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UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

**ARE WE SPEAKING THE SAME LANGUAGE:
EXPLORING MEANING CONSTRUCTION IN A FIRST YEAR
COMPOSITION CLASSROOM**

A Dissertation

SUMMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By

Patty Marcia Reed

Norman, Oklahoma

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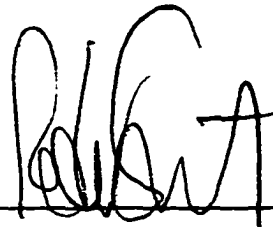
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ARE WE SPEAKING THE SAME LANGUAGE?
EXPLORING MEANING CONSTRUCTION IN A FIRST YEAR
COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP
AND ACADEMIC CURRICULUM

BY



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Abstract

Current studies of writing and literacy are focusing much attention on the construction of meaning through sociocultural approaches and semiotics. This social interactive and meaning constructive perspective involves not only the written text but also what the writer brings to the text and the contextual elements of the writing. This exploratory study had two primary focuses. It investigated how first year college composition students understood and interpreted classroom writing assignments and to what extent the teacher's intentions for the assignments were fulfilled by the students. Also, the study examined how the students constructed meaning from the classroom writing assignments and to what extent these meanings were shaped not only by personal knowledge and investment but also by social and cultural influences as well.

The study was conducted in a first year Composition 1213 class at a two year college. Data were collected from the entire class as well as four volunteer student participants and the teacher. Concurrent think-aloud protocols from three essay assignments along with open-ended interviews over each assignment were the primary data sources. The protocol and interview data were collected from each of the volunteer student participants. The teacher also participated in four interviews. Observational

and questionnaire data from the entire class and the teacher supplemented the primary data sources.

Data revealed that disjunctions occurred between the teacher's intentions for making the assignments and the students interpretations of the assignments on some level with all three essays. Data analysis also indicated that the written texts which the students produced were shaped by sociocultural influences, personal and educational influences, intertextual influences, and motivational influences.

Chapter One: Introduction

As I walked into the classroom for the first time and quietly took a seat in the back of the room, I felt a growing anticipation of both dread and excitement. I was a few minutes early for my first day of data gathering and because of the time there were only two young women already seated in the classroom. They were near the front of the room talking in hushed voices. Soon the room began to fill with loud conversation and laughter as the first year composition students began filling the quiet church like sanctuary of the room. It wasn't long before the tall slender figure of the instructor with high heels clicking appeared at the door. Before beginning class, she quickly introduced me and explained to the students that I would be describing to them a little later on exactly why I was joining their class for the next several weeks. Even though I had been a teacher myself for a number of years, I felt strangely frozen as the sea of faces turned to the back of the room to greet me. My thoughts wondered for a few seconds as to how I was ever going to accomplish the enormous job of interpreting everything that lay before me. Suddenly, I realized the instructor had already started her lecture. The task of interpreting how students interpret and construct meaning in this classroom was not going to be easy.

Statement of the Problem

When dealing with students' constructions of meaning from writing assignments, the word "interpret" becomes difficult to define. Teachers giving assignments usually assume students interpret and understand these assignments the way teachers intend. However, students' perceptions and understanding of what is expected of them when writing often conflict with their teacher's interpretation of the same writing task (Geisler, 1991; Greene, 1993; McCarthy, 1987; Nelson, 1990; Walvoord & McCarthy, 1990). The problem may not be in the student's ability to decode, or even knowledge of the topic of the assignment itself, but in the way the student has construed the task (Flower, 1990).

The following investigation has two primary focuses. It examines how first year college composition students understand and interpret classroom writing assignments and to what extent the teacher's intentions for the assignments are fulfilled by the students. The study also explores how students construct meaning from the classroom writing assignments and to what extent these meanings are shaped not only by personal knowledge and investment but also by social and cultural influences.

The following questions directed this exploratory study: (a) In what ways do four first year composition students' understandings and interpretations of their Composition II classroom writing assignments converge with and diverge from the teacher's intentions? To what extent

do the students' meaning constructions of classroom writing assignments match the teacher's intentions? (b) How do the students' sociocultural backgrounds help or hinder them with classroom writing assignments? To what extent do the various assignments given by the instructor affect the students' interpretations and meaning constructions of the writing tasks? (c) How does the first year composition students' previous knowledge of writing impact their interpretations of present writing assignments? To what extent do the students draw from previous personal and educational experiences when composing written assignments? (d) How are the four composition students' present writings influenced by prior texts? In what ways do the students' prior writings affect present texts? In what ways do prior texts of others influence the students' present texts? (e) What are the students' intentions when fulfilling the Composition II writing assignments? How do personal motivation and goals influence the students' intentions when completing the writing assignments?

Background of the Problem

Writing represents one of the most complex and multifaceted human activities (Gardner, 1975). At the present time educators and researchers find themselves with new areas for the scholarly study of writing. Nystrand, Greene, and Wiemelt (1993) explain that these new areas for research have arisen from the literacy crisis

of the mid-1970's which motivated current writing research hoping to improve writing instruction. Current studies of writing and literacy are focusing much attention on the construction of meaning through sociocultural approaches (Rogoff, 1990; Wertsch, 1991) and semiotics (Smagorinsky & Coppock, 1994; Witte, 1992). Much of the information gained from these researchers suggests that writing is not a simple straight line act but instead a recursive and complicated process. The experiences, beliefs, and cultural backgrounds writers bring to written texts influence the meaning they derive from it. To better understand the complex procedure writers go through and to better understand how writers interpret the actual writing tasks and assignments, researchers are now broadening their studies to include the sociocultural elements that influence the process of writing.

Wertsch (1991) explains that the sociocultural approach includes historical, institutional, and cultural influences. Rogoff (1990) defines culture as being "formed from the efforts of people working together, using and adapting tools provided by predecessors and in the process creating new ones" (p. 16). Vygotsky's (1978, 1987) theoretical framework, a sociocultural approach to the mind, is usually characterized by three general themes: (a) a reliance on genetic or developmental analysis; (b) the claim that higher mental functions in the individual have their origins in

social life; and (c) the claim that an essential key to understanding human social and psychological processes is the tools and signs used to mediate them (Moll, 1992). The following sections are a brief discussion of some of the theories that involve social and cultural elements as they relate to the field of written communication.

Social-interactive model of written communication

Nystrand (1989) proposes that "meaning is a social construct negotiated by writer and reader through the medium of text, which uniquely configures their respective purposes" (p. 78). Nystrand describes a social interactive and meaning constructive act as a social-interactive model of written communication. He goes on to explain that the meaning of a written text is not simply obtained by the objective properties of that text or simply by a reader's cognition of the text but rather by "reciprocity between writers and their readers that binds the writer's intention, the reader's cognition, and properties of text all together in the enterprise of text meaning" (p. 78).

When discussing how readers and writers negotiate social and textual contexts when constructing meaning, Greene and Ackerman (1995) use the term "rhetorical aspects of literacy" which they define "as the means and circumstances through which readers and writers represent and negotiate texts, tasks, and social contexts" (p. 384). Furthermore, they state that when writers are constructing

meaning the particular social atmosphere in which they place themselves in is relative to "(a) authority (e.g., a disciplinary community's conventions for inquiry, the institution of school, or a writer's expertise), (b) the purposes that bring writers together within a particular social forum, and (c) the topic of their discourse or task at hand" (p. 384).

When educators and researchers view writing as a socially interactive means of communication, they must also take into consideration the processes of intersubjectivity and appropriation. Rogoff (1990) explains that intersubjectivity is "the mutual understanding that is achieved between people in communication" (p. 67). She stresses that understanding is achieved between people and that it does not originate from one person or another. Rogoff further emphasizes that both verbal and nonverbal communication are social activities that bridge the gap between one understanding of a situation and another. The basis for communication occurring between the teacher and learner is provided through intersubjectivity, and intersubjectivity supports the extension of the learner's understanding to new information and activities.

Appropriation is another process that is important when viewing writing as a socially interactive means of communication. This process "assumes that for any particular episode involving a novice and an expert, the

novice's psychological functions constitute an organized system that permits the novice to form some notion of what the episode is going to be about" (Newman, Griffin, & Cole, 1993, p. 64). Leont'ev (1981) explains that appropriation comes from a sociohistorical origin. In other words if a novice is trying to learn the function of a culturally devised tool, then this person can not merely examine the tool and realize its function. The novice must engage in culturally organized activities in which the tool is used.

Semiotic model of written communication

One approach to understanding how students construct meaning from writing assignments is to view writing students first as readers of an assignment. If we view students from the perspective that they are readers of an assignment, then we should examine Rosenblatt's (1978) semiotic transactional approach. When referring to readers of literature, she comments that "the reader or critic is faced essentially with a problem in communication--to make clear what is being interpreted as well as to comment on it" (p. 135). Rosenblatt further notes that all of the assumptions and ideas that enter into the reader's interpretation and response demand attention; however, the process of interpreting does not "occur in a vacuum but is deeply conditioned by the social context" (p. 135).

In agreement with the stance that different forms

of communication are embedded within a social context is the semiotic perspective of writing. From a semiotic perspective, the words of the assignment represent signs provided by the teacher, who constructs them with a specific meaning in mind. The words are then read by students, who may or may not construct a similar meaning for the signs of the text. As Nystrand (1986) points out, for the Russian philosopher and semiotician Mikhail Bakhtin, language is inherently dialogic and:

Not only are the material resources of the medium (language) social in origin, but also the choices speakers make at every turn are shaped by the balance their utterances must strike between what they have to say and the context in which the text must function. This is true not only of speaking but also ostensibly monologic forms of discourse such as writing. (p. 33)

Smagorinsky and Coppock (1994) explain that the key to the semiotic perspective is "the importance of constructing meaning through the production and interpretation of signs. An object itself is inherently meaningless. It only takes on meaning--becomes a sign--through constructive acts on the part of the creator or beholder" (p. 285). According to these perspectives, written communication could be viewed as a social interactive and meaning constructive act occurring among

writer, text, context, and reader.

Motivational model of written communication

Educational psychologists also view the construction of meaning as being impacted by social and cultural influences. Researchers of achievement motivation recognize the implications of the influencing sociocultural factors that students must deal with (Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 1989; Maehr, 1984; Maehr & Nicholls, 1980). Some educational researchers refer to task achievement in the classroom as accountability. Doyle (1983) argues that "accountability drives the task system in classrooms" and because accountability drives the task system "students are especially sensitive to cues that signal accountability or define how tasks are to be accomplished" (p. 185).

As with any field of inquiry, there are a number of theories explaining the underpinnings of motivation. One such theory that is related to the influence of sociocultural factors on meaning is Maehr's (1984) Theory of Personal Investment. Maehr explains that the character of this theory is reflected in three primary propositions: (a) The study of motivation begins and ends with the study of behavior; (b) the meaning of a situation to the behavior determines behavior; and (c) the meaning of a situation to the behavior can be assessed and its origins determined. When discussing motivation, Maehr argues that ultimately the most weight should be placed on the subjective side

which he refers to as "the meaning that a person associates with the situation" (p. 117). He further explains that behavior is the initiating factor that prompts discussions about motivation since behavior relates to something that is seen, and "meaning is the critical determinant of motivation" (p. 123).

Maehr's motivational model begins with three basic facets of meaning which he says are critical in determining personal investment in a specific situation: (a) beliefs about self, (b) perceived goals of behavior in a situation, and (c) perceived alternatives for pursuing these goals or the action possibilities. With these three facets at the center of his motivational model, Maehr then explains four factors that influence these facets of meaning, the first of which is personal experience and meaning. The theorist notes that "each individual comes to any situation with a 'package of meanings' derived from past experiences" (p. 134). The second factor Maehr elaborates on is the teaching-learning experience. Within this factor he discusses social expectations and task design. With social expectations Maehr describes a classroom environment as a social organization where norms and roles come into being and social status is assigned. With task design, Maehr discusses the actual task noting that the features of the task itself may affect the meaning that the task will have for a student. The third factor that influences the facets

of meaning is information. Maehr explains this factor in relationship to behavioral options saying that the way a person (teacher) presents information may affect the way another person (student) perceives and interprets the information ultimately affecting the option the student chooses. The social-cultural context is the last factor Maehr discusses as having an impact on meaning. Maehr argues that sociocultural factors play a major role in determining meaning. A person's social and cultural background often determines what is acceptable or unacceptable for that person, therefore affecting how that person interprets and constructs meaning. Maehr elaborates by stating "to a significant extent, it is one's social-cultural group that determines that a given area is an acceptable area in which to perform. Thus, a given social-cultural group may define a task as desirable, repulsive or irrelevant" (p. 139).

The personal investment model of motivation in educational psychology research, just like the social-interactive semiotic model of meaning construction in literacy research, has the potential for creating insight into how first year composition students understand, interpret, and construct meaning from classroom writing assignments. Rogoff (1990) emphasizes that by mutually combining the efforts of the individual and the sociocultural background of the individual, research can

be quite profitable.

Significance of the Study

As the previous discussion of literature might indicate, there are various factors that contribute to the complexity of writing and its role in our educational system. Educators and researchers must not overlook how students' social and cultural backgrounds, as well as the knowledge and motivation they bring with them, affect and manipulate their interpretations and constructions of meaning of writing tasks. This study attempted to explore student responses to various writing assignments by considering not only the classroom environment and motivational influences but also the knowledge that students brought with them from their backgrounds. Through interviews, think-aloud protocols, questionnaires, and classroom observations, researchers may learn much about the knowledge and sources students use to interpret and construct meaning from writing assignments. Nicholls (1984) states that the primary goal of education should be to develop each individual student's intellectual capabilities to the fullest possible extent. However, in order to do this educators must be able to understand the social milieu in which the student is embedded (Vygotsky, 1987). Because students are embedded in a social milieu, I feel that writing should be viewed and studied from a social interactive and meaning constructive perspective.

The present study built on previous investigations of writing pedagogy exploring how composition students interpreted and constructed meaning from three class assignments which were an extended definition essay, an expository essay, and a persuasive essay. The study could contribute to the body of knowledge on the construction of meaning in written communication research because results of the study address contemporary issues in literacy studies such as cultures, contexts, and classroom discourse. As well as adding to the body of research in writing, the findings of the study can also be beneficial to teachers of composition by contributing insights into how students with various backgrounds interpret different writing assignments and construct meaning from these assignments.

Limitations of the Study

Even though a major component of the study was to investigate the sociocultural implications on meaning construction in written communication, the study did not attempt to explain every sociocultural factor influencing the complex act of meaning construction and interpretation. The study focused on four freshman composition students and attempted to explain how these students interpreted and constructed meaning from writing assignments given by the teacher of the course.

Since the investigation depended on human subjects, their backgrounds and characteristics shaped the data.

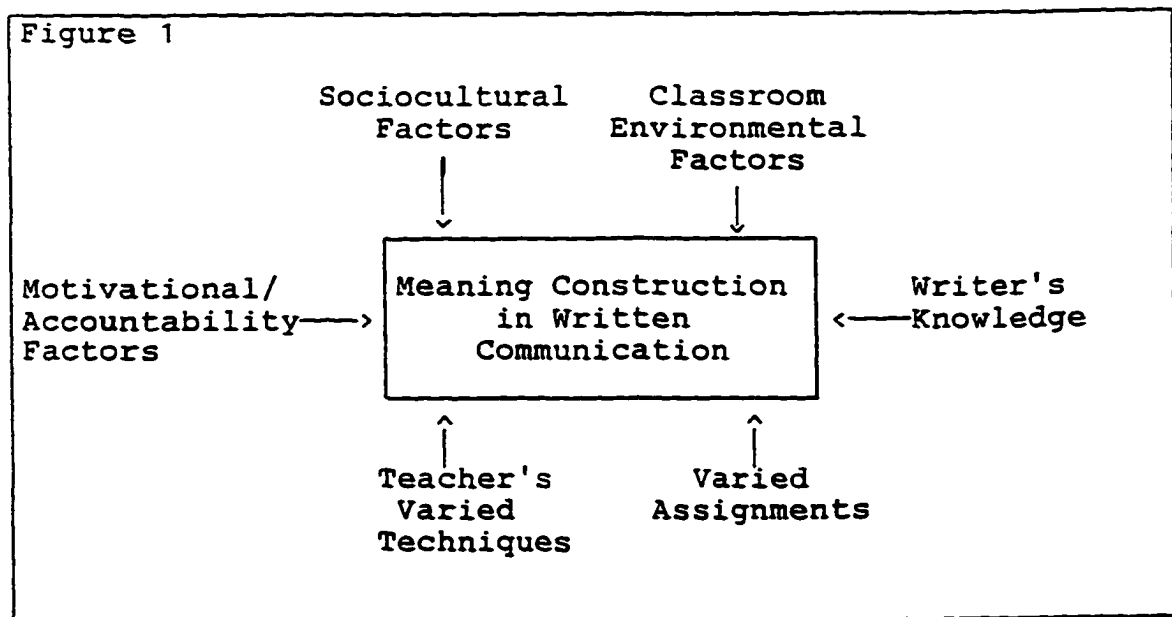
Frey, Botan, Friedman, and Kreps (1991) point out that "people aware that they are being studied often behave differently than they do when not being observed" (p. 127). Also, as Bogdan and Biklen (1992) point out, one of the dominant guidelines of ethics in research projects involving human subjects is informed consent from the participants which this study received.

The study was exploratory in nature rather than conclusive because of the limited number of participants. However, the investigation still yielded patterns in the data which portrayed sociocultural factors, personal/educational experience factors, intertextual factors, and motivational effects on writers while constructing meaning when fulfilling writing assignments. As I will discuss in a later section, two methods of data collection, observations and questionnaires, were used to elicit data from the entire class while two other means of data collection, interviews and think-aloud protocols, were used to elicit data from a volunteer sample of four participants. Some researchers contend that people who volunteer for research projects have a higher intellectual ability than people who do not (Rosenthal, 1965). Thomas (1986) argues that "regardless of the sampling procedure, samples are bound to reflect the character of the parent population at least to some degree" (p. 35).

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

The phenomenon of how students interpret academic writing tasks is a varied and complex one. In order for students' writing processes to develop, educators must look critically at the contexts in which students are asked to write and examine the practices that may hinder or enhance their writing. As discussed in Chapter One, I feel that the act of writing originates and is shaped through a social meaning constructive context (Greene & Ackerman, 1995; Newman, Griffin, & Cole, 1993; Nystrand, 1989; Smagorinsky & Coppock, 1994); therefore, this investigation used a social interactive approach to study students constructing meaning from writing assignments. Figure 1 illustrates the relationship of the factors, though not in any particular order, involved from each of the



previously discussed theories from Chapter One and how these factors contribute to meaning construction. The following is a discussion of some of the literature and research written and conducted on meaning construction and interpretation of writing tasks. Even though most, if not all, of the material discussed in the following review is intertwined with a social approach to writing, I have for organizational reasons divided the review into the categories used in Figure 1: (a) sociocultural factors; (b) classroom environmental factors; (c) writer's knowledge; (d) varied assignments; (e) teachers' varied techniques; and (f) motivational/accountability factors.

Related Literature

Sociocultural factors

The different perspectives that students bring with them from their social and cultural backgrounds can impact how they interpret and construct meaning in a classroom setting. Spivey (1990), when studying how students perform structural transformations on various tasks of composing from sources, found that all students did not perform as was expected of them. The participants, who were to write descriptive papers, were adults and teens who knew nothing about the sport of rodeo. Two of the 60 students in the study organized their reports differently from the way their peers did. One of these students wrote an advice piece informing his readers how to look cool at a rodeo

while the other student wrote a paper comparing a rodeo and a football game. Some of the questions Spivey raised in this study were: Why did these two students perform so differently from their peers? Why did they organize their texts so differently? How did the goals these students had in mind impact their planning and shaping of their texts? Another question that might be added is what were the sociocultural factors influencing the goals of these two students and ultimately how they constructed meaning from this assignment?

The way students interpret a task can also depend on their previous knowledge through their social and cultural backgrounds (Hull & Rose, 1990). Hull and Rose (1990) discuss how sometimes students' reactions to an assignment strike a teacher as being unusual or even totally off the mark due to the fact that most teachers enter the classroom with "expectations about the kind of student responses that would be most fruitful" (p. 287). This study focused on one student and how the unusual and sometimes surprising reactions and comments made by him were the product of a different cultural background knowledge. Rose, the instructor and one of the researchers, gave his college class a poem to read. Most of the class did well interpreting the general description of the poem which dealt with a girl living in a lower economic class while she was aspiring to live in a higher economic one.

However, one student, Robert, made some interesting comments. In particular, one line in the poem said that the girl shopped from a Sears Catalogue suggesting a lower income shopping; however, Robert viewed her shopping from this catalogue as being "economical." Robert then went on to say that the family wasn't really poor because, if they were, they couldn't shop from the Sears Catalogue. Hull and Rose pointed out that because of Robert's sociocultural background knowledge his definition of poverty was different from theirs and most of the other students in the class.

Taking into consideration the cultural diversity of individual students when attempting to solve problems and construct meaning from certain tasks, Rogoff (1990) concludes that "cognitive activities occur in socially structured situations that involve values about the interpretation and management of social relationships" (p. 61). Aspects such as context, social influences, and multiple meanings are considered within a sociocultural model of knowledge.

Classroom environmental factors

Some researchers have found that teachers, as well as students attempting to accomplish academic writing tasks in a classroom, must first be aware of the social environments classrooms present (Doyle, 1983; McCarthy, 1987). When defining a social environment Dewey (1944)

states:

A being whose activities are associated with others has a social environment. What he does and what he can do depends upon the expectations, demands, approvals, and condemnation of others. A being connected with other beings cannot perform his own activities without taking the activities of others into account. For they are the indispensable conditions of the realization of his tendencies.

(p. 12)

If educators view classrooms as settings which are made up of their own properties therefore shaping their own environments, then they must consider how the classroom setting affects the area of interpretation and construction of meaning when dealing with writing tasks and assignments.

