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A Stranger in Strange Lands: A College Student Writing Across the Curriculum

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Abstract. This study asks questions about the nature of writing processes in classrooms. As students go from one classroom to another, they are presented with new speech situations, and they must determine what constitutes appropriate ways of speaking and writing in each new territory. How do students, in the course of the semester, figure out what the writing requirements are in that discipline and for that teacher, and how do they go about producing it? In order to answer these questions the researcher followed one college student's writing experiences in one class per semester during his freshman and sophomore years. Follow-up data were collected during his junior year. Four research methods were used: observation, interviews, composing-aloud protocols, and text analysis. Conclusions are drawn from the data about how this student figured out what constituted acceptable writing in each classroom, and how he worked to produce it. Also presented are conclusions about what enhanced or denied his success in communicating competently in unfamiliar academic territories. Affecting his success were unarticulated social aspects of classroom contexts for writing as well as explicitly stated requirements and instructions.

Dave Garrison, a college junior and the focus of the present study, was asked how he would advise incoming freshmen about writing for their college courses. His answer was both homely and familiar.

"I'd tell them," he said, "first you've got to figure out what your teachers want. And then you've got to give it to them if you're gonna' get the grade." He paused a moment and added, "And that's not always so easy."

No matter how we teachers may feel about Dave's response, it does reflect his sensitivity to school writing as a social affair. Successful students are those who can, in their interactions with teachers during the semester, determine what constitutes appropriate texts in each classroom: the content, structures, language, ways of thinking, and types of evidence required in that discipline and by that teacher. They can then produce such a text. Students who cannot do this, for whatever reason—cultural, intellectual, motivational—are those who fail, deemed incompetent communicators in that particular setting.

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They are unable to follow what Britton calls the “rules of the game” in each class (1975, p. 76). As students go from one classroom to another they must play a wide range of games, the rules for which, Britton points out, include many conventions and presuppositions that are not explicitly articulated.

In this article, writing in college is viewed as a process of assessing and adapting to the requirements in unfamiliar academic settings. Specifically, the study examined how students figured out what constituted appropriate texts in their various courses and how they went about producing them. And, further, it examined what characterized the classroom contexts which enhanced or denied students’ success in this process. This study was a 21-month project which focused on the writing experiences of one college student, Dave, in three of his courses, Freshman Composition in the spring of his freshman year, and, in his sophomore year, Introduction to Poetry in the fall and Cell Biology in the spring. Dave, a biology/pre-med major, was typical of students at his college in terms of his SAT scores (502 verbal; 515 math), his high school grades, and his white, middle-class family background.

As I followed Dave from one classroom writing situation to another, I came to see him, as he made his journey from one discipline to another, as a stranger in strange lands. In each new class Dave believed that the writing he was doing was totally unlike anything he had ever done before. This metaphor of a newcomer in a foreign country proved to be a powerful way of looking at Dave’s behaviors as he worked to use the new languages in unfamiliar academic territories. Robert Heinlein’s (1961) science fiction novel suggested this metaphor originally. But Heinlein’s title is slightly different; his stranger is in a *single* strange land. Dave perceived himself to be in one strange land after another.

Background to the Study

The theoretical underpinnings of this study are to be found in the work of sociolinguists (Hymes, 1972a, 1972b; Gumperz, 1971) and ethnographers of communication (Basso, 1974; Heath, 1982; Szwed, 1981) who assume that language processes must be understood in terms of the contexts in which they occur. All language use in this view takes place within speech communities and accomplishes meaningful social functions for people. Community members share characteristic “ways of speaking,” that is, accepted linguistic, intellectual, and social conventions which have developed over time and govern spoken interaction. And “communicatively competent” speakers in every community recognize and successfully employ these “rules of use,” largely without conscious attention (Hymes, 1972a, pp. xxiv–xxxvi).

A key assumption underlying this study is that writing, like speaking, is a social activity. Writers, like speakers, must use the communication means considered appropriate by members of particular speech or discourse

communities. And the writer's work, at the same time, may affect the norms of the community. As students go from one class to another, they must define and master the rules of use for written discourse in one classroom speech community after another. And their writing can only be evaluated in terms of that particular community's standards.

Some recent practical and theoretical work in writing studies has emphasized that writers' processes and products must be understood in terms of their contexts, contexts which are created as participants and settings interact (Bazerman, 1981; Bizzell, 1982; Cooper, 1986; Faigley, 1985; Whiteman, 1981). Studies of writing in non-academic settings have shown just how complex these writing environments are and how sophisticated the knowledge—both explicit and tacit—is that writers need in order to operate successfully in them (Odell & Goswami, 1985). And classrooms offer no less complex environments for writing. As Ericson (1982) points out, the classroom learning environment includes not only the teacher and the student, but also the subject matter structure, the social task structure, the actual enacted task, and the sequence of actions involved in the task. In addition, in many classrooms students may be provided with too few instructional supports to help them as they write (Applebee, 1984). Specifically, college classroom contexts for writing, Herrington (1985) argues, must be thought of in terms of several speech communities, viewed "in relation not only to a school community, but also to the intellectual and social conventions of professional forums within a given discipline" (p. 333). These overlapping communities influence the ways students think and write and interact in college classrooms, and will shape their notions of what it means to be, for example, an engineer or a biologist or a literary critic.

Research which has directly examined particular classroom contexts for writing has provided insight into their diversity (Applebee, 1984; Calkins, 1980; Florio & Clark, 1982; Freedman, 1985; Herrington, 1985; Kantor, 1984). Though these studies suggest that an individual student is likely to encounter a number of quite different classroom writing situations, there is also evidence that individual student writers may employ consistent patterns across tasks as they interpret assignments, reason, and organize their knowledge (Dyson, 1984; Langer, 1985, 1986).

What has not yet been done, however, is to follow individual college students as they progress across academic disciplines. In this study I offer information about how one college student fares in such a journey across the curriculum. That is, I detail how this student's behavior changed or remained constant across tasks in three classroom contexts and how those contexts influenced his success. Though this study is limited in scope to the experiences of a single student as he wrote for three college courses, it addresses questions central to much writing across the curriculum scholarship:

1. What are the tasks students encounter as they move from one course to another?

2. How do successful students interpret these tasks? Further, how do students determine what constitutes appropriate texts in that discipline and for that teacher, and how do they produce them?
3. What are the social factors in classrooms that foster particular writing behaviors and students' achievement of competence in that setting?

The ultimate aim of this study is to contribute to our understanding of how students learn to write in school. Findings from this study corroborate the notion that learning to write should be seen not only as a developmental process occurring within an individual student, but also as a social process occurring in response to particular situations.

Methods

The research approach was naturalistic. I entered the study with no hypotheses to test and no specially devised writing tasks. Rather, I studied the writing that was actually being assigned in these classrooms, working to understand and describe that writing, how it functioned in each classroom, and what it meant to people there. My purpose was to get as rich a portrait as possible of Dave's writing and his classroom writing contexts. To this end I combined four research tools: observation, interviews, composing-aloud protocols, and text analysis. The data provided by the protocols and text analysis served to add to, crosscheck, and refine the data generated by observation and interviews. Using this triangulated approach (Denzin, 1978), I could view Dave's writing experiences through several windows, with the strengths of one method compensating for the limitations of another.

The Courses

The college is a private, co-educational, liberal arts institution located in a large, northeastern city. Of its 2600 students nearly half are business, accounting, and computer science majors. Yet over half of students' courses are required liberal arts courses, part of the core curriculum. Two of Dave's courses in this study are core courses: Freshman Composition and Introduction to Poetry. The third, Cell Biology, is a course taken by biology majors; it was Dave's third semester of college biology. All three were one-semester courses. In the descriptions of these courses that follow, I use pseudonyms for the teachers.

