is necessary for students to feel *moved* and this *movement* is necessary if we want them to use their creativity, to think critically, and to invest themselves in the writing they are assigned. Focusing on these preferences, this chapter examines whether the literacy narrative enables and fosters these characteristics and whether the literacy narrative strengthens students' sense of ethos.

The first part begins with a brief overview of research that has been done regarding literacy narrative pedagogy. The second part describes the assignment that I presented to my students. The third part contains excerpts from students' reflections after they completed the assignment. Using M. A. K. Halliday's transitivity analysis, I conduct a discourse analysis on these reflections in order to understand what students liked, disliked, and learned from writing the literacy narrative. Because Halliday's transitivity analysis focuses on verbs, students' reflections pinpoint the actions they performed while writing the narrative.

Students' actions indicate how invested students became while completing the assignment, and investment is something that students rarely feel when writing.

Perspectives on Literacy Narrative Pedagogy

Recent articles and dissertations describe the benefits and purposes of assigning students to write a literacy narrative. Most of these studies have been conducted within the context of classrooms that are made up of marginalized students. In contrast, this project centers on mainstream students.

Mary Soliday's article "Translating Self and Difference through Literacy Narratives" (1994) asserts that writing literacy narratives is a highly beneficial assignment for her basic writing students who are "minority, immigrant, and working class" (512). Soliday draws connections between "cultural identity and writing" (512); she proposes that literacy narratives allow students to develop "narrative agency by discovering that their experience [with language] is [. . .] interpretable" and that their experiences can lead to a "broader critical dialogue" with other students and with other narratives (511-12). Soliday's students develop confidence and their "narrative agency" as they begin their college career, when they are perhaps nervous or unsure about using academic discourse.

To illustrate her theory, Soliday looks to one of her students, Alisha. One of Alisha's essays is a reaction to writing a literacy narrative. Alisha describes her movement among three different groups of people (her teacher, her friends, and

her mother) and how her linguistic choices consequently shift. Soliday sees these shifts as moments of translation, the central metaphor in her argument. She writes,

> Stories of self-translation involve representing difference, and the representation of difference is at the core of today's struggles in the humanities over competing versions of multi-culturalism [. . . which] should always involve building classrooms where actual translation can occur – where writing can be used as a means of self-definition and self- representation. (512)

Soliday's students describe their experiences with language when they have come in contact with other dialects and "ponder the conflicts attendant upon crossing language worlds" based on the choices they made within various linguistic contexts (512). In assessing their experiences, Soliday's students reflect on how their concept of self is subsequently changed. Alisha "relativizes the differences between dialects, which, for her, means accepting her double-voicedness as a strength rather than as a sign of her cultural loyalty" (518).[12]

Alisha notices how she uses slang with her friends, yet when she comes home and makes slight changes to her dialect, her mother asks her why she is using "white English" (517). Alisha finds that by separating English into black and white categories, she, too, feels separated. Thus, Alisha concludes that "categories are limiting" (517). This conclusion leads Soliday to believe that Alisha's experience in writing a literacy narrative is successful because Alisah is able "to view her life through a critical and interpretive lens" (520). Alisha becomes aware

[12] This point of disloyalty is explored in Alisha's second essay in which she compares her education to Richard Rodriguez's with whom she finds empathy, but in the end she does not agree that a negation of the self or definitive split between his home life and his career is necessary to succeed academically (518-19).

of how language works in relation to her identities as a daughter, a friend, and a student.

Building on Soliday's metaphor of translation, Alison Cook-Sather's "Education as Translation: Students Transforming Notions of Narrative and Self" (2003) recounts how literacy narratives function in a class she taught called "Finding the Bias: Tracing the Self Across Contexts" at Bryn Mawr College (92). Cook-Sather and her colleagues base the course on biases, the types of biases that Linda Brodkey presents in her essay "Writing on the Bias" (93).[13] The class moves students "to recognize, name, and trace a variety of biases along which they and we live, think, and write" (93). Cook-Sather situates her discussion of translation on Jiri Levy who sees translation on both a "teleological" and a "pragmatic" process: "From the teleological point of view translation is a process of communication. From the pragmatic point of view translation is a process of decision making" (94). Cook-Sather posits that while students revisit and revise their texts, they are involved in making decisions in order to communicate effectively; thus, students play the roles of "characters, authors, and critics; they must be text, translator, and reader" simultaneously (94). As they create and critique their texts, they recreate themselves (94-95). Cook-Sather wants to push her students to be "active producers of their own knowledge" and active in (re)creating their sense of self (95).

[13] Brodkey's essay is also an example of a literacy narrative because she "uses the metaphor of bias in sewing to analyze her development as a thinker, writer, and person" (93). Cook-Sather says that this metaphor of a bias is applied in her course to move students to examine "the process of deciding how one will cut across various facts, ideas, experiences, and contexts – and discerning how others have done so" (93).

Cook-Sather assigns a "multiple-perspectives" project in which students recount the same story from two or three viewpoints, and they include a one-page reflection that describes the levels of authority that each viewpoint carries (97). In her article, Cook-Sather includes quotes from several students who reflected on the assignment; their reactions reveal that as they recreate the same story, they become consciously aware of the linguistic choices they make and the ethical dimensions that are associated with speaking for someone else (104). Their literacy narratives reveal that translation occurs on multiple levels.

J. Blake Scott's "The Literacy Narrative as Production Pedagogy in the Composition Classroom" (1997) also responds to Soliday's model of teaching literacy narratives (108); however, his article is a much more pragmatic approach to literacy narrative pedagogy, compared to Cook-Sather's stance. Scott does not believe that literacy narratives always move students to a recognition that Alisha experiences, one that reflects "Mary Louise Pratt's concept of the 'contact zone'" (115).[14] Scott writes, "Students' literacies are formed in intersections of various home, school, peer, and community influences [. . .] but these intersections are not always zones of conflict" (115). Scott defines literacy "as social meaning-making through language" (109) and views literacy narratives as exercises in which his students recount their "accumulation of literacy" (109).

[14] In her chapter "Arts of the Contact Zone" (1999), Pratt defines contact zones as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly symmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today."

Each of these scholars defend the literacy narrative assignment because it allows students to make connections between their language and themselves, and each researcher emphasizes "discourse communities to which they [students] belong" (Scott 112). However, their conclusions regarding the benefits of literacy narratives differ slightly: Soliday finds literacy narratives important because students examine *how their language changes* and *how their identities subsequently change* as they move among different groups. Cook-Sather finds literacy narratives valuable because students identify *biases in language;* students become aware of the implications of translating and recreating meaning. Scott finds literacy narratives purposeful because students reflect on *how they have become literate.* Soliday wants students to examine their present selves and language; Cook-Sather and Scott want students to examine their past in relation to their present selves. It is this exploration – of examining their past and present language practices – that I find important for mainstream students to conduct, since they do not face linguistic struggles similar to the basic writing students in Soliday's study. Asking mainstream students to examine the source(s) of their language and literacy practices is just as valuable for them as it is for marginalized students.

Three recent dissertations offer insight into the benefits of assigning literacy narratives to both marginalized and mainstream students. Caleb Corkery's dissertation *Narrative and Personal Literacy: Developing a Pedagogy of Confidence-Building for the Writing Classroom* (2004) centers on the confidence

that his African-American students find as they begin college and enter a new linguistic community. Corkery's goal is "to enhance the existing rhetorical skills of incoming freshmen by making their abilities apparent and relevant to college writing," and he does this by focusing on his students' oral skills (5). His assignment, outlined in Chapter 7 of his dissertation, is built on oral and written communication (158). Corkery provides his reader with a list of topics that his students write about and then divides the topics into "five general categories of rhetorical strategy": pathos, imitation, use of maxims, ethos, and dialogism (161). Several pages are devoted to each strategy, and he includes passages from his students' essays to illustrate how the rhetorical strategies are used. By expanding the oral skills his students already possess, Corkery states that his "students' personal standards for literacy [. . .] become a source of strength and relevant as they are adapted to other academic rhetorical situations," much like Alisha's experience described in Soliday's article (186). His students recognize that they already know and use rhetorical skills that are necessary for academic discourse and gain confidence in the process.

Susan DeRosa emphasizes the development of civic literacy when she assigns literacy narratives. DeRosa's dissertation, *Encouraging a Civic Literacy: A Pedagogy of Self-Reflection, Agency, and Action* (2006) examines the necessity for students to write literacy narratives as a step in connecting the personal with community issues. This pedagogy moves students to create a strong voice and "to envision themselves as actively participating and contributing to their

communities" (14). DeRosa also emphasizes the need for "self-reflective writing" so students become aware that writing does not occur *only* in academic settings and that their writing has value within their "local communities" (36). In doing so, she appropriates the metaphor of translation that Soliday uses.[15]

DeRosa connects literacy with public writing by having her students write in various genres: "public letters [. . .] profiles; research reports; proposals; and literacy narratives" (49). She then asks her students to write several smaller/shorter literacy narratives – reflective essays – after each writing project "to explore their literacy development as something that does not just emerge after they have written one assignment" (46). These smaller narratives allow her students to consider the rhetorical choices made for each project. At the conclusion of the semester, DeRosa's students write a final "macro-literacy narrative" to describe their overall experiences and (hopefully) revised notions of literacy. These macro-literacy narratives are not stories about past major literacy events; instead they are reflections about their literacy experiences during the entire semester.[16]

Susan Paterson explores how students present themselves in their literacy narratives in her dissertation *Embodied Narratives: Ways of Reading Student Literacy Narratives* (2001). She extends the discussion found in Bronwyn T. Williams's article "Heroes, Rebels, and Victims: Student Identities in Literacy

[15] Several of the students' final literacy narratives also allude to Soliday's article.
[16] DeRosa includes seven examples, written by her students, of their micro-literacy narratives and of their final literacy narrative in which they reflect on their semesters' experiences. Within her chapters she also includes excerpts from the students' writings, which is similar to this project; however, she does not discursively analyze the narratives.

Narratives" (2004). Both Paterson and Williams examine how students "construct" their identities as they write a literacy narrative: "To adopt a particular structure, then, requires that students adopt a particular identity" (Williams 343). Williams finds that when students take on the role of being "successful writers and readers," they begin to believe they are successful at these skills (345). Paterson analyzes over 100 student-written literacy narratives. She examines "the 'effects' of schooled literacy and […] offers 'ways of reading' these very embodied narratives" (Paterson 1-2) by recognizing how her students "confront their own construction of earlier versions of themselves" (8). Paterson categorizes her students' narratives into groups: those that describe teachers as "heroes and antiheroes" (Chapter III); those that describe personal stories of success (Chapter IV); those that illustrate resistance to school culture (Chapter V); and those that describe the stigmas associated with literacy (Chapter VI).

The two characteristics that these three dissertations share with this project – and with this chapter in particular – are that the literacy narrative assignment is effective and that the analysis revolves around student-produced literacy narratives. However, the student population that makes up Corkery's and DeRosa's study is much more diverse than the students who enrolled in the Advanced Composition classes I study here. The mainstream students in my study are more like the students whom Paterson teaches: white and middle-class. Unlike DeRosa's study, this chapter does not address issues surrounding critical literacy, and unlike Paterson's study, this chapter does not categorize the various roles that

students adopt as they write their narratives. However, this chapter unveils that the literacy narrative assignment is valuable because it engages students, and it moves them to examine how they have developed their literacy skills, which mainstream students take for granted.

My Classroom: Writing a Literacy Narrative

I taught three consecutive semesters of Advanced Composition from the fall of 2006 to the summer of 2007. When I presented this writing project to my students, most of them said they had never heard of a literacy narrative.[17] We read several examples to provide them with some context. I used Wendy Bishop's book *On Writing: A Process Reader* (2004) as the text for the course. She devotes Chapter 2 entirely to this genre. I also provided students with excerpts from Frederick Douglass's *Narrative*, and from Villanueva's, Gilyard's, and Rose's texts. These four excerpts vary greatly from the narratives found in Bishop's text, which include, Christy Brown's "The Letter 'A,'" Richard Wright's chapter "The Library Card" from *Black Boy*, and Amy Tan's "Mother Tongue." Students responded to the narratives either by keeping a dialectical/double-entry journal or by writing one to two page responses, and their comments were used for class discussion.[18] To encourage my students to think and reflect about their literacy

[17] The prompt that I gave my students can be found in Appendix C.
[18] A dialectical or double-entry journal allows students to dialogue with a text. They divide a piece of paper vertically. In the left column they copy a passage from the reading that "speaks" to them in some way. In the right column, students write a response in which they interpret the passage they copied, ask questions, create connections, etc. The exercise is valuable because students choose

histories, I gave them a questionnaire much like the one I used for the interviews.[19] Students then created their narratives around one or more of the questions. Some students compared their literacy story with one of the narratives read in class.

After reading the narratives, the class created a guide, a "How to Write a Literacy Narrative," which was posted on the class's discussion board. In each of the three sections, students mentioned that the writer should be personal, honest, and fairly informal. The narratives should convey a conversational tone so the reader feels connected with the story. Students noted that some literacy narratives include a discussion of how schools and teachers greatly influenced the writer's literacy development or of how supportive role models affect one's literacy development. Students also mentioned that these stories include a description of the writer's transformation, his/her progress, and concluding, (often) inspirational thoughts. One student described a literacy narrative as being about "more than reading and writing," and another wrote that the narratives detail the writer's "relationship with the world, society, and culture [and . . .] how becoming literate changed that relationship." The "how to" guides that students created indicated that they had a solid understanding of literacy narratives as a genre and of different ways they could write or structure their own stories.

---

what they believe to be important. Ann Berthoff writes about the usefulness of a double-entry notebook in her book The Making of Meaning (1981). She states, "But writing can help develop a critical method of reading by, first of all, providing for students an example of a text coming into being – their own. And second, by encouraging habits of reflective questioning in the process of reading, chiefly by means of interpretive paraphrase" (45).

[19] The questionnaire that students in my class use as a prewriting assignment contains questions about reading and writing since I wanted my students to reflect on both of these skills in their narratives. The list of questions can be found in Appendix C.

I met with students individually for a conference to discuss their ideas and answer their questions before they started drafting the narrative.[20] When students brought their first drafts to class, they formed groups of three or four to talk about their drafts, rather than directly reading from them. When students returned from these mini-discussions, most said that hearing about their peers' narratives was helpful in jogging their own memories and giving them additional ideas of what they could include in their own narrative. Students found that they shared similar memories and experiences, like reading the same books (like *Hank the Cowdog* or the Babysitter's Club series) or taking part in the Accelerated Reader (AR) program. Students felt more confident in their stories and about writing the next draft.[21] Students revised their drafts two more times and each revision was followed by peer review.

From three course sections, I collected a total of 40 literacy narratives. Thirteen focused only on reading experiences; five essays were devoted entirely to writing; and seventeen combined recollections of reading and writing. Students described such issues as why they chose to major in English and why some want to be teachers. Four students recounted significant moments they remember about high school, like standardized testing or books they were assigned to read. Three students explained how important journaling had become in their lives when they were going through difficult situations. Two students discussed how important

[20] Several students commented that these one-on-one conferences were the most helpful part of the process because some students were confused about the direction their narrative should take or they were not sure which of their experiences should be the focus of the narrative.
[21] J. Blake Scott discusses the importance of collaboration; he writes that it "can help students remember the significance of literacy events. . . ." (109).

language and words had become to them, and three others connected creativity (or the lack of it) with their literacy practices. One narrative addressed the conflict between writing academically and writing personally. The influence of family members, like parents and grandparents, played a major role in fourteen narratives. Three narratives placed the writer's experiences within a larger societal or cultural context. For example, one student critiqued the education he received because he did not come from a wealthy school district, and when he came to college, he felt that he was behind his peers academically – an experience that has been documented in much of the research that addresses minority or working class students who attend college.

Although the literacy narratives were interesting, thoughtful, and enlightening, my concern lies in the effectiveness of the assignment as a pedagogical exercise. Therefore, the next section centers on the reflective essays that my students wrote upon completing the narrative. (These reflections resemble Susan DeRosa's "micro-literacy narratives" that she assigns her students after each writing exercise.)

Students' Reflections, Processes, and Stories of Relationship

Students wrote a response about their experience with writing the literacy narrative. They responded to one or more of the questions below:

- What do you like best and worst about your literacy narrative?
- What do you wish you could continue to work on, if anything, if you had more time?
- Was there anything difficult about writing the paper?

- Was there anything about the process that was helpful, not helpful, or should be changed?
- Thinking of other assignments you have completed, how does this assignment compare?
- Did you learn anything while completing this project about writing, reading, yourself, others, etc?
- Include anything else you would like me to know that is not covered in these questions.