McCarthy (1987) conducted a study looking at the nature of writing processes in a classroom which she referred to as socially environmental. She followed one college student's writing experiences in one class per semester during his freshman and sophomore years. She also gathered follow-up data during his junior year. McCarthy pointed out that before this student could figure out what constituted acceptable writing in each classroom, he had to first understand the social language of each classroom setting. Among other things she found that there were two social factors that influenced the student's writing

achievement in certain classes. The social factors were (a) the functions that writing served for the student in each setting and (b) the roles that students' texts played in each classroom setting. McCarthy found that these social factors were closely tied with what the student ultimately learned from and about writing in each class. The researcher concluded that when researchers investigate writing classrooms they should not only study particular writing assignments and written products but also "the social contexts those classrooms provide for writing" (p. 261).

Another study that took into consideration the classroom environment was conducted by Smagorinsky and Coppock (1994). These researchers explored how the environment of the classroom as well as cultural tool usage impacted the text of one 16 year old student. The young man in the study had suffered a hearing impairment at a young age, and the hearing loss had not been detected until he was of school age. Prior to the detection of the hearing loss, the subject had relied heavily upon communicating with others through his drawings. For the two years prior to the study, the subject had attended a public school where his academic performance had been quite poor in every area except art. At the time of the study, the student was attending an alternative school/treatment center for recovering substance abusers and performing well in the

class in which he was enrolled. Data were gathered through stimulated recall whereby the researchers used an open-ended interview stimulated by a videotape. The researchers reported that the therapeutic and instructional environment at the facility supported student-generated means of mediating thought and activity. Smagorinsky and Coppock concluded that the environment of the alternative school "has something to teach conventional classrooms about the potential for student growth that is possible through a broadening of the communication genres--and creation of multiple zones of proximal development--through which students have opportunities to learn" (p. 308).

Other theorists and researchers have also examined classroom settings. Doyle (1983) contends that "classrooms provide a continuity of experience as well as particular resources that can be used to accomplish academic tasks" (p. 189). Sociolinguists and ethnographers (Heath, 1982; Hymes, 1972) believe that oral language must be understood in the context in which it occurs. Ultimately, the classroom community should be made up of people who share common understandings of the goals they are trying to accomplish (Hymes, 1972). These common understandings would allow people within the community to communicate with one another and to accomplish their goals assuming they are all abiding by the same rules. However, when these people do not share the same rules, misinterpretation

between members of the classroom setting may occur (Hymes, 1972). A key assumption of the classroom community is that writing, like speaking, is a social activity, and "writers, like speakers, must use the communication means considered appropriate by members of particular speech or discourse communities" (McCarthy, 1987, p. 234).

Writer's knowledge

If writing is to be viewed from a social interactive and meaning constructive approach, which I discussed earlier, then the knowledge that students bring with them to an assignment must be considered. Smagorinsky and Smith (1992) explain that knowledge from a cognitive psychology view includes (a) knowledge of content, which as they explained is not simply factual knowledge of information but is also knowledge of a person's own personal experiences; (b) knowledge of form, which is the knowledge that allows a person to distinguish one thing from another according to certain features; (c) knowledge of condition, which is the knowledge of when to apply knowledge of content or knowledge of form; and (d) knowledge of convention, which is knowledge of context-dependent conventions.

Theorists emphasize the extent to which the teaching of writing is intertwined with the exploration of the topics about which students are writing. They strongly suggest a relationship between topic-specific background knowledge and the quality and interpretation of student writing

(Langer, 1984). Also, whether or not a writer possesses low knowledge on a specific topic influences the type of text that writer produces (Ackerman, 1991).

Langer (1984) investigated the relationships between topic-specific background knowledge and measures of overall quality, coherence, syntactic complexity, audience, and function in expository writing. She found evidence that different kinds of knowledge were predictive of success in different writing tasks. The students whose knowledge of a topic was well organized did better on teacher developed topics which required them to compare and contrast relevant issues. The students whose knowledge was not organized well did better on assignments that presented a thesis and required them to provide supporting evidence.

When investigating how students think and write, Walvoord and McCarthy (1990) found that some students relied in certain situations upon knowledge gained from other courses. The researchers reported that some students in their study transferred knowledge of models such as the term paper models or reflection paper models from one classroom to another. Walvoord and McCarthy went on to discuss that sometimes students either used the models incorrectly or the models were inappropriate for the new assignment. Some students did, however, beneficially apply the models learned in other courses to new assignments. The researchers concluded by stating that more research

is needed in the area of students transferring models from one classroom to another.

Ackerman (1993) contends that "just as teachers cannot assume that all students begin a reading assignment with identical backgrounds, studies of writing and learning must attend to the quality of prior knowledge brought to an act of composing" (p. 354). In order for the field of composition research to view writing as more social than developmental, researchers must not lose sight of the writer's knowledge or topic familiarity.

Varied assignments

Different kinds of writing tend to make students focus on different kinds of information, and different writing tasks make students think about information in different ways (Langer & Applebee, 1987). Langer and Applebee found, for example, that if students were asked to write a summary paper and an analysis paper, the students constructed different representations of the meaning of the assignments. These authors found that summary writing tended to lead to papers with a broader scope of content in composing and comprehending than analytic papers. They also found that summary papers tended to be written more in the students' own words than analytical papers.

Although writers may be given the same information or text to draw from when writing, each individual's own "discourse goals lead to different ways of framing content"

(Spivey, 1990, p. 266). Spivey (1984) examined how 40 college students, who were told to write reports over armadillos using three encyclopedia articles, went through what she called a recombining-reordering transformation. Spivey noted that each of the papers was unique in the ordering and combining of content, and none of the papers was structurally organized like any of the three source texts (encyclopedia articles). Even though all 40 students used the same basic pattern, the collection, ordering, and combining differed among all individual papers, and each individual paper had the author's own unique structure.

Another study that showed how writers' discourse goals lead to different ways of framing content was conducted by Dyson (1984). Dyson analyzed three kindergarten children's literacy behaviors across writing tasks. When examining the children while fulfilling a copying task, Dyson found they did not all approach the task in the same manner. Two of the children viewed the task as simply a mechanical reproduction. However, these two students showed a difference in the way they went at this reproduction. One focused on individual letters while the other focused on letters grouped between individual spaces and how those letter groups were laid out on the board. The third student, during the copying event, monitored her reproduction of the teacher's message. Unlike the other two who primarily focused on forming the letters,

this student pronounced words as she wrote them, and when copying sentences she paused to reread and access the next word to be written.

Not all writers use the same approach and structure when it comes to composing, just as not all writers bring the same knowledge with them to a composing act. And even though writers may be given the same options and text information to begin a writing task, they "use the options differently and thus form different representations of meaning" (Spivey, 1990, p. 282).

Teachers' varied techniques

Just as various writing assignments can make students focus on different information, the techniques that teachers use to approach various writing assignments can also impact the way students interpret and construct meaning. Hillocks, Kahn, and Johannessen (1983) examined the effects of two different approaches to teaching extended definition essays. The researchers contended that conventional instruction which involved giving examples of extended definitions along with the explanations of the parts of the definitions was inadequate for students to write effective definitions. Hillocks et al. felt that writing extended definitions involved very complex procedural strategies. These strategies are "(1) to circumscribe the problem generally, (2) to compare examples in order to generate criteria which discriminate between the target concept and related but

essentially different concepts, and (3) to generate examples which clarify the distinctions" (p. 276). The investigators compared the two different approaches for teaching extended definitions with students. They found that the students whose instruction emphasized procedures for comparing, contrasting, and generating criteria yielded significant pretest to posttest gains. These gains were twice those for students receiving conventional instruction which focused on model definitions.

Instructional situations were also examined by Applebee (1981). The instructional situations of Applebee's study encompassed the fields of English, mathematics, foreign language, science, social science, and business education. One of the areas that the study was designed to describe was the teachers' purposes and techniques when making various writing assignments. Applebee found that when it came to prewriting, which included "making the topic clear and conveying expectations about the dimensions of the task" (p. 73), the writing assignments were not always interpreted by the students the way the teachers intended. For example, after being given a report-writing assignment in a science class one young man commented "I didn't feel that he (the teacher) gave me enough information on what he wanted me to write about" (p. 74). This young man went on to state that he felt he had been turned loose on an unfamiliar topic. The researcher commented that the young

man's feelings and description of the prewriting time was typical of the way secondary school teachers ask students to write. Applebee further stated that in the observational segments of his study "the amount of time devoted to prewriting activities averaged just over three minutes. That included everything from the time the teacher began introducing the topic until the first student began to write" (p. 74).

Some theorists contend that instructional techniques and materials given by teachers are not presented to students in such a way as to achieve the teachers' goals for the assignment thereby affecting the extent the teachers' intentions for the assignments are fulfilled by the students. Bransford and Johnson (1972) explain that instructional materials should be preceded by prerequisite material or introductory activities that bridge the gap between prior knowledge and present tasks and assignments. They state that introductory activities will ultimately "produce writing which is both meaningful to them (students) and faithful to the ideas in the text" (p. 1).

Motivational/accountability factors

Researchers outside the area of literacy have found links between sociocultural factors and students' motivation. When investigating achievement, researchers in the field of educational psychology have found

connections between students' achievement motivation and sociocultural factors. Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura (1989) studied how often teenagers approximate the flow state in their ordinary life and how their motivation was affected by whether they were in flow or not. Csikszentmihalyi (1982) defines flow as an intrinsically motivated learning situation where appropriate levels of skill and challenge are present to help the student grow into a more complex individual. Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura used three groups of teenagers in their study and coded responses from these participants according to eight channels of the flow model. The researchers found that the first group, 47 teenagers from an Italian school with a high academic reputation, spent considerably more time in the flow than the second group, 75 U.S. teens from an above average high school, and the Italian teens spent twice as much time in the flow as the third group, 37 talented U.S. math students. In part, the researchers attributed the differences to different socialization practices saying that the Italian students' socialization practices had prepared them to "confront high challenges with an expectation of mastering them and finding them intrinsically rewarding" (p. 63). The investigators went on to discuss that the motivational structure for the U.S. students was also a product of socialization saying that socialization had tended to introduce a split between school work and free time and

had created the expectation that free time was the only area in which enjoyment could be found.

Other researchers in psychology have also attributed certain personal attributes to sociocultural practices. Goetz and Dweck (1980) linked helpless and mastery oriented responses to social rejection. To collect data on attributions for social rejection, the researchers gave children questionnaires which depicted rejection in hypothetical social situations. Children were initially classified into groups on the basis of their attributions. The ones blaming personal social incompetence for rejection were predicted to show the helpless pattern, while the children attributing rejection to other factors were predicted to display a more mastery-oriented pattern. Next, the researchers had the children write letters to see if they could be admitted into a pen pal club. After rejecting the first letters from the children, the researchers then told them they could try to get accepted into the club once again by writing second letters. Data indicated that some of the children showed a complete disruption of performance after being rejected. Thirty-nine per cent of these children initially refused to write another letter after rejection, or if they did write the second letters, these letters were exactly like the first ones. Goetz and Dweck concluded that socially helpless children were not as likely as others to formulate new

strategies when facing difficulties and that they were more likely to repeat strategies which were not effective.

As the previous literature review indicates, researchers in educational psychology view motivation as an important aspect in one's educational development. When discussing the importance of motivation and its role in education, Vygotsky (1978) points out that by ignoring a child's "incentives which are effective in getting him to act, we will never be able to understand his advance from one developmental stage to the next, because every advance is connected with a marked change in motives, inclinations, and incentives" (p. 92).

Expanding the Knowledge Base

As discussed in Chapter One, I feel that written communication is a very complex social interactive and meaning constructive act occurring among writer, text, context, intertext, and reader. Due to complexities of the act, writing is not easily understood, explained, or taught. Even though there has been a good deal of research conducted over the last two or three decades dealing with the act of writing, it would appear that the more research conducted in the area and the more knowledge we have of written communication, the more questions there are to investigate.

Nelson (1990) was one of the first researchers to explore the area of writing research dealing with whether

or not students and teachers interpreted writing assignments in the same manner. During the course of a semester, Nelson examined how 13 college freshmen interpreted and responded to the writing assignments they received in a variety of courses. Nelson found six students' responses to writing tasks did not appear to match their teacher's intentions for the task. Data for the study were collected through process logs written by students describing all aspects of the work they completed for papers, written notes, drafts, papers students produced for the class, and interviews involving both the students and the teachers. Even though the process logs allowed Nelson to examine students working under classroom conditions over extended periods of time, by the researcher's own admission, these logs did not allow her to capture the more detailed, moment by moment decisions made by the students while involved in the process of composing. A think-aloud method of data collection, which the present study employed, would allow the researcher a more in depth look at how students make moment by moment decisions when composing written work.

Although Nelson is credited with pioneering in the area of teachers' and students' interpreting writing assignments (Hayes et al., 1992), there was an earlier study conducted by Nespor (1987) that was very similar to Nelson's. Nespor concentrated on one high school English class examining how a persuasive essay assignment was

defined by the teacher and three students in particular. Nespor found that some disjunctions existed between the teacher's interpretation of the assignment and all three students. Some of the general kinds of issues that were examined when looking at the students' versions of the task included understanding of the procedures, resources, value of the product, and criteria as well as conceptualization of the task's goal, repertoire of the production system, time and effort allocation, and past experiences in the course and subject matter. However, one major issue that Nespor appears to have overlooked is cultural factors. As I discussed in Chapter One, I believe that the various social and cultural perspectives that students bring with them to the classroom can impact how they interpret and construct meaning from writing tasks and assignments. Students' attempts to construct meaning from assignments and solve problems associated with assignments are related to social values and goals (Rogoff, 1990). Newman et al. (1993) illustrate that there are "differences in the social process that allows the creative construction process to emerge more readily for some groups than for others" (p. 113).

Certain cultural factors often impact academic writing as Berkenkotter, Huckin, and Ackerman (1988) pointed out when investigating how Ackerman attempted to master literacy tasks and skills required of him in his first year in a

rhetoric doctoral program at Carnegie Mellon University. The researchers wanted to explore in detail the educational context on Ackerman's production of texts as he wrote in different courses and for different instructors. The academic community's cultural influences of textual competence in areas such as informal wording, cohesion, and coherence and the way these were interrelated to the student's writing process were major contributing factors in this study. However, there was one part of the complex sociocultural structure which was not addressed and that was a more personal account of the student's social and cultural background. For example, what was the student's cultural background; did the student's ethnic or cultural background influence his writing, and what had been his educational experience prior to his second graduate degree? These factors were not main areas of focus for the Berkenkotter et al. study; however, because my study will be focusing on students just beginning their college careers, these may be important contributing factors. Walvoord and McCarthy (1990) point out that researchers need to explore how issues such as "culture, socioeconomic class, age, or other factors influence students' approaches to texts" (p. 234).

One area of literacy research involving writing which has been sparsely addressed is motivation. Why do students engage in writing activities? What are students' motives

and goals when fulfilling written assignments? Wertsch (1985) explains that according to the Russian theorist A. N. Leont'ev, student and colleague of L. Vygotsky, . . . a motive is not a construct that can be understood in biological or even psychological terms. Rather, it is an aspect of a sociohistorically specific, institutionally defined setting. Among other things, the motive that is involved in a particular activity setting specifies what is to be maximized in that setting. (p. 212)

In order for teachers and researchers to better understand students' constructions of meaning when undertaking writing tasks, they must first examine what motivates students to engage in writing tasks. Hayes (1992) argues that "the motivation to engage in instruction is a critical factor limiting its success" (p. 133). The present study attempted to view students' motives and explore their goals for engaging in writing.

Conclusion

As discussed in Chapter One, I feel that writing should be viewed and studied from a social interactive and meaning constructive perspective. Nystrand (1989) describes the perspective as a social-interactive model of written communication. Furthermore, Moll (1992) explains that individuals should be studied dynamically within their social circumstances and in their full complexity so that

investigators can gain a more complete and valid understanding of them. In order to investigate the social interaction and meaning construction acts that students are involved in while writing, the present study was conducted in a first year composition classroom. So as to alter the context in which writing occurred as little as possible, the study focused on the writing assignments made by the instructor.

Chapter Three: Method

Communication researchers Frey, Botan, Freidman, and Kreps (1991) discuss research methods as planned, systematic processes of investigation. They proceed by stating that research is "a step-by-step manner, employing an ordered system of inquiry" (p. 7). These statements appear relatively simple. However, after reviewing previous research in the field of writing and writing pedagogy, one would certainly feel that the methods used to investigate writing are anything but simple. In fact, there have been a variety of methods and study designs used in the past to investigate writers in particular settings and to investigate writers' written products. Primarily data have been gathered through interviews, think-aloud protocols, observations, and sometimes surveys and questionnaires. Because my study primarily focused on individual students' interpretations and meaning constructions on three specific writing assignments, I chose interviews and think-aloud protocols. The interviews and think-aloud protocols allowed the four student participants to respond to the writing assignments without imposing specific answers that objective test items might have elicited. Also, in addition to these highly individualized methods, I utilized two other methods, observations and questionnaires, in order to gain insight on the influence of context within the classroom and to

shed light on how the entire class of students interpreted each specific writing assignment.

Selection of Sample

The study was conducted in a first year Composition 1213 class. The teacher and I had established a professional relationship, and she agreed to assist in the study. Data from observations and questionnaires were collected from the entire class and the teacher. In conjunction with observations and questionnaires, data from interviews and think-aloud protocols were collected from four students as well as interviews from the teacher. Each of the data collection methods will be discussed later in this chapter. The four students were recruited on a volunteer basis. To recruit the volunteer participants, I began by explaining to the class why I was there and what my interest was in learning more about how composition students interpreted and constructed meaning from writing assignments. Originally, I had six students volunteer; however, shortly after the semester began one student had to drop the class for personal reasons. A second student had a number of absences early on in the semester and because of the lack of data she was also dropped from the study. Since I intended to observe and give questionnaires to the entire class, I passed out permission letters (see Appendix A) to each student. Because most of the students were eighteen or older, I received a large portion of the

letters back that day. The students who were not at least eighteen brought the letters back over the next few days with a parent's signature.

Data Collection

Interviews

Glesne and Peshkin (1992) explain that the strength of interviewing lies within "the opportunity to learn about what you cannot see and to explore alternative explanations of what you do see" (p. 65). Interviews are generally used in two ways. They can be the primary source of data collection, or they can be used in conjunction with other methods of gathering data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). For this study, interviews were used in conjunction with think-aloud protocols, classroom observations, and questionnaires.

Chin (1994) divides interviews into two categories, structured or unstructured (sometimes referred to as open-ended) interviews. Structured interviews may involve face-to-face communication or distant communication such as a phone call. The questions are formed in advance and the investigator follows the exact wording and sequencing of the questions. The unstructured or open-ended interviews may be guided by questions formed in advance; however, the topics are usually negotiated between the investigator and the participant. This approach allows the participant to introduce topics that are significant or of interest

to him or her.

Interviewing, like other data collection methods, has both strengths and weaknesses. Literacy researchers often employ interviews when attempting to gather data on the writing process. For example, Nelson (1990) used interviews when examining how different tasks and writing situations influenced students' approaches to writing. She found that the information gained in the interviews allowed her "to compare teachers' stated goals and purposes for assigning writing with the actual goals and processes students brought to specific writing tasks" (p. 369). Other researchers contend that interviews have certain limitations when used as a data collection method. Rosenthal (1966) examined human factors that could influence data such as gender, racial or cultural factors, and the researcher's unintentional behavior. He found that with the issue of gender female investigators tended to smile more than male investigators; male investigators physically moved more than females; male and female investigators tended to be more friendly to female participants, and female participants felt male investigators were more friendly than females. With racial or cultural factors Rosenthal found that participants who were not from the same race or culture as the investigator would try to give the investigator a better or more correct response. Rosenthal also reported that the behavior of the

investigator was oftentimes influenced by his or her hypothesis or expectations thereby influencing the data gained from the participant.

Just because there are some limitations, interviews should not be discarded. As Bogdan and Biklen (1992) argue, unstructured or open-ended interviews are one of the best known representatives of data gathering. Because the last three interviews used in the present study were retrospective interviews, I was able to use the data to cross-check and compare the information from the other three methods in order to gain a richer understanding of each writer's constructive process. The retrospective interviews were open-ended (e.g., Herrington, 1985) and focused on the student's essays (e.g., Odell, Goswami, & Herrington, 1983). When discussing retrospective data Greene and Higgins (1994) point out "when researchers ask writers to reflect on concrete examples of writing, rather than writing in general, they are more likely to obtain more detailed information" (p. 123).

Even though I used unstructured or open-ended interviews for my investigation, I did use certain questions (see Appendix B) as a guide during the interview process with the teacher and the four student participants. I felt that the open-ended interviews were the most appropriate for the present investigation because they allowed me to ask questions about responses that

participants gave which were outside the realm of questions on my list. Also, the interviews contributed insight into how cultural and personal aspects influenced the understandings and interpretations of the writing assignments by the students. The students were interviewed a total of four times. Details of the procedures that I followed are explained in the last section of this chapter. During the first interview, I tried to establish a non-threatening rapport with the students. The focus for this interview ranged from questions concerning the students' backgrounds to questions concerning the students' attitudes and past experiences in writing. I also tried to assure the students during this initial interview that any information they gave me would remain between us and that I would not divulge anything we discussed to the instructor. This approach obviously helped me gain some trust because Linda, a 25 year old female, revealed some negative feelings toward writing:

Linda: I hate to write, but I don't want her [the instructor] to know that.

Q: So can you tell me why or what it is about writing that you dislike?

Linda: Oh, I don't know. It just takes so much time. Like sometimes I have to work on papers forever before I can get them right.

Linda was being honest with me when discussing her true

feelings about writing, and she seemed to trust that I would not tell her instructor her attitude toward writing.

The second, third, and fourth interviews with the students were conducted after the instructor returned each of their essays. These were open-ended interviews revolving around the individual papers. As will be discussed in the next two chapters, these interviews provided background and strategy information only alluded to in the think-aloud protocols.

