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Embodying Research: A Study of Student Engagement in Research Writing

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EMBODYING RESEARCH:
A STUDY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN RESEARCH WRITING

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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August 2006

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College students often perceive the university as alienating; reading and writing impersonal research texts can intensify this sense of disconnect. College professors often feel passion and enthusiasm toward their own research yet find it difficult to create this excitement in their research writing classrooms. This qualitative study explored student and teacher perceptions and instructional approaches in a university research writing course, seeking clues to student engagement.

Data collection included six weeks' observation of four university-level research writing classrooms, where professors employed distinct approaches—a traditional model-based approach with a thematic focus on a social issue, an ethnographic approach based on field experience at a student-selected research site; an inquiry-based approach with student-selected topics incorporating survey and interview methods; and a thematic approach focused on the politics and culture of a developing nation, with an emphasis on common readings.

Professor interviews, student interviews, and close analysis of eighteen student research papers resulted in the design of two instruments: an indicator of student engagement based on interview responses, and a list of textual characteristics in research papers intended to describe writer engagement as well.

Analysis of these data led to the following findings: students are more engaged when invited to select their own research topics; many students are particularly challenged by reading source materials and building connections between these authors' ideas and their own, while classroom instruction typically places greater emphasis on locating appropriate sources and drafting the research paper; students compose their research papers to meet teacher expectations, whether explicitly modeled or implied, making engagement difficult to infer from student texts; and, student engagement increases when professors place primary emphasis in grading on content and rhetorical quality, rather than on accuracy of form or documentation style. These findings suggest that alternative approaches to the research paper assignment may increase student engagement, especially when students have autonomy in selecting and developing their research topics.

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HOPE'S STORY

I am driving from Indiana to McKeesport, and my cell phone rings. It is Hope, a student in my Research Writing class. She has been reading her classmates' two-page drafts at home, and she is worried about her own essay.

"I wonder if I should rewrite this, start over. Everyone else's paper is so formal. They all have a lot of sources. Mine is personal. I don't know. Maybe I should add more of my sources, take out some of the story."

I listen, think about how to respond. First, what I say:

"You know, I asked you all to write about something that really matters, to start with a personal story or experience and then to use published research for a broader perspective, but above all, to tell your stories. Not everyone is comfortable using a personal voice, and that's fine, but you've been doing that, and your story is very effective. Have you found reading stories about other kids like your son Nick to be helpful?"

"Yes, because that helps me see what it's really like for other parents, to have a six-year old who kicks, bites, swears like a truck driver, hurts himself and others, has been on fifteen different medications and still can't live at home. But when I read everyone else's paper . . ."

"You have been conditioned to write for academic purposes in a certain context, a certain style. Your classmates have too. But I promise you, you will get the grade you want on this paper if you finish the way you've started. It's your writing, it's up to you, but please know that I don't think taking your story out will make the

paper better. I know you want to write a book about your son. Like we talked about—let this be the first chapter.”

Hope is slightly encouraged. This is not our first conversation along these lines, more like the fourth or fifth. I keep driving and think about what I did not say.

A research paper with no personal connection to its author is weaker, not stronger. It has no breath; it is not alive. It is incomplete and gives me no reason to care. Yes, Hope, you are right. I am not strong enough to overcome a lifetime of academic depersonalization training in you or anyone, no matter how many times I ask my students to write the stories they are burning to tell the world (Hurlbert, 1998). But YOU, Hope, you are strong enough.

Yes, use the research you are reading, synthesize it, paraphrase it, MLA it. But use chiaroscuro, let your experiences be the light, foreground your narrative, filter the child psychology through your own lens. You have been conducting high-stakes research for six years, with every doctor visit, medication change, school conference and journal entry, every sleepless night, every broken record conversation. Share what YOU know, and why you know it. Don't make me, your teacher, read another ten-page string of citations next month. Resist the vortex of expository white noise. Tell me your own truth. Please.

CHAPTER ONE

HOW I CAME TO THIS RESEARCH

What if, instead of telling doctoral students, “Look for a gap in the research,” we said, “Look for a story that needs to be told”? . . . Perhaps, if we pushed for dissertations that contained more stories, we might find more people who would actually want to read dissertations. (Pagnucci, 2004, p. 23-25)

I may have written research papers in junior high, but the experience I remember was the “source theme,” a 30-page assignment that all Rockville High School college preparatory students completed in English III and again in English IV. I remember only one of the two topics I spent months exploring (Native American tribes of New England), but I will never forget the torture of completing those projects, nor the satisfaction I felt at successfully navigating the incredibly complex process involved. From the hundreds of notecards I coded numerically by source, to the tiny white slips of plastic film I stuck into the typewriter to strike over my mistakes, to the endless retyping I had to do when I reached the bottom of a page only to discover I hadn’t left enough room for footnotes, the details of writing those papers will always be with me.

I never questioned the nature or purpose of those tasks, and I never, ever marred those texts with a first-person pronoun. I suppose the genre of those expository texts could be labeled objective reporting (which we now know to be an impossibility, of course) or summary-response. Today I would call that assignment

the Show-Me-Tell-Me Paper, or the I-Found-It-I-Read-It Report. This is the student assignment I refer to within this text as the “traditional research paper.” It is written in academic discourse, presented as objectively as possible, and reports the findings of previously published research. But whatever that genre of writing is called, I now know for certain that it is *not* the only (or most appropriate) format for writing from sources or reporting one’s own research.

This study explores the influence of instructional style, personal experience, voice, and genre on student engagement in research writing. My own experiences as a research writer, from my high school source themes to this manuscript, figure in its composition. A year ago, I anticipated a very different, much more tightly structured dissertation study. During its creation, I reached what seemed to be an insurpassable barrier—the alienation and disconnect I experienced between my personal, professional, and writing lives had brought me to a standstill. I realized that my academic writing career had consisted of churning out manuscripts that all fit the same template, followed the same rules, and avoided any mention of my self or my own lived experience. Elizabeth Boquet’s (2002) descriptions of silent, hygienic writing center/clinics intent on sanitizing student writing and effecting a cure were suddenly all too close to my own experience as a graduate student. Like Peter Elbow (1998), I had reached a point in my profession where academic writing had become a dry, meaningless exercise.

I found through time, reading, and a variety of growth-oriented experiences that I needed to include a more natural voice in my expository writing and imbue

each text with my personality and identity. My own history as a child who was silenced and abused played a part in what became an existential turning point. I had to *embody* my own texts (Tompkins, 1993), all of them, by writing about issues I valued, and expressing that connectedness; I could no longer do otherwise. I knew as a teacher that students are empowered when they research and write about issues that matter to them, issues with life-changing potential (Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000; Blitz & Hurlbert, 1998; Freire, 1985; Payne, 2000), and I discovered, through narrative, the importance of a personal stake and voice in my professional writing as well.

I grew into the belief that narrative, specifically telling the stories of significant life experiences, could embody and enliven expository texts, including, and perhaps especially, research-based writing. I began asking students to choose research topics that mattered to them, and, quoting Mark Hurlbert, to write what they were “burning to tell the world” (class discussion, 2003), including the personal stories that led to their decisions about what to research, which experiences they would explore. When students shared these stories in peer revision workshops and class presentations, community, connection, and trust increased dramatically. In a final course reflection, one of my freshman composition students wrote:

[One] interesting thing about this class was the freedom we had in choosing topics to write about. It’s like having your destiny in front of you and all you have to do is shape it. . . . In some classes I’ve had, we had to write about specific topics, some of which you do not

believe in. I'm so grateful for . . . an opportunity to express myself in a class where I'd otherwise remained silent! (spring 2004)

I wondered whether other professors and students saw similar results when using these techniques, and what roles personal experience played in other classrooms. Specifically, I wondered whether the conventions that had kept me from exploring these ideas for years were affecting other research writing classrooms.

Marian MacCurdy's (2000) words concerned me:

The intellectual depth and honesty required of the effective academic essay are lauded by the academy while the emotional and intellectual truth of the personal essay in the context of the academy is not always equally valued. (p. 160)

To find out more about the issues described in this statement, and to explore connections between research writing, personal experience, and narrative, I began reading about academic writing. With time, I focused my reading in the following areas: the historical foundations of objectivity in research writing; the nature and characteristics of research writing; personal writing as viewed by the discipline of composition; narrative research and the narrative life (Pagnucci, 2004); engagement, the term I learned to describe that connection between thinking, identity, and (academic) writing; and, lastly, traditional methods of teaching research writing and some alternative pedagogies. Based on my own experience as an instructor of reading and

writing and as a graduate student/researcher, I also considered these issues from the perspectives of higher education and the institutions that comprise it.

Institutional Perspectives on Engagement in Academic Writing

Despite the growing commitment to post-positivism within the academy, professional literature and student textbooks perpetuate the myths of the objective observer and the distillable purity of knowledge, as acquired through empirical research and imparted via academic exposition (Canagarajah, 2002; Lemke, 1995; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The discourse of research is impersonal, usually containing no evidence of the individual voice or local language of the writer (Webb, 1992). The stories of the researcher and his or her journey during the study are also missing. This omission denies readers the context that would add meaning to our interpretation of research data, context that could open discussion as to the perceiving lenses of authors and their possible influences on study methodologies and results. We cannot cleanse our texts of bias by whitewashing them, by aiming for an impossible objective universalism. Instead, the reward for these efforts has been to produce flavorless, decontextualized, formulaic texts that frustrate students poised to enter communities of research and discourage their engagement.

College freshmen often perceive the university as impersonal, alienating or self-negating (Gardner, 1993; Tinto, 1993; Wang, Martin, and Martin, 2002). Reading and writing disembodied research texts only intensifies this sense of disconnect. The perceived lack of belonging is more complicated for students of color, non-native speakers of English, non-traditional students, and others who may

already experience a split between their home cultures and the mainstream, home languages and discourse of school (Gee, 1989). All knowledge is constructed, and the knowledge required to establish an identity as a college student is certainly no exception.

To assist freshman students in connecting their lived experiences to the intellectual and institutional life of the academy, retention efforts in recent years have focused on means of creating these connections—what Thomas (1990) refers to as academic and social integration. Learning communities, peer tutoring and mentoring, and freshman year experience seminars seek to humanize and personalize the academy.

College writing courses can and should follow this lead, providing integrative, identity-building opportunities through the reading and creation of meaningful texts. When students select the materials they read and write in composition classes, utilizing lived experience as one possible resource in the exploration of new ideas, I believe classrooms as well as research essays are enriched and enlivened. A growing body of literature within our profession agrees (Anderson & McCurdy, 2000; Ballenger, 1999; Blitz & Hurlbert, 1998; Kamler, 2001; Macrorie, 1988; Sullivan, 2003). In the next section, I apply these ideas to the teaching of research writing.

Significance of the Study

The research paper is an assignment viewed by most college professors as inherently valuable, especially as an exercise in critical thinking. Professors hope each student will learn to think more like researchers in a specific discipline—be it

chemistry, business, or literary theory. Yet far too many undergraduate research papers are strings of quotations, loosely connected by a few rhetorically familiar phrases in students' own words (Nelson, 2001).

Students come to the college composition classroom with well-developed expectations for research writing as a genre, based on twelve years or more of academic reading and writing experiences, typically with a conventional emphasis on the impersonal, supposedly objective approach. Currently, the increase of high-stakes, standardized testing in K-12 public education has narrowed student visions of writing for academic purposes still further. Student definitions of terms like research paper and essay become more and more fossilized as classroom environments inevitably "teach to the test." Standardization risks sterilization of student texts and genres, while experimentation and personal voice can lead students to make connections and breathe life into research-based writing. When instructors are aware of their students' expectations and their own assumptions, they can, if they choose, open up student conceptions both of what research-based texts look like, and, on a deeper level, of what constitutes valid research.

It is critical that we professors be aware of our own positions on the inclusion of personal voice and lived experience in research writing and how these stances evolved, so that we can meet the diverse needs of students, many of whom will be led to explore topics of personal relevance within research writing assignments when given the opportunity (Ballenger, 1999; Macrorie, 1988; Pagnucci, 2004; Payne, 2000). Some of these will benefit from the detachment afforded by a traditional

rhetorical approach to these challenging topics. Others will grow through the opportunity to include personal narratives in their research assignments (Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000; Ballenger, 1999; Pagnucci, 2004).

This invitation of the Self to the research writing party entered our professional literature via the expressivists, led by Peter Elbow and Donald Murray. Elbow's ideas, in particular, have led to another strand within the teaching of writing, a theory that all writing is creative and deeply personal (Elbow, 1998; Murray, 1985), and that our personal response to texts will lead us to construct our own meanings (Rosenblatt, 1978). More recently, these ideas have been voiced within post-process composition literature by theorists such as Gary Owens (1999), who suggests that we must challenge our own field "to move away from a discourse of mastery and assertion toward a more dialogic, dynamic, open-ended, receptive, nonassertive stance" (p. 14). Approaches such as the multigenre research paper meet this challenge, inviting students to construct new, inclusive perspectives and beliefs as they read source materials and then compose in genres that range from stream-of-consciousness to creative non-fiction, drama, and expository text, woven together through use of recurring themes (Allen, 2001; Johnson & Moneysmith, 1999; Romano, 2000).

Professional literature in the field of composition reflects a somewhat widened spectrum of opinion regarding personal dimensions of academic writing in the post-modern era. Still, the scale is weighted heavily toward current-traditional rhetoric, so labelled by Daniel Fogarty in 1959 (as cited in Pullman, 1999). The current-

traditional approach is described by Pullman (1999) as an Aristotelian call to “clarity, brevity, and vigor” (p. 18), which typically recommends the avoidance of subjectivity and the personal in research-based writing, along with the narrative style that typically accompanies them.

Instructors choose among these and many other approaches to teach composition and research writing based on their own teaching and writing styles. By exploring the dimension of personal experience, along with more familiar variables in student writing such as genre and voice, professors can build awareness of their own assumptions and offer students additional ways of visioning research writing as these undergraduates join the community of readers and writers that makes up the academy.

Research writing is often the second of two composition courses required in undergraduate programs, as it is at this university. While personal narrative and topics based on personal experience are commonly assigned in first-semester composition, the emphasis in the research writing course is typically on impersonal, expository, and supposedly objective texts (Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000). Despite a growing body of literature that supports inclusion of personal experience and alternate genres in student research writing, little has been done to explore the classroom dynamics when these varied approaches are employed. In my search of the literature in this field, I located only a few sources exploring classroom dynamics, instructor and student perceptions, and teaching styles involved when personal experience becomes an ingredient in the research writing classroom. When we

acknowledge that personal bias in research is unavoidable, that, in fact, our subjectivities can enrich our research-based texts, the interaction between teaching style and student voice in assigned writing becomes a key area to explore.

In my own teaching of composition and ESL (English as a Second Language) writing, I have often been frustrated by students' dependence on models, writing templates that the students believe will guarantee academic success. These perceptions of research writing as a formulaic task are reinforced by the frozen style and structure of the professional research source materials my students read. The academic community often perceives innovation and, in particular, the inclusion of a personal voice or narrative element as weakening the authority of published research (Canagarajah, 2002; Fontaine, 2004, personal communication; Webb, 1992).

I decided to study research writing professors, classrooms, and students because I wanted to see whether other teachers and students had found ways to create engagement in research writing. I wanted to know whether the call to "relocate the personal" (Kamler, 2000, p. x) had produced a difference in student research writing, and if so, how and when that difference appeared.

I explored these issues through empirical observation of four research writing classrooms, including interviews with the professors and students, observation of their classrooms, and analysis of student research papers. My hope is that my findings will encourage faculty to consider research writing assignments that make room for student-selected topics, and student voices, in a variety of genres. I also hope to influence research writing instructors to increase students' investment in an

inquiry-based, authentic search for meaning, and to encourage the drawing of vital connections between school and self. To collect data and analyze my findings, I used qualitative methods of inquiry, as outlined below. These procedures are described in detail in Chapter Three. Some of the relevant terminology and special uses of terms within this manuscript can be found in Appendix A.

Methodology in Brief

To explore the role of personal experience in research writing, I sought responses to the research questions listed below by gathering information from teachers, students, and texts. My first step was to begin the review of literature that would become Chapter Two of this dissertation. Next, I sought and obtained approval from the Assistant Dean for Research and the Institutional Review Board for the study. I then requested faculty participation from four instructors teaching the Research Writing course at the university where I conducted the research during the spring 2005 semester. Once I had obtained their written consent, I interviewed the four participating professors, asking them to discuss their perceptions of research writing instruction and their individual course designs.

I attended most sessions of these four classes for approximately six weeks and recruited four to six student participants from each class for the study, offering a tutoring session in writing as an incentive. I interviewed these student participants about their experiences with research writing, and each participant provided me with a copy of a research paper written for the course. After collecting this data and transcribing the interview recordings, I analyzed interview transcripts for emerging

themes in teacher and student perceptions of research writing, developing a numerical scale to summarize responses that might indicate student engagement with the research writing process. I then turned to the students' research papers. I designed a list of relevant textual features (characteristics of engagement) in order to look for signs of engagement and commitment to the research writing task. I used this list to code and analyze the student texts. Once I had completed these analyses and reflected on the results, I wrote chapters to describe my findings and their implications.

Research Questions

After reading and considering the aspects of academic research writing described above, I formulated the following questions to guide my research:

- How do professors of research writing view student engagement in research assignments? More specifically,
 - do professors believe that they assist or encourage students to include personal experience and a personal voice in research writing assignments? If so, how?
 - What perceptions do they believe influence their approach to personal experience and voice in student-authored texts?
 - How do professors view personal content when included in research writing assignments? How do professors say that they respond to such content?