The analysis focuses on the answers to three of these questions: 1) "What do you like best and worst about your literacy narrative?"; 2) Thinking of other assignments you have completed, how does this one compare?"; 3) Did you learn anything while completing this project about writing, reading, yourself, others, etc.?" These three questions are specific to the literacy narrative: they uncover the effectiveness of the assignment, and they assess what students learn about their literacy skills and themselves.

Thirty-eight students wrote a reflective essay. Compared to the analysis I provided in Chapters II and III, the analysis of these reflections will be much more detailed in its focus on syntax and diction, specifically on verbs. M.A.K. Halliday's transitivity analysis provides the foundation for my investigation of students' reflective essays. In his book *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (1994), Halliday explains that what we experience, the "happenings" of our daily lives, "are sorted out in the grammar of the clause" and the clause functions as "a mode of action" and "as a mode of reflection, of imposing order on the endless variation and flow of events" (106). This order or structure is realized through transitivity, and transitivity translates our experiences into processes – verbs (106).

Verbs are central to my analysis for two reasons. The first reason lies in the fact that verbs play the most important role in a sentence since they dictate action or passivity. Depending on the types of verbs used, for example, one can infer if students play an active or passive role while completing an assignment. The second reason comes from students' associations with the word "writing," a question asked during the interviews. When examining the answers from the interviews, the largest group of connotations consisted of nouns, which indicates that students think of writing as an act or as an object, *not as action*. Central to my analysis is the kind of actions students perform and how those actions affect how they see themselves in relation to the assignment. Verbs not only reflect *being* but also *acting*, and our actions fashion our identities.

Halliday sees verbs as being either internal or external processes, and he divides these processes into six categories: material, mental, relational, behavioral, verbal, and existential (107). He explains how internal and external processes function:

> We become aware of at a very early age […] between inner and outer experiences: between what we experience as going on 'out there', in the world around us, and what we experience as going on inside ourselves, in the world of consciousness and imagination. The prototypical form of the 'outer' experience is that of actions and events: things happen, and people, or other actors, do things [. . .] The 'inner' experience [. . .] is partly a kind of replay of the outer, recording it, reacting to it, reflecting on it [. . .] The grammar sets up a discontinuity between these two: it distinguishes rather clearly between outer experience, the processes of the external world, and inner experience, the processes of consciousness. (106-07)

Internal and external processes are in a relationship, a constant give-and-take. We use internal processes to make sense of external processes.

The actions that occur externally, Halliday labels as material: "Material processes are processes of 'doing'. They express the notion that some entity 'does' something – which may be done 'to' some other entity" (110). Mental processes are internal and revolve around one's senses (112) and are divided into three types: those of perception (feeling), cognition (thinking), and affection (liking) (114). Relational processes are "processes of being" (119). These are separated into those of attribution and identification (119). Linking verbs are examples of relational processes, as seen in the sentence "Susan *is* tall." In this example, Susan's height functions as the attribute. If we were to say "Susan *is* a florist," then her occupation becomes the identifier. Relational processes are also conveyed through possession (130), as in "John *has* a dog."

Material, mental, and relational processes are "the three main types of processes" (107). The three remaining processes are "subsidiary processes" (138). Behavioral processes are "processes of physiological and psychological behavior" and are "partly like the material and partly like the mental" (138-39). Verbal processes include actions that relate to saying or telling, as in "I *said* that I will be late." (140-41). Existential processes are expressed most often through a clause beginning with "There is/are" by standing for "something that exists or happens" (142).

The "principal" processes (material, mental, and relational) will be the focus of my analysis since they appear most often in students' statements. In the passages quoted below, the verbs and infinitives are in bold print. I have not emphasized other verb forms, like gerunds and participials, because in those instances, verbs function as nouns and adjectives respectively, and my focus is on the action that occurs while students were writing the literacy narrative. Groups A and B contain excerpts that respond to the question, "What do you like best and worst about your paper?" Group C consists of excerpts that compare the literacy narrative to other assignments students have written. Groups D and E offer students' reflections of what they have learned from completing the assignment. Their reactions to this assignment reveal themes that have been discussed throughout this project, those of relationship, ownership, and movement.

Group A

Twenty-seven students addressed the first question of what they liked most and least about their literacy narrative. The question is based on liking or disliking aspects of their papers, so mental processes of affection are prevalent throughout the excerpts. The focus of the discussion is placed on the other verb types used in the excerpts.

Student A

*"My favorite part of the paper **is** the first few paragraphs. In the first few paragraphs I **talk** about how I **learned** to read by reading fairy tales with my dad.*

*This **is** my favorite because it **is** one of my favorite memories from my childhood, and I **know** that I **will never forget** it."*

Student B

*"The thing I **like** best about my paper **is** that the focus **is** on my family helping me **become** literate."*

Student C

*"I **liked** how I **incorporated** my family into my writing project. They **have played** a big part in my education and I **like to credit** them for their efforts [. . .] I **enjoyed** writing this essay. I **was** comfortable with my thoughts and the structure of the essay."*

Student D

*"I **feel** that I **was** very honest in my paper and I **made** it more personal so that it **has** a conversational feeling. I **like** this best about my paper because it **makes** the paper more interesting and not boring to read. I **think** I **did** job [sic] overall **conveying** my point and I **like** the topic I **chose**, it **is** a unique topic that **gave** me something to talk about without any problems."*

Student F

*"I **love** that my paper **includes** memories with my mom and dad, and how they **affected** my loved for books."*

Student H

*"What I **liked** most about writing my paper **was having** the chance **to reminisce** of my first times reading and writing."*

Student K

*"I **enjoyed** writing the paper because I **felt** I **could write** the paper in any form I **wanted** and **write** very openly. Another thing I **liked** about writing this paper **was** I **had** plenty of resources to use."*

Student L

*"The part I **like** best about my paper **is** the personal story. It **was** really interesting **to dig up** these old memories to remember how I **learned to read and write**. I **like** that it **was** very close to me; I **think** it **is** the most personal paper I **have written** for*

*a class. I also **like** the freedom we **were allowed** in getting out [sic] point across. I **liked** that we **could use** a story or whatever method. I **have not had** so much freedom like this in the past. I **think** not **having** this rigidity it **made** my paper better and more interesting."*

Student M

"*I **liked** the aspect of exploring my history the best in this paper. I **revisited** several events in my history that I **had almost forgotten** about [. . .] I **suppose** the most enjoyable part of this paper **was** the freedom with which it **was carried out**. The flexible manner with which the building of the paper **was carried out made** me **feel** comfortable **to write** what **was** on my mind. It is only through self-exploration that we can grow as people, and thus this paper topic will always be useful to students."*

Student N

*"I **liked** the ability **to express** my own feelings [. . .] Since I **was writing** about my experiences, I **felt** as if I **was** an expert in the topic (which **is** an unusual feeling).*

Student O

*"When I **was done writing** my first writing project, I **was** proud of my work [. . .] I **like** my examples that I **used** in the paper the most. I **think** I successfully **explained** my thoughts and feelings through the examples **provided**."*

Student P

*"I **loved** thinking back to the days when everything [in school] **seemed** new and exciting. I **loved** finding an interesting way **to convey** a not-so-interesting story. I mostly **loved** reading my final copy and **being** amazed at what I **read**. The words **didn't even seem** like my own."*

Student Q

"*I **am** impressed with my own ability **to recall** events of my past so distant and yet so profoundly shaping. In summing them up, I **think** I **present** a strong case through my essay that the public education system **should reform** its style of early reading education."*

Student R

"*I **enjoyed** writing this assignment for various reasons. It **gave** me a **chance to look back** and **reflect** on my past and childhood memories [. . .] This paper also*

gave *me the opportunity to look closer at the way I* ***write*** *by making me* ***look*** *to the past to see how I* ***developed****."*

Student S

"I ***like*** *how my paper* ***brings*** *back memories of my early school days. It* ***was*** *a lot of fun remembering the things I* ***loved*** *about school. I* ***enjoyed*** *making the connection between elementary school memories and my desire* ***to become*** *a teacher."*

Student T

"I ***like*** *how my paper* ***is*** *a personal story for me. I* ***had never really thought*** *about how I* ***became*** *a literate person, and the process that* ***went*** *along with it until I* ***wrote*** *the paper [. . .] I also* ***liked*** *that I* ***was*** *able to talk like a real person in my paper rather than* ***attempting*** *to sound like a literary scholar. I* ***feel*** *like it* ***will be*** *easier for my readers to relate to me when* ***reading*** *my essay because I* ***do sound*** *like a normal person."*

Student U

"I ***enjoyed*** *writing this paper because it* ***brought*** *back many forgotten memories, and it* ***showed*** *me that I* ***can still write*** *narratives. There is no reason to be afraid of writing as a form of self expression. I also* ***remember*** *how much I* ***love to write*** *narratives. I* ***feel*** *as though I* ***have done*** *my best."*

Student X

"I ***think*** *the facets I* ***enjoy*** *most about my paper* ***are*** *those parts that I* ***was*** *able* ***to relate*** *my story back to my parents' upbringings. Despite the fact that they* ***were born*** *into entirely different situations then [sic] what* ***happened*** *to me, in reviewing our literacy narratives we* ***turned out*** *very similar. I never* ***had stopped to think*** *about that before and* ***being*** *able* ***to put*** *it down on paper* ***made*** *it remarkably clear."*

Student Y

"The thing I ***like*** *best about my paper* ***is*** *its honesty. I* ***think*** *I* ***was*** *able to get things down on paper without holding much back [. . .] Sometimes it* ***is*** *easy for me* ***to write*** *a lot and not really* ***connect*** *myself to the piece, but this paper it* ***was*** *impossible to disconnect myself from the content. Through revising and reviewing, I* ***think*** *I* ***was*** *able to add even more of myself to the piece, which in turn* ***allowed*** *me* ***to feel*** *much more pride in it that [sic] in other papers I* ***have written*** *in college."*

Student Z

"*This paper **was** fairly easy for me **to write**, so I **think** that **says** a lot about what I **think** of it. It **seemed** natural to me **to write** about reading, and that **led** to the paper almost **writing** itself."*

Student A1

"*Overall, I **am** pleased with the final result [. . .] I also **like** that it **reads** similarly to the way I **speak**. Since it **is** a narrative, I **wanted** it **to feel** like I **was telling** these stories to the reader."*

Student A4

*"The thing I **like** best about my paper **is** the topic I **chose is** something I **feel** very passionate about."*

Student A5

*"While I **do not think** my paper **is** by any means perfect, I **am** satisfied with the end result. I **think** the imperfection of my narrative **makes** it a little more personal, and I **feel** that my voice **was depicted** in my writing [. . .] I **enjoyed** the opportunity to broaden my writing experience, and I **am** pleased that I **can see** personality **shine** through my narrative essay."*

Student A7
*"I **think** my ideas about reading **are** the best part of my paper. I **do** a good job of explaining how reading **has developed** and **shaped** me [. . .] One thing that I really **enjoyed** about this project **was seeing** how different books **have affected** me."*

Student A9

"*The thing I **like** best about my paper **is** how I **included** a lot about my mom and I **connected** throughout my life with reading."*

Student B1

*"One of things I **like** best about this paper **is** how I **was** able to be personal and **reveal** a little bit more about myself. I **liked** the overall topic, **being** able to write about books and reading in my life [. . .] I **like** writing about things that **force** you to look at yourself and hopefully **lead** you to new discoveries about yourself. I **think** this project **did** that form me."*

Student B2

*"I **ended up** really **liking** this essay. It **feels** honest and when I **had** my roommates **read** it aloud I **felt** like I **could hear** a voice of my own in the paper."*

Student B3

*"What I **like** best about this paper **is** that I **believe** that I **achieved** that goal of making this paper sound informal so I **don't completely turn** my audience off to literacy and **bore** them with my paper. By including events from my childhood and including struggles that I **dealt** with that **affected** my path to literacy I **felt** like I **was** able **to reach** certain members of my audience that **have gone** through similar struggles."*

Most students begin their responses with "I *like* - - - best about my paper because. . ." or "What I *like* best about my paper is. . ." or "I *enjoyed* writing this paper because. . . ." The mental processes that are placed at the beginning of a sentence are not the important part of the analysis. Instead, the importance lies in why students prefer one part of the narrative over another. In a majority of the excerpts, the narrative becomes the agent, the actor, or the instigator: the paper either *has* or contains certain elements that the student likes, or the paper *does* something for or to the writer. Themes, such as building relationships and feeling connected with the topic, are alluded to repeatedly throughout these excerpts, and these actions are revealed through relational and material processes.

Relational processes are evident in passages in which students describe the content of their narratives. Student A writes, "My favorite part of the paper *is* the first few paragraphs" since she first describes how her father helped her learn to read. Student B likes the "focus" of her paper which "*is* on my family helping me become literate," and Student A4 writes, "the topic I chose *is* something" she is

"very passionate about." Student B2 says, "I felt like I could hear a voice of my own in the paper." Although this last excerpt does not contain a relational process, the student feels as if he is a part of the paper since he hears his voice. He becomes a part of the narrative's content. These examples echo points made in Chapter III – students need to build a relationship with the topic and/or feel connected with the subject if they are going to like or feel proud of their writing. The students in these excerpts feel invested because they recall moments with family members, feel "passion" for the subject, and become part of the narrative.

I found that most of the passages in Group A are constructed to emphasize that the paper is providing the writer with an ability. Many of these examples are similar to Students A and A9 who like remembering the past. Student H says that she liked "*having* the chance to reminisce," and Student R says that the paper "*gave* me a chance to look back and reflect on my past and childhood memories." Student S and Student U use the verb "bring" as in the "paper brings" back thoughts of the past. Student U adds that the paper "*showed* me that I can still write narratives." These last four excerpts contain material processes. The paper becomes the actor and performs an action, which leads the student to perform another action, a mental process of reflecting, recalling, and reminiscing. The paper engages the students cognitively; students do not simply report or regurgitate facts.

Six students describe their narrative as both containing certain elements (through relational processes) and as providing them with opportunities (through

material processes). Relational processes play an important role in these excerpts because the papers affect how the writers see themselves in relation to their narratives. Students L, T, and Y construct sentences in a similar fashion. They begin by identifying what the narrative has, and then they move on to explain how that element affects what they were able to do in the paper. Student L begins her reflection by saying, "The part I like best about my paper *is* the personal story." She identifies the "part" as "the personal story." She continues by saying that she liked "the freedom *we were allowed*" in constructing their narratives. Student T uses "is" to identify that her narrative "*is* a personal story for me." She also describes how she "*was* able to talk like a real person" which allowed her to relate with her audience. Student Y also uses "is" to explain that she likes the narrative's "honesty." Twice, she states that she "was able," first, to present ideas on paper and second, "to add even more of myself to the piece. . . ." Student X identifies the "parts that I *was* able *to relate* my story back to my parents' upbringings" as the aspect he liked best about his narrative. He adds that he had never thought about the similarities he shares with his parents, "and *being* able to put it down on paper made it remarkably clear." The assignment afforded him the opportunity to explore his past. In the end through writing, he forms a stronger relationship with his family and his identity.

Two conclusions can be drawn from these excerpts. First, students like it that the narrative is personal because it allows them to connect with their audience and with the content. The second conclusion centers on the word "able," which is

used repeatedly in these statements. According to *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, able means either "having sufficient power, skill, or resources to accomplish an object" or it means "susceptible to action or treatment." The narrative provides students with "sufficient skill or resources" to accomplish a goal. The narrative moves students to perform a material process: "to *talk* like a real person", "to *present* ideas on paper", and "to *add* more of myself to the piece." Students become actors or agents during the writing process. They were actively involved in the writing. If we want students to internalize their language skills and if we want a writing assignment to become a literacy event, the assignment needs to create connections and provide students with sufficient resources to complete the assignment well.

While mental processes of cognition – remembering, recalling – are processes that are mentioned repeatedly, mental processes of perception, as in feeling, also play a key role in student's responses. For example, Students T and A1 like the conversational tone their narratives took – as if they were speaking directly with their readers. Another aspect students like is the feeling of openness, which allows them to connect with the narrative and with their readers. Student K uses the mental process of perception by saying, "I *felt* I could write the paper in any form I wanted and write very openly." Student L says, "I *felt* as if I was an expert in the topic (which *is* an unusual feeling)." He perceived himself as "an expert" while writing the narrative, noting that he is not accustomed to seeing himself in this role. These students use the word "felt" in place of either "think" or

"believe," two words that are based on logic or reason. The repetition of "felt" points to the emotional connection, not a logical connection, that students had with their narrative.

Four students focus on the role *they* played and the qualities they exhibited while writing the narrative, unlike the excerpts above in which the paper affects the writer's actions. Instead of the narrative being the most important part of their response, the writer becomes the main subject. Student C says, "*I incorporated* my family into my writing project [. . .] *I like to credit* them for their efforts" and "*I was* comfortable with my thoughts." By placing himself as the subject of these sentences, he focuses on his actions, not the paper's. Student D does not characterize his narrative as being honest, but sees himself as being "honest in my paper, and *I made* it more personal [. . .] *I like* this best about my paper because it makes the paper more interesting." He affects the narrative's qualities. Similarly, Student Q begins by saying, "*I am impressed* with my ability to recall events. . ." and he believes, "*I present* a strong case. . . ." Student A9 writes, "*I included* a lot about my mom…." These are the only excerpts in which the writer emphasizes his/her actions or his/her attributes and not the paper.