The instructor was also interviewed a total of four times (see Appendix B). Like the opening interview with the students, the first interview with the instructor dealt with demographical information as well as her perspectives and beliefs about teaching writing. The following interviews were conducted after the instructor made each assignment. Each of these interviews centered around the specific assignments, the extended definition essay, the reporting information essay, and the persuasive essay.

The interviews appeared to provide a rich source of data for the study for two reasons. First, as Walvoord and McCarthy (1990) explain, interviews should be used in conjunction with other methods of collecting information in order to refine and cross-check information from the other data sources. Also the data gained from interviews should be cross-checked with other data sources because sometimes participants are not completely truthful. By

using interviews with this study, I was able to cross-check data from the think-aloud protocols, questionnaires, and observations. Second, the interviews provided the study with information about the background and demographics of the students and the teacher, therefore, giving some insight into the social and cultural backgrounds of the participants.

Think-aloud protocols

Researchers often use think-aloud methodologies to study the thought processes of people. The current investigation incorporated think-aloud protocols in order to elicit data from the four volunteer students while they were composing written assignments. According to Flower and Hayes (1980), think-aloud protocol analysis is an obvious data gathering method when investigating the composing process. Indeed numerous researchers have used think-aloud protocols to study writers composing.

Walvoord and McCarthy (1990) used think-aloud protocols in a number of ways to generate data when they investigated students' thinking and writing processes in four disciplines at three institutions. They used think-aloud tapes for students describing out-of-class interactions with classmates and parents and describe themselves as writers. They also had students use concurrent protocols while working on writing assignments. Concurrent think-aloud protocols, which is the type of protocols the present

investigation employed, involves having the participants report their thoughts continuously during various tasks (Newell & Simon, 1972). Walvoord and McCarthy felt that the protocols provided them with rich data due in part to the students' recording the tapes in various settings over extended periods of time. Witte and Cherry (1986) also used think-aloud protocols when they investigated how composing processes might differ across writing tasks of the same type and those across tasks of a different type. These investigators felt that the protocols highlighted the differences between the two types of tasks which were expository and persuasive writings and allowed them to see patterns that might have otherwise been missed.

Think-aloud protocol analysis like interviews has its limitations. Ericsson and Simon (1980, 1984) concluded that thinking aloud may slow the thought processes of participants. They went on to say that thinking aloud does not change the nature or sequence of thought processes unless participants are asked to attend to aspects they would not usually attend to. Stratman and Hamp-Lyons (1994) contend that the Ericsson and Simon theory was based upon too few studies noting that there are two crucial gaps in the existing studies. These are (a) lack of studies that examine reactivity effects during "ill-defined" tasks (such as reading, writing, and verbal information analysis); and (b) the lack of controlled investigation of possible

differences in reactivity between experts and novices.

The criticisms of think-aloud protocols should not make researchers shy away from the method. Researchers need to be aware of the potential problems of the method and take steps to control and account for them. Using any data gathering method involves trade-offs, and think-aloud protocols provide researchers with very rich and valuable data dealing with the writing process. This method gives the investigator an opportunity to look at data in light of the story they tell. Berkenkotter (1983), who studied think-aloud tapes made by her participants in naturalistic settings when she was not present, explained "the value of thinking-aloud protocols is that they allow the researcher to eavesdrop at the workplace of the writer, catching the flow of thought that would remain otherwise unarticulated" (p. 167).

The current study used concurrent think-aloud protocols in order to gain access to cognitive processes that shaped how students approached writing tasks. Four students produced protocols while composing and attempting to construct meaning from three writing assignments. The writing assignments were an extended definition essay, a reporting information essay, and a persuasive essay. Data from these think-aloud protocols revealed personal experiences, memories, reactions, and strategies the four participants used to interpret and construct meaning from

the assignments.

Questionnaires

A communication researcher's most often used method of data collection is the questionnaire or survey method (Frey, Botan, Friedman, & Kreps, 1991). This method generally asks a respondent representing a specific population questions concerning his or her beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. Oftentimes communication researchers and researchers from other fields use surveys and questionnaires to gather data about populations too large for every member to be studied. For instance, in her study of two chemical engineering classes, Herrington (1985) administered what she referred to as a "Writing Profile Survey" to 134 students. However, when she began her interviews, she only used some 21 students for her sample. The present study used questionnaires in much the same way as Herrington. Questionnaires (see Appendix C) were administered to all 22 students in the composition class after each of the three writing assignments were made. The instructor also filled out a questionnaire (see Appendix C) after making each writing assignment.

Researchers often employ surveys and questionnaires to gather concrete information in an expedient manner. Applebee (1981) designed a study which described the different forms of writing secondary students do in six subject areas, examined teacher's purposes and techniques

when making writing assignments, and illustrated the extent the assignments varied according to subject area, grade level, and patterns of instruction. A survey questionnaire was one of Applebee's tools for data collection. The questionnaire reported the attitudes toward writing, writing tasks assigned, and related instructional activities of a stratified national sample of secondary school teachers. For the present study, the main focus of the questionnaires was to gain information on whether or not the students felt they understood each assignment, felt they had prior experience writing a particular kind of essay, and felt that a particular assignment would be helpful with future class assignments or assignments in other classes. The instructor's questionnaires focused on whether or not she felt the students understood each of the assignments as well as her past experience in teaching each of the three assignments.

Questionnaires have limitations as well as strengths. If researchers are not careful, questions can be misleading or even ambiguous thereby affecting the outcome of the data. Also, samples drawn from a larger population never reflect exactly that population; therefore, "conclusions about a population can only be stated as probabilities" (Frey et al. 1992, p. 86). Yet, when questionnaires are used in conjunction with other means of collecting data as in the present study, they can produce valuable

information (Herrington, 1985; Moll, 1992). Questionnaires and observations were beneficial to the present study because they allowed me to gather data on students' perceptions about writing and about each assignment from the entire composition class. These data collection methods also allowed me some insight into how the four volunteer participants responses were similiar or dissimiliar to the responses from the other class members.

Observations

Some researchers use what is referred to as participant observations while others use the complete observer technique. Participant observations are generally used in prolonged studies where the researcher situates herself in the participants' natural setting and interacts with the participants (Herrington, 1985; Moll, 1992). With the complete observer technique the researcher has no interaction with the participants. Hodges (1994) used this method along with other methods to collect data when she investigated what she called a fact that in most writing classrooms, talk predominates. The researcher looked at the way teachers and students talked about writing and the way that talk contributed to students' achievement of college level literacy skills. From her observations Hodges concluded "that systematic, careful listening to how the teaching and learning of writing play out in course discussions will improve us as teachers" (p. 227).

I employed the complete observer technique as did Hodges (1994) when conducting observations in the composition classroom. Fieldnotes were taken from the observations every day the class met, which was four days a week for five weeks. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) point out two types of information that fieldnotes contain. The first type is descriptive. Here the researcher is concerned with capturing "a word-picture of the setting, people, actions, and conversations as observed" (p. 108). The second type is reflective which "captures more of the observer's frame of mind, ideas, and concerns" (p. 108).

A limitation when using observations to collect data, as with any data gathering tool, is the possibility that the researcher has some preconceived notions or assumptions upon entering the study. However, Smagorinsky (1995) explains that "simply by choosing a means of assessment, the researcher enters the learning environment with assumptions that a particular means of assessment is capable of determining 'learning'" (p. 203). Also, the variances of race and ethnicity between researchers and participants can be a key factor in cultural studies, even to the point of making the researcher's presence a limitation. However, again, Smagorinsky (1995) points out "when researchers enter a sociocultural setting to conduct research on developmental processes, they become part of that setting and thus become mediating factors in the very learning

they purport to document" (p. 201). He goes on to explain that rather than contaminating the environment researchers add mediational means in a student's development of learning.

Even though there are limitations with observations, we should keep in mind Vygotsky's (1978) point that a human's relationship with reality is mediated by social relationships, tools, and artifacts. And one means of gathering information about social relationships, tools, and artifacts is field observation. Being able to see the participant's world as he or she sees it and being able to see how participants interact with one another was an important aspect for the present study.

Classroom observations were recorded in the form of fieldnotes for the present study. These notes were both descriptive and reflective. The descriptive fieldnotes were used to record the details as they occurred as well as a general picture of life as it occurred within the classroom setting. The reflective part of the fieldnotes was a more personal account of the observations. As Bogdan and Biklen (1992) explain, with the reflective fieldnotes "the emphasis is on speculation, feelings, problems, ideas, hunches, impressions, and prejudices" (p. 121). These notes were labeled "O. C." for observer's comments. The observations helped to document the overall atmosphere of the classroom as well as the interactions between

students and interactions between students and teacher. Also, this method of data collection helped to explain special instructions for student writing assignments.

Procedures of Data Collection

As I discussed earlier, data for the present study were collected in a Composition 1213 class. The class met four days a week, Monday through Thursday, for five weeks. Each class meeting lasted two and one half hours. Approximately two days each week during the second half of the class period the instructor would allow students time to work on their essay assignments. During this time I took the student participants to either empty offices or classrooms nearby and had them conduct the think-aloud protocols over their present essays, or I conducted interviews with the students over their previous essays. All think-aloud protocols and interviews were tape recorded.

The first week and a half of data collection consisted of introducing myself and explaining why I was there, gathering permission letters, gathering volunteers for the think-aloud protocols and interviews, and observing the class. I also demonstrated the think-aloud procedure to the volunteer students using my own personal experience of the first hour of the first day I taught school. I chose a personal experience example because during the first week of class the students had written a personal experience essay. At the beginning of the second week,

I conducted the initial interviews with the student participants and the instructor. The first interview consisted of demographics and background information on the participants. At the end of the second week, the instructor, whom I will refer to as Ms. Johnson, verbally assigned the extended definition essay. After the assignment was made, I had all the students and the instructor fill out the questionnaire over the extended definition essay. I also interviewed Ms. Johnson at this time over the extended definition essay.

The third week the number of student participants dropped from six to four. I will refer to these four student participants as Gregg, Karla, Betty, and Linda. At this point I started collecting think-aloud protocols over the extended definition essay. Because the students were working at their own pace, they did not always produce the same number of think-alouds over each assignment. Gregg and Linda produced two think-alouds each over the extended definition essay while Betty and Karla did one think-aloud each over this essay.

On the first day of the fourth week, Ms. Johnson verbally assigned the reporting information essay. As before I conducted an interview with the instructor over this assignment and think-aloud protocols were tape recorded while student participants fulfilled the assignment. For the reporting information essay Betty produced three

think-alouds, Gregg produced two, and Karla and Linda each produced one. At the end of this week, the students received their extended definition essays back from the instructor allowing me to interview each student participant with his or her essay at hand.

The persuasive essay was assigned the last week of class. Like the previous two essays, Ms. Johnson made this assignment orally. After the assignment was made, I again interviewed Ms. Johnson. Gregg, Karla, and Betty all produced one think-aloud protocol over this assignment while Linda produced two. After Ms. Johnson returned the reporting information essays, I conducted open-ended interviews revolving around each student participant's essay. The fourth and final interview with the students was conducted after the class ended. I made arrangements with the students to interview them after they had received their persuasive essays back from Ms. Johnson.

Data Analysis Methods

As pointed out earlier in this chapter, researchers have used various methods of acquiring data when investigating the writing process. They have also used various means to analyze that data. Data analysis involves what researchers have seen, heard, and read so that they can make sense of their findings (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) and pass the findings on to others. However, before investigators can proceed with data analysis they must

first determine whether or not the analysis procedures are an appropriate match with the theoretical underpinnings of the study. Theory is an important part of data analysis and falls into two groups: (a) to explore or develop explanations of why things happen the way that they do, or (b) to confirm existing explanations of why things happen the way that they do. After a theoretical tie has been made between the study and the analysis procedures, then the investigators can proceed with the data analysis.

Exploratory research usually "investigates a topic about which little is known" (Frey et al. 1992, p. 315) thereby exploring and looking for new insights beneath partial descriptions. The present investigation was exploratory in nature and sought to examine a variety of influences and ways student writers constructed meaning from writing assignments given by the instructor and whether or not the instructor's and students' interpretations of these assignments deviated from one another.

As discussed earlier, the present study used multiple methods of collecting data incorporating interviews, think-aloud protocols, questionnaires, and observational data. The interviews and think-aloud protocols were of primary concern with the questionnaires and observational information complementing and informing the data. From examining previous literature there did not appear to be agreement on just one way to analyze interviews, protocols,

questionnaires, or observational data. However, by examining data analysis procedures from previous studies associated with writing and writing pedagogy there did appear to be agreement in that most researchers began with some form of a coding technique.

Coding

Frey, Botan, Friedman, and Kreps (1992) define coding as the "process of placing units into content categories" (p. 313). However, prior to coding investigators must first transcribe tapes and notes containing interviews, think-alouds, and observational data. After transcribing investigators begin from an established theoretical base looking for patterns and categories and then interpreting those within the context of the study. These patterns and categories eventually become the coding schemes used in the study. However, coding is not a simple process. As Smagorinsky (1994) points out "researchers do not develop coding systems in isolation, nor do they develop them whole and intact prior to their application to the data. The complete development of a coding system is recursive" (p. 10). The coding system is not the only thing that may change during data analysis. Investigators may find that their hypotheses also change. As Smagorinsky further explains "researchers are faced with the paradox that, while their hypotheses determine the coding system, often their hypotheses emerge from or are shaped by the

application of the system" (p. 11).

Coding systems represent both the import of the data and a theoretical approach to the data (Smagorinsky, 1994). For the present investigation the transcripts from the interviews and think-aloud protocols led to initial insights regarding the general patterns contained within the data and the development of coding categories. The following list contains the factors that provided the foundation for the coding system. Social, cultural, and semiotic theories of written communication emerging from the works of Newman, Griffin, and Cole (1993), Nystrand (1986, 1989), Rogoff (1990), Smagorinsky and Coppock (1994), and Vygotsky (1978, 1987) stress several factors:

1. Knowledge is not a fixed unit that teachers can simply transmit to students. Rather, knowledge is mutually constructed through a social interaction between the teacher and student.
2. With any activity occurring between two participants, each participant's actions are governed by rules of conduct that emerge from the social group to which each belongs.
3. Writing is interactive each time the reader understands and/or constructs meaning from a written text. If the reader does not comprehend, then there is no meaningful knowledge constructed. Interaction (when dealing with writing) refers to two independent variables, the reader and the writer, and not their influence on each other but

the result of their combination on meaning.

4. The words of the assignment represents signs given by the teacher who has a particular meaning in mind. These signs are then relayed to students who may or may not construct the same meaning.

5. A person must engage in a cultural activity using a particular tool in order to understand the tool's usage.

6. Mutual understanding people reach when communicating does not originate from one person or another but instead is created from both.

Along with these six factors, the coding system for the present study also took under consideration factors from Maehr's (1984) motivational theory:

7. Students who are task oriented focus their achievement behavior upon increasing their knowledge and upon improving their skills as writers.

8. Ego goals affect achievement behavior in that a student possessing these would strive to maintain a favorable perception of her ability from other people.

9. Social solidarity goals affect achievement behavior in that a student would be achieving in order to please someone other than herself.

10. Motivational behavior is affected by extrinsic rewards because students achieve in order to obtain the reward.

The foundation for the coding system analyzing the participants interviews and think-aloud protocols was

provided by these ten factors. In order to have some sense of order in the beginning stages of data analysis, I began working with the interview and think-aloud protocol transcripts on each writing assignment. When I initially began coding the data from the interviews and think-aloud protocols, I was working with the following codes:

1. social interaction (occurring between the teacher and students),
2. social rules (governed by the classroom community),
3. interactive meaning (referring to the shared meaning of teacher and student),
4. conceptualization of tasks (conceptualizing writing tasks),
5. cultural activity (particular writing assignments),
6. mutual understandings (interpretations shared by both the teacher and the student),
7. sociocultural responses (information that extended beyond the classroom),
8. appropriating prior text of self (occasions when students relied on previous papers they had written to assist with present text),
9. appropriating prior text of others (occasions when students relied on previous texts other people had written to assist with present text),
10. task oriented responses (achievement behavior focused upon increasing students' knowledge),

11. ego goals (achievement behavior focused upon a student maintaining a favorable perception of ability from others),
12. social solidarity goals (achievement behavior focused upon pleasing someone other than student),
13. extrinsic rewards (achievement behavior focused upon receiving a reward),
14. other (statements which were incidental to the acts of understanding and composing).

After reading the data from the interview and protocol transcripts and the data from the observational notes and questionnaires several times and again viewing all of this data in light of the two primary focuses of the study and the questions that guided this exploratory study, I came to realize that I was working within five major codes. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) refer to the second set of codes as "major code clumps" explaining that by placing similar data together researchers can create an organizational framework. Again, the two primary focuses of my study are: (a) to examine how first year college composition students understand and interpret classroom writing assignments and to what extent the teacher's intentions for the assignments are fulfilled by the students, and (b) to examine how students construct meaning from the classroom writing assignments and to what extent these meanings are shaped not only by personal knowledge and investment but also by social and cultural influences as

well. The guiding questions of this study are: (a) In what ways do four first year composition students' understandings and interpretations of their Composition II classroom writing assignments converge with and diverge from the teacher's intentions? To what extent do the students' meaning constructions of classroom writing assignments match the teacher's intentions? (b) How do the students' sociocultural backgrounds help or hinder them with classroom writing assignments? To what extent do the various assignments given by the instructor affect the students' interpretations and meaning constructions of the writing tasks? (c) How does the first year composition students' previous knowledge of writing impact their interpretations of present writing assignments? To what extent do students draw from previous personal and educational experiences when composing written assignments? (d) How are the four composition students' present writings influenced by prior texts? In what ways do the students' prior writings affect present texts? In what ways do prior texts of others influence the students' present texts? (e) What are the students' intentions when fulfilling classroom writing assignments? How do personal motivation and goals influence the students' intentions when completing the writing assignments?

In order to clearly relate the data from the 14 previously discussed codes, I collapsed the codes into

five major codes that directly related to my questions which guided this exploratory study. At this point I enlisted the aid of a second reader and following the lead of Smagorinsky (1997) we read the data. The first code addressed the understandings and interpretations of the writing assignments (Conceptualization of Writing Tasks). This code encompassed the concepts of the three writing assignments along with the signs that were relayed by the teacher to the students, the combined meaning shared by the teacher and a student, and interpretations and or misinterpretations shared by both the teacher and a student. This code, conceptualization of writing tasks, was divided into the following subcodes: (a) conceptualizing the extended definition essay, (b) conceptualizing the reporting information essay, and (c) conceptualizing the persuasive essay. These subcodes were then divided into instructor's version, four students' versions, and class version.

The second major code (Sociocultural Responses) took into consideration the theoretical underpinning of the study which dealt with social and cultural influences. As discussed in Chapter Two oftentimes people's social and cultural origins influence the decisions they make and the meaning they construct in certain situations. Wertsch (1991) describes a sociocultural approach as including cultural, historical, and institutional factors. For the present study the four student participants and

the instructor came from very different backgrounds. The students either had always lived within small rural settings or at least for the past few years had lived within a small rural setting while the instructor described herself as coming from a larger more metropolitan background. This section, sociocultural responses, included statements in which the participants relied on their social and cultural backgrounds and values to construct meaning from the three writing assignments.

For the third major code consideration was given to the educational context of certain responses (Personal/Educational Responses). While coding the data for the present study, I found that the personal/educational statements and the sociocultural statements were oftentimes difficult to differentiate. For the most part the personal/educational experience responses were statements that dealt directly with personal situations revolving around the participants' education in some manner including interaction between the teacher and the student and the social rules governed by the classroom community.

The fourth code (Intertextual Appropriation Responses) dealt with the students appropriating information from prior texts while composing present texts. Writers often use syntactics, language, and other techniques and conventions from prior texts in intertextuality. Wells (1996) argues that the main function of writing involves

mediating, recalling, and reflecting. The two subcodes within the third code, intertextual appropriation responses, were (a) prior text of self and (b) prior text of others. Prior text of self referred to those occasions when the students relied on previous papers they had written to assist with present texts. Prior text of others referred to occasions when the students used prior writings of other people while composing present texts.

Last, the accountability factors of the participants (Motivational/Accountability Responses) were considered. Applying motivational influences which are usually derived from psychological perspectives to the area of literacy research is relatively new. However, researchers such as Hayes, Schriver, Hill, and Hatch (1990) feel that developing and applying effective approaches for studying motivational influences in literacy research must be addressed. The fifth code, motivational/accountability responses, referred to instances when the student participants discussed what impacted their reasons for engaging in writing tasks and encompassed responses that dealt with task orientation, ego goals, social solidarity goals, and extrinsic rewards. There were two subcodes within this code. The subcode entitled stemming from self illustrated students' responses that focused their motivation and accountability as coming from themselves. The subcode entitled stemming from others directed student

responses in which the motivation and accountability came from someone or something other than the student.

The information gained from the participants interviews and think-aloud protocols that dealt with the five previously discussed codes is addressed in Chapter Five. Table 1 represents the coding system in a condensed format.

Table 1

Coding System

Conceptualization of Writing Tasks

Conceptualizing the Extended Definition Essay

instructor's version

four students' versions

class version

Conceptualizing the Reporting Information Essay

instructor's version

four students' versions

class version

Conceptualizing the Persuasive Essay

instructor's version

four students' versions

class version

Sociocultural Responses

Personal/Educational Responses

Intertextual Appropriation Responses

Prior text of self

Table 1 Continued

Prior text of others

Motivational/Accountability Responses

Stemming from self

Stemming from others

Even though the data from the questionnaires and observations were not coded, this information was analyzed and used to cross check the information from the two primary data collection methods. The questionnaires provided information dealing with each assignment from the entire class as well as the instructor. This information is discussed in Chapter Five. Numerical quantification of the questionnaire data in the form of bar graphs is also provided in Chapter Five. Investigators often use tables or graphs constructed to picture the data because these provide quick references for the information (e.g., Wallace & Hayes, 1992). Also, the observational data provided much of the setting and context information which is discussed in the next two chapters.

