

California State University, San Bernardino

**CSUSB ScholarWorks**

---

Theses Digitization Project

John M. Pfau Library

---

1990

## Points of conflict: Where the high school and university writing communities differ

Robert Glenn Wood

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd-project>



Part of the [Rhetoric and Composition Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Wood, Robert Glenn, "Points of conflict: Where the high school and university writing communities differ" (1990). *Theses Digitization Project*. 568.

<https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd-project/568>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the John M. Pfau Library at CSUSB ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses Digitization Project by an authorized administrator of CSUSB ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@csusb.edu](mailto:scholarworks@csusb.edu).

POINTS OF CONFLICT:  
WHERE THE HIGH SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY  
WRITING COMMUNITIES DIFFER

---

A Thesis  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Masters of Arts  
in  
English Composition

---

by  
Robert Glenn Wood

November 1990

POINTS OF CONFLICT:  
WHERE THE HIGH SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY  
WRITING COMMUNITIES DIFFER


---

A Thesis  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

---

by  
Robert Glenn Wood  
November 1990

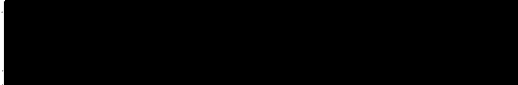
Approved by:

  
Peter Schroeder, Chair, English

Nov 27, 1990  
Date

  
Bruce Golden

11/27/90

  
Jennifer Randisi

11/27/90

## Abstract

Traditionally, the difficulties many freshman college writers experience when they begin to write for the university have been viewed as a result of a failure by the high school, to prepare students adequately for the university. However, the assumption I wish to substantiate in this thesis is that the difficulties many beginning college writers experience is not necessarily the result of a failure of our nation's secondary school system; rather, I wish to argue that they are the result of certain conflicts students experience when they make the transition from one community, with its own unique educational goals, rules, expectations, and critical theories for writing, to another which is often radically different.

After reviewing and comparing current research on the two communities, I have found that the high school and university indeed differ in their educational goals for writing; purposes for assigning writing; expectations and realities of university writing; and critical theories that underlie writing and its pedagogy. Furthermore, this thesis argues that these differences may present students with certain conflicts which ultimately may affect their writing performance at the university.

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter I. Differences in Educational goals for Writing in the High School and University.....	13
Chapter II. Goals for Writing Assignments: The High School and the University.....	24
Chapter III. What Do High School Writers Expect of University Writing?.....	37
Chapter IV. Differences in Critical Theories Between the High School and University Writing Communities.....	49
Conclusion.....	66
Appendix A.....	70
Bibliography.....	72

## Introduction

### The Problem

Over the past four years of my brief college teaching experience I have heard from my students one particular complaint that stands out above the myriad of others I receive during the course of a typical quarter. This complaint is: "I wasn't prepared for this in high school." It appears as though many of these students believe they were inadequately prepared to meet the challenges of university writing (e.g. they learned how to spell and form grammatically correct sentences but not how to write an analytical essay). What this suggests to me is that these students (many of whom were very successful writers in high school) are finding it much more difficult to become good college writers than they had expected. Consequently, many of them suffer academically in the university -- some drop out all together.

The problem I am addressing in this thesis is by no means a new discovery of my own. In fact, at one time or another every freshman composition instructor has probably asked, "Why are many of my students finding difficulty in becoming good college writers?" This question seems to imply that there are differences

in the ways writing is both taught and performed in high school and at the university. It is also a question closely tied to the present, and often heated, political debates concerning the efficacy of our nation's educational systems.

Unfortunately, too often this debate becomes reduced to simplistic attacks on or by educators, politicians, and parents. Politicians and parents accuse educators of not implementing effective curricula which adequately prepare students for the university; parents and educators blame politicians for not providing adequate financial support for public schools; and educators and politicians blame parents for not taking a larger role in their children's education. Each of these arguments contains a certain amount of validity: our public schools do need to revise their curricula to better meet the needs of a rapidly growing and changing student population; parents also need to take a more active role in their children's educations; and, God knows, our schools are severely underfunded in their quests to provide quality educations for all students.

In a democratic society like ours, we might expect a certain amount of finger-pointing between various factions; after all, passing-the-buck seems to be the American way of solving problems. But even among

educators we find a considerable amount of finger-pointing. In his survey of university faculty opinions, Laurence Behrens claims that "[university] students today are widely believed to be more illiterate--not only by the general public...but also by their college professors" (54). Behren's survey suggests that this is the result of a failure on the part of the high schools to provide students with adequate academic backgrounds. Furthermore, In Teaching Language, Composition, and Literature, Mary Fowler writes, "A look at the students who emerge from twelve or fourteen years of the study of English...suggests that some of the criticism of English teaching today is justified. College teachers complain that students who enter can neither read efficiently nor comprehendingly, speak effectively, spell or punctuate correctly, write clear, coherent expository prose, or command a fair level of standard English" (5). To many university instructors, poor student writing is the result of high schools neglecting to teach adequately these skills of writing. But whether or not the opinions of university educators found in Behrens and Fowler concerning the literacy problems of beginning college writers are indeed accurate is a question for which we have no clear answer at present. Depending on the studies one reads, the problem is getting better or the problem is



getting worse. However, we do have a clearer sense that many university instructors believe that the difficulties college students experience in writing for them are, at least in part, the result of a break-down in our secondary school system.

### The Purpose and Goals of this Thesis

What I intend to do in this thesis, however, is to approach this problem from the assumption that the difficulties many college freshmen experience in writing for the university are not necessarily the result of any one particular problem inherent in our nation's educational systems. Rather, I wish to argue that they are the result of conflicts students experience when they shift communities and make the transition from high school to the university, and that a complex network of factors contributes to this difficulty. To put this another way, high school and university students each belong to unique educational communities which contain their own rules, academic requirements, student bodies, and (most crucial to my argument) educational goals, purposes, expectations, and theories for writing and its pedagogy.

Let us look quickly at a somewhat exaggerated analogy to illustrate my point. Perhaps, for the freshman, learning to write for the university is a

task much like that of a non-English speaking foreigner learning to function as an American in an American society. Not only must a new language be acquired, but an entirely new environmental climate and all the peculiarities that go along with it must also be appropriated.

Furthering this analogy, I wish to make a distinction regarding two kinds of conflicts which might result when making the transition from one community to another. The first kind of conflict may be the result of an incremental movement. For example, the foreigner who wishes to learn English must first learn vocabulary and sentence grammar before reading a novel or writing an essay in that language. This incremental movement is somewhat similar to how a math student learns to add, subtract, multiply, and divide ( $2+2=4$ ,  $3 \times 5=15$ ), before learning the fundamentals of algebra ( $2x(1-x)=5$ ). The student learns to build on previous concepts before moving on to others where the concepts learned still apply, but are no longer adequate to accomplish the new tasks. An incremental movement of this type is one that students are used to experiencing in their formal educations and is not necessarily a problem in itself. However, students are expected to make these incremental transitions at the same rates as their peers. With an ever increasingly diversified

student body this may present a source of difficulty for students who are not yet ready to make the transition to the next level.

A second kind of conflict arises when students meet with a situation that is not only new to them but appears to reject, in some way, knowledge previously learned. For example, chapter four of this thesis will argue that the critical theories which underlie the approaches to reading and writing in the two writing communities indeed differ to the point where one theoretical community's approach to writing appears to reject the other's. My assumption is that even for the best and brightest students, this kind of conflict can result in poor writing performance at the university.

In this thesis, then, I will argue that both kinds of conflicts exist when students make the transition to the university writing community and that such conflicts may, at least in part, explain some of the difficulties many college freshmen experience.

In general, those concerned with writing in American higher and secondary education have yet to view the student's shift in community as an important aspect of the problems beginning writers face in writing for the university. David Bartholomae is one of the few educators to have addressed the issue. In his landmark essay, "Inventing the university," Bartholomae

seems acutely aware of just how difficult it is for many students to make the radical transition to become successful university writers:

Every time a student sits down to write for us, he has to invent the university for the occasion--invent the university, that is, or at least a branch of it, like history or anthropology or economics or English. The student has to learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the particular ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community. (134)

If what Bartholomae is saying here is valid, we might also assume that due to the increasing number of students entering the university with various backgrounds and abilities in writing, students will confront these new demands in a variety of ways: some might accept these challenges with relative ease, assimilating new sets of rules about writing into previously formed ideas about how writing works. On the other hand, some may find themselves completely overwhelmed and give up on the task out of sheer frustration or embarrassment, much like the high school freshman who seems to be the only one in the class who can't "get" geometry. Still others may get bits and pieces of it at a time, excelling in certain aspects of writing (e.g. structure, creativity, etc.), but appearing to be lacking in others.