- How do the practices of professors seem to relate to their stated positions in this regard? Specifically,
 - if professors of research writing feel that they encourage student engagement, how do their syllabus, course materials, and classroom practice reflect this?
 - How do professors say they develop topics for assignments in research writing courses, if instructor-designed topics are used?
 - How do professors say they explain and facilitate topic selection if students develop their own topics for research writing assignments?
 - How do professors respond to assigned writing from sources when personal experience is included? How do they evaluate the writing?
- How do students become engaged in their research writing courses and assignments?
 - How do students select topics for research-based assignments, when they are permitted to do so?
 - When and to what degree do research writing students feel comfortable incorporating personal experience in their essays?
 - What features of research writing assignments do students perceive as most valuable? Most meaningful?

- What qualities of their completed texts are they most pleased with?
- Do certain textual features appear more frequently in the research papers of engaged student writers than in those of less engaged writers, and if so, which ones?
 - What signals of writer identity do students employ in their texts?
 - If students include personal experience in their essays, how do they integrate these elements into the text?
 - How and when do students maintain their own writers' voices and express their own opinions while incorporating others' ideas within assigned research-based texts?

Conclusion

The remaining chapters of this dissertation explore the dimensions of personal experience within research writing, as follows. Chapter two reviews relevant literature, taking a historical perspective on research writing, its instruction, and current trends in the field. Chapter Three offers a detailed description of the methodology I used to collect and analyze empirical data and artifacts for the study. Chapters Four, Five, and Six disclose the study's findings with reference to the teachers, the students, and the student texts. Chapter Seven considers implications of these findings and suggests areas for further research.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Protocols for student research-based writing, like those for its building blocks, the literature of empirical research, did not start or evolve within the boundaries of English composition pedagogies. Millennia before our students blinked rhythmically at their Microsoft Word screens, several myths—including the myths of scholarly objectivity, the omnipotent observer, and the distilled purity of empirical findings—were born. The Western idea that a research writer could speak for all, while apparently being none, had its roots in ancient Greek rhetoric, where the mind-body split defeated an oral culture's apprentice-based performing-knowing and women's ways of body-healing-knowing long ago (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997; Estes, 1996; Havelock, 1963). Some Eastern cultures have also privileged mind over body, masculine-identified knowledge over feminine. That, however, is someone else's story.

Our own expository story, in a most abbreviated form, begins with Havelock's (1963) analysis of Homer, Plato, and the emergence of literacy in ancient Greece. In his *Republic*, Plato describes the human architecture of an ideal society, where the philosopher-king earns his position through a lifetime study of the Dialectic, which seeks (but never attains) the ideal Form of every concept through the use of Reason. The antithesis of the philosopher was the despised Poet, a Homeric legacy whose role Havelock explicates in *Preface to Plato* (1963).

Plato's Athenian world was still in transition from its oral roots toward its literate future, and in an oral culture, memory of linguistic forms is a survival skill (Havelock, 1963; Ong, 2002). Sentimental, rhyming poetic forms served Homeric Greece because these verses were relatively easy to memorize with accuracy, which was vital to ensure preservation of the society's most valued memories and teachings. Prior to Plato, poetic forms "provided a massive repository of useful knowledge, a sort of encyclopedia of ethics, politics, history, and technology" (Havelock, 1963, p. 27). These poems were the narratives and the collective memories of their people. Poets utilized three strategies to aid in the memorization of these epic works: mnemonic rhythms, "verbal formulas" of repeated sequences of themes, and the combining of story episodes into long poetic narratives, where individual episodes act as mental bookmarks for the orator/poet (Havelock, 1963, pp. 82-84).

It is these mnemonic devices, as well as an emotional quality used in Homeric story-poems both to attract listeners and anchor the formalized words in their minds, that led to Plato's depiction of the poet as a mere imitator, relying on his listener's emotions to generate cheap thrills. This character was a sentimental purveyor of hackneyed, cliché-laden entertainment, whose epic recitations were the Homeric equivalent of the Grade B film, with a similar lack of redeeming social value.

Plato's depreciation of the emotional quality in Homeric oral texts is mirrored by his sanctification of Reason in written prose, where the sequential organization of narrative story is replaced with a dialectical hierarchy of categories and concepts.

The opposition of these two patterns, along with the historical attachment of emotion to the former, logic to the latter, has led Western civilization down a long, complex, dualistic road that has fostered, among other dilemmas, what philosophers refer to as the mind-body problem (Hannan, 1994). In Plato's *Phaedrus*, the human will is portrayed as a celestial charioteer striving to move forward despite the battle between the winged steeds of Reason and Desire (Trans. Nehamas, Woodruff, 1995). While Reason strains upward toward essentialist ideals through employment of the revered Dialectic, Desire pulls the chariot ever lower toward the earth, home of the body, emotion, and the despised Homeric poets. This dualistic allegory illustrates not only the mind/body split, but also the elevation of one over the other that has dominated our understanding of the discipline of rhetoric for the past 2,000 years.

Western society's preference for formalistic essentialism was reinforced during the Enlightenment, when the scientific method as we know it was born. Now, emotions were viewed not only as a dangerous distraction from the Objective mind, but also as the source of human error in the search for pure knowledge. Subjectivity became a source of contamination sullyng empirical science. Contemporary scholars refer to the mind-body split as Cartesian dualism, after the work of Rene Descartes (1596-1650). Descartes determined that the mind must be separate from the body in order for life after death to be possible, and that the mind, therefore, could be viewed as eternal. Philosophers continue to debate the mind's actual material and location, but its purity and separability from the body were accepted realities within

research communities for several centuries (Kors, 2002). Universal, scientific Truth has been the ideal in scholarship, and this essentialist myth called scholars to the hygienic, sterilized prose we now recognize as traditional research writing.

This style of academic discourse, while no longer a requirement for every academic publication, remains prevalent across professions, and clearly affects more than stylistics. Christine Webb (1992), a research nurse, paints an accurate picture of some of the ways these stilted, rhetorical conventions cripple research writing:

The notion of objectivity in research is conveyed by the use of the third person in academic writing, in statements such as 'It is thought' rather than 'I think,' and 'Data were collected' instead of 'I collected data.' . . . When inexpertly used, this format leads to excruciatingly tortuous sentences about what 'the writer' and 'the author' think. An emphasis on the need to back statements with evidence often leads to a seeming belief that it is not permissible to give a personal opinion. Thus, writing is often so liberally interspersed with references relating to the most mundane, obvious and incontrovertible points that the piece is deprived of 'flow' and is extremely difficult to read. . . . Using this form of language conveys, and is intended to convey, an impression that the ideas being discussed have a neutral, value-free, impartial basis. . . . I hope to demonstrate that this is rarely, if ever, the case. (pp. 747-748)

The Nonexistent Genre of Research Writing

Writers of every genre can, and do, make use of outside sources; creative writers, for example, find that research “requires a type of dedication and investment” that aids them in exploring “the complicated relationship between fact and fiction” (Bishop, 2004, p. 29). Of course, research occurs outside the walls of the academy, too. Heilker, Allen, and Sewall (2004) tell their students that “every text they write is a research paper.” They explain it this way:

A *grocery list* is a research paper. If you are writing a grocery list, your research involves looking in the pantry, the refrigerator, and the freezer . . . if you are writing an e-mail to a friend about what happened last week, your research involves accessing that database of gray matter between your ears to call up the appropriate events to discuss. (p. 50)

As early as 1982, Richard Larson addressed this point in a research-writing themed issue of *College English*, reminding us that “[r]esearch can inform virtually any writing or speaking if the author wishes it to do so” (p. 813). Larson goes on to conclude that the so-called ‘research paper,’ as a generic, cross-disciplinary term, has no conceptual or substantive identity. He writes, “If almost any paper is potentially a paper incorporating the fruits of research, the term ‘research paper’ has virtually no value as an identification of a kind of substance in a paper. Conceptually, the generic term ‘research paper’ is for practical purposes meaningless” (p. 813).

In other words, the college research paper as most of us know it—that pastiche or parade of others’ findings, often evaluated as much for its adherence to

the particulars of a prescribed form as for its content—has no exclusive claim on the term. Sources can just as legitimately be used to enhance texts in the genres of personal essay, auto-ethnography, and creative nonfiction, to name a few. For that matter, perhaps the assumption that undergraduate students must report others' research for years before undertaking their own should also be questioned. Some teachers of research writing have invited students to design and then describe studies of their own, as a later section of this chapter will discuss.

As Schwegler and Shamon (1982) pointed out in that same formative issue of *College English*, “students view the research paper as a close-ended, informative, skills-oriented exercise written for an expert audience by novices pretending to be experts” (p. 820). My own formative research writing experiences, like the source themes I describe in Chapter One, bear this out. This feigned expertise is only one of many artificialities required to complete the traditional research writing assignment. Teachers as well as students find the assignment problematic. As early as 1965, Thomas Taylor made his position clear in an *English Journal* article he entitled “Let’s Get Rid of Research Papers,” asserting that the personal essay (in the tradition of Montaigne and Rousseau) would be a better tool to facilitate the development of the young scholarly mind.

In the 1980’s, Ken Macrorie called the research paper as we know it “scandalous” (Olson, 1986), and later, “an exercise in badly done bibliography, often an introduction to the art of plagiarism, and a triumph of meaninglessness—for both writer and reader” (Macrorie, 1988). Peter Elbow claimed to hate academic

discourse, even while valuing the skills academic writing teaches (1991). And, in Zemliansky and Bishop's 2004 anthology, *Research Writing Revisited: A sourcebook for teachers*, the editors tell us that "the traditional research paper assignment that has been a staple in many writing curricula for over eighty years does not reflect either the importance of research for all writers or the true nature of research as rhetorical inquiry" (vii), in great measure because "its formal stodgy, and rigidly academic boundaries allow for little deviation or creative expression" (p. 232).

In *Beyond Note Cards: Rethinking the Freshman Research Paper*, Bruce Ballenger (1999) presents an exhaustive historical review of this assignment and its rationales, from the late 19th century to the present. He traces the 20th century growth and popularity of the assignment to a paradigm shift away from oratory rhetoric within the academy, and greater availability of libraries and published resources for students. He also tells us that as far back as 1931, over 50% of students surveyed considered that what they learned from the research paper assignment was not worth the time and effort required to complete it.

Ballenger's review, along with the work of other scholars, makes it clear that many writing teachers and theorists as well as students consider the traditional research paper to be an inefficient, ineffective assignment for undergraduate composition courses (see also Ballenger, 2004; Brent, 1992; Davis & Shadle, 2000; Elbow, 1991; Goggin & Roen, 2004; Heilker, Allen, & Sewall, 2004; Macrorie, 1988; Reigstad, 2004; Romano, 2002; Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2004; Zemliansky & Bishop, 2004). Nevertheless, two national surveys, one published in 1958, the

other in 1982—with Peter Elbow, the expressivist movement, and the “me” decade in between—found that over 80% of universities required a research paper for undergraduate students (Manning; Ford & Perry; both as cited in Ballenger, 1999). And most authors (with Taylor the notable exception) agree that research writing in some form should be an element of undergraduate composition instruction. Therefore, before considering some alternative approaches to this form of academic prose, I review how our professional literature defines the goals for student research writing, as well as student perceptions of its aims.

The Goals of Research Writing

I began with a 1964 *English Journal* article, in which Sister M. Christina addresses the issue foundationally, discussing the background high school students need for college research writing. I believed a Catholic school in the 1960s would likely provide a traditional response to the question. According to Sister Christina, the research paper “should involve due mental application rather than merely applied techniques” and can, with proper scaffolding of assignments over the long haul, teach “language power.” She suggested “research training,” a program that she designed in order to develop

- 1) the student’s powers of discrimination along with the acquisition and application of knowledge;
- 2) the power to relate through comparison and contrast;

3) the power to make something new from given material—if only the newness that is achieved in a personally effective organization of evidence on a not at all new idea.” (p. 623)

Christina concludes her essay with the caution that this training program in research writing “should contribute the will and ability to produce with technical accuracy, whatever is written, since *standards for true growth, scientific and spiritual, do not tolerate the imperfect effort*” (p. 623, emphasis added).

Sr. M. Christina’s association of skilled research writing with standards of perfection, growth, and power may shed more light on mid-twentieth-century America’s goals than even she intended. Robert Davis and Mark Shadle (2000) pointed out that the traditional undergraduate research paper, which asks student writers to look, look deeply, and look again at “real” research conducted by others, exemplifies an inherently modernist “possessive gaze.” To Davis and Shadle, this gaze represents modernist society’s “desire for expertise,” a poorly concealed hunger for the world dominance our politics, economics, and academic circles enacted through the possession and domination of knowledge (2000, p. 421).

Most theorists, including those who have abandoned the traditional research paper completely, state the goals of student research writing in somewhat less sinister terms, but there is an ongoing theme of accommodation to an existing order and form of discourse. Heilker, Allen, and Sewall (2005), for example, claim the purpose of the traditional research paper is “maintaining programmatic integrity and ‘disciplining’ students for work in their majors” (p. 49). The theme of preparing

students for research in a specific academic discipline is cited repeatedly as a goal of the research paper assignment within composition programs (Davis & Shadle, 2000; Ballenger, 1999; Nelson, 2001), although some authors view the discourse of each discipline as distinct, and thus believe disciplinary research should be taught by experts in each field (Ballenger, 1999).

Critical thinking has also been cited frequently as a goal of the research paper assignment, at least as far back as the 1980s, when Trzyna (1983) expressed the opinion that this mature thinking would only result from hypothesis development, rather than “reporting and reviewing” (p. 204). For the instructors Schwegler and Shamoon (1982) surveyed in the same period, the research paper leads to thinking in “the same critical, analytical, inquiring mode as instructors do” (1982, p. 821). Paradoxically, the professors Ballenger surveyed (1999) hoped the assignment would “encourage independent thought and interpretation.”

In *The Curious Researcher*, Ballenger’s own research writing textbook, the goal of research writing courses is to train students in “using the ideas of others to shape ideas of their own” (2004, p. xxvi), which echoes traditional, model-based approaches to some degree. The theme of maturing in one’s ideas and the ability to communicate them effectively is repeated often in the literature as a goal of research writing instruction. Bishop and Zemliansky (2001) hoped research writing would lead students “to address new subjects and to communicate maturely with audiences” (p. vii). Ken Macrorie (1988) claimed his I-search process encouraged students “to search and write in a way that furthers thought and reflection, that builds and sees,”

to replace “passivity” with “initiative and self-discipline.” Clearly there is a gap between the desired goals of original, critical, analytical thought and the classroom practice in most research writing courses, which emphasizes the proper selection, reading, and summary of others’ published texts.

Sharon Sorenson’s (2005) textbook *The Research Paper: A Contemporary Approach* is a case in point. The text presents a traditional, model-based approach to the task, and lists goals for student research in skill-based, instrumental terms: by completing a research paper, the student will learn to organize ideas and manage time, and after completing the assignment, will have gained “a gratifying sense of accomplishment” (pp. vii-viii). For Sorenson, the research paper is also a form of assessment, designed by professors to test student skills in locating and organizing materials, comprehending a topic, and/or applying a concept to a specific context (p. 1). In the eleventh edition of another widely-circulated research writing guide, Lester and Lester (2005) claim that the research process teaches students to “pull together and make sense of divergent views” (p. xvi), although the handbook emphasizes procedural details of source selection, style, and documentation. As Douglas Brent commented in 1992, there is an extremely wide gap between what we want our students to accomplish and what we train them to do.

Despite the frequent upheavals in composition theory that have dominated the field since the 1980s, positive views of the research writing experience, if not the traditional research paper, predominate. As mentioned above, most teachers consider familiarity with the professional literature of a discipline a worthy goal, and

a way of entry into the great “Burkean parlor conversations” that connect living writers to the generations who precede and follow them (Ballenger, 1999).

Professors who spend a lifetime enriched by these conversations hope their students will find research an energizing and exciting experience. Many professors find research rewarding, an “exciting,” “fun” experience that should stimulate “wonder” and lead to “the satisfaction of finding out they knew more than they thought they knew” (Ballenger, 1999, p. 26). They may share the optimistic goals Nelson (2001) encountered when she explored the professed aims of teachers for the research assignment, but they are also aware of the gap between their own expectations for student growth and their students’ perceptions of the research paper assignment. Perhaps this is why the professors who share such enthusiasm for their own research are so disappointed by the experience of teaching the traditional research paper in composition courses.

According to Ballenger (1999), “students by and large view the task as collecting and rearranging information” (p. 15). Fister (2001), a research librarian, concurred, stating that students often perceive research writing as a process of transcription. Educators have been known to blame this phenomenon on the Internet and its significant role in student research. I believe that the automaticity of cut-and-paste information retrieval, where a student may not even be typing out the information cited in a paper, does exacerbate a disconnect between student writer and source author. However, this disengagement from authors and their ideas long preceded computer-based research. As noted above, students surveyed in the early

'80s considered research to be “a skills-oriented exercise” (Schwegler & Shamoon, 1982). Furthermore, the process journal Jennie Nelson (2001) excerpted showed that students using print sources also commodified their source texts and showed an amazing disconnect from the authors who produced the ideas the students found in books, journals, and other bound texts. In fact, Nelson’s (2001) student Beth avoided any mention of author, title, or content in her research process journal, referring to all of her sources by the color and size of the library volumes.

Ballenger surveyed 196 students and nine professors regarding their perceptions of the research paper, and the student results were fairly negative. Students compared the research paper to “a vacuum,” “an encyclopedia that goes on and on,” “a blind man walking down the street without his cane,” and (my personal favorite) “an atheist going to church on Sunday” (1999, p. 27).

As I continued to read Ballenger’s survey results, I sensed the huge width and depth of the divide between student experience and teacher objectives for this assignment, and I became even more convinced that there must be better ways to teach and learn research, ways to let our composition students in on the joy of inquiry the teachers in Ballenger’s study reported, the connectedness they feel between their own ideas, other researchers and their findings, and their own “communities of practice” (Goggin & Roen, 2004, p. 16).