I find it significant that these four students constructed their sentences in a way that conveys their action in creating the narrative. In the previous excerpts, the paper, in a sense, was creating the writer, giving the writer an ability or a quality he/she was unaware of or had not used when completing other writing assignments. By examining how students see themselves in relation to the

assignment, we focus our attention on the writing we ask our students to complete and on the actions we want our students to develop. We need to be clear about what we are asking our students *to do* and *to become* as a result of writing a paper. Paying attention to where or how students situate themselves moves composition teachers to be more aware of ethos, of the places where students are coming from and where we are asking them to go.

Along with asking students what they liked about their narrative, a part of this question asks students to discuss what they disliked about their papers. Seventeen students answered this question; however, their answers do not provide any insight into the effectiveness of literacy narrative as an assignment. Instead, students mention qualities about their narratives that could be applied to any writing assignment, not just the literacy narrative. For example, five students did not like a section of their narrative, like the introduction or the conclusion. Two students wished they could remember specific moments more clearly. Five students believe they needed more time to refine their sentence structure and/or to include more examples. One student wishes she could have included some kind of figurative language. The seventeen excerpts can be found in Appendix D.

Group B

Like Group A, this section builds itself around themes that were discussed in Chapter III, regarding ownership and freedom. Passages in this group, Group B, are somewhat similar to those in Group A because the sentences illustrate how

students see themselves in relation to their narrative. Question 2, which asks, "Thinking of other assignments you have completed, how does this one compare?" is based on relational processes. These verbs are most prevalent in this section since the question asks for students to compare, describe, or state what the assignment *is* as compared to others that they have written; students either had to identify the assignment or characterize it by appropriating an attribute or an identifier to it. Several students admit that they have never written an assignment like the literacy narrative, so a repeated idea in Group B is difference. While I assumed that most students have never written a narrative about their literacy history, the reasons *why* this assignment differs is the focus of the discussion. Students explain that the literacy narrative is different in three ways: 1) the genre differs from other assignment they have written because it is a personal or autobiographical essay; 2) because it is a personal narrative, students found that the process was either difficult or easy; 3) students put forth a different amount of effort to complete the assignment, meaning the overall process forced students to write the narrative in stages, so they had more time to write and reflect; they could not just throw the paper together the day it was due.

Student B

"*The only other writing assignment that I **can think** of that **would compare** to this **is** when I **was** in elementary and middle school, and we **got to write** narratives [. . .] I **think** the only other writing assignments that I **have had** in the past **have been** research papers, which in my mind, **are** nothing like this!"*

Student C

*"Compared to other papers I **have completed** I **felt** I **was** more prepared **to start** my paper. The memo, peer review, the questions all **helped** me **gather** my thoughts properly to formulate my essay."*

Student E

"*Most of my writing assignments I'**ve done are** scientific writings: lab reports, research papers, etc. The experience with this literacy narrative **was** brand new and quite enjoyable. I **was** able **to write** anything I **wanted** without any restrictions (scientific writing rules)."*

Student F

"*This assignment **was** not nearly as difficult as others I **have had**. It **was** one of the more time consuming ones [. . .] however it **was** easy because I **knew** what I **wanted** to say. It **was** about me, so I **did not have** to do research."*

Student N

"*Writing a literacy narrative **was** a challenge for me because I **have never written** any assignment like this [. . .] Most papers I **wrote** in high school **related** to a specific research topic, not my opinion and reflections."*

Student O

"*I **fee**l I **did** a better job on this paper than on previous papers I **have written** [. . .] I **had to think** of my life, not just **respond to** or **report** what other people **have written**. This paper **allowed** me **to return** to my childhood and **recall** things I **had previously forgot** or **never thought** of."*

Student S

"*Compared to other writing assignments I **have completed**, I **think** that this paper **is** well done. It **is** different, because I **have never written** about my literacy history before, but I **put** a lot of effort into writing and reviewing my paper."*

Student U

*"This paper **is** totally different than any other paper I **have written** since middle school."*

Student V

"*Compared to other assignments I **have done**, this one **is** very different. In my [English] class, we **wrote** a few essays that **were** over personal topics, but they **were** usually short in length and **had** very specific topics. I **felt** that in writing this paper, I **had** much more room **to elaborate** and **write** about what I **wanted.** At first, the idea of less structure **scared** me, but once I **adapted** to the freedom, it **was** much easier and more enjoyable **to write**. "*

Student W

*"When I **have been assigned** other papers **to do** I **would just sit** down and **start typing** because the sooner I **could get** it **done** the better. Since we **had to actually labor** over these papers I **realized** that I **have** more ideas and corrections that **need to be incorporated** into the paper. This paper **was** an awakening that **showed** me that papers **are** actually work and they **are** very involved."*

Student X

"*This assignment **was** different than pretty much any other assignment I **have had to do** in college. The main thing **was** that it **was** a personal narrative and therefore **had** a little more freedom in how the paper **could be written**. Since I **was not being forced to interpret** or **tell** someone else's story, I **was** able **to go** about telling mine in my own way. This freedom **made** the assignment enjoyable but also a little bit more difficult because I **was forced to choose** the direction and theme of the paper itself."*

Student A3

"*This paper **is** still in a category of its own. Every other writing assignment **was** the five-paragraph mundane assignment [. . .] This paper **was** more of a reflection which, excluding my poetry, **is** still relatively new to me."*

Student A5

"*Writing this literacy narrative **was** a new experience for me. Outside of writing in a journal [. . .] I **am not used to** writing about myself. Since I **have had** a fair amount of experience writing scientific papers and statistical analyses, I **am** comfortable with writing in a formal, objective manner. Thus, trying **to write** in a subjective, personal style **was** difficult for me."*

Student A6

"*It [the paper]* ***gave*** *me the freedom* ***to talk*** *about my life and how I* ***feel*** *about that. That* ***is*** *a freedom that I* ***was never granted*** *in the past. Also, with this freedom* ***came*** *the privilege of writing in a very informal manner [. . .] It* ***allowed*** *me to analyze where I* ***have come*** *from on a literacy basis and* ***I've never really taken*** *the time* ***to do*** *that."*

Student A9
"This ***is*** *the first paper in college that I really* ***tried*** *on."*

Student B3
*"When comparing this to other writing assignments that I'****ve completed****, I honestly* ***believe*** *that this* ***ranks*** *up there with some of my most favorite assignments. The instructor always* ***assumes*** *that their student* ***knows*** *how* ***to write****, but it* ***is*** *interesting for them* ***to figure*** *out what it* ***is*** *that* ***triggered*** *the students passion or lack thereof, for writing. Before taking this class, I* ***had*** *absolutely no idea what a literacy narrative* ***was****. I* ***had never heard*** *of it in my entire life. I* ***feel*** *that by* ***being introduced*** *to this new, specific genre of writing, the foundation* ***has been set*** *for writing this semester and for the rest of my writing career*

The verbs that are used in Group B illustrate the writers' role during the process of writing the literacy narrative. The process dictates how the role that students play changes when they write other types of assignments. Students use relational processes both in identifying the characteristics or the types of papers they have written, as well as identifying or describing how they see themselves while writing: students were allowed to make choices about the narrative's structure and content; in doing so, they chose aspects of themselves that they wanted to reveal.

When students compare the literacy narrative to other genres, the difference they emphasize lies in the amount of freedom the student has in shaping the paper. This freedom strengthens students' sense of ownership over their work.

Four students mention the freedom that the narrative allows that other assignments, such as research papers, do not. For example, Student E says that she has "*done* [. . .] scientific writings: lab reports, research papers, etc." She found the literacy narrative "enjoyable" because she could write "anything I *wanted* without any restrictions. . . ." Student V compares the narrative to other "personal topics" that she wrote about in high school, but they "*had* very specific topics." She writes, "I *felt* that in writing this paper, I *had* much more room to elaborate and write about what I *wanted.*" Student X shares Student V's opinion regarding the freedom that the narrative allows: "Since I *was not being forced* to interpret or tell someone else's story, I *was* able to go about telling mine in *my own* way." Students E and V use the verb "wanted", a mental process of affection, which reflects that they decided what to include and what not to include. Similarly, Student X says that he chose to tell his story "in my own way." By having "room", few "restrictions", and little "force", students wrote a narrative that contains what they want to share with their readers, experiences that reflects their identity.

Student A6 writes that the narrative allowed him to think about his life and "how I *feel* about that" which is something he "*was never granted* in the past." Student N and Student A5 find the assignment "different" and challenging because they are not used to incorporating personal experiences into their writing. Student N remembers papers in high school that "*related* to a specific research topic, *not my* opinion and reflections." He describes the literacy narrative as "a challenge" because he is used to depending on research and not sharing *his* own thoughts.

Student A5 writes, "Since I *have had* a fair amount of experience writing scientific papers and statistical analyses, I *am* comfortable writing in a formal, objective manner." She has not had opportunities to write subjectively or about topics that are personal to her; thus, the literacy narrative prompted her to write in a style that proved to be "difficult." These few students found the literacy narrative demanding because they are accustomed to being detached from the writing they do; they are not used to sharing or revealing a part of themselves.

Student A3 sees the literacy narrative as "a reflection," which varies from "the five-paragraph mundane assignment" that he remembers doing in high school, and Student O finds that reflecting on her past made the assignment different: "I *had to think* of my life, not just *respond* to or *report* what other people have written." However, Student F believes the narrative is "easy" because *he* is the subject of the paper, so he "did not have to do research." These seven examples lead me to conclude that students are not accustomed to reflecting on their own experiences or placing their experiences alongside what they are learning. Student O's comment, for example, hints at the disconnection students feel about their writing practices because they are only asked to "respond" or "report," not consider their knowledge or experience in the process.

Students comment on their personal performance and the amount of work they put into writing the literacy narrative. Student O says, "I *feel* I *did* a better job on this paper than on previous papers I have written." Student S believes the literacy narrative is different because of her personal performance, saying that she

thinks her narrative "*is* well done" and "I *put* a lot of effort into writing and reviewing my paper." Student A9 admits, "This *is* the first paper in college that I really *tried* on." These three students use material processes – "did," "have written," "put," and "tried" – to depict their direct and active role in writing the narrative. They were not passive participants while writing the narrative. They connected with the topic and the process, another indication that students do not feel attached to their assignments often enough, that some assignments remain irrelevant. Most writing assignments students complete remain external and impersonal tasks, which leads to students feeling alienated from their learning, the focus of Groups C and D.

Groups C and D

We assign writing projects because we want students to think critically and to become effective communicators. Each writing assignment needs to be a relevant, purposeful literacy event. However, it has become evident that many assignments students complete are meaningless and inconsequential to their literacy development because students do not connect with the topic they are asked to write about. Thus, one of my main objectives in this project is to uncover what students learn in the process of completing the project. The passages are divided into two groups: Group C contains excerpts regarding what students have learned about writing and/or the writing process. Group D consists of responses that

explain what students have learned about themselves and/or their relationship with literacy.

Group C

Student A

*"Writing this paper **has** definantly [sic] **been** a learning experience for me [. . .] This whole process **has taught** me more about my voice as a writer, and the aspects of my writing that **are** strong and the things that still **need** improvement."*

Student D

*"Writing this paper I **learned** that there are many ways of going about finding a successful way of responding to a topic. In the beginning I **thought** the topic **was** too narrow for me **to sufficiently write** a good paper that I **would be** confident with, but in the end I **am** confident with my paper and I **am** glad that I **was** able **to find** a topic I **was** interested in. I **learned** that the more time you **put** into a paper and the more you **revise** your paper the better it **gets**. Having multiple people **look** at the paper and **give** me feedback **helped** me **craft** my paper **to make** it better and better. I **was** not confident with my paper at first, but after a few drafts and multiple revisions I **brought** it **to be** a paper that I **am** now happy about."*

Student F

*"I **learned** how **to look** for mistakes in writing, such as passive voice, and I **am going to try to be** more careful about that when I **write** in the future."*

Student K

*"I **learned** a lot from the peer reviews I **received** and I **learned** a lot from reading other people's papers. There was a lot I **needed to fix** in my paper and when I **read** other people's I **got to get** an idea of what they **were thinking** when they **wrote** and the approach they **took**. Therefore, I **had** an idea with the direction I **needed to go** with my final copy."*

Student O

*"While writing this paper, I **learned** that I **could be** freer with my writing. I **learned** that the five-paragraph, standard paper **is** boring and, well, lame. I **branched out**."*

Student P

*"I **realized** that the writing process I **learned** in the fifth grade **is** the process I **used** for this paper. I **love** that I **used** what I **was writing** about to write the paper [. . .] It **has brought** everything full circle for me."*

Student S

*"I **learned** that by reading other people's papers, this **helps** you and your writing."*

Student V

*"I **learned** a few things from writing this paper. While writing, I **realized** how many 'be' verbs I **use** and how often I **use** them. Now, I **catch** them easier and **try to minimize** the number of times I **use** them in a sentence."*

Students F and V mention lessons they have learned that could be considered basic suggestions about how to make papers better: lessons about active/passive voice and the use of "be" verbs. Students K and S found the peer reviews helpful because other people's narratives helped them to write their own. Student D realizes that revision is beneficial in affecting how he sees himself: he states that he "*was not confident* with my paper at first, but after a few drafts and multiple revisions I *brought* it to be a paper that *I am now happy* about." His use of the verb "brought" demonstrates that he took action to change the paper, and the paper subsequently makes him "happy," a rare emotion felt when writing.

On a more personal note, Student A says, "The whole process has taught me more about my voice as a writer. . . ." While identifying herself as a writer

(only one of two students who recognize that identity), Student A realizes how her strengths and weaknesses affect her voice. Student O learns something about herself, that she "*could be* freer with my writing." She links herself with the freedom that the literacy narrative allows. These two students' use of mental processes – what they have learned – has changed their sense of self in terms of strengthening their voice and in terms of being more confident in their choices when writing. They realize that writing is not always so restrictive, like "the five-paragraph, standard paper" that Student O refers to.

The majority of the lessons that students have learned revolve around what they have learned about themselves.