The purpose of this thesis, then, is to explore several of the many characteristics that, in theory, comprise and distinguish both the high school and university communities. In particular, I wish to explore the differences between: (1) educational goals for writing; (2) goals for assigning writing; (3) expectations and realities of university writing; and (4) critical theories that influence writing pedagogy. By exploring these factors, I hope to expose some of the significant differences which may ultimately affect the writing performance of university freshmen. I believe it would be helpful to educators to view college freshmen writing difficulties as a complex problem of community incongruence. Viewing the problem in this way has at least two significant benefits: for one, it does not place blame on either community for "failing" to properly educate its students, thus allowing each community to focus its attention on helping students to become successful writers within their own respective environments. Second, with the absence of hostilities, high schools and universities can better build a cooperative base from which to work on specific educational problems.

Because the university and high school writing communities are not monolithic institutions, defining the specific boundaries of each is a difficult task at

best. In fact, I came across no research that even attempted specifically to define the high school or the university writing communities. Furthermore, I found very little research that directly compared the writing done at the university to the writing done in high school. However, one of the theories that I am attempting to support in this thesis is that the two writing communities can be defined by their differences in educational goals, purposes, expectations, and critical theories for writing, which, I will argue, are the general characteristics that distinguish one writing community from the other.

In talking about the university in general, however, I am not including the community colleges, whose educational purposes appear to be more difficult to define than those of the four-year colleges and tend to vary significantly from institution to institution. However, we should be well aware that many university students, particularly within the state systems, are transfer students from community colleges where many of them have taken their freshman composition courses.

What I will not do is attempt to pass critical judgment as to the effectiveness of writing instruction, or education in general, in either of these two communities. Such a task is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, this thesis will argue that

college writing instructors should be more aware of the particular problems that face students in learning to write for the university. My assumption is that the more we know about the writing communities our students come from, and the more we know about our own, the better prepared we will be to help them make the transition to the university.

### Problems with Research

A major problem in answering the questions presented in this thesis is that research is lacking concerning the differences between the high school and university writing communities. Arthur Applebee's surveys of writing in American secondary schools are perhaps the most comprehensive of their kind and serve as my primary source of research on high school writing. But the questions he asks and the conclusions he draws are extremely difficult to compare, in any definite way, to similar studies concerning university writing due to a lack of standardized terminology. For example, the terminology Applebee uses to describe a certain characteristic of student writing may be quite different from the terminology of another researcher studying the same characteristic. This problem is not unique to my thesis but, as Stephen North points out in

The Making of Knowledge in Composition, it is a problem that runs throughout our relatively new discipline.

The most useful source of information for this thesis would be to perform my own extensive survey of the high school and university communities, since no such study currently exists. But such a project is impractical at this time. Therefore, this thesis will use the few surveys and case studies currently available and attempt to form some relevant comparisons and draw some possible conclusions.

At this time I would like to thank Kathleen McClelland for supplying me with her paper, "College Preparatory -vs- College Reality," presented at the 1990 Conference on College Composition and Communication. This was the only available survey that compared directly the expectations high school students have of university writing instruction with the realities of university writing instruction, and it serves as a major source of information for this thesis. Studies like McClelland's are deeply needed for us to better understand the particular difficulties students face in writing for the university.

Thus, given the nature of our problem here, more questions will be raised than we will have sufficient evidence to answer; but by at least raising such



questions perhaps we may see the need for greater  
future cooperative research in this area.

## Chapter I

### Differences in Educational Goals for Writing in the High school and University

In order for us as university instructors to better understand the particular difficulties that high school students might face in making the transition from the high school to the university writing community, I feel it would be helpful at least to consider the differences in educational goals for writing that, either directly or indirectly, could affect the ways writing is approached in the university as compared to high school. This chapter attempts to loosely define and compare the educational goals for writing between the high school and university to expose possible areas of conflict. My purpose for doing this is to help support my hypothesis that certain conflicts between the two institutions may have a negative impact on a beginning college writer's adjustment to the university writing community.

In Teaching Language, Composition, and Literature, Mary Fowler claims that "in the United States the goal of [secondary] education for all American youth, aimed at developing each individual to his full potential, is

quite different from that of the education of a leisure class, and a social and economic elite. Teachers in American schools must meet and teach all kinds of young people of widely differing abilities and widely varying backgrounds" (4). Perhaps one of the most obvious factors separating the high school from the university writing community is the high school's need, among other things, to teach written skills to a wide variety of students with various educational backgrounds and abilities. However, not all students in high school desire to be there, but remain because of legal and parental pressures. Furthermore, of those who do want to be in high school, not all desire to go on to the university.

In theory, anyway, the high school's goals for writing do not appear to be in conflict with the university's. The statement of framework for goals in the Language Arts produced by the California Department of Education lists eleven goals for student writing that seek to develop critical, analytical, and evaluative skills ( see appendix A). But because not all students wish to continue their educations in the university, high schools have an obligation to present a writing curriculum in such a way that those who will not go on to college will have an adequate basis to function competently in a literate and competitive

society. For many high schools, this means focusing their writing pedagogy on meeting the goals on some kind of standardized proficiency exam. In speaking with several California high school English teachers, I found that, in practice, most developed their curriculum towards preparing students to pass the writing tests of the California Assessment Program (CAP). The CAP goals for teaching English-language arts in the secondary schools are to prepare all students to "(1) function as informed and effective citizens in our democratic society, (2) function effectively in the world of work, and (3) realize personal fulfillment" (II-1). The CAP statement of goals for writing is somewhat unclear as to what it means for one to "function effectively in our democratic society." But we might assume that functioning members perform a variety of reading and writing tasks daily. They read newspapers, magazines, pamphlets etc., and many regularly do some kind of writing on their jobs and at home, whether it be filling out reports, writing letters, or making out a grocery list.

To reach this level of functionality we might also assume that one must (1) have a sufficient vocabulary to read and understand the written material one comes in contact with in everyday life; and (2) have the ability to spell, punctuate, and put together

grammatical and coherent written sentences that convey an intended message. Practically, this means being able to score well on the CAP test, which consists of writing an essay on a prompt chosen from one of the eight types of writing specified in the CAP (e.g. Reflective Essay, Speculating about Causes or Effects, Controversial Issue, etc.). These essay tests are evaluated holistically by a panel consisting of high school teachers from various disciplines.

High schools are under constant fire from parental groups and politicians and must at least attempt to meet these goals with an increasingly diversifying student body. Consequently, much of their curricula is geared towards reaching the minimum proficiency in the greatest number of students. Even for the best academic high schools in America the challenge to meet the needs of the masses and still provide an adequate academic foundation for college-bound students becomes a difficult task at best. For example, because it exists in a somewhat elite residential community, and is heavily influenced by several local colleges and universities, Claremont High School in California is considered to be one of the state's better academic high schools. But even Claremont High, with its exceptional number of college-bound students, focuses most of its writing pedagogy on the basic elements of

punctuation, spelling, and the development of grammatical sentences. Of the three sequential composition courses offered at CHS only the third (an optional AP course) deals specifically with developing critical writing skills. Most students who do not opt for the AP course will receive little experience in dealing with the kinds of critical and argumentative writing tasks that are the focus of most college freshman writing courses. Most of the high school writing teachers I interviewed for this thesis expressed their desires to better focus their pedagogy on the more critical writing tasks, but explained that due to the sheer volume of students, their diverse abilities, and the relatively limited time they have to work with them and grade papers, such an undertaking would be highly impractical. Furthermore, because they must concentrate on basic competency, perhaps they give students the impression that competent mechanics, in fact, equals "good" writing. Obviously, competence in the mechanical skills of writing are necessary for "good" writing at the university, but they alone are inadequate.