Alternative Approaches

So, the traditional research paper, an unpopular, much criticized assignment, has shown itself resilient for decades, amidst numerous disciplinary winds that have

shifted curricula in composition, English studies, and other humanities programs. While the existence of research writing as a genre of student composition within the academy seems assured, new approaches to its design and purpose have emerged with process and post-process theories of composition (Davis & Shadle, 2000; Romano, 2000; Zemliansky & Bishop, 2004). Innovative ways of teaching research writing within English studies have led to new terms, like Macrorie's "I-paper," Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater's "ethnographic essay," Ballenger's Montaignian "research essay," and perhaps most notably, Tony Romano's "multigenre project." These approaches to research writing have altered the student task significantly—for some students, in some college writing classrooms.

As with any climate change, the research writing winds have blown in a number of directions. A significant number of compositionists have argued that use of the personal voice breathes life into student research papers (Ballenger, 1999; Blitz & Hurlbert, 1998; Elbow, 1998; Macrorie, 1988; Moore, 2001; Pagnucci, 2004), while others claim that this emphasis on the personal leads to essays directed "to no one for no apparent purpose" (Olson, 2001, p. ix), or to an inevitable loss of intellectual rigor along with the loss of formal, academic discourse (Bartholomae, 1985; Bizzell, 1982). These latter theorists would position research writing within the public sphere, where writing is a social act, "ideological and political" (Weisser, 2001, p. 25). Some authors claim a new vision for the term "personal," one that leads student writers through the autobiographical realm and into historical and

sociological spheres of influence (Heilker, Allen, & Sewall, 2004; Kamler, 2001; Tompkins, 1993).

Student identity is crucial for many shapers of the research writing genre and the larger discipline of composition (Ballenger, 1999; Brooke, 1988; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Elbow, 2003; Goggin & Roen, 2004; Hanauer, 2002, personal communication; Reigstad, 2004). For these theorists, if students are to invest the research paper assignment with meaning, they must perceive themselves as researchers, not as mere compilers of existing textual matter. Thus, students should conduct and report on their own research, empirically, ethnographically, and/or via investigation of primary source material.

The remainder of this chapter considers these issues along with several alternative approaches to the research paper assignment and a description of the model-based approach.

Everyone is Curious: The Inquiry Approach

One of the most popular texts currently in use for research writing instruction in college is *The Curious Researcher* by Bruce Ballenger (2004). Ballenger's approach stresses "the spirit of inquiry" (p. xxvi), which he proposes as an antidote to the "cold" classrooms, "lifeless" analysis, and "wooden" prose he considers typical of research writing instruction (Ballenger 2002, p. xvii). For Ballenger, students are authentically motivated by research "rooted in curiosity" (2002, p. xviii), so his definition of the latter term is worth reproducing here:

Curiosity includes a willingness to be open to what you'll find as you immerse yourself in the research as well as a willingness to change your mind, to let go of preconceived notions. Curiosity is an invitation to be confused and a desire to try to straighten things out, first for yourself and then for the people you're writing for. (2002, p. xviii)

Lack of curiosity, engagement, or interest is frequently cited as a primary reason for high attrition and poor performance in research writing courses.

Reawakening this natural curiosity may be a vehicle to critical thinking, as well as to both personal and academic growth. Mary McMackin and Barbara Siegel (2002) applied the curiosity principle to transform research writing in Siegel's fifth grade classroom.

Early on in their application of inquiry-based research, McMackin and Siegel (2002) asked their students why they thought the class was doing research. When asked why they were going to do a research project, "the responses contained answers such as: to gather information, to use sources, to raise our grades, and to get us ready for middle school" (p. 24). None of the fifth-graders in Ms. Siegel's class thought the purpose might be to learn more about a topic they were interested in, or, as the authors explained to the children, "to find answers to the important questions we have." By fifth grade, this group of children already had a well-developed construct to represent the larger purpose of research writing in school: skill-building practice.

Ballenger (1999), McMackin and Siegel (2002), and other promoters of the inquiry approach share a unique set of assumptions about the goals and nature of research writing. Ballenger described the results of a curiosity-driven research project as allowing students to retain a “sense of themselves as masters of their own work” and to “take charge of discovering what they want to know,” so that they will “begin to get their voices back, eager to share what they have learned” (2002, pp. xix-xxi). Student selection of topics is key to this approach, as is a move away from the formal, academic discourse commonly expected in a research paper. For Ballenger, the “research essay” (he also uses the term “researched essay”) is a more palatable alternative to the research paper, and a more friendly, exploratory tone typifies the genre as he describes it.

In the research essay, students have “the opportunity to *test* an opinion or an idea to determine its truth.” The research essay ideally includes “a narrative of thought” explaining how the writer’s opinions developed during the research process (Ballenger, 1999, p. 92). Most importantly, the research essay “establishes curiosity as the force behind inquiry.” It “makes ‘figuring out what I think’ its subject, and in doing so, gives students . . . a method for working out the relationship between the self and the world” (Ballenger, 1999, p. 94).

Ken Macrorie’s *I-Search Paper* (1988) starts from many of the same assumptions, and indeed this research design is regarded by most compositionists as foundational to the inquiry approach. For Macrorie, “[u]ntil students become curious, start thinking, do something with their knowledge, there is no such thing as

curiosity, thinking, or use of knowledge” (p. 12). Macrorie invites students to complete *I-Searches*—“not Researches, in which the job is to search again what someone has already searched—but original searches in which persons scratch an itch they feel, one so marvelously itchy that they begin rubbing a finger up against it and the rubbing feels so good that they dig in with a fingernail. A search to fulfill a need, not that the teacher has imagined for them, but one they feel themselves” (p. 14).

Like Ballenger and other inquiry-enthusiasts, Macrorie looks to the genre of the personal, reflective essay for inspiration, and his “contextbook” (as opposed to a traditional textbook) is sprinkled with quotations from essayists such as Emerson and Nietzsche, along with inspirational words from compositionists, novelists, and poets. He considers the traditional research paper a numbing, deadening, outmoded form of torture, where the absence of the writer’s voice creates a dangerous void between the student writer and the published authors of his or her sources. Instead, he encourages students to begin by telling their readers what they wanted to find out, and to continue by describing what they did to satisfy their curious “itches”—what they read, who they interviewed, where they traveled to learn more—and finally to conclude by raising new, deeper questions that still remain to be answered (2004).

Tom Reigstad was converted to the I-Search approach after meeting Ken Macrorie in 1984, and has been reading and enjoying students’ I-Searches ever since. He writes, “The I-Search paper might be messy, it might consist of unfinished business, and might raise more questions than it answers. . . . Its itch can be so

marvelous, so tantalizing that you don't really want to stop scratching. . . . The I-Search paper is capable of being the Energizer bunny of alternative research methods—it keeps going and going and going” (2004, p. 47-48).

Bruce Ballenger concedes that Macrorie's *I-Search* is “the most prominent alternative text on the research assignment” (1999, p. 40), but, in spite of their common emphasis on curiosity-driven inquiry, Ballenger believes I-Search papers “are not very interesting to read, though they're certainly more interesting than most formal research papers” (1999, p. 47). His “researched essay” is less process oriented, more philosophical, perhaps, at least in the tone Ballenger hopes students will attain. Its content focuses less on what students did to learn, more on their thoughts and feelings, both about themselves and the issue or topic they studied.

Heilker, Allen, and Sewall (2004) also make use of the personal essay in their alternative approach to research writing. However, they place more emphasis on the autobiographical roots of the essay than Macrorie does; they also distinguish their intent from Ballenger's, as follows: “Whereas Ballenger uses the essay as a more accessible means of helping students through the traditional, externally directed research paper process . . . , we prefer to emphasize the personal, even idiosyncratic aspects of essay writing as an effective way into research writing” (p. 51). These authors consider the personal essay to be prime ground for students to “use their research without being used by it, . . . “to research like writers rather than like students.” Like Macrorie and Ballenger, they consider student choice of a “personally meaningful” topic to be essential. For these authors, using the personal essay as the

genre for research writing does not represent an easy way out, or a way of denying students fluency in the language of the academy.

On the contrary, for Heilker, Allen, and Sewall (2004), “the personal essay is also a more challenging one than the traditional research paper, actually putting greater intellectual and rhetorical demands upon the writer” (p. 51). It is also, in their grandest vision, a means “to bridge the personal versus academic divide.” They look to Montaigne and Aldous Huxley as role models for this genre, great literary essayists who frequently cite the works of other writers across nations and centuries, without disciplinary divides or awkward shifts of voice.

Heilker, Allen, and Sewall (2004) have developed pedagogical strategies to assist students in maintaining their own voice while expressing the views of others. They begin with expressivist writing techniques like freewriting, and a sensory inventory, to prepare students for writing a first draft that is “all about them, that is unapologetically personal and autobiographical” (p. 53). Once students have completed this first draft, then, according to Heilker and her co-authors, it is time for library instruction and book research. They suggest students use source materials as a “springboard,” adding it to the end of their drafts, “interweaving” the new information, or discovering their own ways of adding the ideas of others to their texts. They hope their students will use the ideas of other writers “to improve their personally meaningful texts,” to “expand . . . the scope of the discourse,” and to increase the value of the essay, “making it worthwhile for others to read and care about” (p. 55). For Heilker, Allen, and Sewall, “the personal essay as research paper

does not promise to make research writing easy, fun, or foolproof,” but “it does result in research writing that [they] don’t dread to teach and students don’t fear to compose” (p. 56).

Field Research

As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, some research writing instructors believe students should conduct their own research and consult primary sources during their undergraduate studies. In some classrooms informed by this view, students conduct surveys to see whether an opinion in the literature is borne out by their peers on campus. In others, this approach might mean oral history research, ethnographic field work, or the design of an empirical study. In any case, according to adherents of this approach, when students see themselves as researchers rather than just reporters of research dynamics change, and hopefully, the passion and personal connection many professors feel for their own research (Ballenger, 1999) become evident in their students as well.

I experienced this approach to research writing in my own graduate work, when I took a course in Second Language Literacy with David Hanauer. It was an unexpected surprise to learn that, for the first time in my long life as a student, I would be conducting an empirical study and reporting on the results, rather than exhaustively summarizing or evaluating the work of others. Dr. Hanauer has used this method with undergraduate students as well (personal communication, September 2002). I wondered whether other teachers were inviting research writing students to be “doers” of research, and I found several examples in the literature.

One way students conduct their own studies in research writing courses is through ethnographic fieldwork. Bonnie Sunstein and Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater have written *Fieldworking: Reading and Writing Research* (2002) to guide composition students through the process of exploring a subculture through reading, observation, and writing. In their notes to the instructor, they claim that “doing fieldwork allows students actual contact with people and cultures different from their own,” and thus, “they will often be more invested in the topics they investigate.” Furthermore, these authors have found that “doing fieldwork also encourages a greater understanding of self as each student reads, writes, researches, and reflects on relationships with ‘others’ in the culture” (p. ix). The book asks students to read published ethnographies, use the library for background sources, and, more than anything, listen and write about the subculture they have chosen to research. They observe at their sites regularly, interview informants, map spaces and learn the geography of their sites, write field notes in various forms including the poetic, and work toward the composition of a research portfolio. Student ethnographies serve as models throughout the text.

Fieldworking relocates research and invites students into a rich world of thick description, full of diverse people and cultures that exist here and now, rather than in Samoa, the distant past, or the pages of *National Geographic*. The text also makes another point: fieldwork is hard work, and there is nothing soft about this qualitative research. While books like *Fieldworking* introduce ethnographic writing to composition programs, social science researchers are experimenting with creative

ways of writing their research (Ellis & Bochner, 1996). Found poetry, dramatic scripts, and creative nonfiction bring the disciplines of creative writing and qualitative research closer all the time.

While their text of almost 500 pages offers a wealth of explanatory material and opportunities for reflection, Sunstein and Strater theorize more explicitly in their 2004 article, “More than Just Writing about Me?: Linking Self and Other in the Ethnographic Essay.” The authors begin by sharing the concern that non-fiction essay writing be personal and yet more than personal, that it avoid the solipsism and self-centeredness some students fall into when writing about their own perceptions. For this reason, like Ballenger, they include their approach in the essayist tradition and also draw boundaries around the writing their students produce: “we add yet another adjective—*ethnographic*—to the long line of descriptive adjectives that attach themselves to the term *essay*: creative, narrative, personal, literary, lyric, segmented, and even ‘nonfiction’” (2004, p. 60).

Sunstein and Strater believe the ethnographic essay “provides a bridge between purely personal writing and purely research writing” (p. 62). More specifically, their call to students is “to include the other without ignoring the self, to engage in thick description based on documented observation, to learn to conduct interviews and research in archives, to develop the theoretical and analytic strategies any writer needs in order to understand and write about the many cultures and many ‘others’ that surround the self” (p. 60). Sunstein and Strater offer four strategies to help student ethnographic writers “pay close attention to details of the

‘other’ without losing the sense of self.” The first of these is “linking the self with the information: positioning.” By positioning, they refer to “all those subjective responses that affect how a writer collects and arranges her information, how a researcher sees herself in relationship to her data” (p. 65). Three categories define these positions: “fixed positions” such as age, gender, class and race; “subjective positions,” including one’s life experiences; and “textual positions” expressed through language choices (pp. 65-66).

The second strategy Sunstein and Slater recommend is “Linking the Self, the Other, and the information: asking reflective questions for analysis.” Asking questions while writing helps students develop the reflective thinking that will deepen their analysis. They elaborate on three basic questions. “What surprised you?” helps students investigate the assumptions they bring with them into the research. “What intrigued you?” helps students become aware of their positioning, and the selective perception that could influence the details they notice. Lastly, “What disturbed you?” helps writers identify their own stereotypes and other areas of tension (pp. 68-69). These questions help student researchers identify biases and release the idea that objectivity is possible in research.

The authors’ third and fourth strategies pertain specifically to the literacy activities of field work. The third, “linking the writing and reading ‘selves’,” describes the role of published model texts in student research writing. These “ghost texts,” according to Sunstein and Strater, can be found in the background of student texts, and writing teachers should strive to help students both make use of master texts and

gain confidence in their own textual voices. “Linking the links: a research portfolio in two parts,” relates to the texts students draft, revise, and submit for peer and teacher evaluation of their field studies, and various portfolio options are discussed.

As a result of their field work, Sunstein and Strater’s student ethnographers “found that their research essays were as much about themselves as they were about their subjects. As they wrote about the data they’d gathered . . . and finally, how they made their artistic and rhetorical writing choices, they composed themselves more fully for us, their readers” (p. 76). So, according to these authors, our primary goals for students when we assign both the personal essay and the research paper (and our highest hopes) can be realized through the ethnographic field work approach. Obviously, issues such as geographical location, expense, access, safety and the like limit student research writers just as they do professional ethnographers, with the additional constraint of a semester-long timeframe.

Personal Narrative, Scholarly Narrative, and the Narrative Life

Like John Bruner, Kieran Egan, Mary Jalongo, P. J. Miller, Gian Pagnucci, and Carol Witherell, to name just a few, I believe some of the deepest and most memorable learning occurs when we tell each other stories. I began my exploration of alternative approaches to research writing by thinking about “storying” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), and the story of this dissertation journey would not be complete without a description of the role narrative can play in student research writing. Still, this has been a challenging section to write.

The boundaries were hard to draw here, because ethnographic writing, for example, often contains narrative, and so do the multigenre projects discussed in a later section. Also, in recent years storying has taken a larger, more theoretical turn in qualitative research. It is not only a way to report or frame research, as when Deborah Tannen or Oliver Sacks begins a theoretical text with a disturbing or poignant or downright silly anecdote to focus our attention or provide a memory anchor for the concept discussed. Narrative research also refers to a different way of knowing, a framework and methodology for qualitative studies that some claim can lead students to view research phenomena differently, in an epistemological sense that extends far beyond the writing classroom (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Zigo, 2001). While it is beyond the scope of this work to truly theorize the attributes and value of narrative along with these researchers, I will briefly review some current narrative approaches to research, and then some ways teachers and students are using narrative to write research in composition classrooms.

Many narrative researchers point back to Jerome Bruner's defining work, especially *Acts of Meaning* (1990). (For a critique of Bruner that points back to his French philosophical predecessors and also forward to other narrativists, see Romano, 2002). For Bruner, the self is a composite of a life's stories, and we function as narrators. Our primary task is to make meaning, which we do by constructing and interpreting stories—our own and others'. Bruner contrasted two types of cognition: "logico-scientific" thinking, which uses categories, priorities, order of importance, and mathematical relationships; and "narrative thinking," the process

of “storying.” Storytelling is the way our social selves are constructed (Egan, 1995), since children learn their roles in society by listening to and making up stories (Miller, 1994). As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, storytelling is also the mechanism through which an oral culture’s vital memories are preserved (Havelock, 1963; Ong, 2002).

The role of the qualitative researcher is to provide thick description, shades of meaning, multiple points of view—to construct, in other words, a story. Hunter McEwan (1995) explains that he applied a narrative approach to the study of teaching because he hoped it would supply “reconciliation” between philosophers and practitioners of education, bridging the gap by storying both sides.

While scientific theory is developed by generating hypotheses and testing them with empirical observation, and grounded theory emerges through repeated, close analysis of data already observed, narrative theory is composed by storying—viewing people, places, and things temporally, comparing their stories, looking “inward and outward, backward and forward” (p. 50). Childhood memories or associations from other contexts, other research spaces, might be digressions in another type of study, or deep background that never appear on the written page. These are the threads a narrative researcher follows, moving between these stories and the narratives that emerge at the site to weave the threaded texts that will eventually become one research document—or perhaps many. Through following these threads and writing the stories down, the researcher’s subjectivities, along with his interpretations, come to the surface for further reflection.