Group D

Student B

*"By doing this project, I **learned** how I **became** literate. When you first **gave** us this topic, I **was** like, 'Oh my gosh! I **don't remember** anything about how I **learned** to read or write!' But then I **started** thinking and talking to my family about it, it all **started** coming back to me. I also **learned** that if I **didn't have** my family there to support me, I **would have probably had** a greater challenge at becoming literate."*

Student C

*"This essay **helped** me[to] realize that I **need** to take more advantage of my abilities. I **have come** along [sic] way from first and third grade and I **am** proud of myself."*

Student E

*". . . it really **helped** me[to] know more about myself, my past experiences with writing, and my literacy – something I'**ve** always **had** but yet actually **felt** aware of it.*

Student H

*"As we **were** in class, all of us discussing how we **learned** to read and write, it **amazed** me that we all **struggled** to learn to read and write. In all honesty, I **thought** that the majority of people **didn't really have** hard time [sic] dealing through the times of schooling and family, etc. I also **noticed** that among the minorities in class [. . .] what we'**ve** all **suffered** through language barriers, whether it **be** a small language barrier such as myself or learning English in sixth grade, like E."*

Student L

"*I **learned** way more than I **expected to** while writing this paper. I **learned** more about myself. I **didn't remember** how long and thorough the process of becoming literate **was**. It **is** just so easily a part of my life now that I **forget** that others' [sic] **may not have** such an advantage like I **did** in learning so much. I **have become** more appreciative for my upbringing. I **realize** that all the tasks that my teachers **had** the students and I **do** in grade school, that I just **thought were** busy work, **were** actually for a good."*

Student N

*"I **feel** I **learned** a great deal about myself and how I **got** to where I **am** in regard to my literacy. I **guess** I **have never really thought** about it before."*

Student Q

"*I **learned** a lot about my early education that I only **remembered** vaguely in my subconsciousness [sic]."*

Student R

"*This paper also **gave** me an opportunity to look closer at the way I **write** by making me **look** to the past to see how I **developed**."*

Student S

*"After writing this paper, I **am reminded** of my love for education and teaching."*

Student T

*"I **ended up** learning several things about my reading and writing journey that I **did not know** before. I **had never really thought** about the reasoning behind my lack of reading but I definitely **explored** that in depth in my essay."*

Student U

*"By writing this paper I **realized** that **not being** able to write narratives in school **is** a real issue. Narratives **allow** for self growth and they **help** you better **understand** how you **feel** about issues. I **had never really thought** about how not writing narratives really **stunted** my growth as an author."*

Student V

*"I also **learned** some things about myself. In my paper, I **talked** about how important I **thought** teaching children **to read and write is** and how I **fear** I **may** one day **fail** at this task. I **never really thought** how their future **could be effected** if I **did not do** my job in teaching them **to read and write**. This **was** an eye opener for me and **showed** me the importance of my job if I **become** a teacher."*

Student W

*". . . I **learned** that hard work **does** pay off and that others **aren't going to strike** down your best efforts. I also **learned** that help **is** out there if you **ask** for it."*

Student X

"*Finally, I **think** this paper **taught** me various things about myself that I already **knew** but never really **thought** of. The pride I **feel** for my upbringing **was** something I **felt** but never really **spoke** of and this paper **helped** me to express that. Through that I also **appreciate** everything that **has happened** as far as language and literacy in my life a little bit more [sic]. In my situation, I **think** it **can become** really easy to take everything about it for granted and **having** to write down my experiences with language and literacy **made** me **admire** how unique my life **has been**."*

Student Y

"*It **brought** things to my attention that I **never put** together in my mind. I always **thought** that writing **had been** important, but I **didn't realize** how important. Thinking about how my sister **impacted** me **was** really good and **enabled** me to connect several things in my mind."*

Student A3

*"I **learned** a couple things about myself when I **was writing**. I **learned** that I **have worked** around my learning disability and **am** able to now write more efficiently and **complete** a thought on paper. It **used** to take me a long time to try to write after my health **digressed**. I also **learned** that I **am** a much stronger person than I **thought**."*

Student A4

*"I **did learn** a lot from writing this paper. I **observed** the children I **work** with more carefully and **was** more aware to the challenges they **are facing** besides the obvious."*

Student B2

*"I **learned** a lot about myself while writing this essay. It **forced** me to think about my reading and writing experience **growing up** and to reflect on the changes in the how I **view** these skills. I **realize** how important writing and reading **have become** in the way I **interpret** my world and how I **view** myself. I **think** overall this **was** a challenge, but a worthwhile experience."*

Student B3

"*Now that I'**ve figured** out where I'**m coming** from in my writing, I **believe** that I **will** more clearly **be** able **to draw** ideas from that whether I'**m writing** a research paper, poem, critical essay, or any other form of composition. In the course of writing this paper, I'**ve learned** that I **should not be** worried about following a specific formula when writing a paper. This **is** what I **was taught** in my junior high and high school years and now I **realize** that it **is** pointless. While it **is** important **to have** a distinct structure to my papers, writing on my own I'**m** able **to provide** a much more loose, liberal structure that I **am** comfortable with. Composition **is** a continuous work in progress. As the author of the work **changes,** so the work of the author itself **change**s. If this narrative **had been shown** to me in high school without my name on it, I strongly **doubt** that I **would be** able **to identify** it as my own. I'**ve learned** that **being** out of high school now I **can speak** more freely on what I **feel** without fear of being sharply **reprimanded**."*

Five of these students describe their experiences with the literacy narrative as it relates to movement, an element that was discussed in Chapter III. Student C

refers to motion, as he sees himself as coming "along way" [sic] since he was young, and should be "proud" of his abilities. Student N says he learned "how I *got* to where I *am* in regard to my literacy." He uses two relational processes in this statement; he identifies literacy as a place that one reaches or moves toward and this place affects how he sees himself. Like Student N, Student T equates literacy with her "reading and writing *journey*," and she has "explored" or searched for causes as to why she does not like to read.

Students H and U use material processes that allude to impediments. Student U describes "how not writing narratives really *stunted* my growth as an author." Student H, one of the six students who were not Anglo, mentions, "we've all *suffered through* language barriers. . . ." In these statements the verbs "stunted" and "suffered" reveal metaphors of trouble and distress that are associated with literacy. Because Student U was not allowed to write narratives in school, she believes her writing skills in general were curtailed. Student H, whose parents are non-native English speakers, has experienced problems firsthand with language and her use of the word "barriers" builds on the negative imagery of blockades.[22] However, Student H also realized that becoming literate is not a smooth, seamless

[22] Eleanor Novek's article "Read it and Weep: How Metaphor Limits Views of Literacy" (1992) addresses the issue of negative associations with literacy and illiteracy. One of the metaphors she examines deals with war and disease. She gathers adult literacy programs' pamphlets and soundbites from politicians to argue that the use of such imagery "may encourage us to blame individuals for limitations of their skills, rather than seeking societal solutions to barriers to communication competence" (221). She describes three other metaphors and concludes that these comparisons create "a very narrow, incomplete view of literacy" (223), and if society continues to create "incomplete views of literacy" then the problem of illiteracy will not be solved and people will continue to struggle.

process. She recognizes that everyone in the class faced challenges as they learned how to read and write, whether they grew up in an English-speaking home or not.

Five students write that they know they are literate but had not had the opportunity *to become aware* of how they have cultivated that attribute. Student E begins by saying, she "*knows* more about myself" since she has examined her history with literacy, "something I'*ve* always *had* but yet actually *felt* aware of it." Her use of the verbs "have had" points to ownership, in her possessing literacy, and she then uses a mental process, "felt," to explain how she now senses literacy; she first looks at literacy as an object (something to take possession of). Then it becomes something she feels and has internalized. Students N, T, and X admit that they have "*never really thought*" about their literacy skills prior to writing this paper. Student X focuses on "the pride" he "*feels* for my upbringing [which] was something I *felt* but never really *spoke* of. . . ." The narrative allows him to take his perceptions, based in feelings, and "express" them to his readers. (He takes what is private and places them in a public space.) Student X admits that he has taken his history "for granted." But writing about his experiences "*made* me *admire* how unique my life *has been*." The narrative moved him to a new awareness, and by writing about the experience, he makes the experience concrete. Student Y also says that the paper "*brought* things to my attention that I never *put together* in my mind." Much like the excerpts presented in Group A, Students X and Y see the paper as playing the role of the actor in each sentence: the essay "made" and "brought" the writer to new awareness about his/her life.

Student L also addresses the issue of not recognizing the "advantages" she has had during her life. She says that literacy "*is* just so easily a part of my life now that I *forget* that others' [sic] *may not have* such an advantage like I *did*. . . ." Student L begins with a relational process of identifying literacy as being a part of her life and ends with the relational process of describing others who do not have, or own, literacy. She says that she has "*become* more appreciative" of her past, like Student X. Student B2 describes how the literacy narrative has affected her sense of self: "I *realize* how important writing and reading *have become* in the way I *interpret* my world and how I *view* myself. I think overall this *was* a challenge, but a worthwhile experience." Student B2 relates "writing and reading" to the mental processes of cognition in her reflection. In doing so, she connects her thinking with the way she sees herself. These mainstream students have realized how fortunate they have been.

Student B3 refers to all the themes in his thoughtful response. First, he alludes to movement. He says that he has realized where he is "*coming from* in my writing" so he looks to his childhood and to significant moments that have affected how he approaches his work, which ties to what he has learned about writing. One of the most significant lessons he has learned is that his papers do not have to fit into a well-defined mold, that writing is not formulaic. He also discovers that writing is a part of him: "As the author [. . .] *changes*, so the work [. . .]

changes."[23] His observations lead me to conclude that he has internalized his writing and has become more aware of how language reflects his sense of self.

Twice Student B3 writes in passive voice in his reference to high school: "This is what *was taught*. . ." and "without fear of being *reprimanded* by my teachers or peers." In the first example he does not specify who actually taught him the "specific formula," indicating that it could be that several teachers were responsible for approaching writing in a prescriptive manner. In the second example, he stresses the "fear" he felt if he did not conform to his teachers' expectations. His closing comments reveal what he has learned about education, and part of becoming educated is feeling confident in expressing his ideas "freely."

Three students connect their histories with literacy with their identities as (future) educators. For Student S, the paper "*reminded*" her of the "love" she feels for her future profession. Student V recognizes the responsibility that goes along with teaching children, and says that this realization – brought about from writing the literacy narrative – "*was* an *eye opener* for me and *showed* me the importance of my job if I *become* a teacher." Student A4, who works with children, has become more aware of the challenges they face. Because these three students have examined their literacy history, they feel better prepared to teach children who are just beginning the process of developing their literacy.

Almost all of the reflections students wrote were positive; however, a few students mention that they do not see their stories as interesting. Their perceptions

[23] His observation echoes Cook-Sather's notion of translation, that while students create knowledge, they also create themselves

confirm an observation that J. Blake Scott makes in his article referred to earlier in this chapter. He writes that students may "measure and define" their experiences against those of published writers (114); thus students find no or little validity in their personal encounters with literacy. Scott's concerns were conveyed when a few students compared their experiences with those who have had severe difficulties in learning how to read and/or write. They were worried that they were doing the paper wrong if they did not have some conflict or struggle to describe. Students' anxiety leads me to believe that they do not see their literacy development as significant. They take their literacy skills for granted.

Student B

*"This project **was** a great idea. At first, I thought it **was** dumb, but now it something that I **would recommend** everyone doing."*

Student G

*"I'**ll be** honest with you, when you first **assigned** this paper, I **thought** this **was going to be** one of the worst papers I **have ever written**. I really **didn't think** I **would like** the topic at all."*

Student D

*"When we first received the prompt for this paper I **thought** it **would be** difficult **to find** a way **to talk** about how I **learned to read and write**. All of the essays we **read told** stories about adversity faced while growing up and **not having** the opportunities **to sufficiently learn to read and write**. I **could not find** a way **to relate** to these stories due to my ordinary and common childhood learning experiences, but thanks to all the prewriting exercises and the conferences we **had** I **was** able **to find** a good topic that I **was interested** in."*

Student S

*"I **do not like** how my paper **is** not about a very 'deep' and moving subject. It **is** simply how I **loved** school as a child [. . .] I **wish** I **could have put** more enthusiasm into my literacy narrative. . . ."*

Student Z

*"My biggest problem with the paper **is** that it **seems** boring to me. If I **was** someone else, I **don't think** I'**d be** very interested in it."*

Even though the published narratives helped to illustrate what a literacy narrative is, some students believe that their experiences are not worth relating because they did not face challenges or because they did not see their stories as inspiring. Student D says, he has had an "ordinary and common childhood" so he could not "relate" to the narratives. In the end, however, he is able to connect with his narrative because the prewriting exercise helped him to focus and choose a story to tell. Student S's response builds itself on a relational process since it describes what the narrative is not, that it is not a "'deep' or moving subject," but a reflection about her memories of school and about her goal of becoming an elementary school teacher. Even though she is passionate about the topic, she still finds her narrative to be lacking "enthusiasm". Student Z believes that his narrative "seems boring to me" and that as a reader, he would not be "interested in it." These three students' answers reveal that more time must be spent on building students' confidence in their own experiences and proving that their stories are worth telling.

Student M shares Students D's and S's opinions:

Student M

*"I **did not originally like** the topic for this paper. I **felt** that the topic of personal literacy **was** elementary, and **to write** a paper on it **was** a waste of time. I still **feel** unsure as to why the topic **was assigned**, but I **have felt** like I **took** something from the paper. We **are** in a writing class, and I **suppose** we **should investigate** the basis of our personal experience with writing. The paper itself **was** interesting for me because my own personal struggle with writing **was** fittingly included in the paper. In that respect, it **was** one of the most interesting papers I **have written**. **To write** a paper on my own struggle with writing papers **made** me **think** in ways I **had** not before [. . .]*

*The thing I **disliked** about this paper **was** the tendency for papers **to be** useful to the student writing it but not to the reader. A personal narrative on literacy rarely **has** any outstanding and exciting details. We **have not had to suffer** anything in order **to become** literate like Frederick Douglass did. Thus the papers **were** not terribly interesting. I **am** sure some of the students' papers **were** useful to others, but on the whole, this **was** probably more of an individual growth exercise due to explanation of one's history and exploration on the meaning of it all. So, it **was** therapeutic to me, and I **hope** it **was** to others, but I **doubt** you **will find** these terribly fascinating. I **mean** we all **come** from around the same background. Perhaps walking around to varying areas and talking to different people from different age groups and economic classes **would be** more helpful to you."*

Student M uses relational processes to describe how he sees the assignment, and his views are conflicted. He begins by saying that he first saw the assignment as "elementary" and "a waste of time." But he also believes that the narrative "*was* interesting for me" because he examined his "struggle with writing, so he "felt" like he "took" something from the assignment: he thought "in ways [he] had not before." He alludes to concerns about making the narrative interesting and/or relevant to the reader; he believes that the narrative is valuable *only* to him; it "was therapeutic" for him, but he believes that no one else (including the instructor) will find the story interesting.

Like Student D, Student M refers to the literacy narratives that students read in class and assumes that because the students have not experienced hardships, like Frederick Douglass, the reader (the instructor) will not find the students' stories "fascinating." Student M believes that his and his peers' narratives are not relevant since they have come from similar backgrounds. He recommends to his reader (me) that I should look for "different people from different age groups and economic classes" because their stories "would be more helpful." His concern highlights the sense of alienation I believe these mainstream students share: they have not realized that becoming literate is *not* an ordinary experience, that the experience or the process is valuable, and that their language practices are relevant to their identities. Lastly, Student D's and M's concern for their readers points to a common theme throughout this project, that students want to connect with their readers, that writing is not done only for the sake of the writer or for a grade. Students want their writing to matter, even though this "want" is implicitly stated.

Student A2 was the only student who did not like the assignment at all:

Student A2

*"When thinking back to other writing assignments I **have done** [. . .] I truly **felt** the topic and idea **was** pretty boring. I **am** more into subject driven papers that **are** open-ended (which I **know** this one had a subject, it just **felt** vague) in the way a student **can choose** his/her own perspective. I **like** analysis papers due to the wide range of perspectives on one issue. I **understand** that these narrative papers **are** on the rise in the area of being tasteful and artistic, but I **am not seeing** it yet. Maybe if I **spent** more time with papers like these I **would began** [sic] **to appreciate** them more. Again, I **know** this paper **allowed** for these perspectives, but maybe I just **got** bored with mine. I honestly **don't know**."*

At first, this response seems confusing; however, it suggests that this student finds more relevance in expressing his opinions rather than telling a story. Most interesting in his commentary is that he believes narratives are becoming popular, but he finds little value in them. This point is relayed through his use of mental processes: he "felt" the topic or subject was "boring" and "vague". Feeling is related to perception and sense, and logically, one would state that he would think the topic boring, not feel, so he emphasizes his perception or intuition rather than his reason to explain why he does not like the paper. As he wrote the narrative, he possibly could not sense or connect with the relevance of the literacy event he wrote about, which dealt with how he finally enjoyed reading after being assigned a Toni Morrison novel in his high school English class. His lack of connection with the assignment is further emphasized in the minimal use of relational processes, and he uses the adjective "boring" twice to describe his experience. Boredom is a description most, if not all, instructors definitely do not want to instigate in the assignments given to students.

Conclusion

The verbs indicating processes that students' used in their reflections reveal how students see themselves in relation to the writing they do in academic settings. Halliday's method of dividing verbs into internal and external processes helps identify the processes and the movement that occur when we write in general and literacy narratives in particular. The processes reflect the movement that

occurs within literacy narratives. When we write, we take what happens externally around us, reflect on those events internally, and translate those experiences into words to share with others. Thus, language reflects not only the event that is written about, but also the writer's sense of self. When students write literacy narratives, students explore their past experiences with literacy and connect those experiences with their present selves, so their concept of self is transformed, or as Soliday and Cook-Sather present, the self is translated.

The metaphor of translation parallels Kenneth Burke's theory of identification and reconciliation that was discussed in Chapter I. Both processes call for change: to translate something is to transform it or to reinterpret it so someone else can share in it. To identify with something – as Burke presents it – calls for the slaying or altering of it. I find Burke's approach a more thorough process because rhetoric and language is at its center. The process of identification takes into account the division or the tension that already exists, and in this context, I am referring to the tension that is inherent with learning how to read and write. The *action* of writing the literacy narrative, of creating a text that is about one's private language, moves writers toward the tension in order to internalize it and to have a private conversation with themselves so they become aware of their prejudices toward writing (or reading) and perhaps to remedy the prejudices they feel.

Students in this study have described moments when they recognize the tension that goes along with writing and creating a text, the tension that exists

when situating oneself around an assignment, the tension that arises when comparing your literacy history with someone else's, and the tension that ensues from being forced to contain one's ideas into five paragraphs. The literacy narrative is the first step in reconciling that tension, so students realize that their stories do have meaning, that their stories are influenced by cultural and ideological values, and that their voices can affect change, even when that change occurs within themselves.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: MOVING TOWARD AN ETHICAL PEDAGOGY

Chapter IV concluded by emphasizing the tension between private and public language and between internal and external influences that are elements of the composing process. I find that this tension is something that mainstream students need to explore. Comparing their experiences with the marginalized writers I discussed in Chapter I, it is obvious that mainstream students' linguistic practices have never been challenged. They have not felt isolated from their family because of their education (as Rodriguez did); they have not been pushed into a vocational track (as Villanueva was); and they have not had to create another identity based on their home and school language (as Gilyard did). The literacy narrative is one assignment that moves mainstream students to begin the process of reacquainting themselves with language and the tensions that are involved in its use, as in learning how to write. Several students mentioned that they have never thought about their literacy history before writing the narrative; if they have no opportunities to reflect on their language practices, they cannot become aware of the disconnection that they have with language. They do not see that their dislike for reading and writing leads to an alienation with language.