Chapter Four: Contexts of the Study

As I discussed in the previous chapters, I feel that the act of writing originates and is shaped through a social meaning constructive context. Therefore, I used a social interactive approach to the present study of students interpreting and constructing meaning from classroom writing assignments. As Wertsch (1991) argues, the sociocultural approach includes institutional, historical, and cultural factors, and Vygotsky (1978, 1987) claims that higher mental functions in the individual have their origins in social life. Given that the theoretical basis of this study rests on these sociocultural tenets, this chapter lays the foundation for the contexts and backgrounds of the participants.

College

The city, where the college that I used in my study was located, had a population of 15,000. I will refer to this city as Lakeview. The setting for the present study was a rural community college in the Midwest that I will refer to as Lakeview Community College. The college had a student enrollment of approximately 1700. The student population was made up of both traditional students, students who were approximately 18 years of age and graduated from high school the previous spring, and nontraditional students, students who had not entered college immediately after high school graduation. In my

first interview with Ms. Johnson, she explained that part of the faculty and most of the students came from a different background than she. Ms. Johnson had always lived in large metropolitan areas as opposed to the rural setting of this community college. She stated:

Here is completely different than what I am use to. I love the administration. I love the students. I have a good time, and I'm not like them at all because for the most part the students come from farms and rural towns. I take advantage of this in the classroom sometimes because I set myself up to be the stupid city girl, and it gives them an area of empowerment. It makes them feel good when they know something about something that I'm clueless on. But no, I don't have anything at all in common with these people. But, you know, that's okay because I feel like everybody is more opened minded and it's sort of fun.

The college offered a variety of 1000 and 2000 level courses with the largest student enrollment in the nursing program. Since there was not any residency housing on the campus, most of the students commuted from smaller towns and communities in the area. Three of the four student participants said they chose the college because it was close to their home, and it was cheaper than other colleges in the area. Karla, the fourth participant, said:

I decided to come here because the classes are smaller than at a couple of other colleges I could have went to and because I could take a lot of my classes at night. You see, I work at an elementary school during the school year, so night classes are good for me. Even though two of the students told me that they would be attending four year universities in the fall, the student participants appeared to be happy with their choice of the community college.

Researcher's Role

Before continuing I would like to explain why I chose a rural community college setting for my study. First, I grew up in a rural area in southeastern Oklahoma. The public school that I graduated from had an enrollment of around 600 students. After graduating from a state college, I then went to work teaching English at a rural school in southwestern Oklahoma. Therefore, the rural school has been a significant factor in my life for a number of years.

Another reason I chose the small college setting is because I teach Composition I and II in a rural community college; therefore, it would be very beneficial to me to gain more knowledge into how these students construct meaning from writing tasks and assignments. Van Maanen (1988) argues that "to write an ethnography requires at a minimum some understanding of the language, concepts,

categories, practices, rules, beliefs, and so forth, used by members of the written-about group" (p. 13). Even though I did not consider my study an ethnography strictly speaking, I did find, just as I found with my first teaching assignment, that being familiar in some aspects with the language, practices, and beliefs of the rural college culture was beneficial to me as a researcher.

The last reason I chose the rural college setting for the present study was that after reviewing recent studies I found that most of the research conducted in the area of writing has centered around large metropolitan public schools and universities, thereby overlooking community colleges and rural settings. And because I consider myself a member of the rural educational setting, I felt a need to delve deeper into this culture and report my findings to the many other educators who work and live in this culture. Green (1992) observes that when researchers are studying their own cultures "we must ensure that the familiar will become strange so that we can continue to examine and reexamine our ordinary actions and beliefs, as well as the questions, issues, and phenomena we study" (p. 31). By doing this Green contends that educators "may come to understand central issues facing education in new ways by making visible aspects of today's complex, multifaceted, multicultural world that are currently hidden from view" (p. 31).

As I explained in Chapter 3, my role as a researcher for the present study was that of an observer. I arrived each day approximately five to ten minutes early so that I could listen and observe the students before class started. In the beginning my presence may have kept the students from talking freely before class; however, as the semester progressed they seemed not to notice me. For example, the second day after the extended definition essay was assigned I overheard a discussion between two students. Karla, one of the students who volunteered to participate in my study, and another young lady discussed how they were not sure if they really understood the assignment. The young lady told Karla that she felt that she understood the assignment until she went home and looked up the term that she was defining for her essay and the term had some 40 definitions. I heard other pieces of information in my pre-class observations which I incorporated in the next chapter.

The students were not the only ones who became used to my presence in the classroom. In the last interview with Ms. Johnson, she commented:

In the beginning I was nervous about your being in there, but once I got used to it, I quit caring. I was real self conscious probably the first three or four days of the semester. I was thinking what's she going to think, did I do that right? But after

that I quit thinking about it and thought of you as part of the class.

Noticeably, Ms. Johnson's statement that I became part of the setting is in agreement with some researchers' views on conducting research in sociocultural settings. According to Smagorinsky (1995), when a researcher enters a sociocultural setting to collect data on developmental processes, the researcher actually becomes part of the observed setting.

Class

The classroom that I gathered my research in was quite large with four huge windows on the north wall that provided a good deal of sunlight. There were blackboards across the east wall and a desk for the instructor in front of them. The room housed some 35 desks for students. I remember wondering before class the first day if all of the seats would be filled by Composition II students; however, they were not. There were 22 students in the class the first day, but only 17 students finished the class. The students varied in age from approximately 18 to 35. The class was composed of mostly females with only four male students. There were four African-American students and two students who appeared to be Native American.

Ms. Johnson began class the same way each day. She came in and wrote a topic on the board; students were

expected to write in their journals over this topic for the first five to ten minutes of class. Topics ranged from "Why do I have to take English?" to "Violence and Athletics." As a whole the students in this class were very quiet. Oftentimes when Ms. Johnson asked questions no one would answer until she called out a specific name. During my first interview with Ms. Johnson, she commented, "I'm not sure that I have ever had a class as quiet as these people. It's really difficult for me to engage them in a classroom discussion about anything." Even though the class was quiet and difficult to engage in classroom discussions, in another interview Ms. Johnson commended the students on how hard they worked.

What impresses me a lot and what impresses me every semester with my students is how hard they work and how much they try. I know they're really, really trying to do it right, and they're really, really trying to get it right, even if they do not. And so far this semester I have only had a couple of students who have not turned in everything to me.

In the last interview with Ms. Johnson, she made an interesting comment about two overall personalities in the class saying that some of the students had "a two year college mentality" and others had "a four year college mentality." She stated:

You can see the difference. It's a four year college

mentality rather than a two year college mentality. I think--this sounds arrogant on my part--I don't know, maybe they feel there's more at stake. I think the fact that four year college bound just simply means they're better students. Or if nothing else, they perceive themselves as better students. Whether they are actually better or not, they think of themselves as four year college bound.

Ms. Johnson made this comment when referring to all the students and all of the essays that they wrote during the course of the semester. She went on to explain that she could usually tell which students were four year college bound generally because they were more serious about their work and more eager to learn.

Participants

The following section deals with background and demographic information on the four student participants and the instructor. From a sociocultural perspective the participants' backgrounds have the potential of providing rich information adding to the understanding of the underlying sociocultural factors which can impact how students interpret and construct meaning in a classroom setting. Brandt (1990) believes that personal life experiences and cultural ideologies of both writers and their readers affect how the written texts are viewed by all parties. Because the theoretical underpinnings of

this study rest on the tenet that an individual's understanding and meaning construction is affected by the composition of that person's background, the following information was beneficial to my study.

Students

Karla, a 33 year old female, was the oldest student participant in the study. She attended high school in a metropolitan area about 30 miles from Lakeview. Her graduating class had approximately 250 students in it. As Karla spoke of her high school days, she laughingly told me at that time in her life she was more interested in her social activities than her academics, and she graduated with a C average. She went on to say that now she regretted her foolishness and wished that she had applied herself more in her classes. She told me that neither of her parents had a college degree; however, her mother wanted her to attend college after high school, but Karla had other ideas. After graduating she worked at various jobs for a couple of years until she was married. Presently, Karla was living about ten miles outside Lakeview in another community with her husband, who was a plumber, and her two daughters.

For the last four years Karla had worked as a teacher's aide in the elementary school in her home town. The teacher she worked under and some of the other faculty members encouraged her to go to college and get a degree in

education. Karla's major was elementary education. Upon earning her degree she wanted to teach in the lower elementary grades. At the present time she was in her second semester at Lakeview Community College and enrolled in a speech class along with her Composition II class. In the fall she was planning to enroll in math, history, art, and humanities courses.

When I asked Karla about her high school English classes, she told me that she did very little writing. The only specific paper she remembered writing was a research paper her senior year. The paper dealt with the life and background information of Virginia Woolf. For the most part Karla's English classes consisted of reading literature. She commented:

Just to be real honest, I don't remember very much about what I read or was supposed to read. I just know that that's all we did was read. I didn't like to read, so I'm not sure how much of it I read or how much of it I cheated on and just asked someone what a story was about.

Karla did say that she wrote essays in her Composition I class the previous semester. She remembered writing two narrative essays, one cause and effect essay, and one persuasive essay. She commented that she enjoyed writing the narratives most of all because she wrote about herself and her family, but she felt that she wasn't a very good

writer because "my grammar is not very good." When I asked her what she meant by grammar, she responded "things like commas, fragments, and, oh yeah, where to begin new paragraphs." Karla explained that these were the areas that her Composition I teacher frequently marked on her essays.

The next volunteer participant I used in the study was Linda. Linda was a divorced single parent. She was 24 years old and had a four year old son. Linda lived with her mother and father in a neighboring town, east of Lakeview, where she graduated from high school. Even though she had lived in the same town for the last eight years, she explained that she attended many schools growing up because her father was in the Air Force. Linda's father, who was now retired from the Air Force, worked as an accountant and her mother was a homemaker. She had an older brother and sister who both had bachelor degrees. Linda explained that her family was very supportive of her going to school, and her mother and father helped with her son when they were needed.

For the last two years Linda had attended a four year university, located about 40 miles from Lakeview, where she was majoring in elementary education. When I asked why she had chosen this major, she explained that teaching elementary school was something she always wanted to do. Later, when I asked Linda why she was taking her Composition

II class at that time at Lakeview she explained that Composition I was difficult for her, and she dreaded taking Composition II. She chose Lakeview Community College because it was closer than her regular university and she only needed to take the one class. Two years earlier she had wanted to attend Lakeview, but she couldn't work out a schedule at the time that would accommodate her son.

When I was asking Linda about her background with writing in other classes, I went back to her comment about having a difficult time in her Composition I class. She told me that she wrote either four or five essays in the class and received an A on only one paper. When I asked her specifically what kind of problems she had with her essays she responded:

I'm not sure really. I mean I've never really liked to write, but I would spend hours and days on papers. I even asked my dad for help with them because it was kind of weird going back to school. When I would get through with one, I'd think that this sounds great. Then I would get B's on them. I even got a C on one. I don't really know. I sure hope this class goes better.

Linda said that she wrote a great deal in her English classes in high school; however, she added that her high school teachers rarely made writing assignments that were over a paragraph or one page in length. Linda related

that even though she did not enjoy writing in high school or in college that she made B's and C's in all of her high school English classes and her Composition I class.

The third participant was an 18 year old female whom I will refer to as Betty. Betty appeared to be very talkative and outgoing. She commuted from a small community approximately 50 miles from Lakeview. She graduated from high school the previous spring and was the valedictorian of her graduating class which had a total of 15 students. Betty lived with her stepmother and father. When she was discussing her family she disclosed "half of them (Betty's family) barely made it through high school, and none of them ever went to college. Actually, I'm the first in my whole family to ever go to college." When I asked her whom her whole family included, she said "my parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and people like that." Betty went on to say that her stepmother and father very much wanted her to get a college education. She also explained that she was attending college at the present time on a special program. This program which was set up for underprivileged students who would not normally have the opportunity to attend college was paying for Betty's tuition, books, and fees. Betty explained that even though her parents wanted her to attend college she would not have been able to had she not gotten everything paid. Therefore, she viewed the financial help she was getting

as the main reason that she was able to attend college.

Betty intended to major in computer science and politics. She became interested in computers her last two years in high school when she took programming and Word Perfect classes. Politics interested Betty because she felt that "the government needs help." Betty took Composition I earlier in the summer and was presently enrolled in Composition II and government. In the fall she would be attending a four year state university where she received a scholarship. The scholarship was associated with her being hearing impaired. I was surprised to learn this because I did not notice any hearing problems.

When I asked Betty how she felt about writing, she said, "It's all right; I mean I never really had to do much of it in high school." She explained that her high school English classes basically consisted of reading and verbally analyzing literature. Coming from a very small rural school, she had the same English teacher for four years. Betty disclosed that other than answering questions on worksheets and short essay questions on tests her writing assignments consisted of book reports her freshman and sophomore years and research papers her junior and senior years. In her Composition I class she wrote four essays. She said that even though she wasn't used to writing that much she still enjoyed the class because the teacher always told the class exactly what she wanted, and Betty liked

this. Betty stated:

You know, she told us she wanted a minimum of two pages but no more than three. She didn't care about word counts or anything like that, and I always knew what things she wanted us to write about. And she also told us exactly when to turn in papers, like deadlines . . .

Betty went on to add that not knowing exactly what was expected of her was one thing that sometimes made her feel uneasy about assignments in her Composition II class. Betty's remarks about her present composition class are discussed in the next chapter. Research papers tended to be her favorite type of writing. She explained, "I guess it's weird, but I like finding out about things. You know, like the library, finding things out about something and then writing about it."

The last student participant was an 18 year old male whom I will refer to as Gregg. He commuted from a rural town 12 miles north of Lakeview. While Gregg was discussing his home town, he told me that "the only claim to fame we've got is the oldest bar in Oklahoma." Gregg attended the same school for 13 years which included his kindergarten year. Like Betty, Gregg graduated from high school the previous spring. Unlike Betty, Gregg said he should have done better in high school because his grade point average was only a 2.0. Gregg's mother and father operated a third

generation family farm which according to him wasn't doing well financially at the time. Gregg described his work on the farm as being difficult and tiring. He said that he was the "general flunky" who drove a tractor, fed cattle, and fixed anything that broke down. Gregg's mother and two younger siblings also did their share of work on the farm. Gregg's father worked at a local factory during the week in order to make ends meet. Gregg disclosed that his parents very much wanted him to get a degree, but the main reason he was attending college was "basically, I just want to get off the farm. I want to get a good job somewhere away from that farm."

Gregg was in his second semester in college and chose athletics and history as his majors. Eventually, he wanted to coach football and teach history. He recently enrolled in general biology, United States history to 1877, United States government, and fundamentals of speech for the fall semester at Lakeview. After finishing his first two years of college at Lakeview, he planned on attending a four year state university about 40 miles from his home. Gregg told me that he decided to attend Lakeview Community College because the tuition was cheap, and he could commute to school instead of paying for an apartment or a dorm room.

Gregg said that he never really enjoyed writing because he did not feel that he was a very good writer. While in high school Gregg had the same English teacher for his

ninth, tenth, and eleventh grade years. During these years the classes consisted of grammar and some literature. When I asked him specifically what kinds of writing he did in these classes, he responded, "Well, we had to like rewrite a lot of sentences and paragraphs and correct things in them like periods and commas and stuff like that." Gregg's senior English class consisted of reading literature and responding to the readings orally in class. He also told me that he was supposed to do a research paper his senior year, but he failed to turn in the assignment. Gregg described his Composition I class, in which he made a C, as difficult.

We had to really write a lot. We had to come in every day and write for like five to ten minutes in a journal. We could write about anything we wanted, but, you know, it's kind of hard sometimes. I mean, it's hard to come up with something.

Gregg wrote what he considered two major papers, a narrative essay and a persuasive essay, in Composition I. When I asked him which essay he enjoyed writing the most, he wasn't very enthusiastic about either but said, "I guess the narrative one because it was easier."

Instructor

Ms. Johnson was 28 years old. In my interviews with her, she was always quite talkative and relaxed. The demographic interview began with a discussion of her family

and background. Ms. Johnson was single and lived alone; however, she said that she was very close to her family who lived only a short distance from her. Originally, she was from a large metropolitan area back east, but she had lived in the Southwest for the last 16 years.

Ms. Johnson explained that her family had a great influence on her becoming a teacher.

My family has a tradition of teachers. My mother and aunt are teachers. Even my great grandmother and great aunt were teachers. It's a family thing. Actually, I wanted to be a piano performance major, but my family pointed out to me that I at least needed to get a degree that I could fall back on, if the piano playing didn't work out, and they were right . . . Everything has worked out great because I love teaching and I still play the piano as a hobby and really enjoy it.

Another way Ms. Johnson's family had impacted her life was through religion. She related that she came from a very religious background and felt that this background often enhanced her ability to communicate with her students because "after all we are in the Bible Belt."

Ms. Johnson described herself coming from an upper middle class urban background. Culturally, she saw herself as quite different from her students at Lakeview. During one interview she stated "I don't have anything at all

in common with these people, but I don't think that is the case with my other comp classes." As well as teaching at Lakeview, Ms. Johnson also taught two sections of composition at a state university near her home. She explained that a number of her university students were from upper middle class urban backgrounds like herself. And, like herself, these students were getting degrees in order to maintain their standards of living. Ms. Johnson saw her students at Lakeview as somewhat different saying that "a lot of these kids come from really small towns and farms and they're getting degrees so that they can change their lives." Ms. Johnson appeared to have a thoughtful and clear understanding of her student population. This assessment of the students at Lakeview Community College agreed with what the student participants told me during their interviews.

Even though Ms. Johnson was a bit more formal in the classroom than she was during our interviews, she still possessed the same friendly energetic personality. As mentioned earlier at the beginning of each class, she gave the students a journal topic and asked them to write for about ten minutes. While taking roll each morning, she tried to say something personal to one or two students. For example, one morning she asked one of the students how her young son was feeling. It appeared that Ms. Johnson was well liked by her students.

Ms. Johnson's degrees included a Bachelor of Arts in English Education and a Master of Arts in English with an emphasis in creative writing. She began her teaching career in public schools where she taught eighth and ninth grade English classes for a year and a half. She disclosed to me that she left public schools because she did not feel that she was a strong enough disciplinarian for that age of students. In the fall she would begin her fifth year of teaching composition at the college level and said that she thoroughly enjoyed every minute of it.

When I asked Ms. Johnson what her major objectives were when teaching composition, she responded:

I want every student to be successful. I want every student to understand the techniques of composition writing such as introductory paragraphs, thesis statements, documentation, and keeping a balanced tone. Although I don't think I'm usually successful at this, I want them to be thoughtful in their composition process. Also, I want them to take pride in their work. It seems to me that people who are successful writers take pride in their work. Just because you write something doesn't necessarily mean it's good, but if you take pride in your work you will revise the writing until it's at least better. Every student's best isn't publishable material. That's why I grade a lot on effort. Therefore, it

is important to me to instill pride in students so that it shows in their writing.

Summary Comments

The previous biographical section dealing with each participant lays the foundation for the beginning of understanding how meaning was constructed in the one composition classroom involved in this study. Brandt (1992) emphasizes that when delving into students' literacy one must consider the roots of students' reasoning. The next chapter uses both concurrent and retrospective accounts of the participants making meaning from the three previously described writing assignments as well as observational and questionnaire data collect from the entire class of students.

Chapter Five: The Findings

The following chapter is organized according to the five major codes: conceptualization of writing tasks, sociocultural responses, personal/educational responses, intertextual appropriation responses, and motivational/accountability responses, that were described in the coding section of Chapter Three. The information gathered during the investigation is presented according to these categories that emerged across the data sources, rather than according to categories based on data collection methods. Therefore, the results reported in the following sections emerged from more than one data source. Each of the following sections directly relates to one of the questions that guided this exploratory study.

Conceptualization of Writing Tasks

One of the primary focuses of the present study was to investigate to what extent college composition students understood and interpreted classroom writing assignments and to what extent the teacher's intentions for the assignments were fulfilled. Therefore, the following discussion focuses mainly on where disjunctions occurred between the teacher's intentions for making the assignments and the students' understandings and interpretations of the assignments. By doing this I hope to identify the elements which can lead to confusion between teachers' intentions and students' interpretations. Before beginning

this discussion, however, I would first like to relate the course description of the Composition II class according to the Lakeview Community College Catalogue. According to this catalogue the course description was as follows: English Composition II offers practice in writing themes which may be based on contemporary readings. Also, the course offers instruction in research technique. A research paper is required.

The code, conceptualization of writing tasks, was divided into three subcategories which were conceptualizing the extended definition essay, conceptualizing the reporting information essay, and conceptualizing the persuasive essay. The data from each of these subcategories are discussed in the following order: teacher's version, four students' versions, and class version. The information discussed under the code, conceptualization of writing tasks, relates to the first guiding question of this exploratory study: (a) In what ways do four first year composition students' understandings and interpretations of their Composition II classroom writing assignments converge with and diverge from the teacher's intentions? To what extent do the students' meaning constructions of classroom writing assignments match the teacher's intentions?

Conceptualizing the Extended Definition Essay

Instructor's version.

During my interview with Ms. Johnson over the extended

definition essay, she explained that the last three essays for the class were all "related to the same topic." First, the students were to "find areas of disagreement." The example she gave was the "death penalty." The instructor then related that for the extended definition essay the students needed "to think about what's at the root of their topic." She said that a student choosing the death penalty as the topic for the last three essays might choose the term "justice" to define for the extended definition essay if this person felt that justice was at the root of the death penalty. At this point she explained that the student should "look up justice in the dictionary and expand that definition." There was no length set to the assignment such as a word count or a specific number of pages, and the main goal or objective of the assignment was to have students thoroughly examine their controversial issues.