Another point I would like to suggest is the possibility that the "better" students in high school (those who have mastered the mechanical conventions of writing) are accustomed to being rewarded for this.

However, when at the university they receive a mediocre grade on a paper that is mechanically "correct" they often become indignant. For example, while tutoring in the writing center at Claremont McKenna College a few years back I had a freshman show me his paper on which he received a D. He was quite irate. When I asked him what he thought was wrong with it, he replied:

"Nothing. There's not one correction mark on this paper. I would have gotten an A on this in high school!"

But in contrast to the high school writing community's goal to meet the writing needs of the masses, the university seems to have a much narrower purpose. First of all, the university does not have to meet the needs of all members of society. It might be assumed that university students attend out of choice and out of a desire to achieve more than a "functional" level of writing skill which will not only help them in their academic work but later in their professional careers as well. Second, those who attend the university are assumed already to have the kind of foundational knowledge of writing (spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, etc.) that is focused on in high schools.

Thus, by nature of its students and the smaller number of students per teacher, the university, in

general, appears to be able to focus its writing pedagogy on a level of critical tasks higher than that of the high schools. For example, the California State University, San Bernardino catalogue states that the general education requirements for writing instruction prepare students to "think clearly and logically, to find and critically examine information, and to communicate, at an appropriate level, orally and in writing" (75). This statement suggests that university writing pedagogy aims at more than just the "functional" level of proficiency we find in the CAP statement on writing for high schools. We get the sense that university writing aims at not only strengthening the entire communicative process, it also aims at developing higher-level critical thinking skills as well.

My purpose for pointing out the differences between the high school and university's goals for writing is not to place blame on the high schools for not focusing on the same kinds of writing tasks as the university. Rather, I am merely trying to demonstrate, in a general way, that the very natures of the two institutions and their students appear to demand separate educational goals for writing. Furthermore, I would like to argue that by demonstrating this apparent schism of educational goals I can see at least two



implications for students making the transition to the university writing community.

The first implication is that it addresses the often heard argument, "If only the high schools had the same goals for writing as the universities, students wouldn't have so much trouble performing the kinds of critical reading, thinking, and writing tasks that are found at the university." What this argument seems to suggest is that making better college writers is merely a matter of making them better college writers while they are in high school. On the surface this sounds like a good argument, and to be sure, university instructors (myself included) would like nothing better than to receive freshmen who have already had four solid years of critical reading and writing experience as well as a mastery of spelling, grammar, etc. However, the realities of the situation are that the high school's goals for student writing, as well as their students in general, are much broader than the university's. As much as the high schools would like to focus their writing pedagogy on the "higher-level" writing tasks we find at the university, it appears logistically difficult. With growing political and parental pressures, an increasingly diversifying student body, and a strong "back-to-the-basics" movement in America, high schools are pushed into

focusing their writing pedagogy on achieving a level of "functionality" in all students. With these kinds of pressures, college-level writing, out of necessity, must take a subordinate role in the high school.

A second implication concerns certain motivational factors which affect students in each community. Because high schools are responsible for teaching all their students to write functionally, much of the student's motivation comes from the institution. For example, in Flow in Adolescence and its Relation to School Experience, Larson found that of the 20 or so hours per week students spend in the classroom, only four are actually spent listening to teacher instruction (63). The rest of the class time is spent doing reading, writing, and other tasks that are typically performed outside the classroom for university students. In fact, Larson's study finds that typically high school students do little study outside the classroom.

We can see how this can become a problem for the student writer entering the university. In addition to making the transition to a new community with new sets of rules, expectations, and requirements of writing, the beginning college student is also making the transition to a community where the responsibility for motivation and study rests solely on her or him.

Obviously, for the student finding difficulty with self-motivation (thus, not allowing sufficient time for study), the new demands of the university will be hard to meet.

To support this, Factors Related to Retention Among Freshmen and Transfer Students, a 1989 survey of freshmen at California State University, San Bernardino, found that freshmen average only about 13 hours per week studying for their coursework. But given the general college study rule of two hours outside class for every hour spent in class, we find that full-time students should be averaging around 32 hours per week studying outside the classroom. Indeed the CSUSB study shows that freshmen spend less than half of the time the university suggests for sufficient study. For freshmen writers this problem can be extremely detrimental, since good college writing takes a significant amount of time. We might assume that those students who do not spend adequate time working on their papers will be less likely to critically examine and revise their own work. In fact, the CSUSB study suggests that those students who do not spend sufficient time studying tend to do poorly throughout the university in general, and many of them eventually drop out of school altogether.

What I have attempted to argue for in this chapter is that between the high school and university communities significant differences in the goals for writing appear to exist. The high school's educational goals for writing are geared towards achieving a certain level of functionality for all its students, whereas the university's educational goals for writing are concerned with reaching a higher level of writing proficiency than the mere functionality that the high schools are trying to achieve.

I have also tried to demonstrate that by the nature of their student, the two communities seem to demand separate educational goals for writing. The high schools must attempt to educate a wide variety of students with various backgrounds and abilities, whereas the university is working with a much more homogeneous student population (at least in terms of their educational goals) which allows it the opportunity to focus its writing pedagogy on teaching the higher-level critical writing tasks.

## Chapter II

### Goals for Writing Assignments: the High School and University

Research over the past few decades indicates that students in both the high school and the university perform a variety of writing tasks which ask them to utilize critical, analytical, argumentative, and summary skills in their writing (Donlan, Perron, Bereiter), although we might assume that by nature university writing assignments require more proficiency with these skills. But this chapter is not so concerned with comparing the kinds of writing tasks assigned in the two institutions as it is with exploring the reasons why writing is assigned at all. In Writing in the Secondary School, Applebee claims that the "teachers' [goals] for assigning writing tasks are directly related to the kinds of assignments they give" (63). But what this chapter seeks to argue is that although both the high school and university writing communities may assign similar kinds of writing tasks, their pedagogical goals for assigning writing appear to be somewhat different, which may present a conflict

that could adversely affect some beginning college student's writing performance.

Using terms from a previous British study, Applebee (1981) separates the goals for assigning writing into two distinct categories: (1) transmissive, or what we will call the informational approach, which sees the goal of writing as a means of testing students' ability to encode and reconvey knowledge or information, usually supplied by teachers and/or textbooks; and (2) interpretive, which sees writing as a way for the writer to explore a subject and relate it to personal experience, and to use writing as a way of thinking. According to Applebee, informational uses of writing include tasks like note-taking, recording information, reporting on particular events, and summary. Interpretive uses for writing, on the other hand, include such tasks as journal or diary writing, personal letters or notes, stories, poems, or other imaginative uses (29). Applebee concludes that, overall, about 70% of the high school teachers included in his survey emphasized writing as a means of transmission of knowledge as compared to approximately 16% who were primarily concerned with students' personal experiences or interpretations (60).

Within the high school writing community, Applebee (1981) reports that English teachers are more likely to

stress personal and imaginative writing in their classrooms than are other disciplines. However, emphasis on the informative use of writing tended to be "most" important to their classrooms as well (61).

Applebee notes one English teacher who seems to recognize that writing can be used as a way of thinking. However, we find that the informative purpose for assigning writing is overwhelming prevalent in this English teacher's response:

I think there are two reasons for asking students to write that are not generally connected to each other. One is, I need to know if they are learning what I am teaching...And the other one, and the one I think is more important but probably really isn't, I think it's almost impossible for you to organize what you know and to really understand what you know if you haven't tried to put it down on paper.  
(62)

Perhaps this English teacher's response reflects the political uses for writing in our secondary schools. As we saw in chapter one of this thesis, high school educators are under constant pressure from parents and politicians to produce "results"--results which show that our nation's high school students are "learning" the state-approved curricula. Consequently, it seems reasonable to assume that high schools would be more apt to use writing as a way of testing students'

knowledge to reassure those concerned that their investment in public education is paying off.

Applebee's surveys also show that teachers in other high school disciplines seem even more focused than English teachers on writing as an informative activity. Math and science teachers, Applebee claims, are not as concerned as English teachers tend to be with writing as a means of expression, but are more concerned with writing as a means of applying new concepts to new situations (63). Furthermore, Applebee goes on to note that business and social science teachers tend to view the goals for writing assignments similarly to those of science and math teachers, although the former tended to place more emphasis on the integration of writing skills and the application of concepts (63).