In Freshman Composition, which met twice a week for 90 minutes, students were required to write a series of five, similarly structured essays on topics of their choice. These two or four page essays were due at regular intervals and were graded by the professor, Dr. Jean Carter. Classes were generally teacher-led discussions and exercises, with some days allotted for students to work together in small groups, planning their essays or sharing

drafts. Dr. Carter held one individual writing conference with each student at mid semester.

Introduction to Poetry is generally taken by students during their sophomore year, and it, like Freshman Composition, met for 90 minutes twice a week. In this class students were also required to write a series of similar papers. These were three to six page critical essays on poems that students chose from a list given them by their professor, Dr. Charles Forson. These essays, like those in Freshman Composition, were due at regular intervals and were graded by the professor. The Poetry classes were all lectures in which Dr. Forson explicated poems. However, one lecture early in the semester was devoted entirely to writing instruction.

Cell Biology, which Dave took in the spring of his sophomore year, met three times a week, twice for 90-minute lectures and once for a three-hour lab. In this course, like the other two, students were required to write a series of similar short papers, three in this course. These were three to five page reviews of journal articles which reported current research in cell biology. Students were to summarize these articles, following the five-part scientific format in which the experiment was reported. They were then to relate the experiment to what they were doing in class. These reviews were graded by the professor, Dr. Tom Kelly.

The Participants

The participants in this study included these three professors, Drs. Carter, Forson, and Kelly. All were experienced college teachers who had taught these courses before. All talked willingly and with interest about the writing their students were doing, and both Dr. Carter and Dr. Forson invited me to observe their classes. Dr. Kelly said that it would not be productive for me to observe in his Cell Biology course because he spent almost no time talking directly about writing, so pressed was he to cover the necessary course material.

The student participants in this study were Dave and two of his friends. I first met these three young men in Dr. Carter's Freshman Composition class where I was observing regularly in order to learn how she taught the course, the same one I teach at the college. As I attended that course week after week, I got to know the students who sat by me, Dave and his friends, and I realized I was no longer as interested in understanding what my colleague was teaching as I was in understanding what these students were learning. As the study progressed, my focus narrowed to Dave's experiences, although none of the three students knew this. The contribution of Dave's friends to this study was to facilitate my understanding of Dave. At first, in their Freshman Composition class, these students saw my role as a curious combination of teacher and fellow student. As the study progressed, my role became, in their eyes, that of teacher/inquirer, a person genuinely interested

in understanding their writing. In fact, my increasing interest and ability to remember details of his writing experiences seemed at times to mystify and amuse Dave.

At the beginning of this study Dave Garrison was an 18 year old freshman, a biology pre-med major who had graduated the year before from a parochial boys' high school near the college. He described himself as a "hands-on" person who preferred practical application in the lab to reading theory in books. Beginning in his sophomore year, Dave worked 13 hours a week as a technician in a local hospital, drawing blood from patients, in addition to taking a full course load. He "loved" his hospital work, he said, because of the people and the work, and also because difficulties with chemistry has made him worry about being accepted in medical school. In the hospital he was getting an idea of a range of possible careers in health care. The oldest of four children, Dave lived at home and commuted 30 minutes to campus. He is the first person in his family to go to college, though both of his parents enjoy reading, he said, and his father writes in his work as an insurance salesman. When Dave and I first met, he told me that he did not really like to write and that he was not very good, but he knew that writing was a tool he needed, one that he hoped to learn to see better.

Instrumentation and Analytic Procedures

I collected data from February, 1983, through November, 1985. A detailed, semester by semester summary is presented in Table 1.

Observation

I observed in all three classes in order to help me understand the contexts for writing in which Dave was working. During the observation I recorded field notes about the classroom activities and interactions I was seeing, and as soon as possible after the observation I read my notes and fleshed them out where possible. Returning to fill out the notes was particularly important when I had participated in the classroom activities as I did in Freshman Composition. In that class I participated in Dave's small group discussions of drafts and did the in-class writing exercises along with the students. I wrote my field notes on the right-side pages of a spiral notebook, leaving the pages opposite free for later notes.

Interviews

I interviewed Dave, his two friends, and the three professors in order to elicit their interpretations of the writing in each class. Questions were often suggested by the participants' earlier comments or by emerging patterns in the data that I wanted to pursue. Interviews with professors generally took place in their offices and centered on their assignments, their purposes for

Table 1
Data Collection Record

Observation

Freshman Composition (Freshman year. Spring, 1983)

- Participant observation in 1 class per week for 9 weeks.
- All class documents were collected and analyzed.

Introduction to Poetry (Sophomore year. Fall, 1983)

- Observation of the 90-minute lecture devoted to writing instruction.
- All class documents were collected and analyzed.

Cell Biology (Sophomore year. Spring, 1984)

- Observation of a lab session for 15 minutes.

Interviews

Freshman Composition

- Frequent conversations and 2 hour-long interviews with the professor, Dr. Carter.
- Frequent conversations with the students before and after class.

Poetry

- 1 hour-long interview with the professor, Dr. Forson.
- 4 hour-long interviews with the students at one-month intervals.

Cell Biology

- 2 hour-long interviews with the professor, Dr. Kelly.
- 4 hour-long interviews with the students at one-month intervals.

Junior Year Follow-up (Fall, 1984)

- 2 hour-long interviews with the students.

Protocols with Retrospective Interviews

Freshman Composition

- 1 protocol and interview audiotaped as Dave composed the first draft of his fourth (next to last) essay.

Poetry

- 1 protocol and interview audiotaped as Dave composed the first draft of his third (last) paper.

Cell Biology

- 1 protocol and interview audiotaped as Dave composed the first draft of his third (last) review.

Text Analysis

Freshman Composition

- Dave's fourth essay with the teacher's responses was analyzed. All drafts of all essays were collected.

Poetry

- Dave's third paper with the teacher's responses was analyzed. All drafts of all essays were collected.

Cell Biology

- Dave's third review with the teacher's responses was analyzed. All drafts of all essays were collected.

having students write, and the instructional techniques they used to accomplish their purposes.

The interviews with the students took place in my office on campus and lasted one hour. I chose to interview Dave and his friends together in a series of monthly interviews because I believed I could learn more from Dave in this way. The students often talked to and questioned each other, producing more from Dave than I believe I ever could have gotten from one-on-one sessions with him. I did on two occasions, however, interview Dave alone for one hour when I wanted to question him in a particularly intensive way.

During all interviews I either took notes or made audiotapes which I later transcribed and analyzed. All hour-long interviews with the students were taped.

Analysis of the Observations and Interviews

I read and reread my field notes and the interview transcripts looking for patterns and themes. These organized the data and suggested the salient features of writing in each context, its nature and meaning, and of Dave's experiences there. These patterns and themes then focused subsequent inquiry. I was guided in this process by the work of Gilmore and Glatthorn (1982) and Spradley (1979, 1980).

Composing-Aloud Protocols and Retrospective Interviews

Late in each of the three semesters, I audiotaped Dave as he composed aloud the first draft of a paper for the course we had focused on that semester. Dave wrote at the desk in my office, his pre-writing notes and his books spread out around him, and I sat nearby in a position where I could observe and make notes on his behaviors. The protocols lasted 30 minutes and were followed by a 30-minute retrospective interview in which I asked Dave to tell me more about the process he had just been through. I reasoned that in the retrospective interviews Dave's major concerns would be reemphasized, whereas the smaller issues that may have occupied him during composing would be forgotten. Because I followed Dave across time and collected all his written work for each assignment, I could examine what preceded and what followed the composed-aloud draft. I could thus see how the protocol draft related to Dave's entire composing process for a task.

The information provided by the protocols generally corroborated what he had said in the interviews. Of particular interest, however, were the points at which the protocol data contradicted the interview data. These points spurred further inquiry. Though composing-aloud was never easy for Dave, who characterized himself as a shy person, he became more and more comfortable with it as the semesters progressed. He did produce, in each of the protocol sessions, a useful first draft for his final paper in each course.