The Narrative Way for Teacher Researchers

My own life narrative goes something like this: I became a writer first, a teacher second, a researcher third and most recently of all. Perhaps that is why I see education and narrative as paired so closely. Perhaps, too, it is because lore is especially important in the teaching profession, both for the learning of our craft and in our pursuit of mental and spiritual wellness as we meet the challenges of a particularly stressful work environment (Jalongo & Isenberg, 1995; Pagnucci, 2004; Preskill, 1998). Teachers are onstage in ways most other workers are not, and the stakes for our daily performance of decision-making are high, in human as well as in professional terms. As Huberman (1995) put it, telling one's life story can be "a vehicle for taking distance from that experience, . . . making it an object of *reflection*, . . . allow[ing], say, a teacher, to escape momentarily from the frenzied busyness of classroom life . . . possibly to put it in meaningful order" (p. 131).

I include some reflections on narrative research and storytelling for teachers in part as a means of explaining the narrative moments, the student/teacher stories, that I have included in this dissertation. In addition, like Robert Nash (2004), I believe the "narrative turn" (Bruner, 1990) has pedagogical implications for the teaching of research writing at this university and elsewhere, which I discuss in Chapter Seven. The foundation for that discussion exists in the lessons I've learned in the classroom, but it is validated, confirmed, and much more eloquently expressed by the authors I cite below.

I believe our professional knowledge needs to be recounted narratively to do justice to its many simultaneous dimensions. A number of authors and editors have opened spaces for teachers to share that storied knowledge, and they have also used narrative research to analyze the ways we practice our profession and to facilitate professional growth (Bailey, K., & Nunan, D., 1996; Blitz & Hurlbert, 1998; Freidus, 1998; Huberman, 1995; Jalongo & Isenberg & Isenberg, 1995; Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002; Pagnucci, 2004; Zigo, 2001). Mary Jalongo & Isenberg identified five ways that teacher stories facilitate “self-discovery and growth,” as summarized in Jalongo & Isenberg and Isenberg (1995): they “invite reflective practice,” “chronicle growth and change,” “promote the ‘ethic of caring,’” “help teachers find their ‘voice,’” that sense of secure self-awareness, and “enhance cross-cultural understandings” (pp. 143-149). A detailed description of these works is beyond the scope of this review, but I include the authors above as a way of demonstrating how the teaching profession has embraced this method of seeing, knowing, and doing research.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) have constructed a guide to the methodology of narrative research. *Narrative Inquiry* leads beginning researchers through the phases of this approach to research, with storied illustrations that show “what narrative researchers do” (p. 49).

Clandinin and Connelly firmly root their work in John Dewey’s theories on the nature of experience and continuity. They recount the “narrative turn” as through the lenses of several academic disciplines, and they also incorporate the recent methodology of critical research, encouraging beginning inquirers to

distinguish between “the grand narrative” recounted by the power-holders at a research site and a “narrative inquiry viewpoint” that considers all perspectives, privileging none.

Clandinin and Connelly recommend that narrative inquirers write many stories in the course of a research project, including their own, so that they can understand how their life experiences influence their views of the stories around them. Temporality, sometimes referred to as continuity, is key to this method of research—narrative inquirers consider the flow of the stories they are observing and recording in field texts, always alert for twists and changes in plot. They enter a research site “in the midst,” knowing the stories of that place and those people began before their arrival and will continue after their departure. The narrative researcher must learn to accept ambiguity and work in a “three-dimensional inquiry space” to examine human experience, drawing connections between “interaction,” “continuity,” and “situation” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). These authors consider narrative inquiry to be “a form of living,” a view they explain in terms of boundaries:

Living, in its most general sense, is unbounded. The structures, seen and unseen, that do constrain our lives when noticed can always be imagined to be otherwise, to be more open, to have alternative possibilities. This very notion is embedded in the idea of retelling stories and reliving lives. Our narrative inquiry intention is to capture as much as possible this openness of experience. (p. 89)

Liberating Scholarly Writing

Robert Nash (2004) considered academic discourse to be one of the structures of constraint of his early academic career. Like Peter Elbow, he reached the point where the formality and pseudo-objectivity of this way of writing strangled his desire to write professionally at all.

Why must I continually suppress my own personal voice? Why do I have to continue to whittle away at my interests in search of a researchable topic for my dissertation . . . ? Can't I demonstrate that I know the literature in my field, that I possess the requisite analytical skills in my discipline, and that I can formulate and solve problems, without turning my work into one long literature review qua book report? (p. 17)

Gian Pagnucci (2004) describes this frustration from his perspective as a reader of such dissertations:

Why did we ever decide that we wanted all dissertations to be structured the same way? Each semester I read three or four dissertations, depending on how many students happen to be defending at any given time and who is working on what projects with me. It doesn't take long doing this type of reading before a person is dying for anything fresh and out of the ordinary. As a reader, I crave stories, connections to what I am reading. Yet few dissertation studies are written or structured in a way to allow me to receive stories. (p. 24)

Nash eventually found another Way, which he calls Scholarly Personal Narrative:

SPN puts the *self* of the scholar front and center. The best SPN interview is the scholar's self-interrogation. The best analysis and prescription come out of the scholar's efforts to make narrative sense of personal experience. . . . The ultimate intellectual responsibility of the SPN scholar is to find a way to use the personal insights gained in order to draw larger conclusions for readers; possibly even to challenge and reconstruct older political or educational narratives. (p. 21)

Nash distinguishes SPN from action research, which is more "practical" and oriented toward institutional change. He also stresses the scholarly dimension of this research method: "SPN writers intentionally organize their essays around themes, issues, constructs, and concepts that carry larger, more universalizable meanings for readers" (p. 30). He defines a scholar in numerous ways, from lover of knowledge to teller of stories to bridger of the constructivist/objectivist breach. Among other definitions of the term, he writes, "You are a scholar if you can help your readers to reexamine their own truth stories in light of the truths that you are struggling to discern in your own complicated life story. . . . You are a scholar if you are willing to allow your students, and your readers, to enter your heart as well as your head" (p. 46).

New Visions for the Personal: Autobiographical Narratives of Empowerment

Gian Pagnucci is clearly a scholar by this and most other definitions. In *Living the Narrative life: Stories as a Tool for Meaning-Making* (2004), his own personal, family, and school stories frame discussions of narrative ideology, its pedagogy, and

the professional risks of living the narrative life. Like Nash, Pagnucci has decided the narrative life is worth it, and furthermore “for many of us, narratives are so powerful, we cannot choose any other sort of life” (p. 17).

Robert Nash (2004) and Gian Pagnucci (2004) speak powerfully, giving the “hows” as well as the “whys” and “why nots” of narrative research in the academy. Both of these scholars recommend a radical revision of the academy’s view of stories as inferior to expository prose, the discourse of “paradigmatic reasoning” (Bruner 1986). Furthermore, both emphasize the personal, the emic, as vital to “narrative ideology” (Pagnucci, 2004, p. 47). Finally, both scholars use the word “personal” in ways Donald Murray, Peter Elbow, and other expressivists would endorse.

Barbara Kamler (2001) applies many of these same premises to her work with diverse populations of writers, from high school students to elders composing their autobiographies. However, Kamler defines the term “personal” in service to more politically and critically motivated aims, focusing on discourses of power and their effects on writers. Like Roz Ivanič (2004, 1998), Kamler focuses on dimensions of power that complicate not only the teacher-student, writer-audience relationship, but also our concept of the term “personal.”

Kamler describes the danger of being “personal” and excessively self-focused this way: “There is pleasure in writing oneself as an embodied self—in moving across a terrain of landscapes, geographical relocations and scholarly terrains. There are also dangers of getting lost in the pleasure of the journey, losing sight of what we’re telling or why we’re trying to map these locations” (p. 5).

Personal writing, according to Kamler, should be a vehicle for empowerment, where the goal is “a critical writing pedagogy committed to *relocating the personal*—to asserting the power of writing to transform the text and the way experience is viewed” (p. 54, emphasis added). Thus, as she stories the journey of Sasha, a high schooler who resists academic writing, Kamler seeks “to rewrite the personal/rational binary opposition” that has alienated Sasha, and also to teach the girl that her own story can lead her to courage and a more powerful, assertive role in her high school. For Kamler, through analysis and reframing of writers’ individual and institutional stories, the representation of one’s self can transform not only writing but also the lives it narrates.

There is a tension between these authors that I took very personally—I don’t want the pleasure I take in reading and telling stories marred by an agenda that asks me to psychoanalyze, politicize, or generally chop up the narrative flow of a writer’s truth. And that is *my* story, the story of why I left women’s studies and began writing stories instead of carrying placards. I want an increase in social conscience and hybrid vehicles, and an end to racism and genetically modified produce and unjust wars. But don’t people listen better when they hear stories?

The best part of Kamler’s (2004) book was her introduction, which tells the story of how she struggled to come up with ideas for essays as a girl and then mistook her mother’s kitchen-table coaching as authorship, so she graduated thinking she’d never written a thing and never would, without the presence of her mother. Kamler’s political analysis of voice and public writing and empowerment

made *Relocating the Personal: A Critical Writing Pedagogy* a worthy read. Barbara's story made the book remarkable because it filled my head with pictures and gave me a text I wanted to share with others.

While Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater (2004, 2002), Nash (2004), Kamler (2001) and others have named and defined specific types of narrative research writing, some writing instructors support the use of better-known narrative forms for research writing assignments. Creative non-fiction, a natural framework for narrative and source-based research, is becoming a more common option for research paper assignments (Friedman, 2005). Empowerment is involved here, as students acknowledge that they create their own most truthful version of the events they "story," through narrative smoothing (Sarbin, 1986) and the logistics of the text.

Many instructors find that autobiographical writing, labeled "lifewriting" by Butler and Bentley (1997), provides an excellent starting point for research into historical, sociological, psychological, or even medical contexts on one's own story. Heilker, Allen, and Sewall (2004), discussed above, believe the personal essay to be the ideal framework for research writing, and their assignment includes prewriting that asks students to "tell a story or stories about their topics from their own pasts" (p. 53). The power of the personal is also evident in multi-genre projects, where elements of autobiography, creative writing, and public discourse are meaningfully combined.

"Writing with Passion": The Multigenre Project

Tom Romano's (1995) book *Writing with Passion* describes a new context for source-based writing, one that brings not only narrative but poetry, journalism, and

more together with source-based information in “altered styles” (Romano, 2000).

The multigenre project “asks students to research a topic well and then to report what they know by composing a paper that combines many genres—poetry, stories, songs, exposition, news writing, dialog, what have you” (Romano, 1995, p. xi).

Romano was initially influenced by Odaatje’s (1984) *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, a creative work that wove fact, fiction, and poetry into a post-modernist, complexified portrait of the Kid and those around him. Romano began to work with students on research topics in multiple genres, especially those involving personal experience and life story, believing that “writing that renders experience is valid and useful in its own right.” Romano acknowledges the importance of expository writing, but wants more:

By creating fictional dreams peopled with fully realized characters driven by tension amid enough detail of setting to create atmosphere, students can create truths that show what they know. . . . Octavia Butler created truths in *Kindred* about the effects of oppression on African American slaves and their Caucasian owners Students, too, can go beyond explaining concepts, conditions, and strategies, can go beyond exposition. . . . [S]tudents can render experience with such detail that readers don’t merely understand their meaning. They live it. (1995, p. 8)

Since *Writing with Passion* (1995) appeared, Romano has published *Blending Genre, Altering Style: Writing Multigenre Papers* (2000), offering more instructional strategies and creative examples of student work, most notably “The Allosaurus,” a

science fiction story with encyclopedic, poetic, and prehistoric elements, and the most unified example of multigenre writing I have seen.

Several other authors have shared their experiences with teaching multigenred research writing as well. Camille Allen (2001), an education professor working with pre-service teachers, wrote a pedagogical guide to using multigenre projects with fourth through sixth graders. Her techniques aim to develop and enrich the voices, as well as the research skills, of these writers. Johnson and Moneysmith (2005) use multigenre projects to teach argument at the college level; preparing students through the use of Toulmin models and critical thinking activities. Shadle and Davis (2004) added hypertext to Romano's approach and focused on multiculturalism as a natural lead-in to multigenre research, calling their own model "multiwriting." In an earlier article that introduces their instructional design (Davis & Shadle, 2000), these authors present a concise and helpful review of recent alternative approaches to research writing.

The sources listed here provide not only the theory of multigenre research writing and a solid rationale for replacing traditional research papers with this approach. These authors also address the practical aspects of assigning, facilitating, and assessing multigenre work. In *Writing with Passion*, Romano (1995) addresses issues of controversial source and student content, appropriate means of documentation for blended styles in student work, and grade distributions that value creative, research-based projects as well as the weeks of preliminary work that

produce them. All of these books provide sample projects from a variety of disciplines.

Of the various alternative ways of doing research writing I have explored, I believe the multi-genre project has the most to offer teachers, students, and programs, and the highest potential for meeting the goals of research writing instruction listed earlier in this chapter. I have found these projects to be engaging, challenging, and most of all, enjoyable, both for students to write and for me to read and evaluate. This literature review is not the appropriate context to explain or justify this preference, nor to present my own classroom success stories with the multigenre approach. However, the works listed above paint a rich picture of what multigenre writing can offer professors and students, and offer the specific suggestions to get any research writing instructor started.

Voice: A Working Definition

The concept of voice is referred to often in our literature, almost as often as we make reference to it when discussing student papers. It is not used as often, however, when discussing *research* papers. The compositionists who write about the alternative approaches to research writing discussed above do talk about voice, and they are committed to helping students bring voice into their research writing assignments. I share that commitment, and I also believe voice is both an indicator and a result of engaged student research writing. So, before discussing the concept in the context of this study, I want to summarize some of the ways our profession uses that term.

The author most identified with the concept of voice in the field of composition is Peter Elbow. He tells the story of his own painful journey from the academic discourse mill to expressivism many times, but the most well-known account appears in *Writing without Teachers* (1998, originally published in 1973). For the Elbow of 1973, voice was the characterizing influence in freewriting, the part of writing that is alive, the spark that makes first and second graders shoot their hands into the air when invited to read their own stories out loud. Elbow recommended freewriting and approaching writing as an act of faith in order to express one's own voice, which might very likely have been stifled by the pressure to conform to academic style and focus on the voices of published, professionally validated writers. In any case, this definition of voice is constructivist in nature, suggesting that we ourselves produce and express this unique quality in our texts. In this view, self-expression is the most important goal for a writer, and this is why Elbow (1987) and Don Murray (1985), another foundational advocate of the expressivist voice, recommended considering the Self to be the worthiest audience.

Robert Williams (2000) wrote about voice in this sense as well, and, like Elbow and Murray, feared that his own had been co-opted by the institutionalized voices of others. Williams' source-filled, impersonal research essays were praised in his college career, but he wondered why his own stories were considered inadequate for academic use. After writing the source-laden papers his English professors expected, Williams "didn't learn anything about honest writing, about where [he]'d misplaced [his] voice and why it was absent from all those pages" (2000, p. 5).

For Williams, the academy, the canon, and the pressure to write for future academic audiences threatens his students' expression of their own voices as well, and he declares his position in response:

I won't tell my students their writing's not at the proper level. I won't censure them if they want to write about what they know, not what I've told them I know or what they should know. I won't demand five paragraphs and an outline, or argument/citations, argument/citations, argument/citations, ad nauseam. . . . Nobody reads those manufactured essays full of citations, anyway, except students and teachers looking for citations. I won't. I'm not even sure I can write them anymore. I know I don't want to. (pp. 5-6)

By the end of his essay, Williams confesses that he is not satisfied with his own definition of voice, but comments that "perhaps voice can only be defined by living it, narrating it, writing it" (p. 6). The Elbow of 1973 would surely agree.

In his more recent work, however, Elbow (1994, 1995b) has brought a post-process complexity to the term "voice." He offers six "thoughts" to summarize more recent developments in the meanings of "voice." Elbow begins with the juxtaposition of "voice" and "discourse," or "text," pointing out that the latter two terms usually signify that writing emerges "from the group or the culture or the system rather than from particular people." Discourse usually relates to shared understandings, shared agreements about meaning, appropriateness, and purpose. Furthermore, voice relates to auditory and temporal aspects of language, while text suggests "visual and spatial features" (p. 1).

Elbow continues by listing five common qualities ascribed to “voice” when composition teachers discuss writing: the “audible voice,” which expresses a “spoken sound” within the written text, as in poetics; the “dramatic voice,” which reveals the “implied author;” the “distinctive, recognizable voice” that typifies an author’s work; the “authoritative voice” that shows the “ability or willingness to speak out;” and the “resonant voice,” which Elbow considers downright dangerous, since it reveals the “true self.” Elbow points out that he prefers the term resonant to describe this voice, rather than “authentic,” which is more commonly used. Authentic voice suggests a personal dimension that limits the concept, since, Elbow points out, “sincere and personal writing can be very tinny and non-resonant” (pp. 3-4).

Elbow delineates these threads of meaning to emphasize that the term “voice” as used to discuss writing is more than a “romantic expressivist ideology.” Just as people speak with “multiple and shifting voices” on different occasions, we also display different dimensions of voice within our texts (pp. 4-5). The term “voice” also helps oppressed people reclaim the language that has not felt like a part of them and make it their own, to express their own identities. Although we don’t commonly think of children and teenagers as an oppressed group, they are limited in autonomy and often feel misunderstood, which is why “they need to be rewarded for using the voices that feel to them like theirs” (p. 7). Elbow calls us to an increased respect for our students’ emerging voices: “Are not we ourselves, as academics and professionals, learning that we can use loud, vexatious, personal voices and still do good academic thinking and analysis. Academic discourse is breaking open to a

wider range of voices” (p. 7). He also points out, however, that as valuable as voice is in service of expressing our own culture and claiming affiliations the dominant culture may have ignored or denied, it is just as valuable as a tool to resist the “thrall” of culture and express the writer’s individual identity as well.

Since Elbow’s (1994, 1995a, 1995b) writings on the complexity and multiple dimensions of voice were published, others have sought to broaden our understanding of the concept as well. Feminists, in particular, have resisted the dismissal of voice to the expressivist archives, reclaiming and redefining the concept to express our need to speak up and speak out, to define ourselves without getting stuck in an endless loop of self-analysis (Moore, 2001; Royster, 1996).