In a case study analyzing the goals for writing assignments in high school, Applebee (1984) gives us an example that illustrates how a typical high school teacher utilizes the informational activities for writing assignments. Applebee here uses the goals for writing assigned by Dan Phillips, a general biology teacher. Applebee concludes that "in Phillips' class...the informal assignments are intended to encourage students' learning of the material while the formal assignments test their success" (152). We find



this emphasis on writing in one of Phillips' learning log entries where a student is asked to write a summary of the characteristics of paramecium:

Paramecium are round like torpedoes. All along their sides are tiny, hairlike things called "celia." These celia propell them through the water...Paramecium have a definite front and rear end. Along one side there is an oral groove. Celia beat food into the groove where it is digested and changed into a food vacuole.  
(152)

Here we see that the student uses writing for the purpose of retelling knowledge given to her by the teacher and by a biology text. Furthermore, Applebee points out that the formal essays in Phillips' class ("Discuss the evidence that DNA controls heredity") as well as the exam questions ("Describe, in as much detail as you can, how a food vacuole digests food") are developed for the student to regurgitate specific information about a given subject and to give the teacher a means to test that knowledge (152-53). To Phillips, and other teachers like him, essay writing is a way of explaining things that short-answer and fill-in-the-blank formats cannot accommodate (Applebee (84) 62).

In regards to university writing, Lucille Parkinson McCarthy's case study of a student writing across the disciplines also showed that the goals for

university writing assignments across the disciplines are "almost exclusively informational, the same type of writing that Applebee (1984) found comprised most of the writing in secondary schools" (243). However, even though the majority of writing done in both high school and the university tends to be what we here call "informational," McCarthy found that another goal for writing seems to exist which may be unique to the university writing community. In interviewing the three university professors in her study, she found that "all three claimed that the goal [for assigning writing tasks] was not so much for the students to display knowledge about specific information, but rather for students to become more competent in using the thinking and language of their disciplines" (244). McCarthy notes the response of one instructor, Dr. Kelley, a biologist:

I want students to be at ease with the vocabulary of Cell Biology and how experiments are being done....Students need to get a feeling for the journals, the questions people are asking, the answers they're getting, and the procedures they're using. It will give them a feeling for the excitement, the dynamic part of this field....Student summaries of journal articles were, in other words, to get them started speaking the language of the discourse community. (244)

We find Dr. Kelley's views on the goals for writing assignments to be somewhat different from those of the

high school biology teacher Applebee cites. Dr. Kelley does not seem to be solely concerned as Phillips appears to be with writing as a means of testing what his students know. Rather, writing, for his class anyway, has at least one other significant goal: it is a means of practicing the discourse of the biologist, learning to speak the way a biologist speaks, learning to think the way a biologist thinks. This view supports Bartholomae's argument that the beginning college writer must learn the language (or languages) of the university in order to write effectively.

The process of acquiring the language(s) of the university can in itself be a source of trouble for many beginning college writers. In "Inventing the University," Bartholomae analyzes a freshman placement essay to illustrate how awkward and non-collegiate sounding a beginning college student's writing can be while in that transitional process of moving from the high school to the university writing community. The following is the first paragraph from this essay. The writer's task here is to "Describe a time when you did something you felt to be creative. Then, on the basis of the incident you have described, go on to draw some general conclusions about 'creativity'":

In the past time I thought that an incident was creative was when I had to make a clay model of

the earth, but not of the classical or your everyday model of the earth which consists of two cores, the mantle and the crust. I thought of these things in a dimension of which it would be unique, but easy to comprehend. Of course your materials to work with were basic and limited at the same time, but thought helped to put this limit into a right attitude or frame of mind to work with the clay. (135)

It doesn't take a university instructor to see the awkwardness and "misuse" of language in this student's opening paragraph, although, Bartholomae argues, it is precisely because the student is aware he is writing for university instructors that it appears this way. "He knew that the university faculty would be reading and evaluating his essay, and so he wrote for them" (136). What we have here is a student who is aware that the university requires something more of his writing than did his previous writing community, but he has yet to acquire the vocabulary and schemas necessary for producing "quality" college writing. The student is a writer in transition. That is, the student is in the process of acquiring a new language. He is trying out new words, new concepts, and new ways of expressing them for which he is not yet fully competent. This in itself is not necessarily a source of conflict for the beginning college writer, since, as I have mentioned previously, students are used to an incremental education where new and more difficult tasks must be

performed as the student progresses. However, I can see at least two potential areas of conflict which might adversely affect the high school student's transition to the university writing community.

The first area of conflict should be obvious. It comes when the student is unaware that new forms of discourse and thinking must be acquired to perform well at the university. Such students often rely on ways of writing they found success with in high school. Usually, this means using a vocabulary and structure (often the "five-paragraph" essay) they feel safe with. In fact, Applebee (84) notes the organizational process of one successful high school writer to show how students typically rely on preset schemas and structures in performing analytical writing tasks:

The beginning is the most important to me. If it's not right, it is almost impossible to get anything else. The thesis is in the first paragraph and then [when the first paragraph is written] I have the paper outlined. I need a paragraph to prove each point made in the thesis. (46)

While this may seem like a safe and proven form to the beginning college writer who is stuck for something to say, it simply cannot work adequately for many university writing assignments. And it is the kinds of assignments that these forms do not work for that the inexperienced writer will struggle with most. For

example, in Ways of Reading Bartholomae asks students to perform a similar writing task to that of the freshman placement essay above. In this assignment they are asked to respond to Paulo Freire's essay, "The Banking Concept of Education":

Write an essay that focuses on a rich and illustrative incident from your own educational experience and read it (that is, interpret it) as Freire would. You will need to provide careful detail: things that were said and done, perhaps the exact wording of an assignment, a textbook, or a teacher's comments. And you will need to turn to the language of Freire's argument, to take key phrases and passages from his argument and see how they might be used to investigate your case. (681-82)

We see that the kind of "five-paragraph" form (utilized successfully by the student in Applebee's study) most likely will not adequately meet the demands of this assignment. First of all, this is a complex task that will probably require more development than the "one paragraph for each point" that the student in Applebee's study utilizes. Second, and perhaps more important, a preset form like this will only limit organizational options, thus impeding the exploratory processes of this assignment. For here we have an assignment which provokes students to think and write about their past experiences, as well as analyze the language and arguments of an expert writer, for the

purpose of gaining access to the university discourse community.

A second area of conflict may also result when the university instructor fails to recognize a student's apparent writing failures as being the result of a struggle to acquire the new ways of thinking and writing that she feels will bring her success at the university. For example, an instructor evaluating the student placement essay in Bartholomae's essay might easily deem the student a poor or incompetent writer because of the misuse of language and the frequency of mechanical errors, perhaps negatively affecting the writer's self-confidence in performing academically at the university. On the other hand, as Mina Shaughnessy suggests in Errors and Expectations, the evaluator who is aware that such "errors" are merely symptoms of the student's struggle to acquire the thinking and language skills of the university may better be prepared to help her make the transition to the university writing community. In her study of basic writers, Shaughnessy writes:

[basic writing] students write the way they do, not because they are slow or non verbal, indifferent to or incapable of academic excellence, but because they are beginners and must, like all beginners, learn by making mistakes....And the keys to their development as writers often lie hidden in the very features of their writing that English teachers

have been trained to brush aside with a marginal code letter or a scribbled injunction to "proofread!" (5)

Although Shaughnessy here is writing exclusively about basic writers, we might argue that many successful high school writers as well may experience similar difficulties in their attempt to acquire the language of the university. The acquisition of any new language is a difficult process which takes various lengths of time depending on the individual student. However, beginning college writers are often expected to acquire the languages of the university literally overnight. For those students who cannot do so, frustration and self-doubt will almost certainly affect their writing performance.

Thus, this chapter has argued that the high school and university writing communities do tend to differ in their goals for writing. The evidence suggests that, in general, high schools tend to use essay writing as a way of testing student knowledge, whereas the university tends to use writing as a way for student to position themselves in the various academic disciplinary communities. Although we have no empirical evidence which shows that such a conflict in communities can present specific problems for students making the transition to the university, I believe that



this kind of conflict can cause problems for beginning college writers when either the instructor or the student is unaware that such differences exist.