Analysis and Scoring of the Protocols and Retrospective Interviews

I analyzed the transcripts of the protocols and interviews, classifying and counting what I called the *writer's conscious concerns*. These concerns were identified as anything the writer paid attention to during composing as expressed by (1) remarks about a thought or behavior or (2) observed behaviors. I chose to focus on Dave's conscious concerns because I expected that they would include a broad range of writing issues and that they would reflect the nature and emphases of the classrooms for which he was writing. The protocols would thus provide the supporting information I needed for this study. In identifying and classifying the writer's conscious concerns, I was guided by the work of Berkenkotter (1983), Bridwell (1980), Flower and Hayes (1981), Perl (1979), and Pianko (1979).

The analysis of the transcripts was carried out in a two-part process. First I read them several times and drew from them four general categories of writer's concerns, along with a number of subcategories. Then, using this scheme, I classified and counted the writer's remarks and behaviors. The first protocol was, of course, made during Dave's writing for Freshman Composition. The categories from that composing session were used again in analyzing the protocols from Poetry and Cell Biology. To these original categories were added new ones to describe the concerns Dave expressed as he composed for the later courses. In this way I could identify both concerns that were constant across courses as well as those that were specific to particular classroom writing situations.

I carried out the analyses of the protocols alone because of the understanding of the writing context that I brought to the task. I viewed this knowledge as an asset in identifying and classifying Dave's writing concerns. Thus, instead of agreement between raters, I worked for "confirmability" in the sense of agreement among a variety of information sources (Guba, 1978, p. 17).

Text Analysis

The final window through which I looked at Dave's writing experiences was text analysis. I analyzed the completed papers, with the professors' comments on them, of the assignments Dave had begun during the protocol sessions. If Dave is understood to be a stranger trying to learn the language in these classroom communities, then his teachers are the native-speaker guides who are training him. In this view, students and teachers in their written interactions share a common aim and are engaged in a cooperative endeavor. Their relationship is like that of people conversing together, the newcomer making trial efforts to communicate appropriately and the native speaker responding to them.

Thus, in order to examine the conventions of discourse in each classroom and get further insight into the interaction between Dave and his professors,

I drew upon the model of conversation proposed by Grice (1975). Grice says that conversants assume, unless there are indications to the contrary, that they have a shared purpose and thus make conversational contributions “such as are required . . . by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which they are engaged” (p. 45). He terms this the “Cooperative Principle.” From the Cooperative Principle Grice derives four categories or conditions which must be fulfilled if people are to converse successfully: Quality, Quantity, Relation, and Manner. When conversation breaks down, it is because one or more of these conditions for successful conversation have been violated, either accidentally or intentionally. On the other hand, people conversing successfully fulfill these conditions, for the most part without conscious attention. Grice’s four conditions for conversational cooperation provided my text analysis scheme. They are

1. *Quality*. Conversants must speak what they believe to be the truth and that for which they have adequate evidence.
2. *Quantity*. Conversants must give the appropriate amount of information, neither too much nor too little.
3. *Relation*. The information that conversants give must be relevant to the aims of the conversation.
4. *Manner*. The conversants must make themselves clear, using appropriate forms of expression.

In my examination of Dave’s last paper for each course, I considered both his work and his professor’s response as conversational turns in which the speakers were doing what they believed would keep the Cooperative Principle in force. Dave’s written turns were taken to display the discourse he believed was required in each setting so he would be deemed cooperative. I identified which of Grice’s four conditions for successful conversation Dave paid special attention to fulfilling in each context. In this process I drew from the interview and protocol data as well as from the texts. I then counted and categorized Dave’s teachers’ written responses to his papers according to these same four conditions. A response was identified as an idea the teacher wanted to convey to Dave and could be as short as a single mark or as long as several sentences. Of particular interest were, first, the extent to which Dave and each teacher agreed upon what constituted cooperation, and, second, what the teacher pointed out as violations of the conditions of cooperation, errors that jeopardized the Cooperative Principle in that setting. Further, the form and language of each teacher’s response provided insight into the ways of speaking in that particular discipline and classroom.

The text analysis data added to and refined my understanding of Dave’s classroom writing situations. And, conversely, my analyses of Dave’s texts were informed by what I knew of the classroom writing situations. For this reason, I again elected to work alone with the texts.

Validity of the findings and interpretations in this study were ensured by employing the following techniques. (1) Different types of data were compared. (2) The perspectives of various informants were compared. (3) Engagement with the subject was carried on over a long period of time during which salient factors were identified for more detailed inquiry. (4) External checks on the inquiry process were made by three established researchers who knew neither Dave nor the professors. These researchers read the emerging study at numerous points and questioned researcher biases and the bases for interpretations. (5) Interpretations were checked throughout with the informants themselves. (See Lincoln & Guba, 1985, for a discussion of validity and reliability in naturalistic inquiry.)

Results and Discussion

Information from all data sources supports three general conclusions, two concerning Dave's interpretation and production of the required writing tasks and one concerning social factors in the classrooms that influenced him as he wrote. First, although the writing tasks in the three classes were in many ways similar, Dave interpreted them as being totally different from each other and totally different from anything he had ever done before. This was evidenced in the interview, protocol, and text analysis data.

Second, certain social factors in Freshman Composition and Cell Biology appeared to foster Dave's writing success in them. Observation and interview data indicated that two unarticulated aspects of the classroom writing contexts influenced his achievement. These social factors were (1) the functions that writing served for Dave in each setting, and (2) the roles that participants and students' texts played there. These social factors were bound up with what Dave ultimately learned from and about writing in each class.

Third, Dave exhibited consistent ways of figuring out what constituted appropriate texts in each setting, in his terms, of "figuring out what the teacher wanted." Evidence from the interviews and protocols shows that he typically drew upon six information sources, in a process that was in large part tacit. These information sources included teacher-provided instructional supports, sources Dave found on his own, and his prior knowledge.

The Writing Assignments: Similar Tasks, Audiences, and Purposes

My analysis of the assignments, combined with the observation and interview data, showed that the writing in the three classes was similar in many ways. It was, in all cases, informational writing for the teacher-as-examiner, the type of writing that Applebee found comprised most secondary school writing (1984). More specifically, the task in Cell Biology was a summary, and in Freshman Composition and Poetry it was analysis, closely related infor-

mational uses of writing. Dave's audiences were identified as teacher-as-examiner by the fact that all assignments were graded and that Dave, as he wrote, repeatedly wondered how his teacher would "like" his work.

Further similarities among the writing in the three courses included the purpose that the professors stated for having their students write. All three said that the purpose was not so much for students to display specific information, but rather for students to become competent in using the thinking and language of their disciplines. Dr. Kelly, the biologist, stated this most directly when he explained to me why he had his students write reviews of journal articles: "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. And they need to see that what they're doing in class and lab is actually *used* out there." Students' summaries of journal articles in Cell Biology were, in other words, to get them started speaking the language of that discourse community.

Learning the conventions of academic discourse was also the purpose of students' writing in Freshman Composition. Dr. Carter was less concerned with the content of the students' five essays than she was with their cohesiveness. She repeatedly stated that what would serve these students in their subsequent academic writing was the ability to write coherent prose with a thesis and subpoints, unified paragraphs, and explicitly connected sentences. In an interview she said, "Ideas aren't going to do people much good if they can't find the means with which to communicate them. . . . When these students are more advanced, and the ability to produce coherent prose is internalized, then they can concentrate on ideas. That's why I'm teaching the analytic paper with a certain way of developing the thesis that's generalizable to their future writing." Dr. Carter's goal was, thus, to help students master conventions of prose which she believed were central to all academic discourse.