My own concept of the term “voice” was rooted in the expressivist definition of the term. In addition to Peter Elbow, theorists, teachers and writers like Ken Macrorie (1988), Don Murray (1982), Tom Romano (2000), Sondra Perl (2004), Barry Lane (1999), and Gloria Anzáldua (1999) led me to a rich, positive, *very* personal sense of the term. I thought of my own writing voice as synonymous with my most intimate self, an identity even I was still exploring and discovering. However, Elbow (1995b), Moore (2001), Ivanič (2004), Tompkins (1993), and numerous other contemporary writers introduced me to a deeper, more robust understanding of the term. Local context and individual learning style, even temperament, can make someone else’s strongly-voiced essay look very different from my own prose, which is influenced by personal experience, self-reflection, and a leaning toward the poetic. As I read the texts of this research study—the interview

transcriptions, observation notes, and student essays, I began to broaden and loosen my conception of voice, to see it as a “resonant” (Elbow, 1995b) quality, an authorial embodiment, rather than as the exclusive prerogative of those given to the confessional warm-and-fuzzy approach I have tended to favor.

Models and the Writer’s Identity

The use of models in writing instruction extends as far back as the ancient Greek academies, according to Smagorinsky (1992), and they are still in use today, as numerous textbooks in composition (Penfield, 2005; Rosa & Eschholz, 2006) and research writing (Hult, 2003) attest. Rosa and Eschholz’s textbook is in its 9th edition; Penfield’s is in its 8th. Companion websites provide models online as well, designed to assist students in every type of English course including technical writing, literature, rhetoric and even creative writing.

Lois Laase (1998) explains her preference for teaching paragraph writing to upper elementary and junior high students this way: “When you model paragraph writing, you give children a standard to aim for in their work. You give them something well written that motivates them to write well” (p. 57).

Christine Hult (2003) offers a similar explanation to college-level research writing students in the introduction to her volume of articles reprinted from academic journals: “Because these articles were chosen exclusively from professional journals, they will help you to become familiar with the types of academic writing you will encounter throughout your college experience and into your chosen career” (p. 6). Hult provides “discussion questions” to help students “look for features of the article

such as the effectiveness of its argument, the author's thesis or tone, the article's organization or structure, and so on" (p. 6). Finally, she offers this advice: "You are also encouraged to make connections between the articles and your own experience as a beginning scholar" (p. 6).

Composition instructors commonly use student essays as models to achieve similar objectives. In addition, model essays by past students allow professors to show current classes more specifically what they are expecting in an assignment, and exemplary (or not so exemplary) attempts to attain these goals.

Many proponents of the model-based approach to writing instruction believe that instruction paired with the model, that is, directing students' reading to specific features of a model text, improves the model's value as an example for student composing (Smagorinsky, 1992, for example). Stolarek (1991) found that when students were provided with various learning aids regarding an unfamiliar prose form and then asked to write a sentence in that pattern, those students who received a description, a model, and an explication outperformed those who received only one or two of those ancillary documents without the other(s). Charney and Carlson (1995) saw that models appear to influence both organization and content in student research papers, and that these models were effective whether or not they were considered to be examples of superior work.

Robert Brooke (1988) reported on a study with models that was quite unique in comparison with the others I read. Brooke proposed that

when a student (or any writer) successfully learns something about writing by imitation, it is by imitating another *person*, by trying to act like writers they respect. The forms, the processes, the texts are in themselves less important as models to be imitated than the personalities, or identities, of the writers who produce them. . . . [T]eachers try to offer themselves or the writers they are teaching as valid “identities” for students to model. (pp. 24-25)

I was initially skeptical about Brooke’s claim, even though literacy theorists have attested to the identity-forming effect of school literacy (Delpit, 1995; Gee, 1989; Ivanič, 1998). It seemed to me that college students in a composition course were more likely to decontextualize a model essay or assigned article than to assign its author identity-molding influence based on their reading of the text, or its introduction by their teacher. Roz Ivanič (1998) is very definite about the power of academic discourse in forming identities, however: “I suggest that these discursal characteristics are a function of the interests, values and practices of the academic community, and that by participating in these discourse practices the writers I studied are identifying with those interests, values and practices” (p. 257).

Brooke’s participant-observation study design and findings add persuasively to Ivanič’s argument. He observed a composition teacher, Janet, who wove lessons together by blending reading and discussion of a novel (Laurence’s *A Bird in the House*), writing about the types of experience the novel encompassed, and reflecting on the connections between the two. Brooke asserted that because Janet read and

wrote with the class, and because the course's content was holistic and sensitive to each individual's experience, Janet

connected Laurence's work to the students' own writing through her behavior as reader and writer. Janet thus served as the bridge between the published, professional writer . . . and the students as beginning writers—students grew to consider themselves potentially like Laurence because they could understand and imitate the ways Janet read and wrote in response to Margaret Laurence. (p. 27)

So Janet's course "modeled an identity," according to Brooke, and students responded positively, negatively, or both, based on the degree to which they were comfortable taking on, really becoming, that modeled identity of a reader/writer.

As I read the descriptions of several students in Brooke's findings, the participants in my own study came to mind. Perhaps those who were most engaged were those who were comfortable with the identities their instructors modeled, while those I labeled as less engaged were resisting the identity they were invited (asked? pressured?) to take on, or at least facets of that identity, in order to hold onto their previous self-definition as students, readers, and writers. I explore these ideas further in Chapters Five and Seven.

We can learn a great deal about modeling the identity of an engaged research writer from the whole language movement. As Frank Smith (1988) pointed out, literacy can be viewed as a club, with members and non-members, those who are "in" and those who are not. For Smith, believing oneself to be a reader leads to

successful reading. Perhaps that is why in whole language classrooms, teachers model literacy by practicing it along with the children they teach, reading and writing together with their students. When students develop identities as readers and writers, they join the club, since “inclusion is based as much on self-perception as on external criteria” (Hudson-Ross, Cleary, & Casey, 1993, xv). Hudson-Ross, Cleary, & Casey (1993) believe that whole language teaching “encourage[s] that attitude among children who have experienced it” (xv). In other words, when children choose their own topics, and write stories along with their teachers, they are developing a literate identity. Perhaps if we complete our own research projects alongside our students, modeling enthusiasm, passion and persistence, our students will acquire confidence and join the research writing club themselves.

Conclusion

The remaining chapters of this dissertation describe, analyze, and explore empirical data. Chapter Three describes the methods of this qualitative study in detail, including the theoretical frameworks that informed its design. The following three chapters narrate the findings of the study. Chapter Four presents portraits of the four research writing professors who participated in the study and their classrooms, based on instructor interviews, six weeks of class observation, and relevant documents. Chapter Five summarizes and interprets the interview responses of 19 student writers from these four classes, relating their views about instructor, course, and content. This chapter also presents a proposed scale of student engagement and includes narratives of engagement and what I have termed “dis-

engagement.” Chapter Six explores the 18 research papers I received from these students; first, I discuss the essays in groups based on the level of engagement students reported in our interviews, again using narrative at times. Then I present and explain the coding system I developed to compare the student papers more systematically by looking at certain characteristics and the frequency with which they appear. Chapter Six concludes with the findings that emerged through these triangulated data. Finally, Chapter Seven offers conclusions and implications of the study.

CHAPTER THREE

STUDY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The Qualitative Paradigm

My purpose in undertaking this study was to explore the roles of personal experience and narrative in student research writing. The first issue I addressed in considering ways to approach the research questions I had developed was the philosophical and professional divide between qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Most authors agree that selection of a research methodology should reflect the perspective of the researcher as well as the nature of the problem or situation that is the focus of the study (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). So I sought to identify an approach that would both reflect and open out my own perspective, just as I hoped my study would provide useful insights to writing instructors, composition theorists, and researchers across the academic disciplines. Because I needed an exploratory research design to learn about teacher and student practices with research writing, I chose to conduct a qualitative study.

I was also drawn to qualitative research because qualitative studies emphasize negotiated construction of meaning rather than determination of causation or the investigation of any single influence on a given situation. The qualitative research process is expansive, inclusive, and exploratory. Patton (1990) identifies three key assumptions shared by most qualitative methods:

1. Qualitative studies tend to be holistic, seeking understanding of phenomena through consideration of all influences that affect them rather than isolation or manipulation of any one factor.
2. Qualitative studies use an inductive approach, moving from specific, situated data collection toward more general emergent patterns of meaning.
3. Naturalistic research is predominant in qualitative studies, since no attempt is made to control conditions of the research environment, and in fact, every effort is made to minimize interventions of any kind, including those occasioned by the presence of the researcher.

These characteristics are well suited to the present study, where my goal was to learn about teacher and student perspectives regarding research writing instruction and the writing of research papers. I also sought to explore the role of personal experience in paper topic selection, and its significance (if any) to student engagement in the writing task. Maxwell adds that qualitative methods lead to “understanding the particular *context* within which the participants act, and the influence that this context has on their actions” (1996, p. 17). Since research topics, levels of formality, and rhetorical structure in college research writing are assigned or negotiated, interpreted, rendered into texts, revised and evaluated within a complex and extensive web of personal, local, institutional, and historical contexts, qualitative methodology is especially indicated to explore the interactive nature of these contexts in writing and teaching decisions.

Qualitative research is exploratory in nature (Hoepfl, 1997; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It seeks meaning and weaves both researcher and participants together in an interpretive dance. Marie Hoepfl offers the following guiding definition: “Qualitative research has an interpretive character, aimed at discovering the meaning events have for the individuals who experience them, and the interpretations of those meanings by the researcher” (Hoepfl, 1996, Features of Qualitative Research section, para. 6).

Current Trends and Concerns in Qualitative Research

Qualitative studies in the current, post-positivist paradigm reject the modernist assumption of neutral objectivity in favor of participant observation and an honest exploration of researcher assumptions and bias (Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2000; Ellis & Bochner, 1996). This was particularly important for me because I began this study with a heartfelt desire to “prove” the value of personal experience and narrative in student and professional research writing. I was embarking on a very personal crusade, “burning to tell the world” (Blitz & Hurlbert, 1998) that dry, summative essays composed in the frozen language of academic discourse should be relegated to our professional archives. My own biases toward student-selected research topics in academic writing and the inclusion of personal narrative within research writing as a genre both impassioned and concerned me. I could see that I would need to use the type of emergent approach qualitative methodology can facilitate, to make room for a wide spectrum of perspectives regarding the role of personal experience in student writing, and to be sure that I would learn rather than preach during this dissertation process.

Lincoln and Guba describe the role of values in research decisions as axiological (1985). In post-positivist “interpretive inquiry,” researchers acknowledge that values guide our research decisions at every phase of a study, including “choice of the problem, choice of paradigm . . . , choice of theoretical framework, choice of major data-gathering and data-analytic methods, choice of context, treatment of values already resident within the context, and choice of format(s) for presenting findings” (2000, p. 169). Qualitative methods of data collection such as interviews and participative observation (Savage, 2000), with their emphasis on thick description and reflection, facilitate awareness and discussion of the values that influence our research decisions, data analysis, and ultimately, the interpretation of our results.

Since I sought information about the influence of personal experience, instructional method, and the use of narrative on student engagement in research writing, my study is descriptive and primarily process-oriented. I determined the best method of data collection for this qualitative study to be professor and student interviews, accompanied by classroom observation, examination of artifacts (such as syllabi), and analysis of student essays for purposes of contextualization and triangulation of findings.

When I collected and analyzed my data, my emphasis shifted. I realized that my own interest in the use of narrative and personal experience in research writing had narrowed my view of the materials I collected and that I would need to broaden my perspective. The participants in my study and their texts taught me that writers

can express their interest and engagement with a research writing task in many ways, within traditional forms as well as outside them. The student research papers, and comparison of those texts with the interview data, emerged as the central features of my study and taught me the most. Furthermore, while some students did include narrative sections in their essays, these instances were relatively few, and the element of narrative was not transformative, or even particularly noteworthy, to the student participants. The issue of personal experience with a topic was also less crucial to student engagement than I had initially expected. Freedom to select one's own topic, however, was extremely important to most students, as I had expected and as the literature confirms.

With my purpose, research questions, and a few basic premises of qualitative study design in mind, I proceeded to develop a more specific methodology, described in the sections that follow. After a description of the research setting, I refer to Maxwell's four components of qualitative study—research relationship with participants, sampling, data collection, and data analysis—to discuss the study's design in more detail.

Setting

Marshall and Rossman (as cited in Erlandson et al, 1993) described a variety of factors involved in the selection of an ideal site for a naturalistic study:

The ideal site is where (1) entry is possible; (2) there is a high probability that a rich mix of many of the processes, people, programs, interactions, and/or structures that may be a part of the research question will be present; (3) the

researcher can devise an appropriate role to maintain continuity of presence . . .; and (4) data quality and credibility of the study are reasonably assured by avoiding poor sampling decisions. (Marshall & Rossman, as cited in Erlandson et al 1993, p. 53).

The University

The chosen site, the main campus of a Midwestern university, meets Marshall and Rossman's qualifications for the current study. Located in western Pennsylvania in a semi-urban setting, it serves over 13,000 students, and it is the only state-run university that offers doctoral degrees. With a strong commitment to doctoral and post-doctoral research, the institution permits and, indeed, facilitates dissertation studies on campus, providing the entry Marshall and Rossman (1993) recommend.

Evaluating this site in search of a "rich mix of many of the processes, people, programs, interactions, and/or structures that may be a part of the research question" yields a less definitive picture, especially in terms of student diversity. The institution's commitment to diversity is evidenced by its mission statement:

Through undergraduate and graduate programs, [this institution] serves students from across the nation and around the world by introducing them to and sustaining them in a culture of high aspiration and achievement so they may lead productive and meaningful lives (www.iup.edu/president).

Despite this commitment to diversity, in the 2002-2003 academic year 94.8% of undergraduate students were in-state residents, and 88.2% of all

students enrolled were Caucasian. While this research site may lack student diversity, it provides open access to many of the “programs, processes, interactions, and structures” Marshall and Rossman mention, through well-developed websites and accommodating staff, along with an institutional climate that promotes the sharing of ideas.

The third criterion for site selection stipulated above, that the researcher “devise an appropriate role to maintain continuity of presence” (Marshall & Rossman, 1993), was handily fulfilled by my contract as Teaching Associate at the university throughout the study, and collegial relationships with professors and Teaching Associates. I address their final caution, to “[avoid] poor sampling decisions,” in a later section.

The Department of English and the Research Writing Course

As a Teaching Associate and doctoral student in the English Department at the research site, I had entry to the department and, through conversation with professors and peers, into their Research Writing classrooms, meeting Marshall and Rossman’s criteria for an optimal research setting (as cited in Erlandson, 1993). The English department offers four courses under the label of Liberal Studies, and these four semester-length courses are required of all undergraduate students seeking Bachelor’s degrees. Two of these are composition courses, College Writing and Research Writing. Students usually enroll in College Writing (English 101) during their first semester at the university. These students may alternatively be placed

into Basic College Writing (English 100) if their placement essays are evaluated as below entry level, and they then progress from that course to College Writing. Still others may be exempted from the College Writing course based on a placement essay judged as very strong. Non-native English speakers, usually international students, may be placed into specific sections of College Writing that have been designated for second language students.

In order to register for Research Writing (English 202), students must have satisfactorily passed College Writing and completed 29 hours of coursework (the minimum to attain sophomore standing). While Research Writing students are most often sophomores in their third or fourth semester at the university, upperclassmen also take the course.

The abbreviated description for English 202 offered in the university catalog states that the course:

teaches students to read, analyze, and evaluate nonfiction sources and to present the results of their analysis in clear, organized, carefully documented research papers. The focus of reading and research in each section will be determined by the instructor (University Catalog, 2003-2004).

The materials provided to faculty by the university's English department to describe Research Writing emphasize listening, reading, writing, and critical thinking. These materials offer a well-rounded view of the course, consisting of goals, guidelines, and a variety of artifacts produced by

professors and students for the course. The Liberal Studies program, of which this course is an element, provides criteria for course content as well. These descriptive materials are discussed more fully in Chapter Two.

Instructors of Research Writing have enjoyed considerable academic freedom in constructing their own sections of the course, especially with regards to instructional materials and teaching style. Textbooks, instructional packets, library reserve services (both electronic and traditional), and instructional technology resources, including WebCT, are utilized according to instructor choice. While most class sections meet in traditional classrooms equipped with desks and chalkboards, several classrooms have been equipped with media carts for computer-based presentations to the class, and computer labs are occasionally utilized as well. Content guidelines for English courses within the Liberal Studies curriculum are available; these are often treated as suggestions rather than rules, especially by tenured faculty. While most faculty members teach the course with one or more textbooks, which students purchase, several choose teacher-selected or student-selected materials for the readings of the course. Chapter Four describes the approaches used by the four professors participating in this study.

The Institutional Climate and Campus Culture

One additional source of data exists: the campus itself, which serves as both a learning and living environment. Erlandson et al (1993) note that the inquirer chooses a setting in order “to observe and record the day-to-day operations of the

environment” (53). I completed persistent observation of the institutional climate and campus culture at IUP through collection and preservation of a variety of artifacts and textual sources, creating a thick description to contextualize the data provided by individual study participants and classroom observations. As Erlandson states, thick description can “bring the reader vicariously into the setting the researcher is describing and thereby pave the way for shared constructions” (1993, p. 24).

Selection of Participants

I utilized qualitative research methods and a naturalistic approach for this study, serving as a human instrument as I explored Research Writing classrooms at the research site. I collected data from members of two participant groups—professors at the university teaching English 202 during the Spring 2005 semester and their students.