The following information deals with Ms. Johnson making the extended definition essay assignment to the class. Most of this information came from observational notes. Ms. Johnson began with a discussion of constructing persuasive or argumentative papers when making the extended definition essay assignment. Next, she told the students that they needed to think of an area of disagreement such as "the death penalty or abortion" and find out facts about the argument. The students were to use the same topic for the next two or three papers. (In one of my first

interviews with Ms. Johnson, she remarked that she wasn't sure if she would have time to assign the last paper in this series or not. However, all three essays were eventually assigned to the class.) From this point, the instructor then moved into a discussion of the definition of words using the death penalty and abortion as examples. She told the students that they should begin their definition essays with a dictionary definition and then "expand" upon this definition. Ms. Johnson used frogs and toads as examples and asked the class the differences between the two. The class had very few questions after Ms. Johnson made the assignment. One young lady asked if she might use "child abuse" as her controversial issue. Ms. Johnson told her she could. The instructor then suggested "discipline, punishment, or abuse" as examples of terms the young lady might use for the extended definition essay. After this the instructor asked the class to get into groups of their choice with two or three students in each group and "generate topics which might be used for the next three essays." After the groups had been working a few minutes, one group called Ms. Johnson over saying that they weren't sure what to do. She told them that they needed to come up with some areas of disagreement. She told the group that, if she were trying to come up with an example from her own field, she might use "should freshman composition instructors teach grammar."

The students worked in groups for about 15 minutes. After the group work Ms. Johnson put the following sentence on the board: "According to Webster's dictionary (your term) 'morality' is defined as "quote the definition" (p. ?)." She told the students that they could use this sentence to begin their extended definition essays. She then told the students that this definition might not be adequate. From this point she said that they needed to tell why the definition was not adequate and "you need to more closely define your terms and in the next two or three paragraphs give your take of the definition."

The day after initially making the extended definition essay assignment, Ms. Johnson began the discussion over this assignment by asking how many of the students had a topic for the extended definition essay. Approximately half of the students raised their hands. Next, the instructor told the class that when they were writing formal papers to deal with three things. She put a triangle on the board and wrote ethos, pathos, and logos at each point. After ethos she wrote "ethics integrity (must respect ethics of other authors-if you don't-don't use book.)" After pathos she wrote "emotions-emotional appeal (does the author only use emotions or does he use facts.)" After logos she wrote "logic-do the facts make sense-are they organized logically?" Then Ms. Johnson once again told the students that their introductory paragraph should include their

term, the dictionary definition, and the area of incompleteness. She also told them that their body paragraphs should "expand" the definition that they used in the introductory paragraph.

When Ms. Johnson filled out the questionnaire over the extended definition essay, she indicated that she strongly agreed that she had prior experience in teaching this type of essay. She also strongly agreed that the extended definition essay would be useful to the students when they wrote future papers. However, when she responded to the statement that the students understood how to complete the assignment, she circled that she agreed with the statement, but she wrote the word "hope" above her answer. Obviously, Ms. Johnson had some reservations as to whether or not the students had understood and interpreted the assignment the way she had intended.

Four students' versions.

With the extended definition essay all four students appeared to agree that they needed to come up with a term and define that term using a dictionary; however, either in the concurrent protocols or the retrospective interviews three of the students expressed confusion about what they should do after they stated the dictionary definition.

Gregg related:

Liberty is what my term is going to be. That was her [Ms. Johnson's] idea. I wanted to do amendment

but she said liberty. Okay, let's see liberty. In Webster's Dictionary liberty is defined as freedom or release from slavery, imprisonment. That needs more. What to write now. Let's see. I think she [Ms. Johnson] meant to give my personal definition or maybe she meant to just stay with theirs? Yeah, I--I'm so confused.

Karla also expressed some doubt as to what she should write after the dictionary definition. In Karla's think-aloud she stated:

Okay, I'm not sure about any of this so I'll just start, but cause she said she wanted a definition, I looked up the definition of discipline. Discipline is defined as punishment that corrects, molds, or perfects; control gained by obedience or training; orderly conduct; a system of rules governing. Now, I wasn't sure if I was supposed to use one of the definitions or all the definitions so I just left them. Now, I also looked up rules and this definition says . . . Now, on these definitions I'm not sure how to write them. Do I put commas, colons . . . Okay, now after the dictionary what do I do?

Even though Gregg and Karla understood that they needed to write the dictionary definition of their terms, they did not understand how to "expand," the term Ms. Johnson used when making the assignment, the definition. Not only

was Karla confused about what to write after the definition, but it appeared that she relied heavily on the definitions themselves in her paper. She did not simply write a single definition, but she incorporated all the definitions in the dictionary on two terms. Ackerman (1991) found when studying how writers in two disciplines used topical and rhetorical knowledge that people with low knowledge of an area tended to rely more on source texts than people who were more familiar with the topic. Those writers who were more familiar were more apt to include "new" information in their essays. Later, during a retrospective interview Karla revealed to me that even though her topic was an issue that she felt strongly about she had never written a paper over child abuse, and she had never written an extended definition essay prior to this one. Perhaps Karla was relying so heavily on the dictionary when writing her essay because she found herself in new territory.

During a retrospective interview with Betty, she expressed some confusion about the guidelines that she was supposed to follow when writing her extended definition essay as well as how to expand the definition.

Betty: At the first of class, she told us that there was one rule about the class: There are no rules. So everybody's going like cool. And then on second thought after she made the assignment we were going like, oh, shit we have no idea what we're doing here.

Q: So, what was confusing?

Betty: She was confusing about what she expects. It's not specific enough. Half of us thought it [the extended definition essay] was going to be like 500 words long. This girl even asked her after class one day and she said that. Then, like the next day or so, she says it's going to be a page long. Half of us are going like, God I wish she would have just told us because some of us already had 500 words.

Q: Oh, at the beginning of the assignment, she told you that the essay should be 500 words . . .

Betty: Well, she told that one girl. Then, towards the last day when she finally gave us that stuff it could be one page long. And half of us had already written like 500 words and plus. She needs to be a little bit more specific instead of there are no rules.

Q: Did you find anything else confusing?

Betty: Yeah, I was sort of confused about the definition, so I finally went by and talked to my high school teacher, and she told me that I might use like different people's definitions.

Q: And your term was?

Betty: Violence. So I did like my definition and then society's and everybody else's view of it.

Like Gregg and Karla, Betty was also having problems

understanding what Ms. Johnson meant by expanding the definition. When faced with this confusion, Betty relied upon a former teacher. Betty's discussion of the assistance that her high school teacher provided her is discussed in a later section in this chapter. In addition to Betty's confusion about expanding her definition, she was also having problems with the guidelines given her by Ms. Johnson. She understood Ms. Johnson to say that there were no rules; however, it appeared that the instructor did have some criteria in mind because as Betty pointed out Ms. Johnson eventually told the students that their papers should be one page in length. Doyle (1983) points out when students are given a list of guidelines for producing written papers that these guidelines can be a coping strategy that some students often rely on. In Betty's case she felt that she had received the guidelines too late; therefore, Betty did not feel that the guidelines were beneficial to her when composing her essay and this frustrated her.

When I asked Linda how she interpreted the assignment, she responded, "She told us to get the definition of our words out of the dictionary and then write about our topics." This statement seemed to match Ms. Johnson's intentions for the assignment. However, during the retrospective interview with Linda, she pointed out her concluding paragraph saying, "I thought we were supposed

to give our opinions somewhere, but she said I shouldn't have." Ms. Johnson had remarked on Linda's paper that the argumentative essay would come later. Therefore, Linda had misinterpreted the point of including her opinion in this essay. Perhaps one contributing factor to Linda's misinterpretation and confusion was that Ms. Johnson began the extended definition essay assignment with a discussion of argumentative/persuasive papers.

After reading and analyzing the retrospective and concurrent protocols, it appeared that all four students' intentions and interpretations in beginning the extended definition essay assignment matched the teacher's intentions. However, it did not appear that Ms. Johnson's main objective, which was for the students to thoroughly examine their controversial issues, had been met by all of the participants. It seemed that Gregg's and Karla's main objective was to clearly state the dictionary definition of their term while Betty's main objective was to write at least a 500 word essay. Therefore, the signs, the words that were used when making the extended definition essay assignment, were not constructed by the students and Ms. Johnson in a similar manner. It appeared that the word "expand," the term Ms. Johnson used when explaining what the students were to do after the introductory paragraph, created confusion for three of the students. As Moll (1992) explains "a listener may need to have access

to information from the unique context in which an expression is used in order to understand its reference" (p. 120). Gregg, Karla, and Betty did not seem to understand what the word "expand" meant in the context which the instructor used it when making the extended definition essay assignment. Therefore, these three students were unsure as to how to proceed with the essays after they wrote their introductory paragraphs.

Even though there was some confusion as to the procedure of writing the extended definition essay, Linda, Betty, and Gregg all relayed to me that they had prior experience in this area of writing. This response seemed to coincide with the class response in that over half of them had prior experience with extended definition papers. Karla, however, as I discussed earlier, told me that this was her first experience with any type of extended definition writing.

Class version.

After Ms. Johnson made each of the three essay assignments, extended definition essay, reporting information essay, and persuasive essay, the questionnaires dealing with the assignments were passed out to the class. The three focus questions on these questionnaires dealt with having prior experience, knowing what the instructor expected, and anticipating if the assignment would be helpful in the future. Because each of these questions

Figure 2

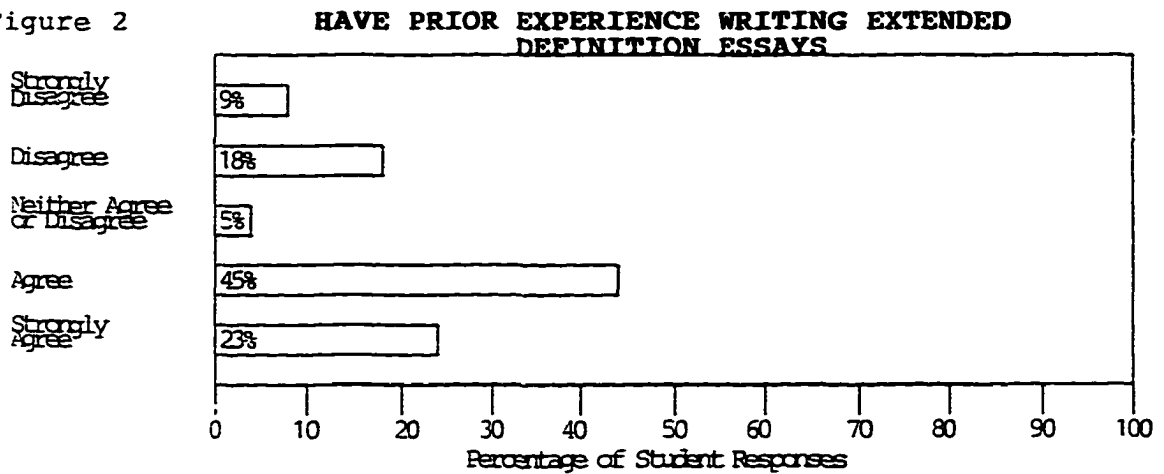


Figure 3

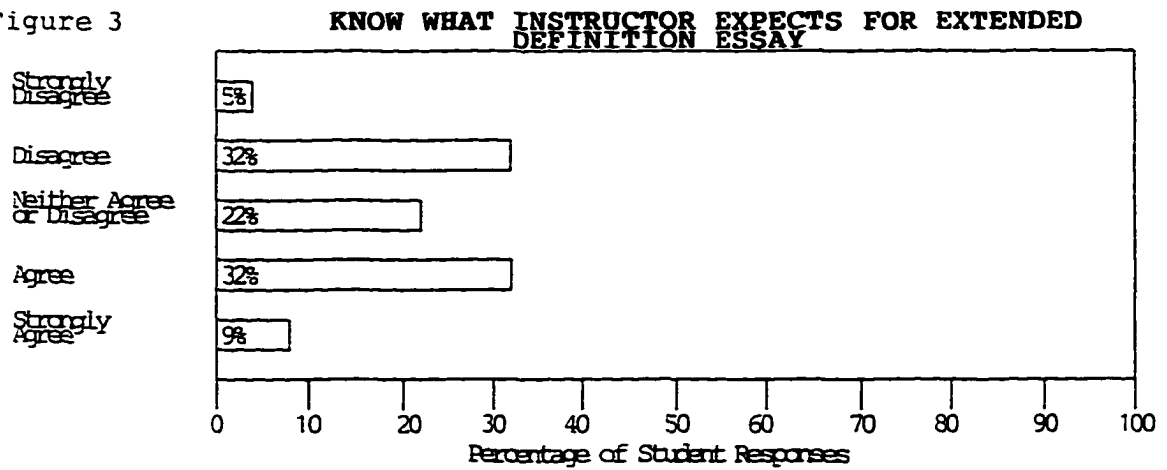
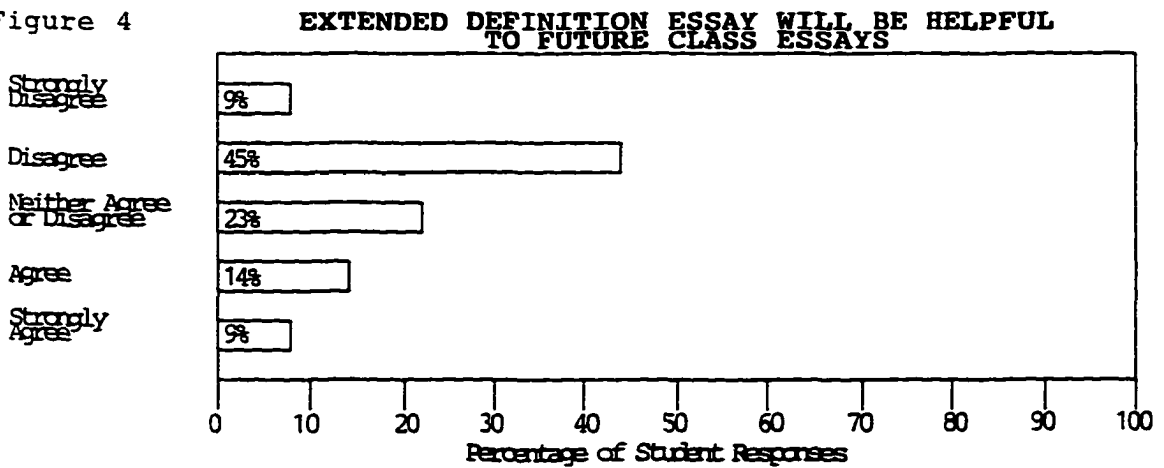


Figure 4



were asked twice on each questionnaire, the students' responses were averaged.

Figures 2, 3, and 4 show the results of the three focus questions on the questionnaire dealing with the extended definition essay. Twenty-three percent of the students strongly agreed and 45% agreed that they had prior experience writing extended definition essays. However, when the students were asked if they knew what the instructor expected of them on the extended definition essay, the class seemed to be divided with 32% agreeing that they understood what was expected of them and 32% disagreeing that they understood what was expected of them for the assignment. When students were asked if they felt this assignment would be helpful to future class assignments, over half of them disagreed (45%) and strongly disagreed (9%). Therefore, it did not appear that Ms. Johnson had made the connection of relevancy among the last three assignments at this point.

Conceptualizing the Reporting Information Essay

Instructor's version.

When discussing the reporting information essay, Ms. Johnson explained that the students should "address the issue that they are looking at and determine the different sides of the issue without making a judgment." She went on to say that most importantly the students should not be persuasive. She only wanted them to report on all sides

of the issue. Because this paper was a research paper, the students were required to go to the library and conduct research over their issues. As stated earlier, one of the main objectives of the course according to the college catalogue was writing a research paper.

When I asked Ms. Johnson how many sources the students were required to have, she explained that the library on campus was not a very good research library and because of this she generally only asked the students to find four or five sources for their papers. According to the instructor the main objective of the reporting information essay was "to get them [students] to be objective and see where they are being objective and to create, if you will, almost the ability to be objective in certain situations." Unlike when the initial assignment was made for the first essay, Ms. Johnson did give a specific length for the reporting information essay which was 500 to 750 words.

When making the reporting information essay assignment to the class, Ms. Johnson began by having the students define what reporting meant. Then she explained to the students that the easiest way to organize the essay was to use a five paragraph guide. She then wrote the following on the board: "#1 intro. (as an example) The three sides to the issue of gun control each value different things. #2 issue #3 issue #4 issue #5 conclusion." She told the students that each of the body paragraphs should deal with

an issue that was relevant to their topic; however, they could use two or four body paragraphs depending upon how many issues there were to their subjects. After this Ms. Johnson told the students that they needed to follow MLA or APA format when they wrote their papers. She mentioned that they could purchase a MLA guide in the bookstore on campus, but she did not advise the students where they might get an APA guide. Next, she informed the students that when they gathered data in the library there would be certain information on each source that they would need to have. On the board she wrote title, author/editor, copyright date, place of publication, and publisher. One of the students asked how many different sources she should get, and Ms. Johnson responded that they needed at least four sources over their issue. She again put a triangle on the board with the words ethics, emotion, and logic at each point saying that the students should be careful that their sources had all three of these things in them.

Two days after making the initial assignment, Ms. Johnson covered how to use a direct quote within a paper and how to write the "bibliography" page. With the direct quote she explained to the students that they should include an author's exact words in quotation marks and longer quotes, the ones over four or five lines, should be indented from each margin. At this point Ms. Johnson asked me if I knew exactly how many lines constituted longer quotes.

I told her that I was not sure but I believed that MLA format was different from the APA format. This was the only time she addressed me during her class lectures. When Ms. Johnson addressed the bibliography page, she referred to the list, which included title, author/editor, copyright date, place of publication, and publisher, that she had previously written on the board saying that this information should be included in each entry. She then drew a box on the board representing a piece of paper and explained the order that the previous information should be placed in. She also told the students that the first line of each entry should go from margin to margin and all other lines should be indented five spaces, and the bibliography page should be doubled spaced. Next, the instructor explained that the entries should be in alphabetical order, and they should not be numbered. The use of the word "bibliography" struck me as unusual because the current issue of the MLA guide referred to these pages as "Works Cited," and the current issue of the APA guide referred to these pages as "References." Ms. Johnson gave the class the last half of two class periods to go to the library and conduct research.

On the questionnaire Ms. Johnson indicated that she strongly agreed that she had prior experience in teaching the reporting information essay, and she strongly agreed that this essay would benefit the students with future

class assignments. Also, she agreed that the students understood what was expected of them with the reporting information essay assignment.

Four students' versions.

According to the retrospective and concurrent data, all four students experienced some confusion and or misinterpretation when fulfilling the reporting information essay assignment. Even though the instructor revealed in an interview dealing with this assignment that one thing she did not want the students to do was use persuasion, Gregg still felt compelled to use persuasion. In one think-aloud Gregg revealed:

I gave both sides of my subject, the ones favoring gun control and the ones that are opposed, like against it. But it needs something else. It's not going anywhere. You know what I mean? Okay, I need my opinion in here. It should be everybody's right to own a gun, if they want to, because [pause] that's what this country is all about being able to do what you want and having the right to do it.

Later, in a retrospective interview Gregg discussed his use of persuasion. He revealed that "I don't think I should have done that [give his opinion]." Rogoff (1984) explains that "rather than employing formal approaches to solving problems, people devise satisfactory, opportunistic solutions" (p. 7) which was what Gregg appeared to do in

this case. In the interview Gregg went on to justify his actions by saying that he had written a couple of other papers on the same topic, and he had given his opinion in both of these. He also justified giving his opinion with the grade he was given on the essay which was a B.

Betty, Karla, and Linda all expressed some confusion when they tried to use documentation in their essays. Just as Betty had relied on her previous teacher with her extended definition essay, she relied on previous papers with her reporting information essay.

Q: Was there anything about the assignment that you weren't sure about or that you didn't understand when you were writing the paper?

Betty: Well, yeah, the sources. I didn't know what to do with them.

Q: What do you mean?

Betty: I didn't know how she wanted me to document the parts that I used in my paper. She talked about it one day, but I didn't really understand.

Q: So what did you do?

Betty: Well, to tell you the truth [pause] we did a couple of research papers in high school, so I found them and just kinda did the same things on this one. I don't think it was really what she wanted. See she circled some of it.

Q: Do you understand now what she wants you to do?

Betty: Not really.

From what Betty showed me on her paper, it appeared that she had used the title of the article as a citation instead of the author's last name. Ms. Johnson had also noted on Betty's essay that she should not use so many direct quotes. It appeared that Betty was not sure as to exactly how she needed to refer to her research; therefore, she was relying on previous texts. Betty's reliance upon prior texts is discussed in a following section of this chapter. When studying how students think and write, Walvoord and McCarthy (1990) found that when some students are not sure as to how to proceed with an assignment they often employ inappropriate models from their prior knowledge to new assignments. Betty transferred the knowledge of a previous research paper to the research paper she was writing for Ms. Johnson even though her previous model was inappropriate for the present essay.

During a think-aloud session Linda also expressed some confusion about how to incorporate sources into her essay.

I don't know. I don't know exactly what she wants. So I just-when I went through each source, I just started a new paragraph. It's worked out because I only have three articles. But I'm not sure about the direct quotes, so I just indented ten spaces on all of them [direct quotes].

Later, during the retrospective interview I asked Linda what she meant by "worked out," and she explained that she was referring to her three body paragraphs. Ms. Johnson had recommended that the students use a five paragraph essay when she made the assignment. Therefore, Linda felt her essay was fine because she had summarized each of her three sources in different paragraphs. Linda was also confused about how to write a direct quote in her paper. When I asked her why she had indented ten spaces, she informed me that "I think I remember having to do it like that on a paper I wrote a couple of semesters back in a class." Like Betty, Linda had transferred the knowledge of a previous research paper to her research paper she was writing for Ms. Johnson. However, unlike on Betty's paper, Ms. Johnson had not marked what Linda had transferred from her previous paper; therefore, it appeared that Linda's transfer of knowledge had been correct.