## Chapter III

### What do High School Writers Expect of University Writing Instruction?

Several researchers over the past few decades have demonstrated that high school students often have misconceptions about various aspects of the university (Clausen, 1975; Goodman 1975; Peltason, 1979). These range from misconceptions about the university's social environment to unrealistic expectations about the cost of attending a university. Each of these studies show that unrealistic expectations of the university can negatively affect the academic adjustment of the beginning college student. This chapter, however, focuses specifically on the high school writer's expectations of university writing. Kathleen McClelland's survey of the eight University of California campuses and several hundred feeder high schools finds that the writing instruction many high school students are currently receiving appears to be significantly different from the writing instruction actually practiced in the university. That is, there seems to be a significant difference between the ways

high school teachers view writing instruction in the university and the ways it is actually taught. We must make the distinction here between the expectations high school English teachers have of university writing and the ways they approach writing in their classes. In Errors and Expectations, Mina Shaughnessy says that "the expectations of learners and teachers powerfully influence what happens in school. If we do not already know this in our bones, we can find it documented in studies of learning" (275). We might assume that for those teachers whose job it is to prepare students for writing in the university (specifically the AP English teachers), the expectations they have of university writing will most likely influence their writing pedagogy. This perhaps may leave former high school students with misconceptions about university writing instruction, thus presenting for them another conflict when making the transition to college.

Although McClelland's study focuses exclusively on the UC writing programs, we might assume that the practices UC writing departments adhere to generally hold true for many other colleges and universities, since the same modern compositional theories which McClelland found generally governed the UC composition programs are becoming more accepted in the institutions

of higher education across the country. McClelland's data found three erroneous assumptions high school writing teachers tend to hold concerning University of California writing instruction. They believe that:

- 1) UC freshman programs are literature oriented;
- 2) most of the writing assigned will call for literary analysis;
- 3) all writing assigned will be exclusively impersonal and governed by a predetermined, formulaic structure. (2)

These assumptions contrast sharply with UC writing instructors' responses, which affirm that:

- 1) most university composition courses are primarily writing rather than literature courses;
- 2) student writing that is highly impersonal, voiceless, and rigidly "academic" is not privileged over writing that is more individualized, expressive, and reflective of personal engagement;
- 3) the traditional means of teaching literature (i.e. lecturing on "correct" interpretations) is not conventional on UC campuses;

- 4) the beliefs and practices of most UC instructors are consistent with modern composition theory. (2)

The first erroneous assumptions high school teachers tend to hold concerning university writing are related to the focus on literature in the composition classroom. First of all, McClelland's data show that more than 62% of high school English teachers surveyed believe that university composition courses are primarily literature courses. Traditionally, both the university and the high schools have made the study of literature the focus of their writing pedagogy. In a 1963 survey, High School English Textbooks, James Lynch found that most high school English texts focus their writing pedagogy on combining fictional literary forms like the short story, the novel, drama, and poetry, with the teaching of grammar. However, over the past decade or so, university writing programs have seen a marked increase in the use of composition texts which, although they may utilize literature in their approach to writing pedagogy, tend to focus more on teaching rhetorical techniques and processes of writing. To support this, McClelland's survey shows that only about 12% of UC writing instructors consider their courses to be primarily literature-based.

Second, not only do most high school teachers believe university writing instruction to be literature oriented, McClelland's data show that 71% of the high school teachers surveyed expected university writing instructors to focus their classes on teaching students to write exclusively on the formalistic elements of literature (plot, theme metaphor, ect.), as well as having them find the "correct" interpretations of literature. But McClelland not only found that literary analysis was not the primary focus of most university composition courses, she also found that of the university instructors who do focus on literary analysis, only 32% expect students to be able to recognize the theme or other formalistic elements.

The third erroneous assumption is that high school teachers tend to believe that university composition instruction focuses on writing that is impersonal and follows a predetermined formulaic structure. According to McClelland's data, writing instruction in the university, while it may utilize various forms of literature, appears to be personally-oriented or what is often called "expressionistic" writing and follows no predetermined structure.

While the precise implications of these three erroneous assumptions on the performance of beginning college writers may not be exactly clear, McClelland's

data do appear to suggest that many high school teachers and students expect university writing instruction to have the same kinds of clearly defined rules and structures for writing which predominate the high school writing community. Furthermore, many also expect any kind of interpretation, whether it be of literary texts or otherwise, to come from the instructor. But McClelland's data also suggest that the university's rules for writing and interpretation are somewhat less clearly defined than the high school's. If this schism indeed exists, we might assume that there is at least one implication for the beginning college writer. Specifically, we might wish to consider whether moving from one community, where the student appears to have little authority as a writer but whose rules for writing are universal and clearly defined, to another community where the student is expected to assume an expert-like authority and whose rules for writing are less clearly defined, may present difficulty for the beginning college writer.

For one, it seems reasonable to assume that students like clearly defined rules for writing. It is much easier for students to be successful writers when they know exactly what and how to interpret, as well as knowing the exact form to use for expressing such interpretations. Even the successful high school

writer, when met with the apparent indeterminacy of university writing, may experience difficulty in finding the self-confidence and self-authority it takes to do many of the expressionistic university writing assignments. And many university composition textbooks require students to invent and argue for their own position on a topic, as well as develop their own organizational structures.

For example, Rise Axelrod and Charles Cooper's The St. Martin's Guide to Writing is one of the more popular freshman composition textbooks used in American colleges and universities. Within the section entitled "Remembering People," a typical writing task asks students to write about a person who means something significant to them:

Write an essay about someone important in your life, someone with whom you have had a significant relationship. Strive to present a vivid image of this person, one that will let your readers see his or her character and personal significance to you. (80)

This writing task asks students to focus on and describe something personal in their lives. Many of my freshmen students have trouble doing this assignment because they have to bring themselves into their texts, write about their own experience, and use first person singular, all of which are things most were



specifically told not to do in high school. And this expressionistic writing is not only commonplace in Axelrod and Cooper's chapter on narration, it is also ubiquitous in their chapters on reporting information, making evaluations, explaining causes, analyzing literature, and others. For example, the writing task for the chapter on taking a position asks students to:

Take a position on a controversial issue. Examine the issue critically, take a position on it, and develop a reasoned argument in support of your position. (202)

This task calls for students to present an argument based on their own interpretation of an issue. The typical high school task of writing on the "correct" interpretation of the text (usually supplied by the teacher) is absent. Again, this task can be difficult for many beginning college writers, since most students are, in a way, asked to view themselves as experts on a particular topic. That is, they are asked to have something important to say. Recently, I asked my own freshman composition students to write an in-class essay on a debate they saw concerning Israel's occupation of Palestine. Their task was: "Choosing a side which you feel strongly about, take a position either supporting or condemning Israel's occupation of Palestine." Their first reaction to this assignment was

one I have seen many times before. Most wanted to know what I (the instructor) believed to be the "correct" position to take on the topic. Their second reaction was another which I had seen more than once before: "We're only students. How can we make a judgement on this issue?" Even after hearing both sides of the debate, many were unable to argue for a position, although in class discussion, most made comments which indicated they, in fact, had personal opinions on the subject. Consequently, many of their essays included little more than a summary of the debate. The following is an uncorrected student example of such a paper:

The Palestinians and the Isrealies have been fighting for years. Ever since 1947 the Arabs and Isrealies have been at a state of war, technically. Even though there is no fighting at the moment, the fighting can begin at any moment.

The six day war is probably the most known conflict between the Arabs and Isrealies. In this war the Arabs and Isrealies were fighting over the west bank, and the Gaza strip. They were captured by the Isrealies. Even though the territories were turned over, the chance for peace among the two is slim. The question is whether Isreal should give the land back to the Arabs.

One side says that Isreal should keep the land because they fought for it and eventually occupied it. There was alot of blood spilt over this land, so why give it back. They fought for it and it cost alot of lives. If they give it back, it will be as if the lives were of no cost.

But another side says that the land belongs to the Arabs. The Arabs have lived

there for a long time and many feel that Isreal has no right to occupy it.

Isreal, though, needs the area because of its strategic importance to them and the United States. Since the United States and Isreal are allies and the U.S. supports Isreal, it would be in the best interest to stay on the U.S.'s good side.