Students' disconnection with language was discussed in Chapters II and III. In these two chapters I illustrated that students' sense of a writerly ethos is diminished due to the alienation they experience with academic writing or "school

sponsored writing" (Emig 97). Students' responses in Chapter II demonstrated that their alienation stems from restrictive writing spaces, mainly due to standardized testing. In Chapter III their comments revealed feeling a lack of exigence or motivation when given an assignment; students have had few opportunities to invest themselves in their writing assignments. Consequently, it is difficult for them to see themselves as writers. The student accounts reveal that they have not internalized their literacy practices. Language remains externalized because assignments they have completed are not relevant to their interests or do not help to develop their sense of self.

This project has offered students an outlet to share their stories about learning how to write. In this chapter I place their stories, their literacy narratives, alongside contemporary pedagogical practices to compare their perceptions of writing to composition's theories. The binaries that have been established within composition studies – which I exemplify with the personal writing versus academic writing debate and the expressivist versus social-epistemic debate – do not coincide with students' perceptions of the tensions and problems in their writing. To better understand students' experiences about writing – specifically what they find beneficial about it – I am proposing that our pedagogy become an ethical pedagogy, one that is rooted in both senses of the word ethos, emphasizing character and place. An ethical pedagogy examines the relationship between the private and the public, the internal and the external, but instead of seeing these binaries as working in opposition to one another, they are presented in more of a

symbiotic relationship, as a constant give-and-take. An ethical pedagogy develops students *and* their confidence while moving them to recognize how language is embedded within social forces that affect their sense of self. This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part revisits the theories and pedagogical practices that have informed composition studies, and the second part discusses ethical pedagogy's place within a post-process theory paradigm.

Collapsing the Boundaries

Because the literacy narrative is an autobiography and a narrative, some compositionists find no value in the assignment because it is not academic in nature. By academic, compositionists mean assignments that are regarded as objective, like research papers, literary analyses, scienctific reports, etc. The use of personal or autobiographical writing in composition classrooms has been a matter of contention for over 100 years. Research papers and literary analyses became common assignments in composition classrooms so instructors did not have to read personal essays (Connors 325). As Deborah Mutnick points out, "the schism between so-called 'personal' and 'academic' writing reflects not just a theoretical or pedagogical difference but an underlying schizophrenia in composition studies" (85).

The rift between academic writing and personal writing was given a full exposition in a debate between Peter Elbow and David Bartholomae. At the 2006 College Composition and Communication Conference in Chicago, I attended a

session titled "New Perspectives on Personal Writing: The Personal as Communal, Connected, and Political." Peter Elbow was the panel's respondent, and he alluded to this debate that had begun in 1991 and was published in the February, 1995 issue of *College Composition and Communication*.

In "Responses to Bartholomae and Elbow," Bartholomae writes that he is not in favor of assigning personal writing in a composition classroom because he believes that it does not acquaint students with academic discourse. He wants his

> students to negotiate the ways they are figured in relationship to the official forms of knowledge valued in the academy – that is, I want them to be prepared to write themselves out of a rhetorical situation in which their roles are already prepared, [and for them,] to be able to work closely with the ways their writing constructs a relationship with tradition, power, and authority – with other people's words. (86)

Bartholomae encourages students to question and critique power relationships. He does not believe that personal writing allows for this objective because, if students write about a personal subject, they do not take part in the social construction of knowledge. They do not become part of the academic conversation – the Burkean parlor.

In his response, titled "Being a Writer vs. Being an Academic: A Conflict in Goals," Elbow stresses he not *only* advocates personal writing, but also wants his students to take authority over their claims. Emphasizing this idea at the conference, Elbow reiterated what he had written 11 years prior: there are some things that students know more about than their teachers, which some professors fail to realize (perhaps because they are worried about giving up authority in the

classroom). Beginning with what students *know* allows them to build their authority, gain confidence, and develop their ethos.

Elbow also stated that he never truly disagreed with Bartholomae regarding the necessity for acquainting students with academic discourse. In the 1995 published response, Elbow writes,

> I should teach my students always to situate themselves and what they have to say in the context of important writers who have written on the subject: to see the act of writing as an act of finding and acknowledging one's place in an ongoing intellectual conversation with a much larger and longer history than what goes on in this classroom. ("Being" 78-79)

Elbow's response makes clear that he does not support a writing classroom that *only* deals with students' past experiences *as isolated incidents*. Bartholomae's use of the verbs "negotiate" and Elbow's use of the word "situate," suggest that both scholars want students to place their experiences and knowledge alongside others' with an academic discourse community. Both scholars' goals entail the creation of a relationship with ideas that have been established. However, while Bartholomae sees literacy and writing as involved with overcoming a power struggle, Elbow sees literacy and writing as empowering and wants students to share in the power; he wants his students to be made aware that they have power, and that their voice matters.

Lester Faigley, an ally of Bartholomae, addresses a different aspect of personal writing in *Fragments of Rationality: Postmodernity and the Subject of Composition* (1992). He examines the text *What Makes Writing Good* (*WMWG*), a compilation of student essays that were chosen and analyzed by composition

scholars. Faigley explores the concept of voice, a so-called characteristic of personal writing, as it is presented in *WMWG*. He observes that most of the student-produced essays in the book that are considered "good" are autobiographical in nature. He looks to the reviewers' comments about these essays and finds that the common feature the essays share is their authenticity (121). But Faigley places this authenticity, the "assumption that individuals possess an identifiable 'true' self and that the true self can be expressed in discourse," (122) against the role the subject (the student) plays while writing an autobiographical piece. In other words, Faigley questions whether students actually *present* an authentic self or simply *perform* sincerity at the bidding of their teacher or the assignment, (even when the goal of assigning a personal essay is to empower students). Students' reflections, presented in Chapter IV, reveal that they valued the opportunity to write a paper in which they could present themselves, unlike an academic paper in which they have to perform or pretend to be interested in the assignment.

Unlike Elbow, Faigley argues that students do not become empowered when writing personal or autobiographical narratives because students may confess something *too* personal, thus giving the instructor an upper-hand because the teacher will know something intimate about the students (130-31). As a result, students remain subjects, remain subordinates: "…these same students will be judged by the teachers' unstated assumptions about subjectivity and that every act of writing they perform occurs within complex relations of power" (128). If the

instructor eventually evaluates students' work and then casts another evaluation over their handling of the event, the event itself is graded, not the text that is written (128).

Thomas Newkirk, in his book *The Performance of Self in Student Writing* (1997), considers the issue of power relations and the personal essay as an invasion of privacy. He explains that he has never heard a student complain about such an assignment:

> The overwhelming and consistent comments we see are those of appreciation for the opportunity to write and reflect on life experiences. I suspect that opponents of the personal essay may appear to 'protect' students from this 'invasion' – one that is not experienced by students themselves – in order to advance another teaching agenda. (19)

Newkirk's observations echo the student voices that have been presented throughout this study. Students mention that they liked writing the literacy narrative because it was personal in nature. As seen in Chapter IV, several students admit that they have not written a personal narrative since they had been in elementary or middle school. It can be assumed that students are not assigned autobiographical essays due to testing mandates. Other genres, such as persuasive writing, have become the focus due to standardized testing; therefore, writing a personal essay does not become part of the curriculum. Students also said that they benefited from the self-reflection that was a part of the literacy narrative. It becomes clear that students find little personal value in academic writing because they have done too much of it and/or because they have written about topics they

find boring. Consequently, students are alienated from writing since most of the writing they do is for school.

The debate between personal and academic writing is rooted in composition theories that were first established by James Berlin in his article "Contemporary Composition: The Major Pedagogical Theories" (1982). Berlin writes that teaching writing is "to argue for a version of reality" or to argue for a version of the truth (766). Berlin explains how he sees the teaching of English as developing into four different approaches.[24] His theories are further investigated and developed in his work: *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900-1985* (1987), "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class" (1988), "Poststructuralism, Cultural Studies, and the Composition Classroom: Postmodern Theory in Practice" (1992), and *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures: Refiguring College English Studies* (1996).

The first rhetoric that Berlin describes in his article "Contemporary Composition" is Neo-Aristotelian. One of its characteristics is the use of "syllogistic reasoning, the system of logic that Aristotle himself developed and refined" (767). By stressing deductive reasoning, truth is revealed and known through logic (767). The truth, subsequently, can be "communicated, with language serving as the unproblematic medium of discourse" (767). Rhetoric

[24] In *Rhetoric and Reality* Berlin categorizes these four approaches into objective, subjective, and transactional theories: current-traditional rhetoric falls under the objective category (7-11), and expressionist rhetoric is subjective (11-14). Transactional theories make up the largest category: the classical (15-16), the cognitive (16), and the epistemic (16-17). By the time Berlin wrote "Rhetoric and Ideology" he slightly shifted the labels into the following categories: cognitive, expressionism and social epistemic.

becomes important in order to help the speaker/writer "find the means necessary to persuade the audience of the truth" (768). In finding the "means" of persuasion, the focus is placed on invention strategies, the three appeals of logos, pathos, and ethos (768).

Berlin labels the second approach as Current-Traditional Rhetoric, which has its roots in Common Sense Realism of the 18th century. This approach opposes deduction and emphasizes induction and empiricism: "It is the individual sense impression that provides the basis on which all knowledge is built" (769). Truth is separated from "the rhetorical enterprise" and is found "through method" or "through genius" (769-70). Invention strategies are replaced by a focus on arrangement and style in order to convey what "has been discovered outside the rhetorical enterprise to the minds of the hearers" (770). Arrangement and style led modes of discourse, in addition to persuasion, to be taught in composition classrooms: narration, description, exposition, and argumentation become central to writing pedagogy (770). Writing classrooms and textbooks continue to reflect Neo-Aristotelian and Current-Traditional approaches.

The next two approaches, expressionist and social-epistemic rhetoric, reflect the debates surrounding personal and academic writing. According to Berlin, expressionist rhetoric has its beginnings in Plato and 19th Romanticism, and it evolved out of a reaction against current-traditional rhetoric (771). Instead of truth existing outside of the self, for expressionists, truth is "discovered through internal apprehension, a private vision of a world that transcends the physical"

(771). Because one's visions "cannot be expressed in normal, everyday language" the writer depends "on metaphor, to seek in sensory experience materials that can be used in suggesting the truths of the unconscious – the private, personal, visionary world of ultimate truth" (*Rhetoric and Reality* 74-75). Writing revolves around authenticity, creativity, and self-expression ("Rhetoric and Ideology" 485). Writing assignments move students to discover language that best conveys "their personal interpretation of experience" (*Rhetoric and Reality* 153). Autobiographical or personal writing, writing workshops, and journaling are practices that are associated with expressionist rhetoric. Each of these tasks leads the writer to a fuller understanding of the self (153).

Berlin's discussion of expressionist rhetoric alludes to a group of scholars whom he identifies as espousing expressionists' tenets, one of whom is Peter Elbow.[25] Berlin takes issue with Elbow's approach to composition because Berlin sees Elbow (and other expressivists) placing power within the individual without examining power on a political or social level ("Rhetoric and Ideology" 485-86). Berlin writes that expressivists see power "as a product of a configuration involving the individual and her encounter with the world" in order "to realize one's voice" (486). Berlin alludes to Elbow's book *Writing Without Teachers* (1973) to illustrate how the book works to "empower" his readers by teaching them how to gain "control over words" (486). By gaining control over one's language practices, the writer develops her voice (486). However, Berlin takes

[25] The other expressivists that Berlin cites are Donald Murray, Ken Macrorie, Walker Gibson, and William Coles, Jr ("Rhetoric and Ideology" 485).

issue with the notion of voice, because such writing emphasizes the writer – only. It does not take into account the social elements of writing. Berlin finds expressivism as insular and solipsistic.

Moving from the individual to the social, Berlin's New Rhetoric (which later he calls social-epistemic rhetoric) evolves from postmodern theories and as a reaction against expressionist pedagogy.[26] The New Rhetoric stresses that truth is attainable "for someone standing in relation to others in a linguistically circumscribed situation" ("Contemporary" 774). Thus, knowledge is created through communication (774). Rhetoric becomes epistemological, not just a means of persuasion as Aristotle suggested (773). While the other three rhetorics see "truth as [it] exists prior to language," the New Rhetoric relies on language to create truth (774). "The writer, the audience, reality, and language" work together to create meaning (775). To explain how truth and meaning work together, Berlin writes,

> All truths arise out of dialectic, out of the interaction of individuals within discourse communities. Truth is never simply 'out there' in the material world or the social realm, or simply 'in here' in a private and personal world. It emerges only as the three – the material, the social, and the personal – interact, and the agent of mediation of change is language. (*Rhetoric and Reality* 16-17)

Language, not the writer (or the subject), becomes the central ingredient in social-epistemic rhetoric. Language causes the material world to exist and causes the

[26] Berlin's term "New Rhetoric" is not in reference to Perelman/Olbrecht-Tyteca's book *The New Rhetoric* (1969). Berlin writes that New Rhetoric has its sources in Ann Berthoff's book *Forming/Thinking/Writing: The Composing Imagination* and in Becker, Young, and Pike's book *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change* ("Contemporary" 773).

subject to exist. The subject's identity is dependent on the language that she is using, and because she is constantly moving from one discourse community to another, her identity is in constant flux. In *Fragments of Rationality* (1992) Lester Faigley writes, "Postmodern theory decisively rejects the primacy of consciousness and instead has consciousness originating in language thus arguing that the subject is an effect rather than a cause of discourse" (9). As such, the self is a product of competing discourses, and these discourses produce disparate identities. This approach completely opposes the expressionist acceptance of "a unified, stable self" (8) and that this self can be expressed through language (Newkirk 86).

When placing students' histories alongside Berlin's taxonomy, it is clear that their perceptions resemble aspects of these pedagogies. Based on students' descriptions in Chapters II and III, most high school classrooms continue to revolve around current-traditional practices. In Chapter II for example, several students remember their teachers stressing punctuation, grammar, and correctness, not their ideas, which is a trademark of current-traditional pedagogy. Students often view writing as right or wrong, and standardized testing as worked to force all students into a one-size-fits-all mold by creating essay questions based on abstract concepts like courage or individual responsibility.

Chapter III provides evidence that students' favorite assignments are often those that allow for creativity, expression, and freedom. With freedom comes the feeling of ownership. In Chapters III and IV the reports from a number of students

expressed a desire to own their writing. In Chapter IV students mention that they like the literacy narrative assignment because it *is* autobiographical. These elements are considered expressivist in nature. However, challenging Faigley's and other's views of expressive writing as solipsistic, a repeated pattern found in Chapters III and IV is the need for relationship; students appreciate assignments that allow them to connect with their reader, as well as with the paper itself, whether the paper is research or a personal essay. Considering that students are aware of their readers and want to make their work interesting and relevant for them, students understand the social side of writing. They are aware of a rhetorical situation (although they may be unaware of this concept by name). The social-ness of writing, along with language, is one of the primary ingredients in social-epistemic rhetoric.

The problem with social-epistemic models of rhetoric is that it dismisses the students'/writers' positions or backgrounds from its theoretical construct; it does not recognize students as agents but as subjects, and as subjects, students' positions are subjugated by the discourse communities to which they belong. When discourse or language becomes the controlling factor,

> the subject is never free of discourse [. . .] it is always a product of discourse [. . .] A subject conceived in this way cannot 'act' on its own; it has no agency except that which is assigned to it by a particular discourse that constitutes it. (Yagelski 78)

The problem with this approach is that students do not see themselves as people who are built on verbal constructs; they do not see themselves as "products of discourse" but as *creators* of discourse. They value their individualism and

uniqueness. Students also value the personal element that comes along with writing something that they are invested in. Students want agency over their writing, agency that rarely has been granted to them throughout their educational career. Chapter II, for example, demonstrated that standardized testing – a discourse – has forced students to write in a specific form that limits their ideas. Several students also commented that they like writing when they are able to express themselves freely. In this context, students take on an expressivist view (without knowing that it is expressivist).

Berlin's theories have proven beneficial for establishing rhetoric and composition as fields of inquiry, and his preference for social-epistemic rhetoric has been echoed by other scholars, like Bartholomae, Faigley, John Schilb, and Patricia Bizzell. These scholars' extensions of epistemic rhetoric have helped to create subsidiary pedagogies like cultural studies and critical literacy.[27] However, in the process, expressivist rhetoric has been denigrated as an apolitical, self-serving approach to teaching writing.