And likewise in Poetry the purpose of students' writing was to teach them how people in literary studies think and write. In his lecture on writing, early in the semester, Dr. Forson stated this purpose and alluded to some of the conventions for thinking and writing in that setting. He told students, "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. You'll find the poem's meaning in the poem itself, and you'll use quotes to prove your thesis. Our concern here is for the *poem*, not the poet's life or era. Nor are your own opinions of the poet's ideas germane."

Dr. Forson then spent 20 minutes explaining the mechanical forms for quoting poetry, using a model essay that he had written on a poem by Robert

Herrick. He ended by telling students that they should think of their peers as the audience for their essays and asking them not to use secondary critical sources from the library. "You'll just deal with what you now know and with the poetic devices that we discuss in class. Each group of poems will feature one such device: imagery, symbolism, and so forth. These will be the tools in your tool box."

Thus in all three courses Dave's tasks were informational writing for the teacher-as-examiner. All were for the purpose of displaying competence in using the ways of thinking and writing appropriate to that setting. And in all three courses Dave wrote a series of similar short papers, due at about three-week intervals, the assumption being that students' early attempts would inform their subsequent ones, in the sort of trial-and-error process that characterizes much language learning. Further, the reading required in Poetry and Cell Biology, the poems and the journal articles, were equally unfamiliar to Dave. We might expect, then, that Dave would view the writing for these three courses as quite similar, and, given an equal amount of work, he would achieve similar levels of success. This, however, is not what happened.

Dave's Interpretation of the Writing Tasks

The Writer's Concerns While Composing. In spite of the similarities among the writing tasks for the three courses, evidence from several sources shows that Dave interpreted them as being totally different from each other and totally different from anything he had ever done before. Dave's characteristic approach across courses was to focus so fully on the particular new ways of thinking and writing in each setting that commonalities with previous writing were obscured for him. And interwoven with Dave's conviction that the writing for these courses was totally dissimilar was his differing success in them. Though he worked hard in all three courses, he made B's in Freshman Composition, Ds and Cs in Poetry, and As in Cell Biology.

The protocol data explain in part why the writing for these classes seemed so different to Dave. Dave's chief concerns while composing for each course were very different. His focus in Freshman Composition was on textual coherence. Fifty-four percent of his expressed concerns were for coherence of thesis and subpoints, coherence within paragraphs, and sentence cohesion. By contrast, in Poetry, though Dave did mention thesis and subpoints, his chief concerns were not with coherence, but with the new ways of thinking and writing in that setting. Forty-four percent of his concerns focused on accurately interpreting the poem and properly using quotes. In Cell Biology, yet a new focus of concerns is evident. Seventy-two percent of Dave's concerns deal with the new rules of use in that academic discipline. His chief concerns in Biology were to accurately understand the scientific terms and concepts in the journal article and then to accurately rephrase and connect these in his own text, following the same five-part structure in which the published

experiment was reported. It is no wonder that the writing for these classes seemed very different to Dave. As a newcomer in each academic territory, Dave's attention was occupied by the new conventions of interpretation and language use in each community. (See Table 2.)

The same preoccupations controlled his subsequent work on the papers. In each course Dave wrote a second draft, which he then typed. In none of these second drafts did Dave see the task differently or make major changes. He is, in this regard, like the secondary students Applebee (1984) studied who were unable, without teacher assistance, to revise their writing in more than minor ways. And Dave revised none of these papers after the teachers had responded.

We can further fill out the pictures of Dave's composing for the three classes by combining the protocol findings with the observation and interview data. In his first protocol session, in April of his freshman year, Dave composed the first draft of his fourth paper for Freshman Composition, an essay in which he chose to analyze the wrongs of abortion. To this session Dave brought an outline of this thesis and subpoints. He told me that he had spent only 30 minutes writing it the night before, but that the topic was one he had thought a lot about. As he composed, Dave was most concerned with, and apparently very dependent upon, his outline, commenting on it, glancing at it, or pausing to study it 14 times during the 30 minutes of composing. Dave's next most frequently expressed concerns were for coherence at paragraph and sentence levels, what Dr. Carter referred to as coherence of mid-sized and small parts. These were the new "rules of use" in this setting. Dave told me that in high school he had done some "bits and pieces" of writing and some outlines for history, but that he had never before written essays like this. The total time Dave spent on his abortion essay was five hours.

In Dave's Poetry protocol session seven months later, in November of his sophomore year, he composed part of the first draft of his third and last paper for that class, a six-page analysis of a poem called "Marriage" by contemporary poet Gregory Corso. To this session he brought two pages of notes and his *Norton Anthology of Poetry* in which he had underlined and written notes in the margins beside the poem. He told me that he had spent four hours (of an eventual total of 11) preparing to write: reading the poem many times and finding a critical essay on it in the library. During his pre-writing and composing, Dave's primary concern was to get the right interpretation of the poem, "the true meaning" as he phrased it. And as Dave wrote, he assumed that his professor knew the true meaning, a meaning, Dave said, that "was there, but not there, not just what it says on the surface." Further, Dave knew that he must argue his interpretation, using not his own but the poet's words; this was his second most frequently expressed concern.

As Dave composed, he appeared to be as tied to the poem as he had been to his outline in Freshman Composition the semester before. He seemed to

Table 2
Concerns Expressed During Composing-Aloud Protocols and Retrospective Interviews

	<i>Percent of Comments</i>		
	Freshman Composition	Poetry	Cell Biology
Concerns Expressed in all Three Courses			
Features of Written Text			
Coherent thesis/ subpoint structure	22	18	0
Coherent paragraph structure	15	13	3
Cohesive sentences	17	8	3
Editing for mechanical correctness	9	3	3
Communication Situation (assignment, reader-writer roles, purpose)			
On-Going Process	8	6	5
Emerging Text	18	6	12
	11	2	2
Concerns Specific to Poetry			
Appropriately using quotes from poem	0	32	0
Making a correct interpretation of the poem	0	12	0
Concerns Specific to Cell Biology			
Following the 5-part scientific guidelines	0	0	20
Correctly understanding the content of the article being summarized	0	0	37
Rephrasing & connecting appropriate parts of the article	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>15</u>
Total	100	100	100
Number of comments	64	62	60

be almost *physically* attached to the *Norton Anthology* by his left forefinger as he progressed down the numbers he had marked in the margins. He was, we might say, tied to the concrete material, the “facts” of the poem before him. Dave never got his own essay structure; rather, he worked down the poem, explicating from beginning to end. In the retrospective interview he said, “I didn’t really have to think much about my thesis and subs because they just come naturally now. . . . But anyway it’s not like in Comp last year. Here my first paragraph is the introduction with the thesis, and the stanzas are the subpoints.” Dave’s preoccupation with the poem and the new conventions of interpreting and quoting poetry resulted in a paper that was not an analysis but a summary with some interpretation along the way. His focus on these new rules of use appeared to limit his ability to apply previously learned skills, the thesis-subpoint analytical structure, and kept him working at the more concrete summary level.

This domination by the concrete may often characterize newcomers’ first steps as they attempt to use language in unfamiliar disciplines (Williams, 1985). Dave’s professor, Dr. Forson, seemed to be familiar with this phenomenon when he warned students in his lecture on writing: “You must remember that the poet ordered the poem. *You* order your essay with your own thesis and subtheses. Get away from ‘Next. . . . Next.’” But if Dave heard this in September, he had forgotten it by November. Dave’s experience is consonant with Langer’s (1984) finding that students who know more about a subject as they begin to write are likely to choose analysis rather than summary. And these students receive higher scores for writing quality as well.

In his writing for Cell Biology the following semester, Dave’s concerns were again focused on the new and unfamiliar conventions in this setting. Before writing his last paper, a four-page review of an experiment on glycoprotein reported in *The Journal of Cell Biology*, Dave spent three hours preparing. (He eventually spent a total of eight hours on the review.) He had chosen the article in the library from a list the professor had given to students and had then read the article twice, underlining it, making notes, and looking up the definitions of unfamiliar terms. To the protocol session Dave brought these notes, the article, and a sheet on which he had written what he called “Dr. Kelly’s guidelines,” the five-part scientific experiment format that Dr. Kelly wanted students to follow: Background, Objectives, Procedures, Results, and Discussion.