Coincidentally, Linda and Karla both chose topics that dealt with children. During an interview over the reporting information essay, Karla expressed some concern about her choice of topics.

Q: Did you find anything confusing about this assignment other than the documentation of your sources?

Karla: Well, yeah. My topic was child abuse, but I'm not sure now.

Q: Did you change topics?

Karla: No, but it may be more about discipline because every time I find an article I think I can use it's really more about discipline like whether parents should spank their kids or not. When I put child abuse into the computer, I get things like stories of child abuse. I don't know. Maybe I need to talk to Ms. Johnson again.

Q: Have you already talked to her about your topic?

Karla: When we first started, I did. I asked her if I could use child abuse, and she told me I could. But I don't know, now.

Karla's concerns at this point seemed focused on the subject she had chosen for all three of her essays. However, Karla's concerns were probably not unusual for writers at any level. As Flanigan (1982) points out "writing is recursive; it moves forward, then backward, then forward again. We organize at many points along the way, just as we revise, re-research, re-edit" (p. 27).

With the reporting information essay all four of the students appeared to grasp Ms. Johnson's meaning of what reporting information literally meant. Although none of the students disclosed to me that they were concerned with the instructor's main objective for the assignment which was to determine the different sides of the controversial issue without making a judgment, all the students, however,

related in either the retrospective interviews or the concurrent protocols that they were to go to the library and look up research on their controversial issues. Even though the students understood they were to do research, three of the students had misinterpreted or not understood to some degree how to present the research they gathered in their reporting information essays. This confusion seemed to match the data collected from the questionnaires the class filled out in that almost half of them were not sure what the instructor expected of them for the reporting information essay.

Class version.

When the students in the class responded to the questions on the questionnaire dealing with whether or not they had prior experience writing reporting information essays (figure 5), 34% of them disagreed and strongly disagreed that they had any prior experience with this type of essay. While 41% responded that they had prior experience with the reporting information essay, 24% were in the middle neither agreeing nor disagreeing. Almost half of the students (47%) to some degree did not understand what was expected of them for the reporting information essay (figure 6). Twenty-four percent of the students responded that they neither agreed nor disagreed with these questions while 29% felt they understood what the instructor expected of them. This response was in agreement with

Figure 5

HAVE PRIOR EXPERIENCE WRITING REPORTING INFORMATION ESSAYS

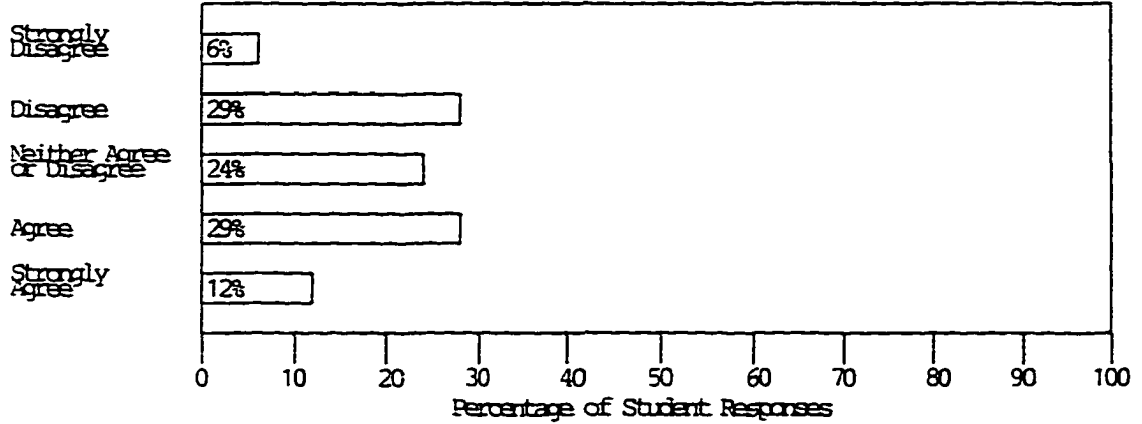


Figure 6

KNOW WHAT INSTRUCTOR EXPECTS FOR REPORTING INFORMATION ESSAY

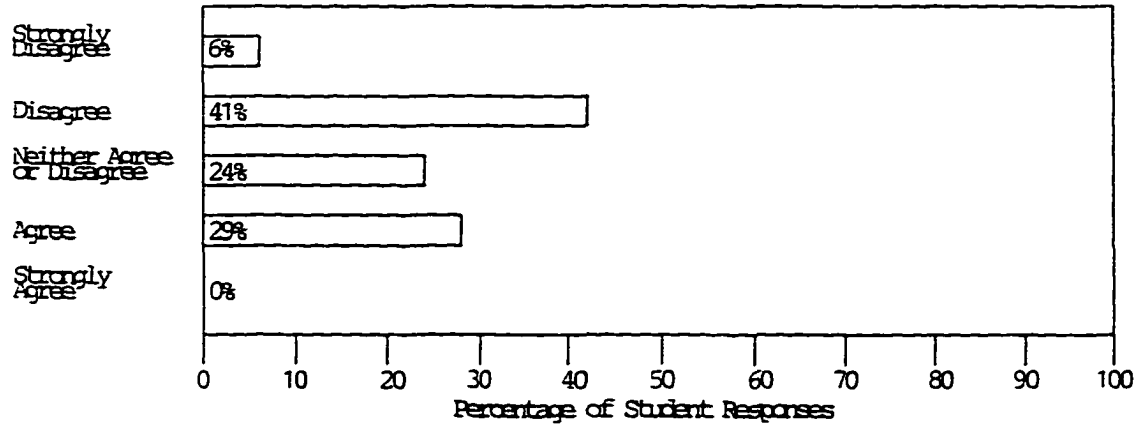
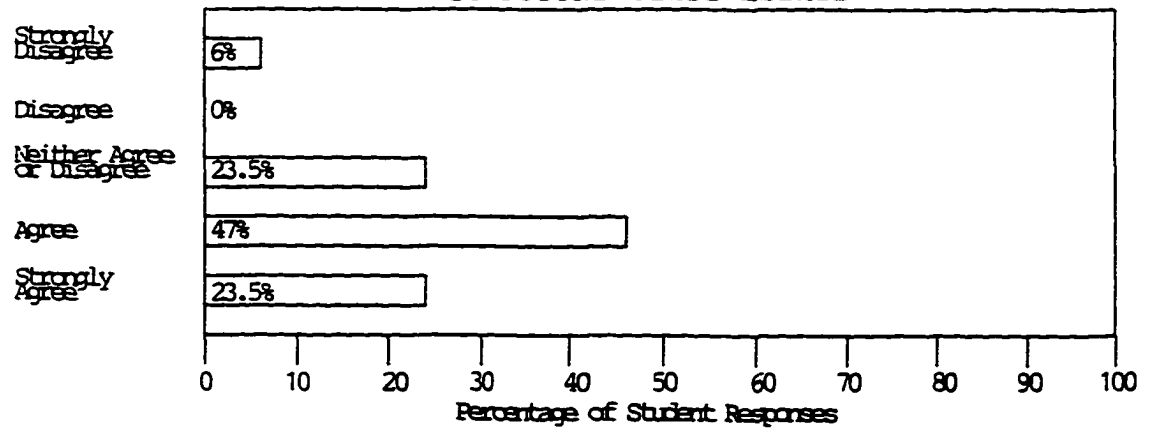


Figure 7

REPORTING INFORMATION ESSAY WILL BE HELPFUL TO FUTURE CLASS ESSAYS



the four student participants in that all four students were confused with at least one aspect of the assignment. However, when the students in the class responded to the questions of whether or not the reporting information essay would be helpful to future class assignments (figure 7) almost three quarters (70.5%) of them felt the essay would be helpful. When these same questions had been asked after the extended definition essay was assigned, more than half of the students disagreed to some extent. Therefore, after making the reporting information essay assignment, the second assignment in a series of three, it appeared that Ms. Johnson had made the connection of relevancy between at least the last two essays which were the reporting information essay and the persuasive essay.

Conceptualizing the Persuasive Essay

Instructor's version.

For the persuasive essay Ms. Johnson expected her students to "write a paper that would accomplish convincing the uncertain moderate person to go ahead and side with whatever side the student had taken in the paper." Furthermore, she explained that a good paper would include an attention getting introduction with some background of the topic and a thesis that would give the student's side of the issue. Also, Ms. Johnson felt that a good paper should include the opposing side of the issue and reasons why the opposing side was wrong. Ms. Johnson

explained:

After they [the students] give the other side, then they have to explain that even though these may be good reasons they are not right for the following reasons. Then they have to back up what they think is right with their research--why they think it's right. Then they must have a conclusion that summarizes why this thing [the topic of the paper] matters in the first place.

Ms. Johnson felt that the persuasive essay was the most important essay she had assigned. One reason she gave for the importance of the paper was that the information from the extended definition essay and the reporting information essay would be used on this paper. Also, she felt that persuasive writing was the most commonly used and most important form of writing.

I am convinced that nearly all writing done in a professional world is in fact persuasive . . . We try to persuade people to do things all the time and so much of our life is persuasive. Then countered with the fact that so much of what they [the students] are being exposed to isn't really persuasion based on logic. It's persuasion based on emotion. I want them to be able to see this so that first of all they will become more informed readers, and secondly, when they try to persuade someone, they actually do it

with facts.

Ms. Johnson went on to say that another reason why this paper was the most important essay given during the semester was because it was longer than the other papers. She related that a good persuasive essay was generally around five type written pages in length. However, she commented that she did not give the students a set length for the paper.

During Ms. Johnson's explanation of the persuasive essay to the class, she again discussed persuasion in relationship to "ethos (ethics of presenter), pathos (emotional appeal), and logos (logic)." Then the instructor put a skeleton outline on the board. This was something she had not done for the first two writing assignments. As mentioned earlier Doyle (1983) sees explicit task instructions as one of the coping strategies that students rely on to relieve the doubt and risk involved in completing academic assignments. The following outline is what Ms. Johnson wrote on the board.

1. Intro.
 - A. Get reader's attention
 - B. Background
 - C. Persuasive thesis statement (take a side--use three reasons for support)
2. Body
 - A. Summarize the position of the opposition and

explain why they are not correct.

B. Discuss each element of thesis and explain why it's right (one for each paragraph).

3. Conclusion

A. Discuss why your topic is valid.

When Ms. Johnson was discussing the thesis statement, she told the students that they didn't have to use three reasons to support their point; however, she recommended that they use three so that each reason would break down into a body paragraph. Interestingly, Ms. Johnson did not mention during her explanation of the outline that the students should use the research they had gathered for the reporting information essay which was something that she had mentioned during her interview with me. This proved to be a point of confusion for three of the four students that I interviewed.

At the end of class on the first day of assigning the persuasive essay, Ms. Johnson gave the students two homework assignments. The first assignment was to make two columns on a sheet of paper and "write the pros of your issue on one side and on the other side write the cons of your subject." After this the students were to choose the three most important issues from each list. She also told the students to bring a magazine ad that used persuasion to class the next day.

The next day Ms. Johnson began class by asking the

students about their lists. Some of them told her that they needed more time to work on them so she gave them about 20 minutes to finish. After the students finished making their lists, she gave them a break. When class resumed, Ms. Johnson discussed persuasive advertisements both on television and in magazines. She then had the students divide into groups of three and discuss their ads "in relationship to the persuasion used in them." At the end of class, Ms. Johnson verbally covered the outline that she had written on the board the day before. She also told the students to "use a moderate tone and appeal to logic, emotion, and ethics."

On the questionnaire Ms. Johnson strongly agreed that she had prior experience teaching the persuasive essay. She then marked that she agreed with both of the following focus questions on the questionnaire which were that the students knew what she expected on this assignment and that the persuasive essay assignment would be helpful to the students in their other classes.

Four students' versions.

All four students described the last paper as a persuasive essay in which they were to persuade their readers to feel the same way they did about their debatable issue. However, all four students did not describe this essay as a research paper. Betty, Karla, and Linda told me during the retrospective interviews they did not realize

that they should have used the research that they gathered for their reporting information papers. Linda related:

It was confusing because I didn't know that we should have included the quotes and references in this paper. I just found that out like the day before the paper was due. I went up and was asking her if I had put everything in my paper because it was awfully short. And she told me I was supposed to include the quotes and references from the reporting information paper. She didn't really say that in class. I know some other people didn't know they were supposed to include this either because this one girl said she was going to have to redo her paper after I talked to her.

Even though the data from the reporting information questionnaires had implied that Ms. Johnson had made her connection of relevancy between the last two papers, she had not made the connection clear to all the students. At least, she did not make the connection to the extent she intended. Ms. Johnson revealed during our interview over the persuasive essay that she expected the students to incorporate the research from their reporting information essay into their persuasive essays, and three of the four students that I interviewed did not understand that they were to do this. Smagorinsky, McCann, and Kern (1987) explain that when teachers use introductory activities that bridge the gap between prior knowledge and present

tasks and assignments before the instructional materials are presented students are better prepared to produce meaningful writing. Perhaps, if Ms. Johnson had used an introductory activity to bridge the gap between the reporting information essay and the persuasive essay, the students might have better understood that they needed to incorporate the research from the first essay into the second one.

During a concurrent protocol Karla also expressed some confusion about how the information from the extended definition essay and the reporting information essay was to be used in her persuasive essay. She was feeling insecure about what to do with the information. Her feelings were that everyone in class understood how to proceed with the persuasive essay except her. Clearly she had been questioning this point for some time, even though she had not voiced her doubts until now.

. . . My big question is [pause]--I don't know if this paper [the persuasive essay] goes with the first two or what. Like when I'm finished should I be able to read it all the way through--all three papers. I don't know. She didn't say that. I'm going to have to ask her before I do any more. I've been wanting to ask her that, but it was like, well, I don't know. I guess everybody else is getting it and I'm not.

Perhaps Karla's fears and insecurities about how she was to organize the information from her first two essays into a coherent persuasive essay stemmed from not being exposed to any type of procedures for doing this. Hillocks (1986) contends that "knowledge of procedures for dealing with the substance of writing (the data) clearly cannot be ignored" (p. 78). From the information that Karla had revealed at this point she had less familiarity with writing in general than any of the other students that were interviewed.

Another point of confusion for two of the students came with the concluding paragraph. Both Linda and Gregg related that they had problems in this area. During a think-aloud protocol Linda stated:

Now for the conclusion. I'm not real sure how to end it. Let's see she said to discuss why topic is valid. So I'm not sure. I thought I'd kind of been doing that all the way.

When Ms. Johnson was going over the outline that she put on the board for the class, she had written by the section dealing with the concluding paragraph "discuss why your topic is valid." Linda was having problems constructing meaning from this statement. It appeared that the statement confused Linda because she felt that she had been discussing why her topic was valid throughout her essay.

Gregg also had doubts about his concluding paragraph.

He felt this section of his paper was weak as he revealed during an interview.

Q: Did you find anything about this assignment confusing?

Gregg: Um, I was lost at the end. I wasn't sure how to end it. I didn't know how to put everything together to put a final paragraph on it.

Q: So, what did you do?

Gregg: Well, see I put this. I just sorta summed it all up in one sentence. I didn't know what to do. You know she put that thing on the board that said to talk about why you're right, but I hadn't ever did anything like this before and I didn't know what to do.

Q: What thing did she put on the board?

Gregg: You know, that outline.

Q: Okay. When you say you haven't done anything like this before, do you mean a persuasive essay or do you mean concluding paragraphs?

Gregg: No, I mean this kind of persuasive paper.

Q: Persuasive research paper?

Gregg: Yeah, I've never had to do one of these before.

Because Gregg did not have previous knowledge to rely on to write his concluding paragraph, he once again avoided employing the formal approach which Ms. Johnson had discussed in class to solve his problem and devised a

satisfactory solution of his own (Rogoff, 1984).

For the persuasive essay all four students seemed to understand that they needed to argue for one side of their debatable issue. Three of the four students, however, did not interpret this assignment the way Ms. Johnson intended. These students did not make the connection between the reporting information essay and the persuasive essay in that the research they used in the reporting information essay was to be incorporated into their arguments for their persuasive papers. As discussed in Chapter One, one of the three basic themes found in Vygotsky's (1978, 1987) work is "the claim that human action, on both the social and individual planes, is mediated by tools and signs" (Wertsch, 1991, p. 19). Therefore, the signs or words that the instructor had used when explaining that the research from the reporting information essay was to be incorporated into the argument in the persuasive essay were not sufficient for the students to construct the meaning Ms. Johnson intended.

When I asked the four participants if they had prior experience writing persuasive papers, Karla responded, "Well, I didn't write one [a persuasive essay] in my other comp class, and it's been so long since high school I don't remember." The other three participants, although, said that they had written persuasive papers prior to this one but not necessarily persuasive research papers. This

information seemed to coincide with the information I gathered from the class because almost 75 per cent of the students responded favorably on the questionnaire when they answered the question of whether or not they had written persuasive essays prior to this one.

Class version.

On the questionnaire dealing with the persuasive essay (Figure 8) some 47% of the students agreed and 23% strongly agreed that they had prior experience writing persuasive essays. While responding to the same questions, only 12% of the students in the class disagreed and 18% strongly disagreed that they had prior experience, and none of the students responded that they neither agreed nor disagreed. Figure 9 shows that almost half (35% agreed and 12% strongly agreed) of the students in the class felt that after Ms. Johnson made the persuasive essay assignment that they knew what was expected of them when completing the task. Eighteen per cent neither agreed or disagreed with these questions, but 23% disagreed and 12% strongly disagreed that they did not know what was expected of them with the persuasive essay. When the students were asked if the persuasive essay assignment would be helpful with assignments in other classes, some 47% of them were undecided (neither agreed or disagreed); although, 29% agreed and 6% strongly agreed that this essay would be helpful when completing writing tasks in other classes.

Figure 8

HAVE PRIOR EXPERIENCE WRITING PERSUASIVE ESSAYS

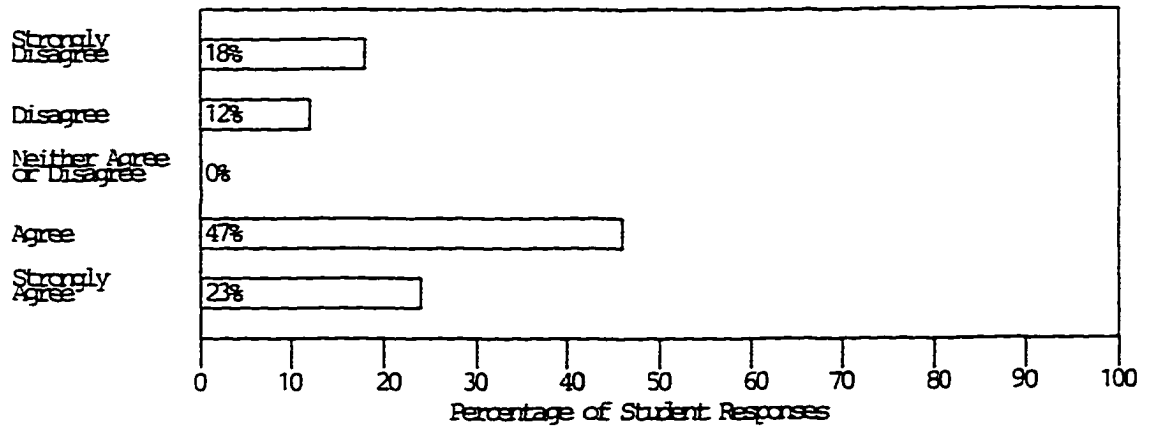


Figure 9

KNOW WHAT INSTRUCTOR EXPECTS FOR PERSUASIVE ESSAY

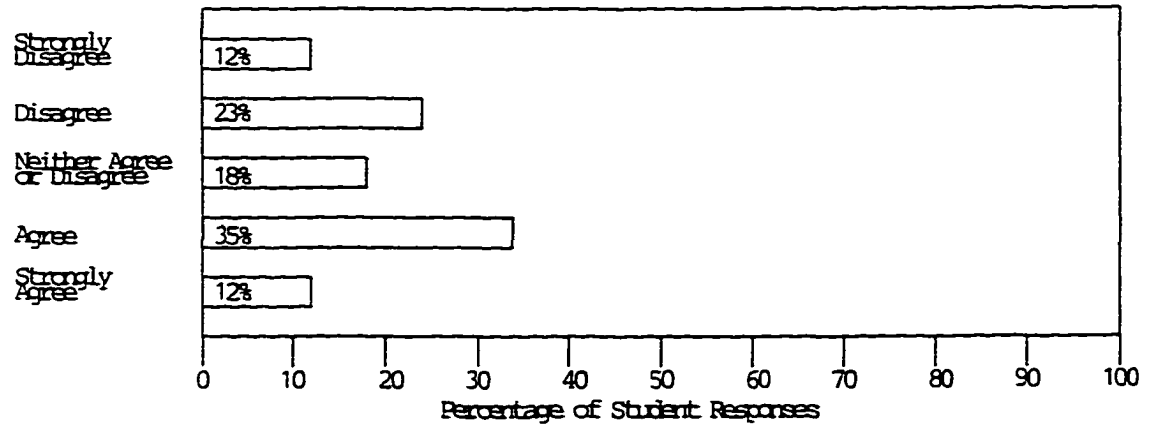
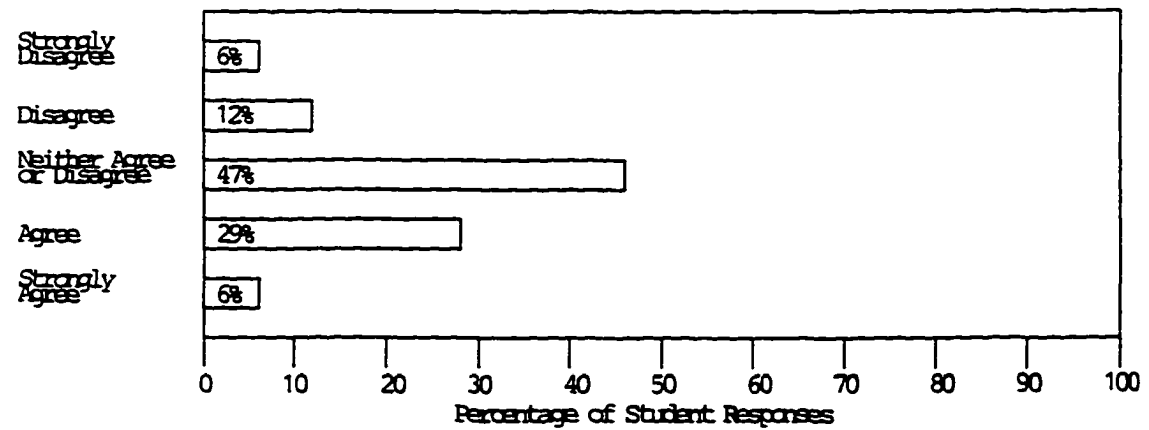


Figure 10

PERSUASIVE ESSAY ASSIGNMENT WILL BE HELPFUL WITH ASSIGNMENTS IN OTHER CLASSES



Only 12% disagreed and 6% strongly disagreed that this assignment would not be beneficial with future assignments.