---

[27]In his chapter "Cultural Studies, Postmodernism, and Composition" (1991) John Schilb writes that cultural studies allows for focus to be placed on "larger social concerns" due to the influence of poststructuralist criticism and the diversity of students who are attending college (174). Schilb emphasizes that "true literacy means examining one's society, not simply manipulating surface features of text" (187). Critical literacy builds on cultural studies and has its roots in Paulo Freire's concept of a critical consciousness, a theme addressed in Villanueva's chapter "Coming to a Critical Consciousness." Villanueva defines a critical consciousness as "the recognition that society contains social, political, and economic conditions which are at odds with the individual will to freedom" (54). In *Critical Teaching and the Idea of Literacy* (1993) Knoblauch and Brannon argue for a pedagogy that develops students into becoming productive citizens (5) and to "alleviate unethical and oppressive conditions" (49). Ann George sees critical literacy/pedagogy as helping students identify inequalities in order to remedy them (92).

In his essay "Expressive Pedagogy: Practice/Theory, Theory/Practice" (2001) Christopher Burnham writes,

> Berlin and the other social rhetoricians view expressivism's primary flaw as a false and otherworldly epistemology of the self that privileges individualism and rejects the material world. Faigley argues that expressivism's romantic view of the self is philosophically and politically retrograde, making it ineffectual in postmodern times [. . .It] directs students away from social and political problems of the material world. (28)

Burnham argues that critics of expressive discourse believe it is "philosophically and politically retrograde" because someone's personal experience seemingly does nothing beneficial for her community or culture. The personal is subordinated to political and/or social concerns. Students do not want to negate or ignore the personal. Students find that a personal connection is imperative when writing; writing that they feel confident in emerges from a clear exigence and from having a sincere interest in the topic they are assigned to write about. Students have written too many papers that do not call for a personal connection or exigence. Their comments suggest that subscribing to an epistemology that sees writers as constructs turns writing into a dehumanizing action.

Neither an expressivist nor a social-epistemic approach is practical (at least not in the way Berlin presents them). An absolute expressivism does not work because it dismisses the social, and an absolute social-epistemic approach does not work because it dismisses the personal. [28] Sherry Gradin offers a synthesis of these

[28]Sherry Gradin argues that critics of expressivism have misread romanticism "as it stems from Wordsworth and Coleridge" (xvi). She devotes Chapter 5 to a re-reading of these Romantic tenets.

two pedagogies in her book *Romancing Rhetorics* (1995). Her "study collapses the walls that scholars like Lester Faigley and James Berlin have built between expressivism and social-epistemicism" (xiv). Gradin takes useful elements from each rhetoric and creates social-expressivism. She visualizes a social-expressivist classroom where

> students carry out negotiations between themselves and their culture, and [they] must do this first in order to become effective citizens, imaginative thinkers, and savvy rhetorical beings. Learning to enact these negotiations means first developing a sense of one's own values and social constructions and then examining how these interact or do not interact with others' value systems as cultural constructs. (110)

Her description allows for writers to reflect on what happens around them in relation to their past. Students examine their values and "confront" their belief systems (xv). Gradin incorporates imagination and creativity into her definition, which conveys an approach that takes the individual into account; however, Gradin does not see the self as a rational, unified being; she sees the self as being the "plural and decentered" self that is depicted in Faigley's discussion of the postmodern subject (Gradin xv).

Timothy G. O'Donnell in his article "Politics and Ordinary Language: A Defense of Expressivists Rhetorics" (1996) also argues that Berlin's reading of expressivist rhetoric is slightly misguided in that it is not so apolitical as critics assume. He writes, "I see expressivist teachers as having a similar purpose: what we do is encourage students to bring words to bear on their experiences, to ground their writing in their lives, to be responsible for their words, and to be responsible to the community in which they are reading, writing, and responding" (429). He believes that scholars who are labeled as expressivist "seemed uninterested in forging their own theory of knowledge, others rushed in to do it for them – theorists who were not at all sympathetic to expressivist aims and methods" (425).

Gradin defines writing as "learning to enact these negotiations" which indicates that she sees students as agents in their own education. Once they gain a "sense of their values and social constructions" they are better equipped to study how their constructions differ from others. Once this process is complete, students become "citizens", "thinkers", and "rhetoricians." Based on this description, I find social-expressivism lacking because it sounds as if the process ends up being a comparison/contrast exercise. Gradin does not address issues regarding literacy and language when language is *the* component of writing. Gradin's approach also does not include any mentioning of ethos or ways to build students' confidence to "enact these negotiations." She takes important elements from each rhetoric, but she ends up with a pedagogy that is divisive; the steps to become "effective citizens, imaginative thinkers, and savvy rhetorical beings" do not appear to work in tandem, and she does not address how these three identities are related to literacy. While Gradin sees the writer as taking control by "enacting negotiations", she does not describe how the writer is "enacted" by the process. As illustrated in Chapter IV, students see themselves as enacting or causing the writing they do, *and* they see writing as affecting how they see themselves. In other words, they see writing as relationship, of creating and being created.

I do not see binary oppositions in composition's pedagogies as benefiting our students, because students do not see writing in binary terms. Positing theories in opposition to one another does nothing to create affective or effective pedagogy. In the next section, I will further define ethical pedagogy that I am calling for. I

open the next part with a story from Robert Yagelski's book *Literacy Matters: Writing and Reading the Social Self* (2000). His approach to literacy involves both personal and social realms. Yagelski argues for "a conception of literacy that rests on the notion of participation in the discourses that shape our lives, a notion that implies individual and collective responsibility" (9). I include Deborah Brandt in this discussion; she presents two versions of literacy. She describes literacy as a set of "tools" in her book *Literacy in American Lives* (2001), but she calls for an "involvement" of both the personal and the social in her book *Literacy as Involvement: The Acts of Writers, Readers, and Texts* (1990). Yagelski's and Brandt's (later) arguments reflect the basic tenets of ethical pedagogy and elements of post-process theory which also calls for a relationship between the individual and the collective.

Post-Process Theory and Ethical Pedagogy

In the opening chapter of his book *Literacy Matters: Writing and Reading the Social Self* (2000), Robert Yagelski tells the story of a visit he paid to a high school English classroom where he met a young girl, Abby. He was expounding on the importance of literacy in the Information Age, attempting to make the students realize that "if you're going to have any control over what happens in your lives, especially your political lives, you need to be able to participate in what's happening around you" and a major component in that participation is

information technology (1). Yagelski says that for most students, his message "seemed to resonate" – except for Abby (2).

Abby did not agree. Yagelski paraphrases her views: "When you're irrelevant, you're irrelevant, computers or not [. . .] The people who make decisions don't listen to kids [. . .] We have no say in what gets decided" (2). Yagelski tried to convince Abby that her voice matters, that she can use it through "petitions and rallies" and voting. But he acquiesced, realizing that Abby was not disinterested about political issues; "she was angry about being perceived as unimportant and she was skeptical about my claims that she mattered" (2).

I look to Yagelski's discussion with Abby because it exemplifies a view that has been presented throughout this project: many students believe that they have no say in their own education. While students have been *told* that their education is vital to being a model citizen or to enter into an academic conversation, I do not think that students *believe* that their voices matter politically or academically. As I have reiterated throughout this study, students have not internalized their literacy skills, meaning they do not see literacy as a reflection of their public or private selves.

Yagelski does not see Abby's anger as stemming from a lack of internalization per se. Instead, he recognizes that her disgust is caused by conflicting messages regarding the importance of literacy. Students in my study are similarly conflicted. Yagelski writes, "Most of what Abby is asked to do as a writer and reader in school has little relevance to her social, political, cultural, and

economic life outside of school" (5). Like Abby, the students who took part in this study reveal that they are alienated from their literacy skills. Students admitted that they have recognized that writing a five-paragraph essay is not relevant in "real life" or in an academic setting, and that spending so much time preparing for a test is one of the main causes for their aversion to writing. Practicing for a standardized test does not call for exigence, which further leads to the alienation students feel.

Alienation and conflict is fostered when literacy is often approached as a set of skills that will lead someone to economic success. For mainstream students, this causes them to take their literacy for granted. Because they come from homes where education is embedded and is seen as a given, they do not concern themselves with the inequalities that surround others' experiences in becoming literate. They assume that because they are attending college, they will automatically have solvent, successful lives.[29] However, while seeing literacy only within an economic context or as a set of tools, students will continue to see literacy as irrelevant "to their personal lives" (Yagelski 9). As a set of tools, literacy remains externalized.

This metaphor is alluded to in Deborah Brandt's *Literacy in American Lives*. She compares literacy to "a productive force", "a form of labor power [. . .]

[29] James Paul Gee addresses how upper class students view their literacy skills in his article "Teenagers in New Times: A New Literacy Studies Perspective" (2000). He compares mainstream students' accounts with working-class students' stories and found that the former tend "to distance themselves from the social, cultural, and political inequalities of our new times and to hold a firm belief in their own essential merit and worth, despite a ready acknowledgement of their very privileged circumstances" (419).

an input. Yet it also is an output, a product of varying value in use and exchange" (171). Brandt continues by saying that "literacy is also a means of production – that is a tool, an instrument, a technology" (171). Based on students' depictions in this study, I believe that students see literacy in this context; equating literacy with a "tool" causes them to use literacy in impersonal ways. As students write and interpret, they place words on a page which is a simulation of their thought processes, and these processes include their experiences. Viewing writing or literacy as *only* a set of tools dehumanizes writers because they are then only machines that operate the skills. Literacy is seen only as an extension of the writer, not as a reflection of the writer's sense of self.

In an earlier text, *Literacy as Involvement*, Brandt presents a more personal account of literacy, one in opposition to a " 'strong-text' account of literacy and literate language" which is a "decontextualized" approach (2-3). She sees strong-text theorists as separating literacy from people (67).[30] Brandt focuses on the relationship between writers, readers, text, and place and becoming literate involves understanding how these elements work together and simultaneously (100). Brandt's account echoes Yagelski's approach: "individual writers and readers shape our collective reality through written discourse. To participate in those discourses is thus to shape our lives and the cultural and institutional ground on which we live those lives" (8). I find this approach to literacy relevant to students' understandings about their skills. Students describe that when they feel

[30] Brandt labels Walter Ong, Deborah Tannen, and David R. Olson as strong-text theorists.

invested in the production of the text, they become part of the text. In becoming part of the text, they are able to form a relationship with their readers. While students do not say explicitly that they want to take part in "the discourses that shape our lives," their reflections illustrate that they want their words to affect others and that they want their words to matter. Moments when their assignments allowed them to form relationships and when they felt a sense of ownership over their writing were moments when they took on a writerly identity.

Yagelski's and Brandt's focus on the relationship between the individual and the collective goes along with both meanings of ethos. S. Michael Halloran alludes to the individual and collective meaning behind the word "*ethos*" (62). He stresses the importance of places, including our classrooms, as conveying ethos. He writes,

> The world in which our students gather together is defined. This is why the concept of *ethos* is so important, and it is why a composition course that deals only with technical matters of stylistic choice is inadequate. Rhetorical choices define the character of the speaker and of the world. We must understand how that happens, and we must help our students to understand too. (63)

In order to better understand the role that rhetoric, language, and literacy play in our lives, I propose a pedagogy based on this notion of ethos. It contains the following characteristics:

- An ethical pedagogy focuses on students (as people) and developing their character, their confidence, and their voices.
- An ethical pedagogy recognizes the places and spaces where writing

occurs.

- An ethical pedagogy recognizes that writing is social, that it creates relationship between writers and texts and writers and readers.
- An ethical pedagogy recognizes writing as action, so writers and readers are shaped and being shaped by discourse and by the texts they create.[31]

I see these elements – of shaping discourses, shaping texts, and shaping selves – as relevant actions in post-process theory. Although it a rather broad and somewhat pliable theory, it offers space for an ethical pedagogy. Post-process theory is a movement that addresses the writer as a person (not as a construct) and accounts for the social-ness of writing. Michael Heard writes in his article "What Should We Do With Postprocess Theory?" (2008) that post-process theory differs from previous composition theories because it does not see writing as teachable; writing "cannot be *mastered* like a skill but must be *exercised*" (284 original emphasis). Comparing writing to an exercise, Heard's metaphor leads us to see writing as constant practice and as action that constantly evolves and changes as the writer changes. Heard's metaphor echoes Halloran's view of ethos in which he says that developing one's ethos is a "process of habituation" (60), implying that a writerly ethos is created out of habit, (so students need to write more and not only in their English courses.)

[31] These last two elements reflect Burke's rhetorical theory of identification since writer and reader are attempting to relate with one another, and within that process each is experiences Burke's metaphorical "slaying" and changing.

Heard looks to Thomas Kent who "stands at the forefront of scholars who developed a theory for postprocess in the early 1990s" (284). Kent describes the basic tenets of post-process theory in his anthology *Post-Process Theory: Beyond the Writing Process Paradigm* (1999). Kent states that most post-process theorist agree on "three assumptions about the act of writing" (1). The first characteristic is that "writing is public" which means that writing is done "in relation to others" because it "includes other language users" (1). If all writing is public, then the notion of writing done for private purposes "evaporates" (1). I interpret this stance to mean that no matter what is written, once words are put on paper (or computer screen) it is in a public state and can be shared.

The second characteristic is that "writing is interpretive" (1). Kent sees this act of interpretation as happening when language is either being received or created, so "we must possess the ability to enter into this relation of understanding with other language users" (1). An act of interpretation can only happen once because "interpretation cannot be reduced to a process" (2). This assumption plays into post-process theorists' understanding that the writing process cannot be "codifiable" (1). There is not one specific process that works *every* time in *every* situation when we read or write. Each time we sit down to write, the process changes because our act of interpretation changes with each text we create. Interpretation is a constant (2).

The last "assumption" of post-process theory is that writing is situated: "writers always write from some position or some place" (3) and being

"somewhere" involves "being positioned in relation to other language users" (4). Kent's use of the word "position" includes the abstractions of our everyday lives, such as "beliefs, desires, hopes, and fears" (4). While writing, the writer attempts to determine the readers' positions, the places where his readers are coming from, and in relation to her own positions while writing. Post-process theory "is created by the interaction of historical discourses and is not a private or predictable act" (287). Writing involves the collective: the writer has been influenced by others' histories and works from theirs and her histories.

Compared to Gradin's version of social-expressivism, I see post-process theory as opening up more doors in the way we go about teaching composition. It takes into account both the social and personal aspects of writing, and by personal, I see it not as private, but as *meaningful*. Post-process theory does not negate the person; it does not treat the person as a subject or as a construct. It envelops the personal by taking into account Kent's "baggage" that goes along with being a social being (4). Heard writes,

> Interpretation always requires a give-and-take flexibility as communicators use the resources of their backgrounds, experiences, and learned strategies to provide contextual meaning for the messages and the codes they get from others. (286)

With its focus on constant interpretation, post-process theory alludes to a type of rhetorical situation; the writer must consider the entire context – the reader, the language, the text – in order to communicate effectively. To further develop this act of interpretation both Heard and Kent look to Donald Davidson, a philosopher, and his system of "passing" and "prior theories" (Heard 287).

Davidson sees rules and habits as "prior theories" and these are constantly "being reshaped as we meet in 'passing' with interlocutors" (287). When these "passing moments" take place, one's prior theories meet with another's prior theories, so we need to constantly "readjust our communication strategies instant by instant" (288). In the context of a writing classroom, Heard suggests that we maximize students' "prior theories" by exposing them "to as many different communication scenarios as possible" so they develop as many "prior theories" as possible (288).[32]

Where do literacy narratives fit within this pedagogy? I believe that assigning a literacy narrative is an exercise in ethical pedagogy. As demonstrated in Chapter IV, the literacy narrative assignment proved to be an assignment that allows for relationship-building, freedom, and ownership. Students' reflections in Chapter IV illustrate that students have been inundated with assignments that do no ask them to think about what they have learned in relation to themselves. The literacy narrative assignment allows them to use written discourse to investigate what has shaped their literate lives. The literacy narrative moves students to reflect on how literacy is both individual and collective; literacy is both personal and social: outside influences make someone literate, like teachers, parents, and media. The reflective essays on the literacy narrative assignment collectively illustrate that they have become closer to a conscious awareness of the relevance of their literacy skills and of how they have become literate. The narratives prove to be

[32] Davidson's system reminds me of Burke's terministic screens.

purposeful because the writers' personal experiences are placed alongside their surroundings to uncover how those surroundings affect their language practices. I see this kind of give-and-take, this kind of interpretation, as happening during the writing of a literacy narrative. Interpretation occurs when students share their stories with their peers, and between a person's past and present selves.