In his composing aloud, Dave’s chief concerns in Biology were, as in Poetry the semester before, with the reading, in this case the journal article. But here, unlike Poetry, Dave said the meaning was “all out on the table.” In Poetry he had had to interpret meaning from the poem’s connotative language; in Biology, by contrast, he could look up meanings, a situation with which Dave was far more comfortable. But as he composed for Biology, he was just as tied to the journal article as he had been to the poem or to his

outline in previous semesters. Dave paused frequently to consult the article, partially covering it at times so that his own paper was physically closer to what he was summarizing at that moment.

Dave's first and second most commonly expressed concerns during the Biology protocol session were for rephrasing and connecting parts of the article and for following Dr. Kelly's guidelines. These were, in essence, concerns for coherence and organization, what Dave was most concerned with in Freshman Composition. But the writing for Biology bore little relation in Dave's mind to what he had done in Freshman Composition. In Biology he was indeed concerned about his organization, but here it was the five-part scientific format he had been given, very different, it seemed to him, than the thesis/subpoint organization he had had to create for his freshman essays. In fact, until I questioned him about it at the end of the semester, Dave never mentioned the freshman thesis/subpoint structure. And the concerns for coherence at paragraph and sentence levels that had been so prominent as he wrote for Freshman Composition were replaced in Biology by his concern for rephrasing the article's already coherent text. In Freshman Composition Dave had talked about trying to get his sentences and paragraphs to "fit" or "flow" together. In Biology, however, he talked about trying to get the article into his own words, about "cutting," "simplifying," and "combining two sentences." Again, it is no wonder that Dave believed that this writing was totally new. It took one of Dave's friend's and my prodding during an interview to make Dave see that he had indeed written summaries before. Lots of them.

The Nature of Cooperation in the Three Courses. The text analysis data provide further insight into why Dave perceived the writing in these courses as so dissimilar. The data provide information about what was, in Grice's terms, essential to maintaining the Cooperative Principle in these written exchanges. Analyses of the teachers' responses to Dave's papers show that his concerns in each class generally did match theirs. Put differently, Dave had figured out, though not equally well in all classes, what counted as "cooperation" in each context, and what he had to do to be deemed a competent communicator there. (See Table 3.)

Analysis of Dave's finished essay for Freshman Composition suggests that his concerns for textual coherence were appropriate. Dave knew that to keep the Cooperative Principle in force in Dr. Carter's class, he had to pay special attention to fulfilling the condition of *Manner*, to making himself clear, using appropriate forms of expression. He succeeded and was deemed cooperative by Dr. Carter when she responded to his contribution with a telegraphic reply on the first page: "18/20." Apart from editing two words in Dave's text, she made no further comments, assuming that Dave and she shared an understanding of what constituted cooperation in her class and of what her numbers meant. (She had explained to students that she was marking with

Table 3
Teachers' Responses to Dave's Papers

	Number of Responses Indicating Violations of Conditions for Cooperation				Grade
	Quality	Quantity	Relevance	Manner	
Composition	0	0	0	2	18/20
Poetry	8	0	0	11	C+
Cell Biology	0	0	0	14	96

numbers that semester in an attempt to be more "scientific," and she had defined for them the "objective linguistic features of text" to which her numbers referred.) Dave did understand the grade and was, of course, very pleased with it.

In an interview, Dr. Carter explained her grade to me. "Though his content isn't great," she said. "his paper is coherent, not badly off at any place. . . . He gave a fair number of reasons to develop his paragraphs, he restated his point at the end, and there is no wasted language. It's not perfectly woven together, but it's good." Though Dr. Carter mentioned the "reasons" Dave gave as evidence for his contentions, she was concerned not so much with their meaning as with their cohesiveness. Cooperation in this setting thus depended upon fulfilling the condition of *Manner*. Dave knew this and expected only a response to how well he had achieved the required form, not to the content of his essay.

In his writing for Poetry the following semester, Dave was attempting to keep the Cooperative Principle in force by paying special attention to two conditions, *Quality* and *Manner*. That is, first he was attempting to say what was true and give adequate evidence, and, second, he was attempting to use proper forms of expression. This is evidenced in the interview and protocol as well as the text data. Analysis of Dr. Forson's 19 responses to Dave's paper shows that Dave's concerns matched those of his teacher, that Dave had figured out, though only in part, what counted as cooperation in that setting. Dr. Forson's responses all referred to violations of the same conditions Dave had been concerned with fulfilling, *Quality* and *Manner*. In seven of his eight marginal notes and in an endnote, Dr. Forson disagreed with Dave's interpretation and questioned his evidence, violations of the *Quality* condition. Mina Shaughnessy (1977) says that such failure to properly coordinate claims and evidence is perhaps the most common source of misunderstanding in academic prose. The ten mechanical errors that Dr. Forson pointed out were violations of the condition of *Manner*, violations which may jeopardize the Cooperative Principle in many academic settings. Dave's unintentional

violations in Poetry of the *Quality* and *Manner* conditions jeopardized the Cooperative Principle in that exchange, resulting in the C+ grade.

Dr. Kelly's responses to Dave's writing in Biology were, like those in Freshman Composition, much briefer than Dr. Forson's. Dr. Kelly's 14 marks or phrases all pointed out errors in form, unintentional violations of the Gricean condition of *Manner*. But these were apparently not serious enough to jeopardize the aims of the written conversation in Biology; Dave's grade on the review was 96.

This application of Grice's rubric for spoken conversation to student-teacher written interaction gives further insight into the differences in these classroom contexts for writing. It is evident that successfully maintaining the Cooperative Principle was a more complicated business in Poetry than in Freshman Composition or Biology. In Biology, Dave was unlikely to violate the condition of *Quality*, as he did in Poetry, because he was only summarizing the published experiment and thus only had to pay attention to the condition of *Manner*. In Poetry, by contrast, he was called upon to take an interpretive position. This assumed that he had already summarized the poem. He had not. Thus his analytical essay took the form of a summary, as we have seen. In Biology, on the other hand, the writing was supposed to be a summary that then moved to a comparison of the summarized experiment to what was going on in class.

For Dave, the latter assignment was more appropriate. Novices in a field may need the simpler summary assignment that helps them understand the new reading, the new language that they are being asked to learn. They may then be ready to move to analysis or critique. One wonders if Dave's success in Poetry would have been enhanced if he had been asked to write out a summary of the poem first. He could then have worked from that summary as he structured his own critical essay.

Similarly, in Freshman Composition, Dave was unlikely to violate the condition of *Quality*, to say something untrue or provide inadequate evidence for his claim. Though Dave did have to provide evidence for his subpoints, he was not evaluated for his content, and thus he concentrated on the condition of *Manner*. Further, the writing in Freshman Composition did not require Dave to master unfamiliar texts as it did in both Poetry and Biology. And for Dave the task of integrating new knowledge from his reading into his writing in those courses was his salient concern, as we have seen.

The apparent absence of attention paid in any of these classes to fulfilling the conditions of *Quantity* or *Relation* is puzzling. Perhaps Dave's prior school writing experience had trained him to include the right amount of information (*Quantity*) and stay on topic (*Relation*).

The text analysis data, then, show that what counted as cooperation in these three classes was indeed quite different. Dr. Forson, in his extensive responses, apparently felt it necessary to reteach Dave how people think and

write in his community. This is understandable in light of Dave's numerous unintentional violations of the Cooperative Principle. Further, though Dr. Forson told students that he was being objective, finding the meaning of the poem in the text, he told me that his responses to students' papers were to argue his interpretation of the poem and, thus, to justify his grade.