Lincoln and Guba, whose work has been foundational in establishing accepted methodologies for naturalistic research (1985), recommend “purposive sampling” in qualitative research, and contrast this conscious selection with the random sampling preferred in most quantitative studies. In purposive sampling, “[t]he object of the game is not to focus on the similarities that can be developed into generalizations, but to detail the many specifics that give the context its unique flavor. A second purpose is to generate the information upon which the emergent design and grounded theory can be based” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 201). In the *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, which Yvonne Lincoln later co-edited (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), Janice Morse describes participants in interview-based studies as

informants, stressing that the ideal informant “has the knowledge and experience the researcher requires, has the ability to reflect, is articulate, has the time to be interviewed” and, of course, participates willingly (p. 228). Morse suggests these criteria be employed as the basis for “primary selection” of participants. She also cites Patton (1990), who points out that the motive behind purposive sampling is to identify a data source that is “information rich” (Morse, p. 229).

My initial selection identified and requested participation of four Research Writing instructors at the research site, bearing in mind the criteria above. I recruited two men and two women, based on the observation that gender might affect the way personal topics are addressed by teachers and writers (Armstrong, 1996; Payne, 2000). My first step in arranging these observations and interviews was to describe the project to professors of Research Writing who met the demographic specifications and, to the best of my knowledge, embodied the additional characteristics Morse specified. I also considered recommendations from my committee members for instructors who (a) had demonstrated an interest in the issue of personal experience in academic writing, or (b) employed an innovative course design. I met with Research Writing instructors who agreed to participate, and I scheduled classroom observations and a one-hour interview appointment with each instructor at that time. I also asked faculty participants to bring a syllabus, textbook(s) if these were used in the course, and other relevant course materials to the interview. I also discussed the ways I would protect their anonymity and invited them to select their own pseudonyms, though three of the four directed me to choose for them. For these

three participants, I chose names using an alphabetic formula designed to disguise their identity.

I planned to analyze data for a student population of at least 16. To allow for students who might withdraw from the study or from the Research Writing course, I attempted to recruit 20 student participants in total (10 of each gender), five from each participating professor's Research Writing class. While gender is not a specific issue addressed by my research question, I chose to control the group for gender because I assumed there would be differences in the way male and female students deal with personal experience as a focus of discussion or writing in the classroom (Payne, 2000). As it turned out, I did not discuss the gender of participants in my findings later on. As described in Chapter 5, I succeeded in recruiting 19 student participants in total; two of the 19 did not complete a second interview, although they did not withdraw from the study. The population was quite homogeneous ethnically, which was unfortunate for the generalizability of the study, but as explained earlier in this chapter, not surprising given the ethnic make-up of our undergraduate population.

Each of the four professors participating in the study introduced me to his or her students during a class observation, and I briefly described the purpose and nature of the research, including the confidentiality and anonymity I would provide. I took particular care to emphasize that their participation and the sharing of essays they completed for the course would have no influence on their course grade, and that I would not reveal the identity of any student participant to his or her professor. I

explained that I would use pseudonyms to refer to the student participants in my dissertation, and that no one would know their true identity unless they chose to reveal it. I offered tutoring and feedback regarding any essay assigned for the course as an incentive for participation (as well as a step in my own data collection). Interested students were invited to contact me privately by e-mail correspondence.

I planned for a minimum sample of 16 students for this study; the initial target of 20 was intended to allow for students who might withdraw from the study or from the research writing course. Since 19 students volunteered to participate, I met the minimum requirement of 16 students and did not need to turn anyone away. However, I did not meet the goal of four participants from each class. One of the five initial participants in Dr. Farnham's class failed to complete a second interview, another student from that class did not submit her research paper to me, and a third, Zeb, handed in a paper so brief that I did not consider it in my analysis of student essay data. None of these students withdrew from the study, so I did include the data I had (except for Zeb's one-page paper, as just mentioned).

Since student participants self-selected, it is possible that certain traits were more common among them than within each class as a whole. For example, those who volunteered may have been more interested in improvement of their writing, and thus more engaged in the course, since I offered tutoring as an incentive for participation. They may have been interested in participating because they were more interested in research writing, and thus more engaged than the average student. Volunteers may have been more willing to take risks, and this personality

trait could correlate with engagement in the research writing experience—venturing into a new task with enthusiasm. Several student participants expressed concern for low grades in their interviews, and defined themselves as poor writers, so lack of skill in writing may have affected the characteristics of engagement I looked for in the students' research papers in these cases. Table I, below, lists the student participants and their instructors (by pseudonym), as well as each student's major and class standing as of Spring 2005, when I collected this data.

Table 1

Student Participants with Instructor, Major, and Class Standing

Student	Instructor	Major	Standing
Ellen	Dr. Farnham	Psychology	Sophomore
Hannah	Dr. Farnham	Spanish	Junior
Mark	Dr. Farnham	Accounting	Sophomore
Sam	Dr. Farnham	Hospitality Management	Junior
Stacie	Dr. Farnham	Elementary Education	Sophomore
Zeb	Dr. Farnham	Criminology	Sophomore
Bob	Prof. Ingram	Hospitality Management	Sophomore
James	Prof. Ingram	Natural Science	Sophomore
Karen	Prof. Ingram	Fashion Merchandising	Sophomore
Karl	Prof. Ingram	English	Sophomore
Susan	Prof. Ingram	Anthropology	Junior
Allen	Dr. Meehan	Music Education	Sophomore
Leslie	Dr. Meehan	Nursing	Sophomore
Nancy	Dr. Meehan	International Business	Junior
Tom	Dr. Meehan	Communications Media	Sophomore
Brad	Dr. Young	Criminology	Junior
Kathie	Dr. Young	Hospitality Management	Sophomore
Lacey	Dr. Young	Marketing	Sophomore
Sandra	Dr. Young	Nutrition	Sophomore

Research Relationships

Maxwell cautions that the type of relationship shared by researcher and participant in a study should be a “design decision,” not simply the consequence of what develops during the course of the research (1996, p. 67). While ethnographic terms such as “negotiating entry” (Marshall & Rossman, 1994, as cited by Maxwell, 1996, p. 66) and “establishing rapport” (Seidman, 1991, as cited by Maxwell, 1996, p. 66) are widely used to describe the development of these relationships, these terms are problematic for several reasons. Human relationships do not progress directionally in sequential stages, and trust between people does not develop

predictably or consistently even within a structured interview. Philosophical and ethical concerns influence the type of relationships that are sought in any research project as well, and these are inscribed differently by constructivist research, critical ethnography, practitioner research, and feminist studies, among others (Maxwell, 1996).

My particular concern in setting up research interviews with writing students was my role as a teaching associate and colleague (or in some cases, peer) of their instructors. These interview participants had seen me in the role of observer in their English classrooms and some knew that I was an English instructor. In some cases, the students were aware that I had some acquaintance with their course instructor, and I was initially concerned that they would worry about the confidentiality of their comments, even though I addressed this issue when obtaining written and verbal informed consent, as described above. I also reiterated the agreement of confidentiality when asking sensitive questions, such as their opinions of the research writing course.

Morse (1994) cautions that researching where one is employed “is not wise,” though she recommends that dressing differently from employees at the site may be of some assistance in clarifying a researcher’s (distinct) role (p. 223). I discussed this issue with faculty participants before entering their classrooms and meeting students, requesting their input about appropriate ways to introduce myself to the class, explain my research, and request their participation. I was received cordially in each case, and as the several weeks’ observation continued, professors and students

became accustomed to my presence. In some cases, I took on the role of resource person in the classroom, perhaps in part because I had a laptop computer with me and could look up reference materials when needed during class.

Another area of initial concern arose from the work of Sinding and Aronson (2003), who noted that interviewees often attempt to accommodate or assist researchers with answers they believe will help further the cause of a research project. First-year college students want to please professors, which can amplify this tendency. One way I attempted to mediate this effect was to keep questions as open-ended as possible. Thus, rather than yes/no questions such as “Were you allowed to choose your own topic?” I relied on open-ended questions and prompts: “Tell me how you developed the topic (thesis, introduction) for this paper.” Interview prompts/questions discussed a variety of topics related to the development of each student’s research project(s).

Protection of Human Subjects

This study design was approved by the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) at the research site, which is also the university where I am enrolled as a doctoral student. This board evaluated the research design in order to preserve the ethical treatment, safety, and privacy of all participants. In addition, I sought at every contact with study participants to ensure that they had a full understanding of the purpose of my research, that they were comfortable that neither their professor nor their classmates would be informed of their participation unless they themselves disclosed it, and that their written materials and recorded

interview comments would be kept confidential. Since participants retained a copy of the letter of consent they signed, they had (and still have) access to my contact information should they wish to withdraw participation or ask questions at any time. I took further steps to increase the comfort of student participants, which I discuss in the Qualitative Interview section below. There was no known risk of harm to any participant, and it is my hope that the reflection and conversations generated by study activities have been beneficial to student writers and faculty members who participated.

Design of the Study

Valerie Janesick (1994) described qualitative research as a dance, where the researcher depends on a well-designed research plan in much the same way that a dancer draws “power and cohesion” from the spine. “[F]ind[ing] her center from the base of the spine and the connection between the spine and the body,” Janesick writes, “the qualitative researcher is centered by a series of design decisions” (p. 211). Following Janesick’s metaphoric model, I outline basic design decisions here with the intention of establishing a firm, dependable center, accompanied by the flexibility and fluidity typical of the exploratory dance of observation, analysis, and interpretation in qualitative research.

The context of this study was the Research Writing course as taught at the study site (English 202), with a focus on student and professor perspectives regarding factors affecting student engagement—creation of a personal connection—in the research writing task. These factors include means of topic selection, relevance of

personal experience to the research topic, the use of narrative and other alternative approaches, and features of voice and writer identity within student essays. Table 2 below lists the data collection and data analysis methods I used as means of exploring each of the principal research questions I had posed. I describe research instruments and specific procedures for collection of data in the sections that follow.

Table 2
Data Collection and Data Analysis Methods by Research Question

Research Question	Method of Data Collection	Methods of Data Analysis
How do professors of research writing view student engagement in research assignments?	Faculty interview	Transcription Selection of relevant material Segmentation and coding Identification of emergent themes
How does the practice of professors in this regard appear to relate to their stated positions?	Classroom observation Examination of syllabus and course materials Student interview	Editing of field notes Transcription of interviews Selection of relevant material from transcripts, documents, and field notes Segmentation and coding Identification of emergent themes
How do students become engaged in their research writing courses and assignments?	Student interview	Transcription Selection of relevant material Segmentation and coding Identification of emergent themes
Do certain textual features appear more frequently in the research papers of engaged student writers than in those of less engaged writers, and if so, which ones?	Text analysis Student interview	Selection of relevant material in student essays Identification of narrative content and features of personal voice and/or personal involvement in the essay texts Transcription of interviews Segmentation and coding Identification of emergent themes

Instruments of Research

Classroom Observation

Strauss and Corbin (1998) stressed that “*multiple perspectives* must be systematically sought during the research inquiry” (p. 280), suggesting that multiple methods of data collection improve the depth, as well as the breadth, of a study. Angrosino and Mays de Pérez (2003) defined social scientists as “observers both of human activities and of the physical settings in which such activities take place” (p. 107), while Adler and Adler called observation “the most powerful source of validation” (1994, p. 289). I concur, since naturalistic data collection is holistic, occurring *in situ* to include the broadest context possible at a research site. As Lincoln and Guba stated, observation “allows the inquirer to see the world as his subjects see it, to live in their time frames, to capture the phenomenon in and on its own terms” (1985, p. 193).

These considerations indicate that classroom observation would be an appropriate and important means of seeking answers to the research questions I posed at the beginning of this exploration. In addition, these observations aided me in refining the interview questions, reflecting the shift in qualitative research professions from viewing observation “as a ‘method’ per se” to considering it “a context for interaction among those involved in the research collaboration” (Angrosino & Mays de Pérez, 2003, p. 111).

I planned to observe four class sessions with each of the Research Writing instructors participating in the study. I hoped at least three of these sessions would

occur before interviews with student participants would begin. Once I began observing in each class and recruiting participants, I saw that my physical presence in the classroom encouraged student participation. I also realized that I became more familiar with the research paper task and the preparation students received as my observations continued. I therefore attended most class sessions through the remaining six weeks of the semester, observing between 11 and 16 sessions for each of the four classes. This variation had to do with weekly class schedules (three 60-minute vs. two 75-minute sessions) as well as library days, class cancellations, and so forth.

I also intended to complete the professor interviews before classroom observations began. In one case, this was not possible due to scheduling conflicts, and so one faculty interview was held after I had attended the class. As it turned out, Professor Farnham's responses to my questions were more meaningful because I had already observed his class. If I were to conduct another study of this type, I would schedule faculty interviews after initial visits to the classroom. I scheduled observations and faculty interview appointments when professors agreed to participate in the study.

During observations, I employed the role Adler and Adler (1994) defined as "peripheral-member researcher," meaning that I expected to "develop a desirable insider's perspective without participating in those activities constituting the core of group membership" (1994, p. 380). To reduce observer bias, I recorded events as faithfully as possible, avoiding abstraction and theorizing at all costs (Pelto & Pelto,

1978, as cited by Angrosino & Mays de Pérez, 2003). Obtaining recordings is challenging in writing classes, since they often include students writing at computers or in notebooks, small group meetings in several areas of the room simultaneously, movements of instructor and students to different areas of the room when writing workshops take place, and so forth. Therefore, I relied on field notes as my principal observational record. I created a running record with a laptop computer while observing classes, seeking to include all apparent indicators of “motives, beliefs, concerns, interests, unconscious behaviors, customs, and the like” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 193) along with a sequential record of conversation and events. I sought to revise field notes within 24 hours of each class session to correct and amplify any hastily recorded information. This was not always possible, but I found my notes to be of great help in reconstructing the classes I had observed later. I also added occasional reflective and interpretive notes, aiming for a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of the class experience. According to Schwandt (1997), thick description “is not simply a matter of amassing relevant detail. Rather, to thickly describe social action is actually to begin to interpret it by recording the circumstances, meanings, intentions, strategies, motivations, and so on that characterize a particular episode” (p. 161). I saw that each class session was a unique experience, and my notes captured the flow of the course as well as individual events as the weeks passed.

The Qualitative Interview

Interviewing has a special status among data collection methods, considered by many social science researchers to be the most influential method (Fontana &

Frey, 1998), the “gold standard” of qualitative research (Silverman, 2000). Gall, Gall, and Borg emphasized the interview’s capacity to “probe deeply into respondents’ beliefs, attitudes, and inner experience” (2003, p. 222; see also Creswell 2002). When contrasted with surveys and questionnaires, in-depth interviews can better assist researchers in “understanding the experiences of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman, 1991, p. 3).

Interviews in naturalistic inquiry are dialogic and interactive (Erlandson, 1993), allowing participant and researcher to construct meaning in various social dimensions, including “power, friendship, reciprocity and shared understandings” (Birch & Miller, 2000). Lincoln and Guba (1985) specified three characteristics of interviews used in naturalistic research: degree of structure, degree of overtness, and quality of the relationship between the interviewer and the “respondent.” They made the key point that structured interviews should only be used when the interviewer “*knows what he or she does not know* and can therefore frame appropriate questions to find it out,” while the unstructured interview asks the respondent to provide “the questions [the interviewer] ought to be asking and then answer them” (p. 269).

Overtness, as used by Lincoln and Guba (1985), refers to the participant’s knowledge of the interview’s purpose and the future use of its contents; the ethics of naturalistic research require full disclosure of these issues with all concerned.

Lincoln and Guba cited Fred Massarik in describing the quality of interview relationships, which can range from hostile through phenomenal; in the latter, both

parties are “caring companions” committed to “empathic search” (Massarik, 1981). Lincoln and Guba noted that the most commonly described relationship in naturalistic interviews is the depth interview, where “reviewer and respondent may view one another as peers” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 269-270). Massarik’s category of asymmetrical trust, however, may be an unavoidable aspect of interviews between a professor-researcher and undergraduate university students. Establishing a relaxed atmosphere may be helpful in such interview settings; Lincoln and Guba recommended preparing for the interview by planning one’s clothing and general conversational openers in order to lessen tension. I did prepare for student interviews in this way, dressing casually, asking students about their majors, providing a beverage from the library coffee bar, and I found these practices did help to break the ice. More often than not, I found that my presence in their classrooms provided an icebreaker when interviews began. It was easy to begin a conversation based on a daily assignment, or a joke the professor had made that day, and our shared experience created a bond.

Other post-positivist researchers have brought additional critical concerns to bear on the qualitative research interview. Feminist and postmodern researchers ask us to be mindful of the power relationship inherent in any researcher/Other interaction. Critically conscious researchers acknowledge these dynamics in open conversation with participants, viewing the research as the co-creation of those involved (Ellis & Bochner, 1996). Talk show hosts like Oprah Winfrey are typically held accountable for their exploitation of crisis moments in their guests’ lives.

Researchers often are not, although our interview questions may provoke or intensify fear, anxiety, or self-condemnation in participants. Thus, while most qualitative researchers seek an eventual benefit to study participants by enhancing society's understanding of the participant's situation and relevant life issues, the critically conscious researcher goes further. He or she also endeavors to leave participants with a sense of completion, an understanding of the study's purpose, and, in some cases, a therapeutic benefit from disclosure and discussion of significant issues in their lives (Birch & Miller, 2000).

In my own research setting, the power dynamics involved in teacher/student/university relationships suggested certain obvious disclosures for all student interviews. I stated the following clearly on written consent forms and at the start of each interview:

1. Confidentiality of student identity

Neither their professor, other students, or other professors would know which students participated in this research study unless they chose to reveal their own participation.

2. Anonymity within dissertation text

Students could indicate at any time that they would prefer their comments not be used in the dissertation text.

Student participants would be identified only by a pseudonym if quoted.