Summary Comments

Near the end of the semester, after Ms. Johnson had received all the essays from the students and graded them I interviewed her one more time. During this interview she expressed concerns with the persuasive essays that the students wrote. After assigning the last essay, she did not feel that there was enough time left in the semester for the students to fully comprehend what she wanted them to do.

Ms. Johnson: The major mistake was that their persuasive papers turned into totally undocumented essays about why they were right, and I'll swear I said not to do that, but I think that what happened is they got in a hurry. There just wasn't enough time. Half of these last paper were catastrophes. Even those students you were working with so closely didn't do it [follow the guidelines of the assignment] properly. I don't think that Karla had any documentation in the last paper. You know, I've heard it said you need to teach something three times before they get it. And most of the time I'll go over it; I'll go over it; I'll go over it. This time I sort of threw it all at them and said get it, and they couldn't. They were overwhelmed; there just wasn't

enough time.

During the follow-up interviews that were conducted at the end of the persuasive essay interviews with the four students, Linda expressed that with each assignment there should have been more explanation.

Q: What did you think about the class?

Linda: It went okay, I guess.

Q: Do you feel that there is anything that could be done to improve the class?

Linda: Ms. Johnson could go into more details and be more explicit with what she wanted with the essays, especially on the last paper.

Beth agreed that Ms. Johnson could have been more explicit when making the writing assignments commenting, "She should always give the length of all the papers, like word counts or how many pages. And go over the research stuff more or like maybe use examples of what she wants."

As stated earlier one of the primary focuses of the present study was to investigate to what extent college composition students understood and interpreted classroom writing assignments and to what extent the teacher's intentions for the assignments were fulfilled. Through the interviews, think-aloud protocols, class observations, and questionnaires, it is evident, at least to some extent, how the four students and the class responded when conceptualizing the three writing tasks. To some extent

it is also evident that disjunctions occurred between the instructor's intentions for assigning the three essays and the four student participants intentions when trying to understand and interpret the three essays.

Sociocultural Responses

Another focal point of the study was how and to what extent first year college composition students constructed meaning from classroom writing assignments. Data revealed that the four student participants when constructing meaning from the three writing assignments included sociocultural responses, which are discussed in this section, personal/educational experience responses, intertextual appropriation responses, and motivational/accountability responses, which are discussed in the following three sections.

The code, sociocultural responses, dealt with responses relating information gained from social or cultural interactions. The information discussed under this code relates to the second guiding question of this study: (b) How do the students' sociocultural backgrounds help or hinder them with classroom writing assignments? To what extent do the various assignments given by the instructor affect the students' interpretations and meaning constructions of the writing tasks?

Gregg's topic, which was gun control for all three essays, was taken directly from his sociocultural

upbringing.

Q: Why did you choose gun control as your topic?

Gregg: Well, I picked something that I was interested in because it affects me.

Q: How does gun control affect you?

Gregg: Well, because I like to hunt. My dad likes to hunt; my granddad likes to hunt; we all like to do it. And I was raised around guns. They were just always around.

Q: So is it like a family tradition?

Gregg: Yeah, I guess. I mean I learned how to use a gun when I was just a little kid. When I was real young, like in grade school, my dad was always big on teaching gun safety and respect.

Q: What do you mean?

Gregg: Well, like he always said you've got to know how to clean a gun and care for one and what one can do. I mean he didn't want me to shoot my foot off or anything.

The social and cultural environment in which Gregg lived had a very strong impact on him influencing the topic he wrote about in his Composition II class. Because guns had always been a large part of Gregg's life, he felt that writing about something he was familiar with and had very strong feelings toward would be easier than choosing a topic that he knew little about.

Ms. Johnson's knowledge of guns and the sport of hunting was not as extensive as Gregg's. On one of his essays he related a story about someone being accidentally shot when a hunting rifle fell from a carriage. Ms. Johnson questioned Gregg's use of the word "carriage" on his paper. As Hull and Rose (1990) point out oftentimes a student's social and cultural background knowledge alters his or her definition of a particular word or phrase. Gregg related to me that at first he didn't understand why Ms. Johnson questioned the word. However, after closer scrutiny he commented, "She didn't know what a carriage was." Gregg explained that it was a make-shift stand or holder for a rifle. He appeared to be a little perplexed because as he stated, "I don't know how much she took off for that, but it's not my fault she didn't know what the word meant." Gregg had a difficult time understanding not everyone possessed the knowledge of guns and the sport of hunting that he and obviously everyone from his social and cultural background did.

Betty's observations associated with her definition of violence while she was writing the extended definition paper was another example of how a participant's background influenced her writing. Betty chose violence associated with the television and movie industries as the topic for her three essays. She explained why she chose this topic.

I picked it [violence in television and movies] because

everything you see on TV or when you go to the movies is somebody killing somebody or beating up on somebody. They just try to gross you out. I mean you just can't watch it for very long. I mean maybe 30 minutes and then you change the channels cause you get sick of it.

When I asked Betty if she had any problems with the extended definition essay, one thing that she commented on was that Ms. Johnson suggested that she use an example to further her explanation of violence at one point. Betty's comment on this was:

When she said that, I thought I really don't know anything, you know. I've always lived in a small town and we don't have any drive-by shootings and stuff. I know this one girl about my age in another class got to talking about a drive by shooting that happened right next door to where she use to live. But we don't have that kind of stuff, you know. I mean it's like real peaceful, boring even. Nothing ever happens good or bad.

Betty felt that Ms. Johnson wanted her to use a personal example of violence, and she realized that she didn't have one. As Brown (1994) points out students' histories influence their written texts either through previous experiences or lack of previous experiences. Due to Betty's social and cultural background, she lacked content knowledge

of violence which is not simply factual knowledge of information but is also knowledge of a person's own experiences (Smagorinsky & Smith, 1992).

During one tape recorded session, Karla and Linda worked together. They were discussing how they intended to fulfill the persuasive essay assignment which also included some of their views on social and cultural behavior.

Karla: It looks to me like this paper is going to be just like the last one. What do you think she wants us to do different on this last paper?

Linda: Well, see my argument is for spanking children, and I think what she means is to put in some of my personal reasons, opinions. Like here I say, 'we have a degenerating society. Children need guidelines and guidance by adults, and when they don't go by the guidelines, they must be punished. The way I was raised was first my parents set up rules, and if I broke them, the first time I got grounded. If I broke them when I was grounded, then I got a spanking. So if a spanking is necessary, then that is what a kid should have.' Then I'm going to talk about my son. See what I mean. I didn't put all that in the last paper.

Karla: So, you're?

Linda: I'm just telling what needs to be done like

when I was a kid and what I do to my own kid. Karla was having problems differentiating the persuasive essay assignment from the reporting information essay assignment. Linda was apparently trying to explain to Karla that the meaning that she had constructed from the persuasive essay assignment was directly related to her social and cultural background. It appears that Linda was developing her persuasive essay by drawing from her social and cultural resources of child rearing. Linda and Karla were both mothers of young children and had both, during separate interviews, disclosed to me that they had chosen topics dealing with children because the topics were things that they were familiar with and felt strongly about. As discussed in Chapter Two, the sociocultural approach includes cultural, historical, and institutional factors (Wertsch, 1991), and it seems that Karla and Linda could not separate themselves from their past experiences when composing written texts. Ackerman (1993) contends that in order for the field of composition research to view writing as more social than developmental "studies of writing and learning must attend to the quality of prior knowledge brought to an act of composing" (p. 354).

Personal/Educational Experience Responses

The personal/educational experience code dealt with responses relating to personal situations revolving around the participants' education in some manner. This code

took into consideration occasions when the students discussed information that pertained directly to their educational backgrounds. The information discussed under the code, personal/educational experience responses, is related to the third guiding question of this exploratory study: (c) How does the first year composition students' previous knowledge of writing impact their interpretations of present writing assignments? To what extent do students draw from previous personal and educational experiences when composing written assignments?

During a retrospective interview over the extended definition essay, Karla revealed that she attempted to transfer knowledge of a writing model from a previous class but had to do so successfully.

Q: Have you ever written essays in the past that had five paragraphs in them?

Karla: Yeah, in Comp. I. I mean my Comp. I teacher, she laid it on the line. In my opening paragraph I had to have my thesis statement. The last thing it had to have was three points. My first paragraph had to be about the first point, second paragraph about the second point of my thesis, and my third paragraph had to be about the third point, and then I had a closing. But it didn't work here. In all those paragraphs, I didn't give her a definition. That's what I didn't do. I gave her like my feelings,

see I said 'for example, I feel' or like here 'for example, I think' and this had been okay on my papers in Comp. I, but it wasn't here.

Karla had attempted to transfer her knowledge of writing five paragraph essays that basically dealt with her opinions and feelings from her Composition I class to the extended definition essay assignment in her Composition II class, and according to Karla, her method had not worked. When investigating how students think and write, Walvoord and McCarthy (1990) found similar results with students attempting to transfer models of papers from previous classes. These researchers point out that, like Karla, students sometimes use previously learned models of writing papers even when they are inappropriate for new assignments.

During an interview over the same essay (extended definition), Betty explained that she had relied on the assistance of a former high school teacher when she was trying to interpret and construct meaning from the writing assignment.

Q: Did you find anything else confusing?

Betty: Yeah, I was sort of confused about the definition, so I finally went by and talked to my high school teacher, and she told me that I might use like different people's definitions.

When faced with not understanding and not knowing how to proceed with the assignment, Betty relied on something

familiar or in this case someone, her former English teacher. Betty appeared to feel comfortable with the response she got from her former teacher because later in the same interview she revealed that in her extended definition essay she incorporated two definitions of violence in her paper. She used her own definition and society's definition.

Other examples of personal/educational experience responses within an educational context came from Betty when she explained why her extended definition essay contained five paragraphs. She stated, "My high school teacher always said that you need at least five paragraphs for a paper, you know." Also, Karla explained that she was using examples in her extended definition essay because "I guess I learned to do that in Comp. I. She was always telling us to use examples, stories, something to explain what we were talking about." When Gregg was writing his introductory paragraph for his reporting information essay, he explained that his basic goal was to catch the reader's attention. He went on to say that getting the reader's attention was a technique for writing introductory paragraphs that he learned in his Composition I class. Another point Gregg commented on that he learned in his Composition I class was with the thesis statement in his persuasive essay. When referring to his Composition I instructor, he stated:

She said to always put what I'm going to talk about in it [the thesis statement] and to make sure that I kept those in order and like didn't go off to something else and then come back to something different. She [his Composition I instructor] really helped me with that. I had some major problems with those [thesis statements] at first.

Karla, Betty, and Gregg all commented that the skills they used while composing their Composition II texts were learned in previous classes from the same discipline. The knowledge that these three students used from their previous English classes did appear to be used successfully with their present texts. Walvoord and McCarthy (1990) found that some students do successfully apply the models learned in other courses to new assignments as did Karla, Betty, and Gregg while fulfilling assignments for their Composition II course.

Data from the present study suggests that each of the student participants did at some point rely on his or her personal/educational experiences within an educational context while constructing new texts. Researchers such as Ackerman (1991), Hillocks (1987), and Smagorinsky and Smith (1992) have all examined the kinds of knowledge needed to write efficiently for various tasks, and all agree that writers need general knowledge, task-specific knowledge, and community-specific knowledge

in order to write effectively in specialized discourse communities.

Intertextual Appropriation Responses

The code, intertextual appropriation responses, referred to syntactics, language, and other techniques and conventions that the students used from prior texts while composing present texts. This code was divided into two subcategories. The first subcategory, prior text of self, referred to previous writings that belonged to the students, and the second subcategory, prior text of others, referred to previous writings which belonged to other people. The information discussed under the code, intertextual appropriation responses, relates to the fourth guiding question of the study: (d) How are the four composition students' present writings influenced by prior texts? In what ways do the students' prior writings affect present texts? In what ways do prior texts of others influence the students' present texts?

Prior Text of Self

During a think-aloud session over the extended definition essay, Karla referred to a previous text when she needed assistance with the wording of a sentence. The following excerpt begins with her reading from her extended definition essay.

Although many of us--Although many of us--Ugh, don't like. Although many of us [pause] reject. I need

another word. Reject the thought of being disciplined--Although many of us reject the thought of being disciplined. Discipline needs to be a part of everyone's life. I don't know. [pause] I probably shouldn't--. There it is. I probably shouldn't do this but I'm going to see if there's something in this paragraph I had to write in speech about consequences the other day. Yeah, okay, I'm going to put--. I feel all people young or old need to have rules or boundaries with consequences when these rules are not followed. Now, I'll just add with consequences or discipline. Okay. I feel all people young or old need to have rules or boundaries with consequences or discipline when these rules are not followed.

When Karla came to a point in her essay where she needed assistance, she appropriated words from a paper that she had previously written for another class. In addition to appropriating words from a previous text, Karla also drew from a previous text the structure she wanted to use for a thesis statement as she showed in the following comment. "In order to get it [thesis statement] just right I looked to see how I did them [thesis statements] on my Comp. I papers." With this example of intertextuality, it appeared that Karla was consciously reproducing forms with which she was familiar. As Bloome and Bailey (1992)

argue literacy events are based not only on a history of previous events but also on links to a network of other related texts and events.

Gregg also exemplified the conscious reproduction of form when writing his introductory paragraph on his persuasive essay. As mentioned in an earlier section, Gregg revealed that he used the technique of catching the reader's attention when writing his introductory paragraph for his persuasive essay. However, Gregg went on to explain that when he was composing the paragraph he used the same guidelines that he used with a previous introductory paragraph.

Gregg: I kinda patterned it off of the introduction I wrote for this other paper.

Q: What do you mean?

Gregg: Well, when I was making up this story, I did it just like another one I did.

Q: Another paper you wrote in this class?

Gregg: No, in my other English class before this one.

Q: So you used basically the same story?

Gregg: Yeah, I mean no not really. I changed it all up.

Q: So, you used your previous introductory paragraph as a guideline when you were writing this one.

Gregg: Yeah, that's what I did.

Linda, like Gregg, previously wrote a paper over her topic which dealt with the treatment of children. And, like Gregg, when it came to her introductory paragraph she relied heavily on her previous paper. During a think-aloud she stated,

Okay, I think I can use this. What's worse than watching TV and seeing a bloody child that didn't get hurt in an accident, but got beaten from an abusive parent. We need to stand back and take a long look at abuse. There are 5,000 or more reported cases of death from abuse each year. These are innocent children living a life of fear. But there are also innocent children living a life of neglect. And I mean [pause]. Okay, I'm going to have to change some of this here. I gotta start in on the discipline part. I can use this first part. This first part is from an old essay I had on discipline. Okay, what can I say after neglect to join in? Okay, I'll say but there are also innocent children living a life of neglect. And by neglect I mean these kids are not taught any morals or discipline by their parents.

Linda did not explain in what class she wrote her previous paper; however, she did appropriate this prior text for part of her introductory paragraph in her present text. Also, Linda's prior text was used to generate new ideas

for her present text. When she came to the word "neglect" in her old text, Linda thought of using this word in conjunction with the topic of her present text which was lack of discipline. Therefore, it appeared that she had used intertextual appropriation in two different ways. Lemke (1988) explains that intertextual links can be made in several ways including between the organizational structure of texts, register levels, genres, content, and even the situational contexts in which they occur. Linda not only used some of the exact content from an introductory paragraph of a former text in her present text, but she also thought of changing the context of the word "neglect" in her old text so that the word could be used in her present text as well.

Like Karla, Gregg, and Linda, Betty also looked to previous texts when she needed help with the documentation areas of her reporting information essay. During an interview Betty explained to me that she didn't understand how Ms. Johnson wanted her to document her essay; therefore, she appropriated the documentation form of her previous high school research papers to her present text.

Prior Text of Others

Just as writers appropriate form and content from their own previous papers, they can also appropriate information from prior texts of other people. During one tape recorded session involving Karla and Linda, Karla

was confused about how to proceed with her persuasive essay. She was particularly concerned about how she was going to make the persuasive essay different from the reporting information essay. During the session Karla was examining Linda's rough draft of her persuasive essay.

Linda: Yeah, I'm just putting my personal views and opinions in. Like here how I'm raising my kid and how I was raised is a lot of it . . .

Karla: So, I need to talk about how I see things and what I do with my kids?

Linda: Yeah, you've got to--like you've got to give your opinions and stuff and say this is the way it should be.

Karla: Oh--yeah, I see.

Linda was apparently explaining to Karla that she had used ideas from her own experiences in her text. Now, Karla was appropriating ideas from Linda's essay. Later, in a think-aloud Karla stated, "Okay, now I need to say something about what I do with my kids . . . One way--One rule I have for my girls is no TV if they don't clean their room on Saturday mornings . . ." It appeared that Karla had appropriated the idea of including the disciplinary actions she used on her own children into her text after looking at Linda's persuasive essay.

Gregg revealed that he too appropriated information from other texts. For example during one of his think-

alouds, Gregg stated,

When I think of gun control, I remember this article I read a couple of years ago about the Brady Bill. It was before it was passed and this guy--he really knew his stuff. I mean he talked about if guns are outlawed only criminals will have them. That's what I need to do--make my paper explain things like that.

Also, during an interview over the extended definition essay, Gregg stated that he followed "a worksheet" that he received in a previous class for the documentation on his essay in Composition II.

The data gathered during this study revealed that the four student participants situated their writings in an intertext whereby appropriating their own prior texts and prior texts of others to assist in writing new texts. Bloome and Bailey (1992) explain that intertextuality is "a key concept in understanding relationships between texts (including conversational and written texts), between and among events, between events and cultural ideology, and as a starting place for understanding education as the development of communicative competence" (p. 198). It appeared that all four student participants, at one time or another, found relationships between their present texts and prior texts of themselves and prior texts of other people.

Motivational/Accountability Responses

The code, motivational/accountability responses referred to instances when the student participants discussed what impacted their reasons for engaging in writing tasks. This code was divided into two subcategories which were entitled stemming from self and stemming from others. The subcategory stemming from self dealt with student responses in which the motivation and accountability for engaging in the writing task originated from the student. Statements which explained that a student's motivation and accountability originated from someone or something other than the student were labeled stemming from others. The following information discussed under the code, motivational/accountability responses, relates to the final guiding question of the study: (e) What are the students' intentions when fulfilling classroom writing assignments? How do personal motivation and goals influence the students' intentions when completing the writing assignments?

Stemming from Self

While conducting the retrospective interviews with the student participants over their essays, all four students responded at one time or another that they felt accountable to themselves while fulfilling an assignment. During interviews over the extended definition essay, Betty and Karla both responded that they felt responsible to themselves. Betty related, "A lot of it [fulfilling the

assignment] is for me. I like getting things done." Karla commented:

Mostly I want to prove to myself I can do this stuff. I didn't do that great in high school and that's been a long time ago and I want to do good. I just figure the harder I try the better I'll do.

Karla was obviously task oriented (Maehr, 1984) when she was fulfilling this assignment because she felt that the more work she put into the assignment the more knowledge she would gain.

Also, during interviews over the persuasive essay, Linda and Gregg responded that they too felt some responsibility toward themselves while fulfilling the assignment. When I asked Gregg what he felt accountable for with this assignment, he commented, "With this one [persuasive essay] I tried more on the research stuff because I'll probably have to use--like, I know I'll have to do research papers in my other classes . . ." Like Karla's earlier response, Gregg also wanted to gain more knowledge from the assignment. Therefore, while composing the persuasive essay Gregg was task oriented. He wanted to expand his knowledge of writing research papers because he felt that this knowledge would be useful to him in the future.

Stemming from Others

Just as all four student participants responded at

one time or another that they felt accountable to themselves while composing the writing assignments, all four also responded that at some point they felt accountable to someone or something other than themselves. Karla and Gregg both commented that in part they wanted to please Ms. Johnson when fulfilling the extended definition essay. Also, with the persuasive essay Gregg was not only motivated to do well for himself, but he was also motivated by his readers. He explained that "I want to tell it like it is . . . I mean I think I need to explain why it's so important not to take guns away from everyday people, you know." During an interview over the extended definition essay, Linda too explained that she was motivated to do well in her composition classes due to an outside influence. Her motivation stemmed from a departmental requirement at the university that she normally attended.

Linda: I have to have a B for my major.

Q: And your major is elementary?

Linda: Yeah, elementary ed.

Q: So you have to maintain a B in all your classes?

Linda: No, just the English classes. But everything else I can have a 2.00 but on the English classes I have to have a 3.00.

It would appear that Gregg and Linda's responses conform to a social solidarity perspective (Maehr, 1984) in that their social and cultural backgrounds were determining

what was acceptable and unacceptable for them. Therefore, these students were attempting to achieve in order to please someone other than themselves.