The differing language and forms of these professors' responses probably also added to Dave's sense that in each classroom he was in a new foreign land. Response style may well be discipline-specific as well as teacher-specific, with responses in literary studies generally more discursive than in the sciences. Further, Dr. Forson's responses were in the informal register typically used by an authority speaking to a subordinate (Freedman, 1984). His responses to Dave's paper included the following: "You misfire here." "I get this one. Hurrah for me!" "Pardon my writing. I corrected this in an automobile." The informality, and the word "corrected" in particular, leave little doubt about the authority differential between Dr. Forson and Dave. By contrast, Dave seemed to interpret the numerical grade in Biology as more characteristic of a conversation between equals. In a comment that may say more about their classroom interaction than their written interaction, Dave spoke of Dr. Kelly's brief responses to his review: "Yeah. He's like that. He treats us like adults. When we ask him questions, he answers us." Dave's apparent mixing of his spoken and written interaction with Dr. Kelly emphasizes the point that students' and teachers' writing for each other in classrooms is as fully contextualized as any other activity that goes on there.

Before Dave turned in his last papers in Poetry and Biology, I asked him to speculate about the grade he would get. When he handed in his six-page paper on the Corso poem, "Marriage," on which he had spent eleven hours, he told me that he hoped for an A or B: "I'll be really frustrated on this one if the grade's not good after I've put in the time on it." A week later, however, he told me in a resigned tone and with a short laugh that he'd gotten a C+. By contrast, when he turned in his last review in Biology, he told me he knew he would get an A. When I questioned him, he replied, "I don't know how I know. I just do." And he was right: his grade was 96. Dave obviously understood far better what constituted cooperation in Biology than he did in Poetry.

Social Aspects of the Classrooms that Influenced Dave's Writing

Why was Dave's success in writing in these classrooms so different? The answers to this question will illuminate some of the dimensions along which school writing situations differ and thus influence student achievement. It would be a mistake to think that the differing task structure was the only reason that Dave was more successful in Biology and Freshman Composition than he was in Poetry. Assignments are, as I have suggested, only a small part of the classroom interaction, limited written exchanges that reflect the

nature of the communication situation created by participants in that setting. Two unarticulated qualities in the contexts for writing in Freshman Composition and Biology appeared to foster Dave's success in those classes. These were (1) the social functions Dave's writing served for him in those classes, and (2) the roles played by participants and by students' texts there.

The Functions Dave Saw His Writing as Accomplishing. It has been argued that the social functions served by writing must be seen as an intrinsic part of the writing experience (Clark & Florio, 1983; Hymes, 1972a, 1972b; Scribner & Cole, 1981). Evidence from interviews and observations indicate that the writing in Freshman Composition and Biology was for Dave a meaningful social activity, meaningful beyond just getting him through the course. Further, Dave and his teachers in Freshman Composition and Biology mutually understood and valued those functions. This was not the case in Poetry. The data show a correlation not only between meaningful social functions served by the writing and Dave's success with it, but also between the writing's social meaning and Dave's ability to remember and draw upon it in subsequent semesters.

In Freshman Composition Dave's writing served four valuable functions for him. He articulated all of these.

1. Writing to prepare him for future writing in school and career
2. Writing to explore topics of his choice
3. Writing to participate with other students in the classroom
4. Writing to demonstrate academic competence

In Biology Dave also saw his writing as serving four valuable functions:

1. Writing to learn the language of Cell Biology, which he saw as necessary to his career
2. Writing to prepare him for his next semester's writing in Immunology
3. Writing to make connections between his classwork and actual work being done by professionals in the field
4. Writing to demonstrate academic competence

Evidence from interviews and observation shows that Dr. Carter and Dr. Kelly saw writing in their classes as serving the same four functions that Dave did.

On the other hand, in Poetry, though Dave's professor stated four functions of student writing, Dave saw his writing as serving only one function for him: writing to demonstrate academic competence. Dave, always the compliant student, did say after he had received his disappointing grade in Poetry that the writing in Poetry was probably good for him: "Probably any kind of writing helps you." Though he may well be right, Dave actually saw his writing for Poetry as serving such a limited function—evaluation of his skills in writing poetry criticism for Dr. Forson—that he was not really convinced

(and little motivated by the notion) that this writing would serve him in any general way.

Dave contended that any writing task was easy or difficult for him according to his interest in it. When I asked him what he meant by interesting, he said, "If it has something to do with my life. Like it could explain something to me or give me an answer that I could use now." Writing must have, in other words, meaningful personal and social functions for Dave if it is to be manageable, "easy," for him. These functions existed for Dave in Freshman Composition and Biology, providing the applications and personal transaction with the material that may be generally required for learning and forging personal knowledge (Dewey, 1949; Polanyi, 1958).

Dave's Poetry class, however, served no such personally meaningful functions. Six weeks after the Poetry course was finished, I asked Dave some further questions about his last paper for that course, the discussion of the Corso poem on which he had worked 11 hours. He could remember almost nothing about it. When I asked him to speculate why this was, he said, "I guess it's because I have no need to remember it." By contrast, when I asked Dave in the fall of his junior year if his Cell Biology writing was serving him in his Immunology course as he had expected, he said, "Yes. The teacher went over how to write up our labs, but most of us had the idea anyway from last semester because we'd read those journal articles. We were already exposed to it."

Of course the functions of his writing in Biology served Dave better than those in Poetry in part because he was a biology major. The writing for Cell Biology fit into a larger whole: his growing body of knowledge about this field and his professional future. The material in Cell Biology was for Dave a comprehensible part of the discipline of Biology which was in turn a comprehensible part of the sciences. Dave was, with experience, gradually acquiring a coherent sense of the language of the discipline, how biologists think and speak and what it is they talk about. And his understanding of the language of biology was accompanied by an increasing confidence in his own ability to use it. Both of these are probably necessary foundations for later, more abstract and complex uses of the language (Piaget, 1952; Perry, 1970; Williams, 1985).

In the required one-semester Poetry class, however, the poems seemed to Dave to be unrelated to each other except for commonly used poetic devices, and his writing about them was unrelated to his own life by anything at all beyond his need to find the "true meaning" and get an acceptable grade. Dave's different relationship to the languages of these disciplines was shown when he said, "In Biology I'm using what I've *learned*. It's just putting what I've learned on paper. But in Poetry, more or less each poem is different, so it's not *taught* to you. You just have to figure it out from that poem itself and hope Dr. Forson likes it." Nor, in Poetry, was Dave ever invited to make

personally meaningful connections with the poems. And he never did it on his own, no doubt in part because he was so preoccupied with the new ways of thinking and speaking that he was trying to use.

In Freshman Composition the social function of writing that was perhaps most powerful for Dave was writing to participate with other students in the classroom. In his peer writing group Dave, for the first time ever, discussed his writing with others. Here he communicated personal positions and insights to his friends, an influential audience for him. That an important social function was served by these students' work with each other is suggested by their clear memory, a year and a half later, both of their essays and of each others' reactions to them.

The four social functions that Dave's writing in Freshman Composition accomplished for him enhanced his engagement with and attitude toward the writing he did in that class. This engagement is reflected in Dave's memory not only of his essays and his friends' reactions to them, but also in his memory and use of the ideas and terms from that course. When Dave talked about his writing during his sophomore and junior years, he used the process terms he had learned in Freshman Composition: prewriting, revision, and drafts. He also used other language he had learned as a freshman, speaking at times about his audience's needs, about narrowing his topic, about connecting his sentences, providing more details, and choosing his organizational structure. This is not to say that Dave had mastered these skills in every writing situation nor that he always accurately diagnosed problems in his own work. In fact, we know that he did not. It is to say, however, that Dave did recognize and could talk about some of the things that writing does involve in many situations. Thus, the value of this course for Dave lay not so much in the thesis/subpoint essay structure. Rather, Dave had, as a result of his experiences in Freshman Composition, learned that writing is a process that can be talked about, managed, and controlled.