I would like to suggest here that this student's paper suffers from more than mere grammar and development problems. The writer herself appears to suffer from a lack of confidence in arguing for a specific position on this topic. Although she hints at a position, we see in her conciliatory treatment of both sides that she clearly does not see herself as having the authority to take an "expert's" position on the topic. Possibly, her first instinct is to rely on summarizing the positions of the real experts (those involved in the debate). She also leaves her own feelings on the subject completely out of the paper. But in discussing the topic in class, she expressed strong pro-Israeli sentiments. Perhaps a genuine fear of taking the wrong position (or one different from myself as the instructor and evaluator of her paper) kept her from taking the same strong position she took in the class discussion.

Perhaps it would be stretching it somewhat to say that this student's problems with this assignment is a direct result of her failed expectations of university writing. But we might suggest that a student who is not

used to interpreting her own data, taking her own position based on that data, and organizing and developing her argument according to the nature of her position, may very well experience difficulty in executing a particular assignment.

This chapter suggests that the differences in expectations and realities between the high school and university writing communities which McClelland distinguishes further illustrate the complex changes the beginning college writer may experience when making the transition to the university. As I have mentioned before, it is difficult to measure in any empirical sense the specific effects on writing performance that these spurious expectations might have on the beginning college student. But we might at least wish to consider the general implication that the former high school student who has been taught writing in one way and expects the university to approach writing in the same way could possibly find difficulty adjusting to a writing community which does not meet her expectations. Many psychologists claim that the primary reason for failed marriages is that one spouse (or both) did not meet the expectations the other held before entering into marriage. Perhaps the same holds true for the beginning college writer. We might think of the beginning college writer as one entering into a new

relationship, a relationship which calls for students to speak, think, and write in new and more difficult ways. If the student does not meet the expectations of the university, and conversely, if the university does not meet the expectations of the student, adjustment to this new relationship, most likely, will be difficult, and poor student writing performance could easily result.

## Chapter IV

### Differences in Critical Theories Between the High School and University Writing Communities

In the first three chapters of this thesis I have suggested and attempted to substantiate the position that, in general, the high school and university writing communities are often separated by differences between educational goals for writing, purposes for assigning writing, and the expectations and realities of university writing pedagogy. In my fourth and final chapter I would like to suggest that basic theoretical assumptions about what writing is for and how it should be taught underlie the differences discussed in earlier chapters. More specifically, I would like to suggest that an increasing number of university composition programs are leaning towards post-structural theories and their implications for writing instruction, whereas most high school writing instruction tends to remain firmly grounded in primarily formalist principles.

It would be foolish to assume here that the two writing communities are monolithic institutions to the point that they adhere (either consciously or unconsciously) to specific, clearly-defined critical

theories for approaching writing. However, we cannot overlook the fact that composition instruction in both institutions is closely tied to their respective English departments and is influenced by the critical theories for literature that exist within them. In recent years within the university, modern compositional theory has seen a shift in focus from the New Critical theories, generally adhered to by the teachers of literature in both the high school and the university, to the post-structural theories of the past few decades. Joseph Comprone writes, "composition, long the service-oriented stepchild of English departments, has begun to develop its own specialists, some of whom read the same theoretical books as their literary theory colleagues" (293). The literary theories Comprone is referring to are the post-structural theories of Wolfgang Iser, Norman Holland, David Bleich, Stanley Fish, and others. Although post-structural theories vary significantly from theorist to theorist, most seem to hold to certain consistent assumptions concerning the nature of the relationships between meaning, text, reader, and writer. Briefly, let us look at some of the assumptions of both post-structuralism and formalism to see where they differ in general as theories and where they

differ in their implications for writing instruction and its evaluation.

Formalist theory or "New Criticism" has been a dominant force in the university and high school English departments across the country over the past sixty years or so. In A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature, Wilfred Guerin summarizes the nature of formalistic criticism:

As its name suggests, "formalistic" criticism has for its sole object the discovery and explanation of form in the literary work. This approach assumes the autonomy of the work itself and thus the relative unimportance of extraliterary considerations--the author's life; his times; sociological, political, economic, or psychological implications....The heart of the matter for the formalist critic is quite simply: What is the literary work, what are its shape and effect, and how are these achieved? All relevant answers to these questions ought to come from the text itself.  
(70)

We see here that formalist theory not only places a heavy emphasis on the craft or "technique" of the text, it also asserts that meaning is inherent in the text itself. Indeed, the implications for teaching and evaluating student writing are wide-ranging, as Edward M. White explains:

On the positive side, [formalist criticism] urged readers of student writing to attend to the texts that the student produced, rather than to the student's social class, appearance, or moral predispositions. Since, as Vygotsky



taught us, language and thought were virtually the same, the theory provided the teacher with a certain valuable scepticism for the student who claimed, "I know what I mean but I just don't know how to say it": if you don't know how to say it, we could self-righteously reply, then you don't know what you mean! Most important, it focused both students' and teachers' attention on the craftsmanship of prose, what Schorer calls "technique," and on the way that craftsmanship conveys meaning. In so doing, this theory provided a useful if limited framework for the teaching of writing, since craftsmanship is always teachable, if not always learnable, in a way that inspiration, say, is not. (286-87)

Lucille Parkinson McCarthy's case study of a university student writing across the disciplines finds that writing assignments which utilize formalistic principles are indeed ubiquitous in university literature courses. For example, she notes one English teacher's directions for approaching the essays for his class: "The three critical essays you will write will make you say something quite specific about the meaning of a poem (your thesis) and demonstrate how far you've progressed in recognizing and dealing with the devices a poet uses to express his insights. Our concern here is for the poem, not the poet's life or era. Nor are your own opinions of the poets ideas germane (244)."

Post-structural theory, on the other hand, aims at something quite from that of formalist theory. Perhaps the most noticeable difference between the two theories is that, to the post-structuralist, meaning is not

inherent in a text. Rather, meaning is the result of certain values, attitudes, and preconceptions that the reader/writer brings to a particular text. In "An Introduction to Reader-Response Criticism," Jane Tompkins explains that "Reader-response critics would argue that a poem [or text] cannot be understood apart from its results. Its 'effects,' psychological and otherwise, are essential to any accurate description of its meaning, since that has no effective existence outside of its realization in the mind of the reader" (ix). What post-structural criticism perhaps does most consistently is focus its attention on the reader and/or writer of texts, rather than solely on the text itself. Such a focus contrasts sharply with formalist theory which believes that meaning must come solely from the text itself. But more specifically, in relation to writing pedagogy, post-structural theories allow us the opportunity to shift our attention on student writing from the traditional focus on mechanics, form, and technique, to better focus our attention on the composing processes of the individual student.

Concerning an essay by Adrienne Rich, Bartholomae and Petrotsky's Ways of Reading offers us an example of a post-structurally oriented writing assignment:

In "When We Dead Awaken," Rich is writing not to tell her story but to tell a collective story, the story of women or women writers....Yet Rich tells her own story--offering poems, anecdotes, details from her life. Write an essay in which you too (and perhaps with similar hesitation) use your own experience as an illustration, as a way of investigating not just your situation but the situation of people like you. (Think about what materials you might have to offer in place of her poems.) Tell a story of your own and use it to talk about the ways you might be said to have been shaped or named or positioned by an established and powerful culture. You should imagine that this assignment is a way for you to use (and put to the test) some of Rich's key terms, words like "re-vision," "renaming," "structure," and "patriarchy." (702-03)

In this assignment we do not find the exclusive focus on the text that we saw in the English instructor's directions for writing in McCarthy's case study. Rather, we see an emphasis on the writer's personal experience as well as her personal interpretations of the meanings in Rich's essay.

In "Post-Structural Literary Criticism and the Response to Student Writing," Edward M. White offers an explanation as to why modern compositional theorists have so readily adopted post-structural literary theories and their implications for writing instruction:

Recent developments in literary theory are bound to be of particular interest to teachers of writing for a number of reasons: they not only make strong statements about the nature of the interaction between reader

and writer, but they have seized the imaginations of so many of our new Ph.D's and teaching assistants that there is no way to avoid the implications of these theories for our writing programs" (285).