I closed Chapter IV with an emphasis on the tension between private and public language and between internal and external influences that are parts of the composing process. Composition theorists often talk about tension and negotiating within that tension, especially when writing is placed in a postmodern context. Perhaps, composition theorists are working to find ways to avoid the tension, to make the process of composing easier. However, as I said at the close of Chapter IV, I think it is important to move students toward the tension so they internalize it, interpret it, and use the experience when they are given other writing assignments. Tension is involved during the "passings" during the acts of interpretation that Heard alludes to. When tensions arise, choices have to be made. In the context of writing, the choices made to the text reflect the writer, and this moment of making choices constitutes an act of interpreting.

As we negotiate among the situated-ness of writing and the various discourse communities to which we belong, our sense of self is changed. Goffman wrote in *Asylums. Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*:

> It is . . . *against something* else that the self can emerge [. . .] Our sense of being a person can come from being drawn into a wider

> social unit: our sense of selfhood can arise through the little ways in which we resist the pull. Our status is backed by the solid buildings of the world, while our sense of personal identity often resides in the cracks" (qtd in Friedson, 360 original emphasis).

The resistance Goffman alludes to is the tension that people must negotiate as we move from situation to situation and discourse to discourse. The solid buildings are the communities (institutions), and our identity becomes part of the community, much like the way ethos encompasses both the social and the individual.

The opinions and reflections that students offered in this study are not surprising, so in a sense, this study has been a statement of the obvious: students do not like to write because they find it impersonal; they have had to write about topics they do not like; they worry about errors that they *might* make; and they do not use their creativity often enough. I also realize that these conclusions are based on a small group of students; however, I can only assume that if were to go to another university in New England, for example, students' attitudes toward writing would be quite similar to the students in this study.

But I see this study as a first step in understanding where college level students are in relation to their writing practices, and it leads us to begin making changes in the way we teach writing, particularly on the secondary level. In *The Composing Process of Twelfth Graders* (1971) Janet Emig concludes that "school sponsored writing […] is a limited and limiting experience (97). Considering that this seminal work was published almost 40 years ago, it is disheartening to realize

that "school sponsored writing" continues to be restrictive and confining. On the college level, this project also reveals that composition instructors need to invite students into the theories that inform our practices, so students are better equipped to talk about writing and to understand the reasons behind our objectives and assignments. In addition, our writing assignments need to be more open and inviting; they need to revolve around strengthening our students' sense of ethos; they need to *move* students to *want* to write and to see their writing as affecting others to act: "we must study writing as it expresses the integration of human will and action, of thinking and expression" (Couture 31), not as separate entities but as working in concert together to create a text and a writer.

WORKS CITED

"Able." Def. 1. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. 10th ed. 1998. Print.

Aristotle. *Treatise on Rhetoric*. Trans. Theodore Buckley. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1995. Print.

Bartholomae, David and Peter Elbow. "Responses to Bartholomae and Elbow." *College Composition and Communication* 46.1 (1995): 84-92. *JSTOR*. Web. 2 Apr. 2007.

Berlin, James. "A Contemporary Composition: The Major Pedagogical Theories." *College English* 44.8 (1982): 765-77. *JSTOR*. Web. 11 Sept. 2006.

- - -. "Poststructuralism, Cultural Studies, and the Composition Classroom: Postmodern Theory in Practice." *Rhetoric Review*. 11.1 (1992): 16-33. *JSTOR*. Web. 2 May 2005.

- - -. "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class." *College English* 50.5 (1988): 477-94. *JSTOR*. Web. 2 May 2005.

- - -. *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900-1985*.Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1987. Print.

- - -. *Rhetoric, Poetics, and Cultures: Refiguring English Studies*. Urbana IL: NCTE, 1996. Print.

Berthoff, Ann E. *The Making of Meaning: Metaphors, Models, and Maxims for*

Writing Teachers. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Heinemann, 1981. Print.

Birkenstein, Cathy and Gerald Graff. *They Say, I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*. New York: Norton, 2006. Print.

Bishop, Wendy. *On Writing: A Process Reader*. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2004. Print.

Bitzer, Lloyd. "The Rhetorical Situation." *Philosophy and Rhetoric*. 1.1 (1968): 1-14. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 14 Apr. 2008.

Brandt, Deborah. *Literacy as Involvement: The Acts of Writers, Readers, and Texts*. Carbondale, IL: U of Southern Illinois P, 1990. Print.

- - -. *Literacy in American Lives*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001. Print.

Brodkey, Linda. "Writing on the Bias." *College English* 56.5 (1994): 527-47. *JSTOR*. Web. 6 Aug. 2004.

Burke, Kenneth. *The Philosophy of Literary Form*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1941. Print.

- - -. *A Rhetoric of Motives*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1950. Print.

Burnham, Chris. "Expressive Pedagogy: Practice/Theory, Theory/Practice." *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*. Ed. Gary Tate, Amy Rupiper, Kurt Schick. New York: Oxford UP, 2001. 19-35. Print.

Chaddock, Gail Russell. " 'No Child Left Behind' Losing Steam." *csmonitor.com*. *The Christian Science Monitor*, 21 Mar. 2007. Web.

23 June 2006.

Clarke, Marguerite, George F. Madaus, Catherine L. Horn, and Miguel A. Ramos. "Retrospective on Educational Testing and Assessment in the 20th Century." *Journal of Curriculum Studies*. 32. 2 (2000): 159- 81. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 17 Jan. 2009.

Connors, Robert. *Composition-Rhetoric: Backgrounds, Theory, and Pedagogy*. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1997. Print.

Connors, Robert and Edward P.J. Corbett. *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*. 4th ed. New York: Oxford UP, 1999. Print.

Connors, Robert, Cheryl Glenn, and Melissa Goldthwaite. *The St. Martin's Guide to Teaching Writing*. 5th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003. Print.

Cook-Sather, Alison. "Education as Translation: Students Transforming Notions of Narrative and Self." *College Composition and Communication* 55.1 (2003): 91-114. *JSTOR*. Web. 5 May 2009.

Corkery, Caleb A. "Narrative and Personal Literacy: Developing a Pedagogy of Confidence Building for the Writing Classroom." Diss. U of Maryland, 2004. *ProQuest* . Web. 1 Jan.2007.

Couture, Barbara. "Modeling and Emulating: Rethinking Agency in the Writing Process." Kent 30-48.

DeRosa, Susan L. "Encouraging a Civic Literacy: A Pedagogy of Self-Reflection, Agency, and Action." 2006 Diss. U of Rhode Island, 2000.

ProQuest. Web. 1 Jan. 2007.

Dobbs, Michael. "More Changes Made to 'No Child' Rules." *The Washington Post* n.pag. 30 Mar. 2004. *Proquest*. Web. 23 June 2008.

Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave Written by Himself*. 1845. Ed. David W. Blight. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2003. Print.

Elbow, Peter. "Being a Writer vs. Being an Academic: A Conflict in Goals." *College Composition and Communication* 46.1 (1995): 72-83. *JSTOR*. Web. 20 Apr. 2007.

- - - . *Writing without Teachers*. New York: Oxford UP, 1973. Print.

Eldred, Janet Carey and Peter Mortensen. "Reading Literacy Narratives." *College English* 54.5 (1992): 512-39. *JSTOR*. Web. 6 Aug. 2004.

Emig, Janet. *The Composing Process of Twelfth Graders*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1971. Print.

Faigley, Lester. *Fragments of Rationality: Postmodernity and the Subject of Composition*. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1992. Print.

"Four Pillars of NCLB." *U.S. Department of Education*. n.d. Web. 11 July 2008.

Friedson, Eliot. "Celebrating Erving Hoffman." *Contemporary Sociology*. 12.4 (1983): 359-62. *JSTOR*. Web. 26 Sept. 2004.

Gee, James Paul. "Teenagers in New Times: A New Literacy Studies Perspectives." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*. 43.5 (2000): 412-20. International Reading Association. Web. 3 Mar. 2005.

George, Ann. "Critical Pedagogy: Dreaming of Democracy." *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies.* Ed. Gary Tate, Amy Rupiper, Kurt Schick. New York: Oxford UP, 2001. 92-112. Print.

Gilyard, Keith. *Voices of the Self: A Study of Language Competence*. Detroit: Wayne State UP: 1991. Print.

Gradin, Sherrie L. *Romancing Rhetorics: Social Expressivist Perspectives on the Teaching of Writing*. Portsmouth NH: Boynton/Cook Heinemann, 1995. Print.

Halliday, M. A. K. *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. 2nd ed. London: Edward Arnold, 1994. Print.

Halloran, S. Michael. "Aristotle's Concept of Ethos, or if Not His Somebody Else's." *Rhetoric Review.* 1.1 (1982): 58-63. *JSTOR*. Web. 6 May 2008.

Heard, Matthew. "What Should We Do with Postprocess Theory?" *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, And Culture*." 8.2 (2008): 283-304. *Project Muse*. Web. 8 May 2009.

Heath, Shirley Brice. "Protean Shapes in Literacy Events: Ever-Shifting Oral and Literate Traditions." *Literacy: A Critical Sourcebook*. Ed. Ellen Cushman, Eugene R. Kintgen, Barry M. Kroll, and Mike Rose. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001. 443-66. Print.

- - -. *Ways with Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms.* New York: Cambridge UP, 1983. Print.

Hyde, Michael J, ed. "Rhetorically, We Dwell." Introduction. *The Ethos of Rhetoric*. Ed. Hyde. Columbia, SC: U of South Carolina P, 2004. xiii-xviii. Print.

Kennedy, George. *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition: From Ancient to Modern Times*. Chapel Hill: The U of North Carolina P, 1980. Print.

Kent, Thomas, ed. Introduction. *Post-Process Theory: Beyond the Writing-Process Paradigm.* Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 1999. 1-6. Print.

Killingsworth, M. Jimmie. *Appeals in Modern Rhetoric: An Ordinary-Language Approach*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 2005.

Knoblauch, C. H. and Lillian Brannon. *Critical Teaching and the Idea of Literacy*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1993. Print.

Lewin, Tamar. "College Board to Revise SAT after Criticism by University." *New York Times*, 23 Mar. 2002, late ed. *Proquest*. Web. 23 June 2008.

Lindemann, Erika. "Freshman Composition: No Place for Literature." *College English* 55.3 (1993): 311-16. *JSTOR*. Web. 21 July 2005.

Mabry, Linda. "Writing to the Rubric: Lingering Effects of Traditional Standardized Testing on Direct Writing Assessment" *Phi Delta Kappan* 80.9 (1999): 673-79. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 11 July 2008.

McGrath, Charles. "Writing to the Test." *New York Times,* 7 Nov. 2004, late ed. n. pag. *Proquest*. Web. 23 June 2008.

"Most States Fall Short on Student Testing, Government Says." *USA Today* 7 July 2006 n. pag. *Proquest*. Web. 12 July 2006.

Mutnick, Deborah. "Rethinking the Personal Narrative: Life-Writing and Composition Pedagogy." *Under Construction: Working at the Intersections of Composition Theory, Research, and Practice*. Ed. Christine Farris and Chris M. Anson. Logan UT: Utah State P. 79-92. Print.

National Council Teachers of English (NCTE). *The Impact of the SAT and ACT Timed Writing Tests: Report from the NCTE Task Force on SAT and ACT Writing Tests.* Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2005. Web. 11 July 2008.

Newkirk, Thomas. *The Performance of Self in Student Writing*. Portsmouth NH: Boynton/Cook, Heinemann. 1997. Print.

Novek, Eleanor M. "Read It and Weep: How Metaphor Limits Views of Literacy." *Discourse and Society* 3.2 (1992): 219-33. *Sage*. Web. 3 Mar. 2005.

O'Donnell, Thomas G. "Politics and Ordinary Language: A Defense of Expressivist Rhetorics." *College English* 58.4 (1996): 423-39. *JSTOR*. Web. 1 Apr. 2007.

Paley, Amit R. and Jonathan Weisman. "Dozens in GOP Turn against Bush's Prized 'No Child' Act." *Washingtonpost.com*. The Washington Post Company, 15 Mar. 2007. Web. 23 June 2008.

Paterson, Stephanie D. "Embodied Narratives: Ways of Reading Student

Literacy Histories." Diss. U of New Hampshire, 2001. *ProQuest.* Web. 1 Jan. 2007.

Perelman, Chaim and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca. *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*. Trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver. Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame UP, 1969.

Pratt, Mary Louise. "Arts of the Contact Zone." *Ways of Reading,* 5th ed. Eds. David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky. New York: Bedford/St. Martins, 1999. N. pag. *Network Writing Environment*. Web. 6 Sept. 9 2004.

Reynolds, Nedra. "Ethos as Location: New Sites for Understanding Discursive Authority." *Rhetoric Review* 11.2 (1993): 325-38. *JSTOR.* Web. 14 Jan. 2008.

Rodriguez, Richard. *Hunger of Memory: The Autobiography of Richard Rodriguez.* New York: Bantam, 1982. Print.

Rose, Mike. *Lives on the Boundary: The Struggles and Achievements of America's Underprepared*. New York: Free P, 1989. Print.

Scharrer, Gary. "English Standards Head Back to Basics." *Chron.com*, *Houston Chronicle*, 23 May 2008. Web. 23 June 2008.

- - -. "Texas Educators Split over Teaching English Basics." *Chron.com*, Houston Chronicle, 20 Apr. 2008. Web. 23 June 2008.

Schilb, John. "Cultural Studies, Postmodernism, and Composition." *Contending*

With Words: Composition and Rhetoric in the Postmodern Age. Ed. Patricia Harkin and John Schilb. New York: MLA, 1991. 173-88. Print.

Scott, J. Blake. "The Literacy Narrative as Production Pedagogy in the Composition Classroom." *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*. 24.2 (1997): 108-17. Print.

Soliday, Mary. "Translating Self and Difference through Literacy Narratives." *College English* 56.5 (1994): 511-26. *JSTOR*. Web. 3 Aug. 2004.

Tate, Gary. "A Place for Literature in Freshman Composition." *College English* 55.3 (1993): 317-21. *JSTOR*. Web. 21 July 2005.

"Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS)." Student Assessment Division, TEA. 213-15. Web. 11 July 2008.

"Texas Assessment of Knowledge Skills (TAKS)." Student Assessment Division, TEA. 13-22. Web. 11 July 2008.

Texas Education Agency. *Exit Level English Language Arts TAKS Information Booklet*. Austin: Student Assessment Division. 2004. Web. 11 July 2008.

Trimbur, John. "Articulation Theory and the Problem of Determination: A Reading of *Lives on the Boundary." Composition Theory in a Post-Modern Classroom*. Ed. Sidney I. Dobrin and Gary Olson. Albany, NY: State U of New York P, 1994. 236-53. Print.

Villanueva, Victor. *Bootstraps, from an American Academic of Color*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1993. Print.

- - -. Personal Interview. 5 Oct. 2006.

Williams, Bronwyn T. "Heroes, Rebels, and Victims: Student Identities in Literacy Narratives." *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* 47.4 (2004): 342-45. *International Reading Association*. 3 Aug. 2008.

Williamson, Kent. Memo to Texas State Board of Education, Texas. 12 Mar. 2008. Web. 25 Mar. 2008.

"Write Up a Better Idea." *Los Angeles Times* 13 July 2002. *Proquest*. Web. 23 June 2008.

Yagelski, Robert P. *Literacy Matters: Writing and Reading the Social Self*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2000. Print.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Name:
Age:
Level in College:
Major:
Hometown:
Size of high school:

1) When you hear the word "writing", what other words and/or ideas come to mind?

2) What do you write outside of school/coursework? How often do you write something that is not school-related?

3) What have been your favorite writing assignments? What have been your least favorite writing assignments? Explain your choices.

4) What are your earliest memories of writing?

5) Was writing ever used as a punishment in school? If so, what was the reason and what would you and/or your classmates have to do?

6) What do you believe characterizes good writing? (If it helps, consider authors/writers whom you believe write well and try to explain what you like about their writing.)

7) Reflecting on your possible career, do you anticipate writing as being a part of your occupation? Explain your reasoning.

8) What points have your teachers stressed or repeated about writing? Which ones do you continue to adhere to? Why?

9) In high school, how much time per week did you spend in class preparing for standardized writing tests, either for state mandated tests or for the SAT?

10) Are you writing more or less as a college student? What kinds of writing assignments have you completed?

11) What have you learned about writing that you did not know/understand as a high school student but you understand now?

12) Do you see writing as helping your thinking/learning process or does writing inhibit your thinking/learning process? Explain.

APPENDIX B

ANSWERS TO QUESTION 11:

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED ABOUT WRITING THAT YOU DID NOT KNOW/UNDERSTAND AS A HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT BUT YOU UNDERSTAND NOW?