Thus the social functions that writing served for Dave in each class were viewed as an intrinsic part of his writing experiences there. Where these functions were numerous and mutually understood and valued by Dave and his teacher, Dave was more successful in figuring out and producing the required discourse. And then he remembered it longer. In Poetry, where his writing served few personally valued ends, Dave did less well, making a C on the first paper, a D on the second, and a C+ on the third. It should be noted, in addition, that grades themselves serve a social function in classrooms: defining attitudes and roles. Dave's low grades in Poetry probably further alienated him from the social communication processes in that classroom community and helped define his role there.

The Roles Played by the Participants and by Students' Texts. Other social aspects of these classroom contexts for writing which affected Dave's experiences were the roles played by the people and texts in them. Such roles are tacitly

assigned in classroom interaction and create the context in which the student stranger attempts to determine the rules of language use in that territory. Here we will examine (1) Dave's role in relation to the teacher, (2) Dave's role in relation to other students in the class, and (3) the role played by students' texts there.

Dave's Role in Relation to the Teacher. This is a particularly important role relationship in any classroom because it tacitly shapes the writer-audience relation that students use as they attempt to communicate appropriately. In all three classes Dave was writing for his teachers as pupil to examiner. However, data from several sources show that there were important variations in the actual "enactments" (Goffman, 1961) of this role-relationship.

In Composition, both Dave and his professor played the role of writer. Throughout the semester Dr. Carter talked about what and how she wrote, the long time she spent in prewriting activities, the eight times she typically revised her work, and the strategies she used to understand her audience in various situations. She spoke to students as if she and they were all writers working together, saying such things as "I see some of you write like I do," or "Let's work together to shape this language." And, as we have seen, she structured the course to provide opportunities for students to play the role of writer in their peer groups. She also asked them to describe their writing processes for several of their essays. Dave told me in an interview during his junior year, "In high school I couldn't stand writing, but in Comp I started to change because I knew more what I was doing. I learned that there are steps you can go through, and I learned how to organize a paper." As a freshman, Dave understood for the first time something of what it feels like to be a writer.

In Biology both Dave and his teacher, Dr. Kelly, saw Dave as playing the role of newcomer, learning the language needed for initiation into the profession. Dr. Kelly played the complementary role of experienced professional who was training Dave in the ways of speaking in that discipline, ways they both assumed Dave would learn in time.

In Poetry, on the other hand, Dave played the role of outsider in relationship to his teacher, the insider who knew the true meanings of poetry. And Dave stayed the outsider, unable ever to fully get the teacher's "true meaning." This outsider/insider relationship between Dave and Dr. Forson was created by a number of factors: (1) Their spoken and written interaction, (2) the few meaningful social functions served for Dave by the writing in that class, (3) the demanding nature of the analytic task, combined with (4) the limited knowledge Dave commanded in that setting, (5) the limited number of effective instructional supports, and (6) the low grades Dave got, which further alienated him from the communication processes in that class. (To the instructional supports provided in Poetry we will return below.) Because Dave's outsider role was not a pleasant one for him, he seemed increasingly

to separate his thinking from his writing in Poetry, saying several times that he had the right ideas, the teacher just did not like the way he wrote them.

Dave's Role in Relationship to Other Students. Students' relationships with each other, like those between students and teachers, are created as students interact within the classroom structures the teacher has set up. These classroom structures grow out of teachers' explicit and tacit notions about writing and learning. What specifically were the relationships among students in Freshman Composition, Biology, and Poetry?

In Composition, as we have seen, students shared their writing and responded to each other's work. The classroom structure reflected Dr. Carter's perhaps tacit notion that writing is a social as well as intellectual affair. However, in neither Poetry nor Biology was time built into the class for students to talk with each other about their writing. Dave lamented this as he wrote for Poetry early in his sophomore year, because, he said, he now realized how valuable the small group sessions had been in Freshman Composition the semester before.

In Biology, Dave told me students did talk informally about the journal articles they had selected and how they were progressing on their summaries. Dr. Kelly, who circulated during lab, was at times included in these informal talks about writing. And it is no surprise that students discussed their writing in this way in Biology in light of Dr. Kelly's notions about writing. It is, he believes, an essential part of what scientists do. He told me that it often comes as a rude shock to students that the way biologists survive in the field is by writing. He said, "These students are bright, and they can memorize piles of facts, but they're not yet good at writing. They know what science *is*," he told me, "but they don't know what scientists *do*." Thus, writing up research results is seen by Dr. Kelly as an integral part of a biologist's lab work. No wonder his students talked about it.

In Poetry, however, there was little talk of any kind among students. Classes were primarily lectures where Dr. Forson explicated poems and explained poetic devices. Only occasionally did he call on one of the 22 students for an opinion. This lack of student interaction in Poetry was in line with the image of the writer that Dr. Forson described for students, an image that may be widely shared in literary studies: A person along with his or her books and thoughts. Dr. Forson did, however, tell students that he himself often got his ideas for writing from listening to himself talk about poems in class. Yet, in conversation with me, he said that he did not want students discussing the poems and their writing with each other because he feared they would not think for themselves. Dave picked up on this idea very clearly. It was not until the fall of his junior year that he admitted to me that he and his girlfriend had worked together on their papers. They had discussed the interpretations of the poems and how they might best write them, but, he told me, they had been careful to choose different poems to write about so that Dr. Forson

wouldn't know they had worked together. This absence of student interaction in Poetry may have contributed to the outsider role that Dave played in that class.

Throughout this study I was amazed at the amount of talk that goes on all the time outside class among students as they work to figure out the writing requirements in various courses. What Dave's experience in Poetry may suggest is that where student collaboration in writing is not openly accepted, it goes on clandestinely.

The Roles Played by Students' Texts. What were students' texts called and how were they handled? Interview and observation data show that students' texts were treated quite differently in these three courses, and this affected how Dave saw the assignments, and, perhaps more important, how he saw himself as writer.

In Freshman Composition Dave wrote what he referred to as "essays"; in Biology, "reviews"; in Poetry, "papers." This latter term is commonly used, of course, but it is one that Emig (1983, p. 173) says suggests a low status text: "Paper"—as if there were no words on the sheet at all. In Poetry the high status texts, the ones that were discussed and interpreted, were the poems. Students' works were just more or less successful explications of those. Furthermore, in Poetry the one model essay the students read was written by the teacher. Though students were told they should think of their peers as their audience, in fact they never read each other's essays at all. Students' texts were, rather, passed only between student and teacher as in a private conversation.

In Biology, student texts enjoyed a higher status. Excellent student reviews were posted and students were encouraged to read them; they were to serve as models. Some student writers were thus defined as competent speakers in this territory, and the message was clear to Dave: This was a language that he too could learn given time and proper training.

And in Freshman Composition, of course, student texts were the *objects* of study. The class read good and flawed student texts from former semesters and from their own. This not only helped Dave with his writing, it also dignified student writing and elevated his estimation of his own work. Student texts were not, in short, private affairs between teacher and student; they were the subject matter of this college course.

Thus the roles that were enacted by teachers, students, and students' texts were quite different in each classroom and were an integral part of Dave's writing experiences there. The participants' interaction and the social functions that writing serves are important factors working to create the communication situation. And this communication situation, it has been suggested, is the fundamental factor shaping the success of writing instruction (Langer & Applebee, 1984, p. 171).

The Information Sources Dave Drew Upon

In a process that was in large part tacit, Dave drew upon six sources for information about what constituted successful writing in Freshman Composition, Poetry, and Biology. These included teacher-provided instructional supports, sources Dave found on his own, and his prior experience. Many of these have been mentioned above. They are summarized in Table 4.