White suggests here that post-structural theories are enjoying a rapidly growing constituency within the university writing community. And although we can't make the assertion that all or even most of the university's writing instructors utilize post-structural theories in their composition courses, the overwhelming number of post-structurally oriented articles appearing in College English and College Composition and Communication over the past decade, as well as a marked increase in the publication of post-structurally oriented freshman composition textbooks, suggests that post-structural literary theory is a significant force in the university composition programs across the country.

To further support this assumption, Kathleen McClelland's survey (which I discussed extensively in chapter three of this thesis) concluded that, in practice, the writing programs in the eight University of California institutions hold consistently to the post-structural principles that appear to be ubiquitous in modern compositional theory. McClelland comes to this conclusion through the responses of UC writing

instructors. She found that most UC writing instructors do not require students to:

1. analyze texts using formalistic literary devices;
2. find the theme of literary works;
3. find the "correct" interpretations of literary works;
4. write essays using a preset form like the five-paragraph-essay.

Instead, McClelland found that most UC writing instructors do tend to focus on:

1. writing as a form of thinking;
2. writing as a process;
3. writing as a means of personal expression;
4. writing generated from personal experience.

While McClelland's survey focuses exclusively on eight, somewhat elite, universities, we might assume that a number of other university composition programs are also using similar post-structural elements in their writing pedagogy, if for no other reason than the significant numbers of post-structurally oriented articles on composition published by scholars representing a wide variety of colleges and universities across the country. These articles may be symptoms rather than, or as well as, causes of this tendency. But in either case, many of these scholars have direct influence on their university's writing programs, either by directing composition programs

themselves, or by acting as consultants to the directors, or by serving on composition committees. Furthermore, many composition scholars also have influence on the hiring of new tenure-track and adjunct writing instructors within their university. In fact, six of the last eight tenure-track English instructors hired into California State University, San Bernardino's English department are graduates of the University of California system, which McClelland claims are primarily post-structural institutions in their approach to writing.

A second reason which leads me to believe that the university is devoting significant attention to post-structural approaches to writing in its pedagogy is the recent rise in the publication and popularity of post-structurally oriented freshman composition textbooks. For example, since its first edition in 1986, Axelrod and Cooper's The St. Martin's Guide to Writing has become one of the most widely used freshmen textbooks in colleges and universities across the country. Although it makes no overt claim to be a post-structurally oriented text, the post-structural critical theories that run throughout are unmistakable. For example, The St. Martin's Guide focuses all its writing tasks on helping students to gain a better perspective on their own experience, to see themselves

as having something important to say. The St. Martin's Guide also uses traditional approaches to writing like modeling and strategies for organization and revision, but the primary emphasis of the writing assignments are clearly on the student's own interpretations.

Bartholomae and Petrosky's Ways of Reading is another popular composition text that puts into practice post-structural literary theories. This text focuses on the ways texts affect readers and, conversely, the ways readers affect texts. Moreover, the post-structural nature of the text becomes clearer when we see that it contains essays by several post-structurally oriented writers like Stanley Fish, Roland Barthes, Walker Percy, Clifford Geertz, and others.

Kirszner and Mandell's Writing: a College Rhetoric offers us another example of how post-structural theory is finding its way into popular composition texts. For example, its explanation of "meaning and literature" resounds with post-structural theory:

When interpreting literature, many people mistakenly assume that a work of literature has a single meaning. They feel they can discover this meaning if only they can find enough clues to figure out just what the author is trying to say. However, a literary work is often quite subtle and has meaning of which the author may not be fully aware. In addition, the experience a reader brings to a literary work when he or she reads helps to create meaning. Your private

feelings, your life experiences, and what you know all tend to color your responses to a literary work. (313)

Here we see a radically different view of authority, meaning, and the text than we saw earlier in the Guerlin's description of formalist theory. Again, the authority for interpretation clearly resides on the reader (or student). Furthermore, the emphasis on the importance of the reader/writer's previous experiences is also stressed.

These are just three examples of many recent freshman composition textbooks that have post-structural underpinnings. And with the rapidly growing acceptance of post-structural literary theory in the composition programs across the country, we might expect the number of post-structurally oriented textbooks to increase in the coming years.

But while the university writing community may be focusing its composition pedagogy on post-structural principles, the high school writing community, on the other hand, appears to be firmly entrenched in formalist theory. McClelland's survey of several hundred UC feeder high schools supports this assumption. Her data suggest that most high school English teachers teach students to:

1. find the themes of all literary texts;



2. produce a "correct" interpretation of a given text;
3. write almost exclusively in a "five-paragraph" form.

Perhaps where the high schools best make use of formalist theory is in the five-paragraph theme which Applebee, as well as McClelland, find to be a significant part of high school writing pedagogy.

Applebee (1984) explains:

This model for writing [the five-paragraph essay] has its roots in classical rhetoric and the British essayist tradition, but owes its current popularity to texts such as Baker's (1977) The Practical Stylist and McCrimmon's (1980) Writing With a Purpose. For the most part, the students in our sample used this structure to analyze a work of literature. They also occasionally applied it to autobiographical, informative, and argumentative essays, and even to writing outside the English class. (86)

It is easy to see why this particular form of writing might appeal to high school writing teachers. First of all, it's relatively easy to teach, and given the small amount of time high school teachers have to spend with their students, a form that can be easily learned and utilized by a variety of students is a beneficial tool indeed. Second, the five-paragraph essay is a form that can be applied to almost any analytical writing situation which the student may encounter in high school.

Another area where high school English teachers tend to use formalist theory is in the analysis of literature. For example, one high school teacher gave me her list of questions she requires students to answer after reading a work of fiction for her class. The following is a sampling of the questions from this list:

1. Respond to questions about character.
2. Make generalizations about character analysis.
3. Comment on themes.
4. Comment on structure.
5. Analyze plot, theme, setting, etc.
6. Comment on quotation assigned by teacher.

We can see from this list that the teacher's primary concern in teaching literature is to have her students develop the ability to identify and comment on the formalistic elements of fiction. This in itself is not necessarily a formalist assignment, but if the evaluator assumes that these tasks have "correct" answers that can only be found in the text, then this becomes a formalistic assignment. After interviewing this particular teacher and several other teachers in her department, I found that most did assume that there was only one correct answer for each of these questions, and that meanings come solely from the text. Again, this is a practice that can be very beneficial to the high school's educational goals for writing.

First of all, as it is with the five-paragraph theme, formalistic elements like plot, theme, character, setting, etc. are relatively easy to teach because they are easily accessible to students. All that needs to be known is right there in the text. Furthermore, if we assume that all readers are in fact "reading the same text," we can more easily and more consistently evaluate their responses to those texts, which, as we have seen earlier in this thesis, is very important to the high school writing community.

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, it would be foolish to assume that there are clear and definite boundaries that separate the critical theories used in the university writing community from those of the high schools. It is quite reasonable to assume that many university writing programs continue to focus their writing pedagogy on formalist theory. Similarly, we might also assume that as a result of the many cooperative writing programs going on between high schools and universities, at least some high school writing programs have integrated post-structural theories into their pedagogy. But what I would like to suggest here is that the evidence seems to imply that the high school and university writing communities, in general, differ in their overall tendencies towards

certain critical theories and their implications for writing.

We might assume that the former high school writer (particularly a successful one) who is used to relying on the conventions of formalist theory might find difficulty in writing for a new community whose pedagogical theories for writing appear to be quite different from the ones learned in high school. Those of us in the literary field are well aware of the often violent clashes that occur when post-structural critics confront formalist critics. Because these theoretical communities are almost direct opposites by nature, each is inclined to reject the other outright. In the same way, perhaps, students with strong formalist backgrounds might also be inclined to reject post-structural methods of teaching writing because they may appear completely foreign to them and because they appear to reject the ways of writing they found success with in high school.

Also, post-structural theories perhaps suggest a tone of indeterminacy in their implications for writing. That is, the universal structures and rules for writing and interpretation are less clearly defined with post-structuralism than they are with formalism. Take for example the student essay on the Israeli occupation of Palestine we discussed in chapter three

of this thesis. I suggested that the student's failure with the essay might be in part be the result of the seeming indeterminacy of the assignment. That is, the assignment required her to choose her own position based on her interpretation of the evidence presented on the subject. In this way we might argue that this is a post-structurally oriented assignment. And we might wish to consider whether students who come from a formalist background might have similar difficulty performing post-structurally oriented assignments because they appear so indeterminate.