3. Clear explanation of goals of this research

I support student participants' educational goals and progress as writers. I was clear, however, that their interviews with me were not a part of their Research Writing course. Participation in the study was not designed to enhance their progress in the course, although self-reflection often benefits learners in any class. In addition, I offered tutoring to student participants during the second interview, at their option, when we discussed papers they had written for the Research Writing course.

4. Member checking

I contacted student participants quoted or paraphrased in the dissertation text, offering them the opportunity to verify that I had accurately represented their comments and views.

5. Withdrawal of consent

Student participants could withdraw from the study or withdraw consent for use of their interview comments at any time by contacting me (contact information provided at the time the consent form is signed). Consent documents and my verbal directions stated clearly that their withdrawal from the study at any point would not influence their course grade in Research Writing.

The power dynamics were different in the relationships formed with faculty participants in the study; notwithstanding, protection of their confidentiality, anonymity, integrity, and rights within the research relationship was just as important

as with student participants. Therefore, I followed the steps above with all participants, making adjustments as appropriate.

Audio Recording

I recorded interview sessions for two reasons. First, this allowed me to preserve a complete and precise record of each participant's comments during the interview. Second, I was able to be more fully present and provide a more comfortable atmosphere, since I was not distracted by the need to take notes or memorize as much of the conversation as possible. After consulting with colleagues and faculty members on recent technological advances in the field, I decided to use both digital and cassette recorders for my interview sessions. Digital recordings were recommended for easy indexing and voice recognition during transcription; cassettes provided a backup for the data in a format that was familiar to me. This duplication was invaluable, as it turned out, because the most efficient and affordable dictating equipment available to me was a cassette-based system. So, while I transcribed a few interviews digitally using Audacity software, I completed most of this task with the cassettes and a Panasonic transcriber loaned to me by the English department at the research site.

Faculty Interviews

The questions for the first of interview with each Research Writing instructor were exploratory in nature, so I made use of a short list of open-ended questions and prompts. As cited above, a semi-structured interview allows the participant to suggest questions the researcher would ask, if he/she had pre-requisite knowledge of the

issues involved (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These first interviews lasted for about an hour each. After initial greetings, I obtained the instructor's written and verbal consent, including consent to record our conversation. I then invited the instructor to discuss his or her approach to research writing instruction, using a list of questions which included these:

- How do you structure your research writing course?
- What do you hope students will get out of the course?
- What characteristics describe successful student writing in your class?
- How do you develop topics and assignments for student writing in this course?
- Do you encourage students to find personal connections to topics they research for this course? If yes, how?
- Do your students ever include personal experience in writing they complete for your course?
- Do you address personal issues that students discuss in their writing? If so, how and when?

While I expected these conversational prompts to bring out the issues addressed by my first two primary research questions and the associated sub-questions (see pp. 14-16), I expected that additional topics of interest would emerge during each interview that I could not anticipate. I therefore invited each of the four faculty participants to add any information they considered relevant to their design and approach toward the Research Writing course.

Before concluding the interview, I asked each instructor to show me the syllabus for the course, along with the textbook or other course materials he or she was currently using. I asked the instructor to talk about how and why he/she selected or developed these materials. Lastly, we set dates for classroom observation sessions, and I thanked each instructor for participating.

Student Interviews

As described above, students in participating instructors' research writing classes heard a description of this study in class and received a flyer inviting them to volunteer via e-mail. When I responded to interested students, I asked them about convenient times for the first interview, and we scheduled that appointment by e-mail. I also explained, both in the flyer they received in class and in our e-mail correspondence, that I would provide them with a letter of consent explaining their participation in more detail that I hoped they would sign after asking any questions they might have.

As mentioned above, I dressed casually for student appointments to put participants at ease (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I also provided soft drinks to help establish a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere. After participants signed consent forms and granted me permission to record the interview, I asked a few general questions about each student's major, where he/she was from, previous English courses taken at the college level, and previous experience with research writing. I then asked the following questions:

- What kinds of topics did you write about in English 101 (or other previous English courses, as relevant to each participant)?
- How did you choose those topics?
- Which assignments did you like best? Why?
- What do you like writing about? Why?
- What do you think of your Research Writing course so far? What led you to this opinion?
- What do you think your Research Writing professor expects in your writing?
- What are you most interested in doing/learning/writing about in this course?

In addition to these questions, I invited student participants to share any additional comments they might have about their course, the instructor, or their own past experiences in writing research papers and other types of essays. Finally, I asked each participant to select an essay written for the Research Writing course that he or she would like to talk about, and to bring a copy of the essay that I could keep to the next interview. I also reminded each student that I would be offering tutoring on that paper or other writing issues at that second interview appointment, at their discretion. I let each participant know I would be contacting him or her by e-mail to set up the second interview in 2-4 weeks, thanked him or her, and ended the interview. This first interview was about 20 minutes long on average.

The second student interview began with some general questions designed to put the participant at ease. Topics varied somewhat, but I typically asked how the semester was progressing, or the student's opinion about a campus or current event.

After ascertaining that the student had brought an essay to the interview as requested, I proceeded with these or similar questions:

- How has your English class been going?
- Could you tell me about some of your writing projects for class? What have you been writing about?
- How did you select that topic? (discuss additional essays if appropriate)

Turning next to the essay the student brought, I made use of the following list of questions. Specific items varied slightly since I knew the students and their interests a little more than at the time of the first interview. I followed up on some responses with additional questions, and in some cases omitted questions that were not relevant. This section of the interview typically lasted from 30-40 minutes.

- Could you tell me about how you developed this paper and why you chose this one to discuss today?
- Is this an interesting paper? Who, in particular, would be interested in reading this?
- Could you read a section of your paper out loud?
- Did the topic change or develop as you did research or drafted the paper?
- Can you think of anything you would like to learn in the future that is connected to this paper?
- What is the most important fact or idea you learned while doing this research?
- Do you think you view this topic differently from any of the authors you've read?

- Can you name any of the authors in your paper?
- Which authors do you identify with or think highly of, and why?

After discussing the student's essay, I invited students to begin the tutoring session I was offering as an incentive for their participation by asking:

- Would you like help with this paper? Are there any other questions or issues you'd like help with in your writing?

Most students did ask for editing suggestions for the paper they had brought to the session. Their instructors knew I would be offering this help, and we had discussed the types of consultation I might offer. A few students asked for assistance with papers for other courses, and several declined tutoring. I continued to record during this part of the session, although new ideas relevant to my research questions did not typically emerge. Most students requested help with proofreading issues, especially with Works Cited lists and documentation of sources within the manuscript.

Data Analysis

Miles and Huberman (1994) evolved a three-stage method for data analysis that many qualitative researchers use as a guide, including numerous dissertation authors in my own doctoral program (Huber, 2002; Noji, 2003; Winner, 1999). The first stage, data reduction, is a process of "selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming" transcriptions and field notes (Miles & Huberman, p. 10). In my own data reduction, the first step was to transcribe recorded material and then organize the transcripts, notes, and artifacts I had collected in an accessible way.

The study generated 40 interviews, totalling approximately 30 hours, which I recorded in both digital and analog formats. I transferred the digital recordings to my computer, with backup copies on CDs. Analog recordings were made with a portable cassette recorder. I transcribed interview data with the aid of Microsoft Word and digital audio software (Audacity).

I retained transcriptions from all recorded interviews, along with signed consent forms, observation notes, syllabi and course materials (for faculty participants), and essays (for students). Once I had selected relevant portions of interview transcripts, observation notes, and other documents, I summarized information as much as possible to create more streamlined texts for data analysis.

The second stage in Miles and Huberman's method of data analysis is termed data display (1994). Data displays "assemble organized information into an immediately accessible, compact form," usually in a visual format (p. 11). Data can then be grouped in categories through a process of comparing. Through constant comparison within and among data sources, a process of shaping occurs (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), leading to the discovery of emergent themes, which I labelled through a coding process as they emerged. The next two sections describe the methodology I used to code and analyze each type of data I collected.

Interview and Observation Data

The first data I analyzed in a summative way were the faculty interviews. I read these carefully, looking for recurring themes and emphatically-stated ideas within each interview transcript. I examined my classroom observation notes, class

handouts, and the course syllabi alongside these transcriptions, searching in each case to paint a brief rhetorical portrait of each professor (Lightfoot, 1997) and his or her Research Writing class. My primary focus was not to compare these instructors, but rather to understand each teacher and his/her teaching approach as deeply as possible. My best efforts in this direction appear in Chapter Four.

I took a slightly different approach with the student interview transcripts. After rereading the transcripts for each set of interviews (19 first interviews and 17 second interviews), I created a list of recurrent themes. I then extracted the remarks relevant to each theme, creating a typed list of participant comments for each theme. I found that when I looked at these comments together on the page, I could think more deeply about their significance. I used these lists to develop the findings reported in Chapter Five.

Next, I recorded the responses that I considered most relevant to each student's engagement—with the Research Writing course, the research process, and his or her completed research paper. These numbers reflected positive (Y), ambiguous or mixed (AMR), and negative (N) responses. While specific questions and responses varied among interviews, all students had mentioned the issues I selected.

For comparison purposes, I assigned the values of 1 (Y), .5 (AMR), and 0 (N) to total this data. I believe the highly subjective nature of the interview situation and the topics discussed (preferences in instructional style, for example) limit the generalizability of this numerical data. Certainly, these numbers do not represent an

equidistant relationship between the three values for the student responses. Still, these values provided me with a summary, an overview of my interview findings, and also served as a tool for comparing interview and essay data. I displayed this data in chart form (see Tables 4 and 5 in Chapter Five), facilitating my “conclusion drawing/verification,” the third stage in Miles and Huberman’s data analysis model (1994, p. 11).

Student Research Papers

As mentioned above, the essays I collected from the student participants were much more central to my analysis and findings than I had initially expected. Because I did not locate any existing instrument relating specific rhetorical or language features in student research writing to student engagement, I designed a list of characteristics myself. I selected linguistic features commonly recognized as signals of a writer’s voice in a text (Lane, 1999; Elbow, 1995b), as well as other types of textual evidence. In developing this list, I relied in part on general discussions of student engagement in research writing (Ballenger, 1999; Bishop & Zemliansky, 2001; Kamler, 2001; and Zemliansky & Bishop, 2004, among others), in part on a survey of student beliefs about research writing (Ballenger, 1999), and finally, on my own “felt sense” of the features I have seen over the years in the research-based texts of committed, engaged students.

I assigned codes to twenty specific writing features, which I grouped into six major categories. Five of these six categories referred to features indicating writer engagement with or connection to the topic, a specific issue, or a source author’s

idea; in contrast, the sixth group of codes identified language features distancing the writer from his/her topic, suggesting a possible lack of engagement or connection.

The six categories, with an explanation of each, appear below. The complete list of twenty characteristics, with explanations and examples from participants' essays, appears in Appendix E.

Characteristics in Research Papers Indicating Engagement

I. Expression of opinion regarding issue or controversy

I used this category to label passages where the student writer expressed his or her own point of view regarding any issue. I did not apply this category to material students cited from other sources, whether paraphrased or directly quoted.

For example, when Brad wrote, “the laws [in Afghanistan] should be created according to the will of the people” (p. 1), he was expressing a personal opinion.

In contrast, this sentence—“Major inconsistencies were visible in the outcomes of trials of equal crimes (Thier 2004)” (p. 1)—clearly came from an outside source, so I did not apply the code for this category.

II. Evidence of engagement with source authority

This category included seven characteristics indicating that the student writer was explaining, interpreting, or reacting to information from a primary or secondary source.

I included instances where students evaluated the quality of source information, compared sources or value systems, or expressed a reaction of sympathy or aversion regarding a topic, author, subject, or issue relevant to the research.

I also marked passages where the student cited source material with a powerful or emphatic message. I marked student use of jargon or insider talk as well, and I included any use of narrative, since storytelling implies involvement with the source of the story.

III. Reflection on the research process

The rhetorical features in this group refer to the student writer's metacognitive comments, if any appear within the essay.

Nine of the students made one or more comments of this nature in their research papers. These comments discussed the student's development of the research paper's thesis, or of the essay itself, satisfaction or challenge with the research, or discussion of learning that occurred during the research or composing process.

IV. Linguistic markers for voice

Voice, as Peter Elbow (1994, 1995b) uses the term, is "resonant of the writer's identity," "distinctive," "recognizable," and "authoritative." While no written characteristic can quantify this feature precisely, I selected three markers that I believe point toward an authorial presence, or voice, in student research writing. These were: the use of first or second person pronouns, an appeal to one's audience, and the use of words or phrases of unusual intensity (note the distinction between this category, concerning the writer's voice, and category 2, above, where a source author's intensity would be counted).

V. Emphasis on authors as people, rather than on research texts as commodities

I considered the use of signal phrases, discussion of a source author's beliefs, or comparing authors' points of view as evidence that the writer considered his/her source materials as the ideas of other, equally human, researchers or research participants.

VI. Neutral forms

I used this category to mark characteristics indicating a sense of distance between the writer and his/her subject, or between writer and reader. Hence, a higher score in this category might indicate less engagement with the research writing task. Features included passive voice, excessively formal language, and vagueness.

I still had one major decision to make before I could begin to code features in the student papers. Would I count each feature once per word, phrase, sentence, or paragraph? Would I use only one code for a given phrase or sentence, or would I

use multiple codes if more than one feature was represented by the phrase? I wanted to be as specific as I reasonably could, yet I believed considering units smaller than one sentence would make boundaries between features extremely difficult to determine.

I therefore considered the sentence to be the unit of measurement, and counted the presence of any characteristic once per sentence. I also decided to count all features present in each sentence; for example, a given phrase might express the writer's opinion, state a reaction to a source author, and include first person pronouns, simultaneously. I made an exception to the above for the feature of narrative—when students narrated an incident, each complete narrative was counted as one occurrence of that characteristic.

There were several caveats I had to bear in mind regarding the use of discrete categories and quantified measurement in a study exploring qualities like personal connection and engagement. For example, many students believe they should not use certain features, such as the first person, in research-based writing. In addition, some professors in this study either required or recommended specific rhetorical structures or stylistic moves, which they demonstrated via model essays or in-class writing activities. Finally, the student participants varied in research writing experience and in the degree of writing skill they possessed. Thus, their ability to express personal voice in an essay that included outside sources, for example, varied as well.

These confounding factors concerned me. However, as I compared the students' research papers, I found a wide variation in the total number of coded features indicating engagement (from a low of 35 to a high of 328). I did not believe the factors of writing skill or instructional style could explain away this large range, especially since essays of similar length and students from the same class sections still showed considerable variation in the number of these characteristics I identified.

I also compared each student participant's rating based on interview responses to the rating I derived based on his or her research paper. This triangulation would, I hoped, strengthen my inferences about factors leading to successful student connection/engagement with research writing projects.

Trustworthiness

Establishing trustworthiness is a priority for any qualitative study, since analyses of text-based data are vulnerable to researcher bias in different ways than are statistical findings. Viewed by many as the qualitative equivalent to validity, trustworthiness strengthens a researcher's claim that the data says what he or she says it does. Maxwell stresses that it is crucial to consider specific threats to the validity of a study's findings and interpretations, rather than relying on boilerplate strategies and considering them to have solved the problem of validity.

In this study, I considered alternative explanations for each of the conclusions after analyzing the data, considering how my interpretations might be questioned or disproved in order to increase theoretical validity. I considered commonly held researcher biases, along with specific biases I am aware of in my own professional

and personal background, before drawing conclusions. I list the most significant of these in the section entitled Researcher Bias below.

During data collection and analysis, I preserved data in participants' own words whenever possible and consulted the original sources often, especially interview transcripts, in order to avoid inappropriately conflating responses or unconsciously "pigeonholing" data into categories of my own making. Finally, I employed the procedural strategies that follow, as recommended by foundational theorists in the field of qualitative research.

Triangulation

Triangulation describes the use of multiple data sources and/or research methods in a study. This apparent overlap by the qualitative researcher seeks to address threats to validity such as reactivity ("the influence of the researcher on the setting or individuals studied" (Maxwell, 1996, p. 91)) and researcher bias.

Triangulation, like member checking, is a strategy that invites additional perspectives into the study to minimize the effect of these threats. Janesick (1994) reviews four types of triangulation identified by Denzin in 1978, and to these adds a fifth, as follows:

1. *data triangulation*: the use of a variety of data sources in a study
2. *investigator triangulation*: the use of several different researchers or evaluators
3. *theory triangulation*: the use of multiple perspectives to interpret a single set of data

4. *methodological triangulation*: the use of multiple methods to study a single problem

and Janesick's addition:

5. *interdisciplinary triangulation*: "using other disciplines, such as art, sociology, history, dance, architecture, and anthropology to inform our research processes" and thus "broaden our understanding of method and substance" (pp. 214-215, emphasis added in the fifth item).

This study shows its strength in data triangulation, since observations, student interviews, syllabi, and student essays all add depth and additional perceiving lenses to the data provided in faculty interviews. Interviewing a minimum of four students from each of the four research writing classrooms added credibility to the student data by adding additional data sources and points of view. In terms of investigators, I requested feedback from peers as well as the members of my dissertation committee, in the hopes that they would discern any omissions or distortions in my interpretation of data that might arise from my own biases, as discussed in the section that follows. Faculty members experienced in qualitative research advised me, offering consultation about questionable cases when I was coding and interpreting data as well as more global advice. A peer in our doctoral studies program evaluated the scale of engagement I developed to analyze student interview data. I applied several theoretical perspectives when interpreting the data in my study, including grounded theory, hoping to open as many windows as possible on the issues concerned. In terms of methodology, I believe that by using cross-

comparison of cases and the coding process, applied both within and across data types, I have satisfied Janesick's recommendation.

Janesick's interdisciplinary triangulation is the most intriguing category to me. I concur with her assertion that "psychometric views of the world" have led, tragically, to "aggregating individuals into sets of numbers" and "moved us away from our understanding of lived experience" (1994, p. 215). I hope I have added perspectives of other disciplines to my study by considering new approaches some teachers use to teach research writing to their students. The multi-genre research paper is one means of bringing an interdisciplinary perspective to the research writing course.