Other examples of student responses in which the participants felt motivated by someone or something other than themselves came from Karla and Betty. One of Karla's responses dealt with ego goals (Maehr, 1984). She commented, ". . . I want to do good. I'm in class with all these young kids. You know, it's like I am 35 years old and everybody thinks I ought to know this stuff." Karla went on to explain that when she referred to "stuff" she meant the various essays that were assigned in class. By this comment it seemed that Karla felt that members of the class viewed her as knowledgeable, and she strove to maintain their favorable perception of her ability as a writer.

At one point Betty also discussed her motivation to do well in class as stemming from someone and something other than herself.

Q: Who did you feel accountable to when you were writing this paper?

Betty: Pretty well both of us.

Q: When you say both of us, who are you talking about?

Betty: Well, Ms. Johnson cause I had this teacher in high school that, if you didn't get in what she liked then--well, you wouldn't do very good. So I

always think about that.

Q: And you also felt accountable to?

Betty: Well, me . . . See I have to keep my grades up or I'll lose my scholarship.

Betty had disclosed to me during her demographic interview that she was attending college on a program for underprivileged students. It would certainly appear that she was extrinsically motivated (Maehr, 1984) to perform well in class for fear of losing the money which was paying for her education.

Information from the retrospective interviews indicated that the four student participants fulfilled their writing assignments for various reasons which included both motives that stemmed from themselves and motives that stemmed from someone or something other than themselves. Maehr's (1984) personal investment theory points out that individuals will differ in their goals and personal investments.

Summary Comments

As teachers we've all heard students say at one time or another, "Can't I just make something up?" One interesting thing about the data that I collected from the four student participants was that not one of them ever said "Oh, I just made something up." Of course, some of them took shortcuts from time to time such as Gregg's one sentence conclusions or Betty's quick reliance upon her former English classes. However, for the most part

it appears that the four participants put a great deal of thought into their essays. And much of this thought was impacted by influences originating from their backgrounds.

As discussed earlier, the second focal point of the present study was how and to what extent college composition students constructed meaning from classroom writing assignments. While, no doubt, much remains unknown about how writers' interpret and construct meaning when writing, the data suggest that the four student participants were affected by sociocultural influences, personal and educational influences, intertextual influences, and motivational influences when fulfilling the three classroom writing assignments.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

The present study builds on previous investigations of writing pedagogy exploring how composition students interpret and construct meaning from various assignments. The study adds to the body of knowledge in the field of writing and meaning construction because it addresses contemporary issues in literacy studies such as cultures, contexts, and classroom discourse. To be able to contribute insight into how various composition students interpret different writing assignments and construct meaning from these assignments is very important to me as a teacher and could be useful to other members of the educational community as well.

Meaning Construction and the Study

As discussed in Chapter Five the meanings that the four students constructed from the three classroom writing assignments did not always appear to match the teacher's intentions for making the assignments. In fact, disjunctions occurred between the students' understandings and interpretations of the assignments and the teacher's intentions for the assignments at some level on all three assignments.

With the extended definition essay disjunctions occurred between the teacher and the students with both the main objective of the assignment and the words Ms. Johnson used when making the assignment. The teacher's

main objective of the assignment was for the students to thoroughly examine their controversial issues; however, both Gregg and Karla demonstrated that their main objective for the essay was to clearly state the dictionary definition of their terms, and Betty's main objective was to have a certain number of words in her essay. Also, the word "expand," the term Ms. Johnson used when making the assignment, created misunderstandings between the teacher and three of the four students. Gregg, Karla, and Betty did not understand what the term meant in the context that Ms. Johnson used it in when making the assignment, and because of this misunderstanding the students did not know how to proceed with the body of their essays after they wrote their introductory paragraphs. As discussed in Chapter Five, perhaps, if the students had been given more concrete guidelines (Doyle, 1983) for producing the assignment, then these guidelines might have prevented some of the confusion and disjunctions which occurred between the teacher and the students.

Disjunctions also occurred between the teacher and the students with the reporting information essay assignment. Once again Ms. Johnson's main objective for the assignment, which was determining the different sides of each controversial issues without making a judgment, did not appear to be the students' main objective when fulfilling the assignment. Three of the four students

felt that the documentation of their research was the main point of the assignment. The same three students were confused about how to document the research they gathered in their essays, and this confusion led to more disjunctions between the teacher's and the students' understandings and intentions for the assignment. As a result of not fully understanding what was expected of them when documenting their research, these students relied heavily on their previous knowledge (Walvoord & McCarthy, 1990) of writing research papers.

Disjunctions between the teacher and the students occurred with the persuasive essay assignment as well. It appeared that the major disjunction between the teacher and the students with this assignment was that the essay was supposed to be a research paper. Ms. Johnson's intentions were for the students to use their research from the reporting information essays in the persuasive essays; however, three of the four students did not interpret the assignment in the way the instructor intended. Betty, Karla, and Linda did not realize that the persuasive essay was supposed to be a research paper. Therefore, one of Ms. Johnson's main objectives for the assignment was misconstrued by the students. As discussed in the previous chapter, if Ms. Johnson had used introductory activities to bridge the gap between the assignments (Smagorinsky, McCann, & Kern, 1987), then maybe the

disjunctions between teacher's intentions for making the assignments and the students' intentions when fulfilling the assignments might have been avoided.

Perhaps one contributing factor to the students' confusion on all three essays was that it appeared that Ms. Johnson stressed the product of each of the writing assignments more so than the process. According to my classroom observation notes, Ms. Johnson did not encourage the students to engage in any prewriting steps such as list making, freewriting, outlining (other than the skeletal outline she provided them with the persuasive essay), or revising. Some researchers (Emig, 1971; Flanigan, 1982; Flower & Hayes, 1980; Graves, 1975) believe that writing is not a straight line act involving one step, but instead writing is a complicated act involving many different steps that occur repeatedly and at different times during the writing process. Perhaps had Ms. Johnson involved the students more in the process of each of the writing assignments then the students might have been able to more clearly construct the meaning that she intended from each of the assignments.

Another factor that might have contributed to the disjunctions between the goals of the teacher and the meanings made by the students dealt with intersubjectivity. As discussed in Chapter One intersubjectivity is the mutual or common understanding which is reached between people

while communicating (Rogoff, 1990). Even though intersubjectivity was reached on some levels of the writing assignments, it did not seem to be reached with the assignments overall. For example, with the persuasive essay the students understood that they needed to argue for one side of their issue; however, as previously discussed three of the four students did not understand that the essay was supposed to be a research paper. Therefore, the lack of intersubjectivity was a contributing factor to the divergences between the teacher's intentions for the assignments and the meanings constructed by the students.

The last factor that might have contributed to the disjunctions between the teacher's intentions for the assignments and the students' interpretations of the assignments stemmed from failed appropriation. As explained in Chapter One, Newman, Griffin, and Cole (1993) describe appropriation as a process of interpreting an act or episode in terms of one's frame of reference. In the present study the act or episode was the instructional processes of the three assignments. Newman, Griffin, and Cole further explain that during instructional processes teachers generally have the benefit of interacting with students on a regular basis, in some cases every day of the week for an entire semester or even two semesters. Therefore, this constant interaction aids in the process of

appropriation thereby restricting the danger of failed appropriation because the teacher is not limited to only one or two guesses about the student's behavior. As Ms. Johnson indicated in her last interview, she did not feel that she had adequate time to cover the instructional processes of the essay assignments. Therefore, the time constraint, which was that the class only lasted for five weeks, Ms. Johnson spoke of could have contributed to the failed appropriation which occurred between herself and the four student participants when constructing meaning from the three writing assignments.

Written Communication Theories and Research

The experiences of the four student participants involved in the present study while composing their essays supports existing research in several ways that have been discussed in the previous chapter. For instance, the students' experiences supported the Vygotskian (1978, 1987) perspective that an individual's intellectual development can not be understood without consideration given to the social milieu from which that person emerged. All four students relied on their social and cultural background when choosing a subject for their essays and/or when attempting to write about their subjects. Gregg, Karla, and Linda all chose subjects which were directly related to their backgrounds. Gregg wrote about guns because guns had always been a part of his social and cultural

background. Karla and Linda chose subjects that dealt with children because they were both mothers and this was something that was a large part of their social and cultural backgrounds. Betty chose violence and the entertainment industry to write about which was not directly related to her background; however, when defining violence she realized that her personal definition of the word was limited to her social and cultural background.

Another example of how the four student participants' experiences supported existing research was through their reliance in certain situations upon knowledge gained from other courses (Walvoord & McCarthy, 1990). At some point Karla, Betty, and Gregg all transferred inappropriate models of papers from previous classes when attempting to fulfill their essay assignments in Composition II. Linda also transferred knowledge of incorporating direct quotes into her reporting information essay; however, unlike Karla, Betty, and Gregg, Linda, after speaking with Ms. Johnson, successfully transferred her previous knowledge to her present essay.

Data that explain the four students' accountability and motivation for engaging in writing tasks (Maehr, 1984) also support existing research. The students related that they felt accountable both to themselves and to someone or something other than themselves while fulfilling the three writing assignments. For example, Karla and Gregg

were task oriented when fulfilling at least one of their writing assignments because they each wanted to gain more knowledge when actually completing the assignment. As well as being task oriented, Karla found that she was motivated to do well on her essays because of ego goals. She felt that the younger class members viewed her as knowledgeable, and she wanted to maintain their favorable view of her. Also, Linda and Gregg seemed to conform to a social solidarity perspective while writing one of their essays because their social and cultural backgrounds were determining what was acceptable and unacceptable for them. And it appears that Betty was extrinsically motivated to perform well on her essays because she had to maintain an above average grade point in her classes because of a scholarship.

Implications

From the data and information gathered for the present study, it appears that the four student participants did not separate or divorce themselves from their backgrounds while composing their essays. During this study all four students relied heavily on their former knowledge whether that knowledge came from previous classroom discourse or from cultural experiences. And even though teachers may be aware of the extent to which students rely on their social and cultural backgrounds, I feel that trying to incorporate and encourage this knowledge within a curriculum

can be beneficial for both teachers and students. Classroom communities where a student's individual diversity is encouraged can lead to richer models of classroom discourse in which cooperative sharing and meaning construction take place.

As discussed in previous chapters, the present study was exploratory in nature rather than conclusive. A major component of the study was to investigate the social and cultural implications on meaning construction both inside and outside the classroom community. However, the study did not attempt to investigate every social and cultural implication influencing the complex act of meaning construction and interpretation. Even though the study was exploratory, it yielded patterns in the data that indicate certain effects on writers while constructing meaning when composing texts. These effects include sociocultural factors, personal experience factors, intertextual factors, and motivational factors. Teachers should be aware of all of these factors and influences and the impact they might have on the writer's meaning construction while composing new texts.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A

CONSENT FORM for participation in a study entitled "Are We Speaking the Same Language: Exploring Meaning Construction in a First Year Composition Classroom" conducted through the University of Oklahoma-Norman by graduate student Patty Reed.

This research project will investigate the ways freshman composition students interpret different writing assignments given to them in class. Students will be observed in classes and a small group of volunteer students will also be tape recorded as they think aloud during the process of doing course assignments. The instructor and students will be observed several times each week, and the volunteer students will be tape recorded on several occasions during periods when they are preparing class assignments. Both students and teachers may also be asked to consent to interviews. Interview questions will be stimulated by observations and the students' own writings. The questions will therefore be open-ended; one possible question might be, "When you were writing this paper, what were you thinking about?" Through participating in the research, students may come to a better understanding of their intellectual and academic strengths as far as their writing is concerned and a better understanding of what is expected of them by their instructor. The instructor may come to a better understanding of how students interpret the assignments which are given to them in class. The research will entail no risks to the participating students or instructor.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. Participating students and the instructor are free to withdraw from the project at any time with no penalty.

Students and the instructor will not be identified by their own name when the research is reported. Only people who are associated with the research project will have access to the tape recorded information in order to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

The research will create no additional risks of injury than a student would ordinarily encounter during the routine process of schooling. Should a participant become injured during the course of the research he or she assumes responsibility for protection.

If you have questions or concerns about this research project please contact the investigator, Patty Reed at Route 2, Box 28 in Tuttle, Oklahoma 73089. Her phone number is (405)3812228.

Signature: _____

Appendix B

Interview Guide for First Interview with Students

1. Can I get your age and phone number?
2. Where do you live? How long have you lived there?
How far is that from here?
3. Are you originally from this area?
4. Could you tell me about your home town?
5. Do you work? If so where and for how long?
6. Do you have a major? If so what is it?
7. How many semesters have you been attending college?
8. Why did you decide to attend college?
9. What other courses, besides Composition II, are you taking this semester? Have you enrolled for next semester yet? What will you be taking?
10. Will you be attending this college next semester?
11. Why did you chose this college?
12. Would you tell me about your family? (parents, siblings, spouse, children) How does you family feel about you attending college?
13. Where did you graduate from high school? How large was your graduating class?
14. What were your English classes like in high school? How much writing did you do? What were some of the major papers you had to write in your high school English classes? How much literature?
15. Did you have any other classes that you wrote a great

deal in?

16. Tell me about your Composition I class. Did you do much writing in this class? What were the major papers you did? Did you take Composition I here?
17. How do you feel about writing? Do you enjoy it? Do you do any writing outside of school?
18. What type of papers do you enjoy writing the most? Why?

Interview Guide for First Interview with Teacher

1. Would you tell me about your background? Where are you from? Where did you grow up?
2. Would you tell me about your family? (parents, siblings, spouse, children)
3. Why did you choose the teaching profession?
4. What are your degrees in? Where did you get your degrees?
5. Tell me about your teaching career? How long have you taught? Where have you taught? What have you taught?
6. How long have you taught at this college? What do you think about this college? How do you view your students here?
7. What are your major objectives when teaching composition?

Interview Guide for Second and Third Interviews with
Students

1. How did you interpret this assignment? What were you supposed to do? Why did you think this?
2. Was there anything about the assignment that you didn't understand or that was confusing to you?
3. Inquire about key terms used in assignment such as analyze, describe, define, etc.
4. Why did you choose this topic (if appropriate)?
5. Why did you begin (name a certain one) sentence or (name a certain one) paragraph this way?
6. Where did you learn to write in this manner?
7. Why did you use (name the amount) paragraphs or just one paragraph?
8. Where did you learn to do this?
9. What did you feel responsible/accountable for when writing this paper? Who did you feel responsible/accountable to?
10. Where did your motivation stem from?
11. What do you feel the teacher was looking for when she assigned this paper?
12. What aspect of the assignment was the most important to you? Why? What aspect of assignment do you think was most important to the teacher? Why?
13. Why did you feel you received this grade?
14. Did you feel you deserved this grade?

Interview Guide for the Second and Third Interviews with
the Teacher

1. What is the writing assignment?
2. If there is a key term used (such as analyze, define, describe, etc.), ask what this term means in relation to the assignment.
3. Was this a major writing assignment? Why or why not?
4. What do you feel the students should attend to first when beginning the assignment?
5. What was the purpose of this assignment?
6. What would an A, B, C, etc. paper involve for this assignment?
7. If a paper is grammatically incorrect but has good content, how would you assess it? What influences the grade?
8. How did you prepare the students for this assignment?
9. What would a good paper dealing with this assignment involve?
10. How long do the students have to complete the assignment?
11. When you gave the students the writing assignment, how did you go about designating the length of the paper? Was it according to words, pages, content?

Interview Guide for Fourth Interview with Students

1. How did you interpret this assignment? What were you supposed to do? Why did you think this?
2. Was there anything about the assignment that you didn't understand or that was confusing to you?
3. Inquire about key terms used in assignment such as analyze, describe, define, etc.
4. Why did you choose this topic (if appropriate)?
5. Why did you begin (name a certain one) sentence or (name a certain one) paragraph this way?
6. Where did you learn to write in this manner?
7. Why did you use (name the amount) paragraphs or just one paragraph?
8. Where did you learn to do this?
9. What did you feel responsible/accountable for when writing this paper? Who did you feel responsible/accountable to?
10. Where did your motivation stem from?
11. What do you feel the teacher was looking for when she assigned this paper?
12. What aspect of the assignment was the most important to you? Why? What aspect of assignment do you think was most important to the teacher? Why?
13. Why did you feel you received this grade?
14. Did you feel you deserved this grade?
15. Overall what did you think about the class?

16. What did you think about the instructor?
17. Do you think the class could have been improved? If so how?
18. Do you have any other comments or anything you would like to add?

Interview Guide for the Fourth Interview with the Teacher

1. What is the writing assignment?
2. If there is a key term used (such as analyze, define, describe, etc.), ask what this term means in relation to the assignment.
3. Was this a major writing assignment? Why or why not?
4. What do you feel the students should attend to first when beginning the assignment?
5. What was the purpose of this assignment?
6. What would an A, B, C, etc. paper involve for this assignment?
7. If a paper is grammatically incorrect but has good content, how would you assess it? What influences the grade?
8. How did you prepare the students for this assignment?
9. What would a good paper dealing with this assignment involve?
10. How long do the students have to complete the assignment?
11. When you gave the students the writing assignment, how did you go about designating the length of the paper? Was it according to words, pages, content?

Interview Guide for the Follow-Up Interview with the Teacher

1. How do you think the semester went? Why?
2. Do you feel anything should have been done differently?
If so what?
3. Do you feel that my presence in the classroom altered
your actions or the students' actions in any way? If
so how?
4. Was this class any different than any of your other
composition classes? If so how?
5. Do you have any other comments or anything you would
like to add?

Appendix C

Students' Questionnaire Guide for Extended Definition Essay

Following is a questionnaire dealing with an extended definition essay. After each statement is a list of possible responses which are: (a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree. After reading each statement, circle one of the responses.

1. I have experience prior to this paper in writing extended definition essays.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
2. I know what the instructor expects of me with this assignment.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
3. I am looking forward to writing this paper.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
4. I believe this assignment will be helpful to me when writing future essays in this class.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
5. I have taken other college level composition classes in the past.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
6. I understand what the instructor wants me to do when writing the extended definition essay.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
7. I enjoy writing.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
8. I believe the extended definition essay assignment will help me when I write other essays in this class.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
9. I have written extended definition essays in the past.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree

10. I enjoy writing papers for my college composition classes.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree

Teacher's Questionnaire Guide for Extended Definition Essay

Following is a questionnaire dealing with an extended definition essay. After each statement is a list of possible responses which are: (a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree. After reading each statement, circle one of the responses.

1. I have experience in teaching extended definition essays.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
2. The students know what I expect from them on this assignment.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
3. I am looking forward to teaching students how to write these papers.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
4. I believe that this assignment will be helpful to the students when they write future essays in this class.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
5. I have taught extended definition essays in other college classes.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
6. I feel that the students understand how to go about completing this assignment.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
7. I enjoy teaching writing.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
8. The extended definition essay assignment will be beneficial to the students when they write future essays in this class.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
9. I have taught other college level composition classes in the past.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or

disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree

10. I enjoy teaching college composition classes.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree

Students' Questionnaire Guide for Reporting Information Essay

Following is a questionnaire dealing with a reporting information essay. After each statement is a list of possible responses which are: (a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree. After reading each statement, circle one of the responses.

1. I have experience prior to this paper in writing reporting information essays.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
2. I know what the instructor expects of me with this assignment.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
3. I am looking forward to writing this paper.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
4. I believe this assignment will be helpful to me when writing future essays in this class.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
5. I have taken other college level composition classes in the past.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
6. I understand what the instructor wants me to do when writing the reporting information essay.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
7. I enjoy writing.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
8. I believe the reporting information essay assignment will help me when I write other essays in this class.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
9. I have written reporting information essays in the past.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree

10. I enjoy writing papers for my college composition classes.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree

Teacher's Questionnaire Guide for Reporting Information Essay

Following is a questionnaire dealing with a reporting information essay. After each statement is a list of possible responses which are: (a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree. After reading each statement, circle one of the responses.

1. I have experience in teaching reporting information essays.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
2. The students know what I expect from them on this assignment.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
3. I am looking forward to teaching students how to write these papers.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
4. I believe that this assignment will be helpful to the students when they write future essays in this class.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
5. I have taught reporting information essays in other college classes.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
6. I feel that the students understand how to go about completing this assignment.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
7. I enjoy teaching writing.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
8. The reporting information essay assignment will be beneficial to the students when they write future essays in this class.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
9. I have taught other college level composition classes in the past.

- (a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
10. I enjoy teaching college composition classes.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree

Students' Questionnaire Guide for Persuasive Essay

Following is a questionnaire dealing with a persuasive essay. After each statement is a list of possible responses which are: (a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree. After reading each statement, circle one of the responses.

1. I have experience prior to this paper in writing persuasive essays.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
2. I know what the instructor expects of me with this assignment.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
3. I am looking forward to writing this paper.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
4. I believe this assignment will be helpful to me when fulfilling assignments in other classes.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
5. I have taken other college level composition classes in the past.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
6. I understand what the instructor wants me to do when writing the persuasive essay.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
7. I enjoy writing.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
8. I believe the persuasive essay assignment will help me when I write papers in other classes.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
9. I have written persuasive essays in the past.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
10. I enjoy writing papers for my college composition classes.

(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree

Teacher's Questionnaire Guide for Persuasive Essay

Following is a questionnaire dealing with a persuasive essay. After each statement is a list of possible responses which are: (a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree. After reading each statement, circle one of the responses.

1. I have experience in teaching persuasive essays.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
2. The students know what I expect from them on this assignment.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
3. I am looking forward to teaching students how to write these papers.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
4. I believe that this assignment will be helpful to the students when they fulfill assignments in other classes.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
5. I have taught persuasive essays in other college classes.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
6. I feel that the students understand how to go about completing this assignment.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
7. I enjoy teaching writing.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
8. The persuasive essay assignment will be beneficial to the students when they write papers in other classes.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
9. I have taught other college level composition classes in the past.
(a) strongly agree; (b) agree; (c) neither agree or disagree; (d) disagree; (e) strongly disagree
10. I enjoy teaching college composition classes.