I know from my own experience as a freshman composition instructor that when I use such post-structural texts as Axelrod's St. Martin's Guide or Bartholomae's Ways of Reading, students often feel uncomfortable with the assignments because the texts require them to do something different with reading and writing than they previously had been trained to do. With the assignments in these and in similar texts, students are asked to work against the conventions that for them once defined analytical reading and writing, and to try on new ways of finding meaning in both their own and other texts. Thus, we might at least wish to consider whether this kind of a shift from one critical community to another might have a negative influence on

the writing performance of the beginning college  
writer.

## Conclusion

In this thesis I have attempted to support a theory that the problems many beginning college writers experience when they write for the university may be the result of the transition from one community with certain educational goals, purposes, expectations, and theories for writing and its pedagogy, to another community which is often radically different. The evidence presented in this thesis appears to support my hypothesis that in these four aspects the university and high school writing communities differ significantly, and at times, to the point of being direct opposites.

First, in supporting my hypothesis, I have argued that the high school and university writing communities differ significantly between their educational goals for writing. The differences in students between the two institutions allow the university to focus its pedagogy on a higher level of critical writing than the high school, while the high school must focus its writing pedagogy on reaching a level of functionality for all its students. Therefore, because of these differences, most high school students probably will not have significant experience with university-type

writing tasks until they actually get to the university.

Second, I have attempted to demonstrate that the university and high school writing communities appear to be separated by differing goals for assigning writing. The high school tends to assign essay writing for the purpose of testing certain knowledge students have learned from the teachers and the texts. University writing, on the other hand, tends to be used more for the sake of helping students to become members of particular disciplinary communities.

Third, evidence seems to suggest that high school writing teachers tend to hold unrealistic expectations of university writing instruction, and that such expectations may affect the ways they approach writing instruction in their classrooms. High school teachers tend spuriously to believe that university writing instruction focuses primarily on impersonal, formulaic essays. They also believe that most university writing instruction is focused on literary analysis and finding "correct" interpretations of literary works. The evidence presented in this thesis shows that these beliefs are indeed spurious, and that many high school college-bound students will eventually meet with a university writing pedagogy for which they were not adequately prepared.



And fourth, the university and high school writing communities perhaps differ most of all in their critical assumptions about writing and its pedagogy which underlie the differences between the two communities. I have attempted to demonstrate that university composition pedagogy is now heavily influenced by post-structural theory, whereas the high school appears to be heavily entrenched in formalist theory. Because the two critical theories, and their implications for writing, are so radically different from one another by nature, confronting a new composition theory and its pedagogical implications may cause a conflict for the student moving from one community to the other.

Bringing all this together, I believe the evidence suggests that both high school students and high school teachers perhaps are most comfortable when they are dealing with clear-cut "rules" and structures for writing. High school students learn early that there are "correct" and "incorrect" rules for writing (e.g. all sentences must contain a subject and verb; never begin a sentence with "and"; don't use first person pronoun in expository writing, etc.). Similarly, the five paragraph essay appeals to both high school students and high school teachers because the form is universally applicable to nearly all high school

writing tasks. It is easy to teach, learn, and evaluate. Students who produce the correct answers or forms are rewarded; those who do not get a lower grade.

On the other hand, college writing is less clear-cut. Ideally, it is not enough to merely learn the rules, and at times the rules themselves turn out to be deceptive, even contradictory. Those students who once found success in high school as a result of being able to "follow the rules" may become disconcerted when they find that merely following the rules is inadequate. Furthermore, they may become even more frustrated when certain tasks turn out not to be governed in any obvious way by a clear set of rules, conventions, or formulae.

At this time, we cannot say exactly to what extent such differences between the high school and university writing communities may have on the individual student making the transition. Perhaps, for some, the effects of this transition are insignificant. But as university writing instructors, we are well aware of the seemingly increasing number of students who struggle as they write for our classes. Perhaps one, or even all, of these factors are at the root of their struggle. I believe this thesis at least presents us with a window for looking in on some of the many complex problems that students face when they write for the university.

## Appendix A

### Program Goals for Language Arts

1. The student comprehends the printed material needed to succeed in his educational, vocational, and social interests and inquiries.
2. The student responds to literature in subjective, analytic, and evaluative ways.
3. The student interprets literature and the humanities as a reflection of the life, values, and ideas of this and other cultures.
4. The student uses language effectively in interaction with others, gaining and improving skills in group communication processes.
5. The student recognizes that ideas are expressed in many ways: in varieties of dialects, of verbal modes, of styles and usage levels, of associations and points of view.
6. The student writes honestly, creatively, and clearly.
7. The student adapts his speech and writing to different purposes, audiences, and communicative forms, using the mechanics and conventions of writing and speech appropriately to assure accuracy and clarity in communication.

8. The student acquires, interprets, and evaluates information through purposeful and critical observation and listening.
9. The student knows that the language adapts to the needs of people through time.
10. The student expresses and interprets ideas, attitudes, and feelings effectively in non verbal ways.
11. The student knows that his experience in the world is given meaning and shape by his language.

## Works Cited

Applebee, Arthur N. Contexts for Learning to Write. Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1984.

----- Writing in the Secondary School: English and the Content Areas. Washington: NCTE, 1981.

Axelrod, Rise and Charles Cooper. The St. Martin's Guide to Writing. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987.

Bartholomae, David. "Inventing the University." in When a Writer Can't Write. Edited by Mike Rose. New York: The Guilford Press, 1985.

Bartholomae, D. and Anthony Petrosky. Ways of Reading. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987.

Behrens, Lawrence. "Writing, Reading, and the Rest of the Faculty: a Survey." English Journal, 1978, 67.6, 54-60.

Bereiter, Carl, and Marlene Scardamalia. "From Conversation to Composition: The Role of Instructor in Developmental Process." In R. Glazer (ed.), Advances in Instructional Psychology, Vol. 2. Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1982.

"California Aptitude Test," 1987.

Clausen, John. "The Social Meaning of Differential Physical and Sexual Maturation." in Adolescence in the Life Cycle. Ed. by Sigmund Dragstin. New York: Halsted Press, 1975.

Donlan, Dan. "Teaching Writing in the Content Areas: Eleven Hypotheses from a Teacher Survey." RTE, 8.2, 250-62.

Fowler, Mary. Teaching Language, Literature, and Composition. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965.

Goodman, Norman. "Expectations, Ideals, and Reality: Youth Enters College." in Adolescence in the Life Cycle. Ed. by Sigmund Dragstin. New York: Halsted Press, 1975.

Grove, Patricia. Reason in Composition. A master's thesis presented to the faculty of Claremont Graduate School, 1964.

- Guerin, Wilfred. and Earle Labor, Lee Morgan, and John Willingham. A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature. 2nd ed. New York: Harper and Row, 1979.
- Kirszner, Laurie G. and Stephen Mandell. Writing: a College Rhetoric. 2nd ed. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1988.
- Larson, Reed and Mihaly Csikszentmihlyi. Being Adolescent. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1984.
- Lynch, James J. and Bertrand Evans. High School English Textbooks: a Critical Examination. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1963.
- Mayers, P. Involvement in Learning: Realizing the Potential of American Higher Education. Wash. D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Education, 1984.
- McCarthy, Lucille, Parkinson. "A Stranger in Strange Lands: A College Student Writing Across the Curriculum." RTE, 21, 1987, 233-65.
- McClelland, Kathleen. "College Preparatory -vs- College Reality. Unpublished paper presented at the 1990 Conference on College Composition and Communication.
- Peltason, Jack. Students and their Institutions: a Changing Relationship. Wash.: American Council on Education, 1979.
- Perron, John D. Written Syntactic Complexity and the Modes of Discourse. University of Georgia. ERIC Document no. ED 139 009, 1977.
- Shaughnessy, Mina P. Errors and Expectations. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Tompkins, Jane. Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-structuralism. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980.
- White, E. M. "Post-Structural Literary Criticism and the Response to Student Writing". In The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook. Second edition. Ed. by Gary Tate and Edward P.J. Corbett. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.