Student 1

"Um, I'm sure there's something. I mean, I guess I learned that, I guess I learned that writing was more than like [. . .] I guess when it came to academic writing that there was pretty much research papers or book reports type summaries like. I guess I learned everything that you write like has to have a central theme. Research is much more narrow [. . .] Academic writing has to have a really specific focus and that goes not just for research papers for essays on short stories. I would never think about writing a summary in college. I would find this part, find something that I find interesting in this paper and really, really expand on it and continue to build on it. I never really did that in high school. I think a lot of high school writing is really is a lot of 'put this in your own words' type thing type summary. Now that I think about it, I guess in high school I thought that a lot academic writing in high school was put this in your own words. I don't really get that sort of assignment that sort of thing in college."

Student 2

"I don't think I've really learned anything about writing – I've learned how to and techniques and stuff but as far as the importance and stuff I've always felt the same about [. . .like] how to develop thoughts about things and about your topics. It was like a year and a half ago. I like couldn't tell you what I've learned but I can do it though [. . .] In high school I had a terrible time with it and now it's just not so hard. I don't know why."

Student 3

"Just [. . .] the no right or wrong answer, there's your two interpretations maybe usually two or three things that you can draw from it, and then there's surely 20, 30 more people that could draw a completely different view. It's all up to your how you view it. I think your past experiences have an influence on that."

Student 4

"Probably that, honestly, the most that we wrote were like book reports. We never. Our first in English 104 last semester, our first assignment when analyzed the political cartoon, I had never done that before so I was so nervous when I turned it in so I never analyzed anything, taken things apart. I had to write persuasive papers but my history class I've never like compared two opposite points of view and then argued stronger for one, I had never done that either. A lot of doors open here in college."

\

Student 6

"*That it doesn't have to be five paragraphs. That you're allowed to break the mold, I guess, and a lot of people don't know their mechanics. It scares me because the people who will be teaching my children don't know how to spell and don't know how to…."* I asked Student 6 if she thought that the audience or the forum in which people write affects the amount of errors she sees. She replied, "*I think that might be part of it, but bad spelling? Like I don't think there's an excuse for that like you have a dictionary…. Our online culture, the instant messenger plays into that."*

Student 7

"I don't think really anything."

Student 8

"*I think I've learned how to write longer papers that are more intelligent. I look at college writing as I need to learn this rather than I need to turn this in*." I asked her to clarify what she learned about writing longer papers. She said, *"I never had teachers sit down and like explain to you how to write a college paper except for maybe my freshman English class, but I just had to figure out what having the expectations of this a college level paper. You know, I just kind of figured it out by myself. I don't think I ever really learned [. . .] I've done better in classes that rely on papers."*

Student 9

"Well, in high school I was kind of taught that the conclusion needs to sometimes touch on something new and that would occasionally lead me off in another direction that you can't go because you don't have any proof so college has definitely taught me never to do that."

Student 10

"Well, I think they might have went over it in high school, when I was like reading, I think, they never really showed us how we were supposed to interpret the books. I can see through those little things. In writing, now being able to notice that you can kind of put it into your own writing to an extent. I can understand the techniques that underlie that and make sure that you know every word in the whole paper can actually mean something, even though it something small you can twist it a little bit to make it fit in even better or add more to the story."

Student 11

"Nothing that has like revolutionized [anything]."

Student 12

"Well I kind of knew like that not every single essay was like the three topics type paragraph essay but like just learning, I mean, I guess, like more about you can have one topic and just a lot of little paragraphs or whatever you want. You don't have to stick to like one thing in the real world."

Student 13

"I think, like, I wrote a journal for class, and it was supposed to be freestyle, but I kinda stuck very sophisticated and like I just I didn't take it just like a journal like where you just write. I took it more as a paper. I did it very structuralized, and I got like a B in it, and I was expecting a high grade because I researched and used different words and things and so my second one, I did it more freestyle so I had like a 90 something, but I had a better grade, so I guess like actually paying attention to the actual style of writing that they are asking for like styles are more important than I thought. And something small, like you're not supposed to underline titles." I asked her if she liked the freestyle type of assignment. She responded, *"It took me less time. It was just drawing down thoughts of what you thought the chapter was about. It was really easier."*

Student 17

"I guess a special way to write your conclusion for [. . .] effect, and I guess the writing format, APA writing style." I asked him if he learned about citations in high school, and he said, *"No, it was pretty much write what you feel like. There was a format right an intro, body, and conclusion but it was nothing special."*

Student 18

"Not really like everything's so far like everything I've already known or just a lot of refresher."

Student 19

"I never really written a rhetorical analysis, so I learned how to analyze an argument and state my own claim and write about that. That's kind of something new."

Student 20

"Well, there have been a few instances, I mean there were some things on the MLA format for the citations. I didn't know this exactly because I've never had to come across that portion of reference or citing a reference. Also when we were taking notes like on argument, we never really went in depth in high school about the writing triangle, about ethos, pathos, logos so that was actually kind of new for me, but when I saw it, and she explained it it made sense to me."

Student 22

"How to work cite. Mainly 'cause like in high school, you know, they really don't stress like how to work cite your papers and that's something like I was introduced probably like my last my senior year, our teachers kind of told us at the end like when you go to college you're going to have to work cite [. . .] and then when they told us here, I actually learned like how to actually work cite like at the end of your essays. There's also like thesis, quotes."

Student 23

"Yeah, actually, I'd say a lot. In class they've kind of reviewed the basics and stuff, but I do feel like in college it is more about content because I feel like in high school they are preparing you for papers that you're gonna write in college, and they care more about that you're gonna write them right and not what you're writing about." I asked her if she has learned to pay attention to what she's saying, and she replied*, "Right, than actually how it's being written."*

Student 24

"It just made me realize that there's a lot more to it than just, you know, putting whatever you're thinking on paper. If you wanna, but if you really wanna reach an audience, you gotta be really clear and like, there's lots of different ways you can get your point across [. . .] in a more organized way." I asked her if she had ever

written a rhetorical analysis or other argumentative papers: *"Well, I remember we wrote, we had to pick an issue of what we felt strongly about and write the opposite. Well it was kind of hard because I didn't agree with that point."*

Student 30 (written)

"In high school, I felt that my writing was strong. My teachers praised me, and I scored well on tests. However, now that I've come to college, I've had difficulty writing the new types of papers that I've been assigned. I've learned, through my problems with writing, the importance of a thesis statement. I realize now that a thesis statement must have more depth than I was previously taught."

Student 31

"To write what we know, and not be afraid to take risks."

Student 32

"I know more about technical writing that I did in high school, but as far as other types of writing I feel like I know the same amount. I almost want to say that my writing assignments in high school were better than they are now because I had more time to work on them than I have now."

Student 33

"I am a quick lateral thinker, so I can be expressing words that make complete sense to me while my audience is left scratching their heads. Only 'weird' people get me all the time, and 'weird' usually means so creative they can barely function in society. I also make lots of references to pop culture, philosophy, the Bible, fashion, the user's manual for my Craftsman lawnmower all in the same breath. Needless to say, it isn't always followed (and I can take big breaths). So I'm still learning how to write with the clarity and depth of explanation necessary for the vast majority of my audiences to understand. At first it felt like dumbing myself down – like I was playing to the lowest common denominator and going into laborious detail, but that isn't true at all. I was simply making too many assumptions before, and not enough points."

Student 34

"To be interesting and funny. Also, practice CAN help! Writing is a skill that can be taken up."

Student 35

"As of now in my English class we have only talked about rhetoric. This isn't a new topic to me because my English 4 AP class was solely based on thinking outside the box and analyzing writing styles. I haven't taken a 'conventional' English class since I was a sophomore and because of that I tend to now always analyze what I'm reading and try not to think inside the box anymore."

Student 36

"I would say that how to cite is what I have learned the most so far compared to in high school here. I always got marked off a lot for not having the right format on it depending what type of writing method we were using."

Student 37

"One that I have already learned is that I do not know how to analyze articles and I am still struggling with that."

APPENDIX C

THE LITERACY NARRATIVE ASSIGNMENT USED IN THREE SECTIONS OF ADVANCED COMPOSITION AND PREWRITING QUESTIONS

Writing Project #1: Literacy Narrative

Objectives:
*to relate one's experiences with literacy
*to analyze and interpret those experiences in connection to one's overall literacy development
*to explain and analyze how cultural, societal, and/or familial influences affect one's literacy development
*to define or explain what it means to be a literate person
*to explain the connections between language and identity
*to write a clear, interesting personal narrative with few grammatical errors

Description of Assignment:
Language and identity are inseparable. As we begin to examine this connection, our first task is to reflect on how we learned to use language; so the first project deals with writing a literacy narrative, which I define as a text that describes, reflects, analyzes, and simply tells the story of the writer's relationship with language, including how one's culture and economic status influence his/her learning. Due to these outside influences, we'll discover, as we read examples, that literacy is tied directly to one's sense of agency.

The first task is to answer the eleven questions about your literacy history. Hopefully, the answers will lead to a moment or moments that you want to explore more fully. In addition to the questions, we'll be reading several examples of literacy narratives including those found in Chapter 2 of Bishop's text. As you read these examples, you might find that you connect to a writer's experience or that you disagree with a writer's perspective. Your reactions can be included in your own literacy narrative, too. So**, *engage with the readings***. Once we begin drafting the paper, we'll discuss your process, progress and problems, and peer review one another's drafts.

Although this topic is rather broad and open, remember that you will need to analyze and interpret the event or events that you describe in relation to your overall understanding of literacy and being a literate person.

Format & Requirements:
1. Minimum length: 4 pages, double-spaced, 11 or 12-pt font
2. Title (we'll work on titles in class)
3. No cover page
4. MLA guidelines for parenthetical citations & works cited page (if needed)
5. Submit your published (final) draft to turnitin. (Due date will be announced in class)

DON'T DISCARD ANYTHING YOU DO FOR THE PROJECT!!!!
STAY ORGANIZED!!!

Double-Entry Notebook/Dialectical Journal:
As you read the examples of literacy narratives – those in your text & those I hand out in class – you'll keep notes of ideas, statements, passages that are intriguing.

You'll divide your paper in half. In the left column, you'll copy the sentence or passage. Even though there is no length requirement for what you copy, you should copy enough so the passage is understandable by itself. Cite the passage according to MLA guidelines. In the right column, you will write your reaction to that passage. Ask yourself why you find it interesting, provocative, thoughtful, etc. You're 'talking back' to the writer essentially. **YOU ARE NOT SUMMARIZING** the passage!!!!!!

The goals of this assignment are to engage with the readings, to prompt your thinking, and to relate incidents in your life to someone else. Hopefully, passages that you noted will be included in your literacy narrative (but this is not a requirement).

The Notebook/Journal that you submit must be typed (in column format). It should contain at least 15 entries. But, since we're reading approximately 15 literacy narratives, you'll probably have more.

The Notebook/Journal will be included with the supporting materials, BUT you will turn it in prior to the paper due date as a separate grade. You'll be evaluated on your insight and thoroughness, along with the basic task of following the directions listed above.

Prewriting Questions for Literacy Narrative

1. What are your earliest memories of learning how to read? (Who taught you? How old were you? Did you have a favorite book? Was it easy/difficult?)

2. What are your earliest memories of learning how to write? (Who taught you, how old were you or what grade were you in? Did your teacher focus on penmanship? What did you write?)

3. Was writing ever used as a punishment in school? If so, what was the reason and what did you or your classmates have to do? (For example, did you have to write, "I will not…" fifty times on a sheet of paper when you misbehaved?)

4. What have been your favorite writing assignments? What has been your least favorite? Explain why you liked and disliked the assignments? (You could have done the assignment anytime in your educational career – elementary school through college.)

5. While you were growing up, did your primary caregivers promote reading and/or writing? Explain how they did or did not. (Did you go to the library often? Were your papers put on the refrigerator? Did they do a lot of reading and/or writing themselves? Did you ever keep a personal diary/journal?)

6. Has your interest in reading, throughout your lifetime, fluctuated or remained the same? How would you explain the change or the consistency? (For example, did you read a lot when you were a child, but now, you hardly ever read? Have you always been an avid reader? Have you always disliked reading?)

7. When do you remember reading something that was well-written? What was it? Why did you consider it "good"? (Your answer does not need to be a piece of fiction.)

8. When you sit down to write a paper – for any class – what is the (detailed) process you go through? (I know in EN 104 we stress drafts, revision, etc., but think about your normal, non-required process: do you brainstorm, make outlines, write several drafts, write a draft in pen/pencil before typing on the computer or do you go directly to the computer?)

9. Since beginning college, have you experienced any type of hurdles caused by your economic class, your ethnicity/race, your language, your home base, etc in regard to reading and/or writing? Explain the obstacle and how you have or have not been able to get over these types of challenges.

10. Since beginning college, do you see writing as helping *your* thinking or learning process OR does writing inhibit your thinking or learning process? (For example, some people's brains work faster than their hands, so writing something down creates a barrier to thought, whereas others find that writing helps to develop and create thought.

APPENDIX D

WHAT STUDENTS DISLIKE ABOUT THEIR LITERACY NARRATIVE

Student A

"I think the worst part of my paper is towards the end when I talk about how I found my voice again [. . .] it is very hard to explain exactly how I feel about finding my voice again."

Student B

"The worst thing about my paper is the introduction. I am horrible at writing these! My introduction is super boring, but I haven't been able to think of a way to change it yet."

Student C

"I feel like my conclusion is rather weak. I read and reread it and I feel like it is missing something, but I do not know what it is."

Student D

"I was not really satisfied with my delivery of the last paragraph."

Student H

"My least favorite moment in writing the paper was the feeling of being rushed."

Student J

"I couldn't remember everything that I enjoyed reading, so I wish I could have found a few more examples."

Student L

"The part I thought was worst in my paper is the analysis."

Student O

"My sentence structure bothers me the most about my paper. I still feel that I

stated some sentences awkwardly, but I am still unfortunately not sure how I could have fixed the problem."

Student Q

"If there is one thing I dislike most about the paper, it is that the tone shifts in formality throughout. The reader repeatedly hears voice shifts, which is distracting when she's trying to follow my point."

Student T

"There are a few things I do not really like about my paper. Mostly, I wish I was able to use more figurative language in my paper. It is something that definitely does not come naturally to me, so when I try to I feel like it does not sound right at all. I also wish that I would have tied in a few more specific examples to relate to the reader even more. I do have some in my paper, but I think a few more would have only helped support my paper."

Student V

"My least favorite part of the process was the peer reviews online. While it was easy and convenient to access these papers online, I felt I could have gotten better ideas and maybe understood the ideas that were presented more clearly. There were a few times when I was unsure what my reviewer meant and what I should do to fix the problem they had addressed."

Student X

"The thing I like least about the paper is that it feels rushed to me. I had plenty of time to work on it, but I still do not think I was able to say and include everything I really wanted to. There aren't any real specifics that I can list out, but I just feel that there are more ideas in my head that could be included."

Student Y

"I think the worst thing about my paper is the sentence structuring. If I had more time to write I would have liked to revise the sentences a bit more. I have a hard time with forming sentences, and often times I don't think they express the meaning I am trying to get across. I am also not sure about the overall flow. It seems like it makes sense in my own head, but I am not sure it makes sense to others or if they are able to follow where my words are attempting to lead them."

Student A6

"I did run into a few roadblocks while trying to brainstorm on what I was going to write about. At first I thought that the assignment was really vague and broad and I had no idea where to go with it. Then once I found something good to put into my paper, I realized that I couldn't make that one thing into a four page report. Therefore, I had to incorporate more than one idea or experience in this paper and find a way to make them flow. This was probably the toughest task I faced in writing this paper."

Student A7

"I do a bad job of structuring my ideas. In some parts of my paper I think that my ideas are scattered and do not flow well throughout the paper. I also have had trouble with changing tenses. Because I am constantly switching from the past to the present, sometimes I forget which tense I should be using. I also had a hard time explaining myself. Because I had so much ground to cover, I am afraid that I might have made vague statements. Towards the end of my paper I think that I make assumptions about other people while not really focusing on myself. Also, because I was writing about events that happened in my past, I also had a hard time remembering what all exactly happened."

Student A9

"I think the worst thing about my paper would be the length. I didn't really know what else to include in the paper, and I feel like it might a little short in length. I think I touched on all the different topics that I wanted to include in my paper, but my paper ended up not being as long as I would have liked it to be, and need it to be for class."

Student B3

"The worst thing about my paper would have to be the lack of explanation of significant people in my life. When it comes to events that occurred over ten years ago, my memory is not exactly at its clearest."

VITA

Name:	Julie Elizabeth Groesch
Address:	Department of English Texas A&M University 4227 Blocker College Station, TX 77843
Email Address:	jgroesch@tamu.edu
Education:	B.A. English, St. Mary's University, San Antonio, 1990 M.A. English, Language, and Literature, Our Lady of the Lake University, 2001 Ph.D. English, Texas A&M University, 2009