Of particular interest are the information sources Dave drew upon (or failed to draw upon) in Poetry, the course in which the writing assignment was the most demanding and in which Dave did least well in assessing and producing the required discourse. The information source that Dr. Forson intended to be most helpful to students, the instructional support on which he spent a great deal of time, was his response to their papers. However his extensive comments did not help Dave a great deal in learning how to

Table 4
Information Sources Dave Drew Upon
in Assessing Required Discourse

Information Sources	Freshman Composition	Poetry	Cell Biology
What teachers said in class about writing	Constant lectures & exercises about process & products	-One lecture -General statements to the class about their papers when returning them	-Ten minutes giving "guidelines" when returning 1st set of reviews -Informal comments in lab
Model texts	Many, including flawed models	-One, written by teacher -One, written by professional (from library)	-The articles being summarized served as models. -Posted student reviews
Talk with other students	Frequent groups in class	With friend outside class	Informal, in class
Teachers' written responses to writing	Read responses & revised early essays accordingly	Read. No revision required	Read. No revision required
Dave's prior experience	The extent to which Dave drew upon prior experience is difficult to say. In each class he believed he had no prior experience to draw from. However we know he had had related prior experience.		
Personal talk with teacher	One conference with teacher	None	None

communicate in that setting. Dave said that the comments on his first paper did help him some with his second, but he really did not refer to Dr. Forson's responses on the second paper as he wrote the third. Nor did Dave use the comments on the third paper when preparing for the essay question on the final exam. Dr. Forson required no revision in direct response to his comments, and the expected carry-over of his responses from one paper to the next did not occur. Rather, Dave repeated similar mistakes again and again. The assumption that trial and error will improve students' writing across a series of similar tasks did not hold true for Dave's work in Poetry.

Neither was the model text in Poetry, Dr. Forson's analysis of the Herrick poem that he went over in lecture, as useful an information source for Dave as Dr. Forson had hoped it would be. Dave told me that though he had looked at Dr. Forson's model critical essay as he wrote his first paper, it had not helped him a great deal. "Seeing how someone else did it," he said, "is a lot different than doing it yourself." In Freshman Composition and Biology, however, the model texts, both excellent and flawed ones, were more numerous. And in Biology, the model provided by the article Dave was summarizing was virtually inescapable. Model texts are, it seems reasonable, particularly important to newcomers learning the conventions of discourse in a new academic territory.

An information source which Dave was not adept at using in any course was direct questioning of the professor, the native-speaker expert in each setting. Dave never voluntarily questioned a teacher, though in October of his sophomore year, when he was doing poorly in Poetry, he did make an attempt to speak with Dr. Forson at his office. But when Dr. Forson was not there, Dave waited only a short time and then left—relieved, he said. He did not return. In Freshman Composition, however, Dave was required to interact with Dr. Carter individually in his mid-semester conference. That interview provided an additional information source upon which Dave could draw as he assessed and adapted to the writing requirements in that class.

Discussion

What, then, can be learned from Dave's experiences? First, this study adds to existing research which suggests that school writing is not a monolithic activity or global skill. Rather, the contexts for writing may be so different from one classroom to another, the ways of speaking in them so diverse, the social meanings of writing and the interaction patterns so different, that the courses may be for the student writer like so many foreign countries. These differences were apparent in this study not only in Dave's perceptions of the courses but in his concerns while writing and in his written products.

Second, the findings of this study have several implications for our understanding of writing development. This study suggests that writing

development is, in part, context-dependent. In each new classroom community, Dave in many ways resembled a beginning language user. He focused on a limited number of new concerns, and he was unable to move beyond concrete ways of thinking and writing, the facts of the matter at hand. Moreover, skills mastered in one situation, such as the thesis-subpoint organization in Freshman Composition, did not, as Dave insisted, automatically transfer to new contexts with differing problems and language and differing amounts of knowledge that he controlled. To better understand the stages that students progress through in achieving competence in academic speech communities, we need further research.

Dave's development across his freshman and sophomore years, where he was repeatedly a newcomer, may also be viewed in terms of his attitude toward writing. Evidence over 21 months shows that his notion of the purpose of school writing changed very little. Though there were, as we have seen, other functions accomplished for Dave by his writing in Freshman Composition and Biology, he always understood the purpose of his school writing as being primarily to satisfy a teacher-examiner's requirements. A change that did occur, however, was Dave's increased understanding of some of the activities that writers actually engage in and an increased confidence in his writing ability. As a freshman, he had told me that he did not like to write and was not very good, but by the fall of his junior year he sounded quite different. Because of a number of successful classroom experiences with writing, and an ability to forget the less successful ones, Dave told me, "Writing is no problem for me. At work, in school, I just do it."

Whether Dave will eventually be a mature writer, one who, according to Britton's (1975) definition, is able to satisfy his own purposes with a wide range of audiences, lies beyond the scope of this study to determine. We do know, however, that Dave did not, during the period of this study, write for a wide range of audiences. Nor did he, in these classes, define his own audiences, purposes, or formats, though he did in Freshman Composition choose his topics and in Poetry and Biology the particular poems and articles he wrote about. What this study suggests is that college undergraduates in beginning-level courses may have even less opportunity to orchestrate their own writing occasions than do younger students. Balancing teachers' and students' purposes is indeed difficult in these classrooms where students must, in 14 weeks, learn unfamiliar discourse conventions as well as a large body of new knowledge.

The findings of this study have several implications for the teaching of writing. They suggest that when we ask what students learn from and about writing in classrooms, we must look not only at particular assignments or at students' written products. We must also look at what they learn from the social contexts those classrooms provide for writing. In Freshman Composition, Dave learned that writer was a role he could play. In Biology, writing

was for Dave an important part of a socialization process; he was the newcomer being initiated into a profession in which, he learned, writing counts for a great deal. From his writing in Poetry, Dave learned that reading poetry was not for him and that he could get through any writing task, no matter how difficult or foreign. This latter is a lesson not without its value, of course, but it is not one that teachers hope to teach with their writing assignments.

This study also raises questions about how teachers can best help student “strangers” to become competent users of the new language in their academic territory. Because all writing is context-dependent, and because successful writing requires the accurate assessment of and adaptation to the demands of particular writing situations, perhaps writing teachers should be explicitly training students in this assessment process. As Dave researched the writing requirements in his classroom, he drew upon six information sources in a process that was for him largely tacit and unarticulated. But Dave was actually in a privileged position in terms of his potential for success in this “figuring out” process. He had, after all, had years of practice writing in classrooms. Furthermore, he shared not only ethnic and class backgrounds with his teachers, but also many assumptions about education. Students from diverse communities may need, even more than Dave, explicit training in the ways in which one figures out and then adapts to the writing demands in academic contexts.

For teachers in the disciplines, “native-speakers” who may have used the language in their discipline for so long that it is partially invisible to them, the first challenge will be to appreciate just how foreign and difficult their language is for student newcomers. They must make explicit the interpretive and linguistic conventions in their community, stressing that theirs is one way of looking at reality and not reality itself. As Fish (1980) points out, “The choice is never between objectivity and interpretation, but between an interpretation that is unacknowledged as such and an interpretation that is at least aware of itself” (p. 179). Teachers in the disciplines must then provide student newcomers with assignments and instructional supports which are appropriate for first steps in using the language of their community. Designing appropriate assignments and supports may well be more difficult when the student stranger is only on a brief visit in an academic territory, as Dave was in Poetry, or when the student comes from a community at a distance farther from academe than Dave did.

Naturalistic studies like the present one, Geertz says, are only “another country heard from . . . nothing more or less.” Yet, “small facts speak to large issues” (1973, p. 23). From Dave’s story, and others like it which describe actual writers at work in local settings, we will learn more about writers’ processes and texts and how these are constrained by specific social dynamics. Our generalizations and theories about writing and about how people learn

to write must, in the final analysis, be closely tied to such concrete social situations.

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