Member Checking

Member checking was ongoing during data collection and data analysis stages in my study, since I contacted student and faculty participants for clarification as needed when transcribing interview texts. When I had written the data analysis and conclusions for the study, I e-mailed all student participants. This correspondence invited students to meet with me in order to view the completed report and give me feedback as to the way their own points of view were represented. Since I have identified each participant by pseudonym in the manuscript, confidentiality was not breached. I have also made the completed manuscript available to faculty participants, inviting their feedback to improve the accuracy of my account.

Limitations of the Study

The first limitation I acknowledge to the research is that generalization of findings would not be appropriate due to the relatively small number of participants and the location of data collection at a single research site. I believe that through collection of multiple types of data from each participant and thick description, I have been able to develop useful theories grounded in the data and contexts I investigate.

Secondly, the classroom observations I conducted were limited to a single English course, and could not take into account the varied approaches these instructors present in other English courses taught at this university. Furthermore, classroom dynamics are complex and highly sensitive to environmental and interpersonal phenomena, so causal attributions were made, if at all, with a high degree of caution. I addressed these variables to the extent possible by informal discussions with faculty members at the end of class sessions about their perceptions of each class meeting, and by asking students how they experienced the teaching approach used in their Research Writing course.

Demographic considerations also placed some limitations on the study, since the undergraduate student population at IUP is quite homogeneous, with most students Caucasian and residents of Pennsylvania (see Setting, above). Students who share a common cultural and geographic background may not feel the same motivation to share personal information with classmates that students in more diverse communities do. At the same time, student comfort level may be greater than

that experienced in an urban, multicultural classroom, and so community and sharing might be greater than in other settings, also potentially limiting the generalizability of these findings. It is my hope, again, that by interviewing 19 students, looking at their writing, and observing their participation in the classroom, I have established internal validity and created an adequate basis for the theoretical ideas I propose.

Researcher Bias

Maxwell (1996) stated that qualitative research “is not primarily concerned with eliminating variance between researchers in the values and expectations they bring to the study, but with understanding how a particular researcher’s values influence the conduct and conclusions of the study” (p. 91). My own values reflect a strong bias toward promoting the use of personally selected topics, individual voice, and narrative elements in research writing instruction and in professional academic publications as well. Furthermore, as a creative writer and poet, I find the imposition of academic discourse and neutral language to be problematic and quite uncomfortable. I believe honest subjectivity, rather than pretended objectivity, should be at the core of all meaningful research. Thus, I began this study vulnerable to underplaying or discounting data that might view these traditional approaches positively.

As a composition and ESL instructor, I have worked with many professors and students who saw these traditional approaches as beneficial, and so I sought others’ perspectives on my data to be sure I chose language that represented the

data fairly, and that I considered alternate views as I interpreted these data. I asked faculty and peers for feedback regarding my methodology, particularly my plans for data analysis, and I used triangulation in considering my findings, as described below.

My long experience as a writer and writing teacher created a bias as well, since I could only sympathize, and not truly empathize, with students who find academic discourse a challenging skill they wish to master. I have always been an articulate writer, and my own rejection of academic discourse as the model of choice for research writing probably makes me less sensitive to the situation of students seeking to master this form of writing to achieve academic success.

Lastly, I am a forty-something, white, Jewish intellectual, and the assumption that every college student is motivated by the same intellectual curiosity I brought to the academy has gotten me into trouble before. I have relied on the wisdom of colleagues and mentors, who have graciously read my manuscript with a critical eye and assisted me enormously by offering their own points of view.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE TEACHERS

Through observation, interviews with professors and students, and careful reading of syllabi and classroom documents, I discovered two guiding features in these four research writing classrooms: first, instructional approaches were extremely diverse, based on each professor's vision for the English 202 course at this university; and second, each of these teachers cared a great deal about his or her students and strove to encourage their enthusiasm for research and their academic success. In the following sections, I offer a description of each professor and his or her instructional approach. I hope these brief portraits will help supply a context for the findings that follow. As detailed in Chapter Three above, I constructed my initial understanding of these professors and their approaches via interviews early in the semester and classroom observation during the months of March and April of 2005. Professors kindly supplied syllabi and class handouts during this time, and all were forthcoming about answering questions after class or at other times during the semester. As I interviewed students and read their research papers, I added detail to my own construction of each professor's instructional approach. The following portraits are arranged in alphabetical order by professor pseudonym. I am aware that my descriptions may betray my own bias toward a student-centered, active classroom, so I will begin by emphasizing that I believe each of these professors, classroom approaches, and teaching styles developed strengths in the students who participated, although these strengths varied based on the emphasis of each

approach. While these instructors employed varying degrees of flexibility and student autonomy in their approaches, they do not represent a continuum, but rather a sampling of contemporary approaches to research writing instruction. I appreciated this diversity and found the experience of prolonged observation in four classrooms during the same six-week period to be extremely useful for my own teaching in addition to developing a well-grounded perspective in each approach and its influences on the student participants I interviewed.

Follow the Model: Research as a Step-by-Step Process

Dr. Stephen Farnham has been teaching research writing for over twenty years, and his loyalty to a consistent course theme (discrimination) distinguishes his approach. As he explained in our interview, “I’ve always had success with this topic because it’s in the news every day. And it’s been in the news every day for 30 years and it will be in the news every day for the next 30 years.” Professor Farnham’s preference for following established models was evident in the materials, methods, and assessment techniques that characterized his research writing classroom. During class, Dr. Ingram referred often to an established, correct method for writing research papers, a series of steps which, when followed in sequence and checked through the use of exemplary models, would yield a predictable and successful result.

The syllabus for Dr. Farnham’s course made his emphasis on accuracy in both process and product clear from the opening paragraph, which began: “ENGL 202 is designed to teach students how to read, analyze, and evaluate non-fiction sources and to present the results of their analysis in clear, organized, carefully

documented research papers.” The course theme, discrimination, was introduced next, with a list of minorities students could choose to investigate in their research projects. In addition to a 20-item bibliography, students in the spring of 2005 completed an abstract, a comparison of sources, a short research paper, two oral presentations, and a final research paper of 1200-1500 words. Early in the semester, each student submitted a ranked list of discriminated minorities he or she would prefer to investigate further, selected from Dr. Farnham’s master list. Based on these preferences, Dr. Farnham assigned students to groups (the African American group, the elderly group, etc.). Most oral and written projects throughout the semester centered on various aspects of discrimination experienced by this target group.

Students used two published textbooks for Dr. Farnham’s course: an anthology of readings about discrimination (Rothenberg 2004) and *St. Martin’s Guide to Library Research* (Lunsford & Mooth, 2003). However, the principal source of models for 202 students in the spring of 2005 was a course packet assembled by the instructor. The student essays in this compilation represented the best papers Farnham had received in the past ten years, and he selected them carefully to model strengths (and a few weaknesses) typical of student papers for each of the major assignments. As he pointed out to the class, “All of the papers in your packet are As and Bs. I’m not going to give you bad examples.”

While two other professors participating in this study also made use of model essays, Dr. Farnham devoted much more class time to their examination, and he referred to these texts at almost every class meeting. These discussions, which

focused almost exclusively on organization and form rather than essay content, reflected this teacher's emphasis on accuracy as well as his preference for a traditional approach to the research process. In our interview, Dr. Farnham reprised the way he introduces the 202 course to his students. He tells them: "I am going to take you through a traditional step-by-step process. Once you know how to do this process, you can cut corners. . . . I don't do some of these things myself anymore. But until you've done it a few times the correct way, I recommend that you follow this process." While allowing some eventual leeway for individual preference, this comment underlined Dr. Farnham's belief in one correct prescription for research writing—the sequence of steps he presented throughout the semester.

Dr. Farnham's classroom approach stressed modeling in other ways as well—most class days, using a lecture/discussion approach, he demonstrated proper form for documented research writing and then encouraged student questions as a means of clarification. He modeled the critical thinking and style of exposition he wanted his students to emulate in their own research papers, leading the class through discussions of essays in the Rothenberg anthology and the course packet, asking them to compare, relate, and theorize as they connected one reading to another. Dr. Farnham used repartee and a touch of sarcastic wit to establish rapport with the class. Some student participants perceived him as "a good guy" who cared about the students; others saw his humor and occasional surveys of class opinion as partisan and (ironically) discriminatory. While Dr. Farnham included touches of humor often and expressed personal concern for students with problems, his overall approach

was serious, businesslike, and teacher-centered. Some students appeared disinterested during lectures; study participants, however, told me that they appreciated learning the nuts and bolts of the traditional research writing and documentation process, which two students called “the right way” of doing research.

In our interview, Dr. Farnham stressed that he wanted students to learn to evaluate texts—both their own and the published sources they read. He commented that he requests this critique as an element of every written assignment, every semester, but he has found that most students produce summaries of sources rather than “significant analysis and evaluation,” even when the class reads and discusses four or more models of successful work ahead of time (interview). Evaluation was also a required element in student oral presentations, where students designed their own rubrics and scales for assessment of their classmates’ presentations.

The assignments in this course were scaffolded, with a sequence of group and individual assignments culminating in a 1200-1500 word research paper. Dr. Farnham directed students to choose either an “objective” or “argumentative” stance in the major paper, and to remain consistent to this point of view throughout the essay. This structure allowed for the inclusion of individual experiences students might have had with their topic area, particularly in the introduction to this final paper. One student participant in this class, however, indicated that she did not feel comfortable discussing the discrimination she herself had experienced as part of her research paper, choosing instead to maintain a journalistic tone, citing legal cases of racial profiling punctuated by rhetorical questions appealing to her audience’s sense

of fairness. None of the students participating shared stories about friends, family members, or themselves in the writing samples they submitted to me for the study. One person did express appreciation for the overall topic of discrimination, however, stating, “I’m really interested in what we’re dealing with, discrimination, it’s really a big issue, and I think it’s being swept under the carpet, and I think it needs to be brought out . . . because it’s something that a lot of people do not like to speak about” (Hannah, interview, 4/4/05).

Professor Farnham provided specific guidelines for writing the final project, including detailed instructions for an outline, which was to begin with the essay’s thesis, utilize traditional format throughout, and maintain parallel grammatical structure. Students who utilized appropriate sources (mostly print-based rather than web-based) and documented these sources accurately would be rewarded for attention to detail. Dr. Farnham made the point in class that the proportion of cited versus original material in a student paper would depend on a student’s familiarity with the topic. With a topic unfamiliar to the writer, “ninety percent of [one’s] paper might be documented; there’s nothing wrong with that” (interview).

Grades were a frequent topic of discussion in class. Dr. Farnham offered accommodations in the weight of specific assignments toward the final semester grade, discussed the components of each assignment’s grade often, and reported grade outcomes of specific assignments to the class. (“There were as many Ds on these papers as As, Bs, and Cs combined.”) Student participants from Dr. Farnham’s class expressed considerable anxiety and disappointment about their grades,

particularly about points lost for mechanical errors and mistakes in documentation. Several students in this class told me that the tutoring I offered as an incentive was the reason they had volunteered, so that may have been a factor in the frequent grade-related comments these students made. When I asked students what Dr. Farnham considered to be good writing, all made some reference to technical accuracy or attention to detail, and several were glad they were being taught “the right way to do it,” even while commenting that they felt quite inadequate to the task.

Dr. Farnham’s instructional approach emphasized reading together about a theme, selecting appropriate sources, and weaving them together through the use of analysis and evaluation. When students completed these steps and followed conventions of traditional research writing carefully, they produced the type of quality work that would, according to this professor, stand them in good stead in graduate school and stand the test of time.

The Curious Journey: An Inquiry-driven Research Writing Classroom

From the hemispheres of the brain to a peer-reviewed article on aeronautics by a past research writing student, the images that crossed the projection screen in Professor Ingram’s class presented a travelogue through territories of research. His course offered most of the features of a safari, minus the mosquitoes—a daily attending to the interesting features, large and small, of living a curious life, as Ingram led the class through the territories that gave him and his students the “itch” Ballenger (2004) and Macrorie (1988) described, that itch of engaged curiosity that

only research can satisfy. From jazz music to Frank Lloyd Wright, from fashion trends on campus to patterns in abusive relationships, Ingram encouraged his students to find that itch, and to interview, survey, read, and consult until the itch was satisfied. Perhaps Ingram modeled the curious researcher effectively because he was actively involved in his own research, as a Ph.D. candidate completing his dissertation at the university. With a background in high school teaching, Professor Ingram had a well-established foundation in language arts instruction as well as experience in teaching college-level composition.

While issues of form and documentation played a role in Ingram's daily method of operations, it was the content, the inquiry-driven knowledge students consulted and constructed, that wove this course together. Ingram modeled the pleasure of satisfying one's curiosity by sharing his own curious itches with his class. Students were invited to travel the information highway and report back on their sightings—on Turkey's boycott of PanAm, for example (apparently the airline's name bears an unfortunate resemblance to a Turkish obscenity).

Not surprisingly, Professor Ingram has adopted Ballenger's *The Curious Researcher* (2004) as a text. As he explained in our March 2005 interview, "Ballenger is pretty good, he writes with voice and style, and the kids generally find that they can read that text without hating it." (Most student participants in Dr. Ingram's class indeed stated that they liked the course, instructor, and their own research topics.) The surprising element in the course was Dr. Ingram's second text: Lester and Lester's *How to Write a Research Paper* (2005). The latter text

exemplifies all that Ballenger loves to hate—an impersonal, reductive, skills-based approach to research. After spending time in Ingram’s classroom, however, this choice made a strange sort of sense. While class discussions were wide-ranging, and all about the ideas students were gathering and exploring, he was also thorough in providing the tools of proper form and documentation, and he expected students to use them.

In addition to the Lester and Lester text, Dr. Ingram offered students a series of handouts he designed on the infrastructure of the research paper, from the proper use of signal phrases to specific guidelines for entries in the required annotated bibliography. He presented these as resources for practice, asking for active student involvement rather than passive reading of a model essay or rote copying of a template form. Ingram’s approach to research writing treated students in his classroom as engaged, independent adults exploring territories of knowledge they had selected based on curiosity and enthusiasm. He projected an expectation of student engagement, and he invited the class to share his own enthusiasm for the exploratory journey of inquiry.

When I asked Professor Ingram about the terms research and writing, he made it clear that these are separate elements in his classroom, “two components [that] need to be emphasized individually.” Research, to Ingram, is a living thing, an exploratory, creative process, much of which takes place outside the library. Like Dr. Meehan’s students, this class engaged in primary research, but on a smaller scale, rather than as the semester project. Students designed and conducted a survey, an

interview, and a site observation during the semester, reporting back frequently about their research “among the living and breathing” (class observation). The records, results, and artifacts of these activities, along with published sources, composed the raw materials for the primary writing activity of the course—the more narrowly focused process of creating a ten-page paper. Interestingly, Professor Ingram was the only professor I observed who offered students the option to include an “alternate genre” as part of their research project. With his individual approval, students could opt to use original artwork, audiovisual productions, and other creative work as part of their final project, and could shorten the length of their research paper correspondingly if they chose to do so. Professor Ingram told the class the story of a student who researched eating disorders and submitted a sculpture of her own body, representing the battle she had fought for self-acceptance.

Dr. Ingram’s classroom demeanor was relaxed. He trusted his students to work independently, and when deadlines were close, often dismissed them to work in the library, at an on-campus research site, or elsewhere. He set deadlines for drafts and short assignments, but students were largely left alone to complete their work—or not. Most student participants appreciated being “treated like an adult” (Bob, interview, 3/05). Those who were self-starters and regular attendees flourished; those who needed more structure during the last half of the semester sometimes fell by the wayside and stopped attending, or did not complete the final paper at all. Most of

those who volunteered for this study liked their professor and appreciated his laid-back style. All liked the research topics they had chosen.

The Ethnographic Journey: What You Write Is What You See

Part of my agenda is to get them to see that we do research every single day.

It's around us, it surrounds us . . . you do research when you're standing in line at the cafeteria and you're looking at those French fries and they're so curled up from that hot light that you know you don't want to go near them, and you're going to get something else instead. . . (Meehan, interview, 2005).

While Catherine Meehan's students read library sources, used MLA style, and turned in a major paper at the end of the semester, none of these activities held center stage in her research writing classroom. Her course was a fieldwork practicum, an animated, semester-long seminar, and her students were ethnographers in training. They were also research writing students, and so Meehan's discussions of narrative, dialogue, and thick description defined markers for them, signposts along the path to success in her section of English 202. Her emphasis on thick description was enriched by her interest in creative writing and her participation in university programs providing professional development to K-12 language arts instructors.

Dr. Meehan's research writing syllabus listed eleven student objectives, seven of which related specifically to the course's emphasis on primary, qualitative research:

- develop proficiency using multiple research methods including library searches, Internet searches, interviewing, observation, field notes, surveys, and artifact collection

- develop a code of ethical practice and apply it while gathering and writing up data
- design techniques for analyzing quantities of primary data
- integrate primary data from fieldwork, background material from library and Internet sources, and writer's own voice into a coherent, written whole that develops a thesis or line of inquiry
- represent the point of view of research participants
- become aware of one's own subjectivity in doing research
- propose and complete 3 formal papers: 1) short observation paper; 2) interim report; 3) ethnographic field work project and numerous daily writing assignments

During Dr. Meehan's class period most students were engaged, on-task, and productive. Whether composing found poetry based on their field notes or discussing the episode of *American Chopper* that was required watching the night before, they were actively involved in the analysis of their own recently-collected ethnographic data or other tasks of research writing. Even students who were uncomfortable with this non-traditional approach to research writing were animated and verbal in class, expressing their confusion or lack of enthusiasm freely.

Professor Meehan's course began where many other sections typically end: with the summary, analysis, and comparison of library sources. Common readings based on research by authors like Deborah Tannen and Desmond Norris were the raw material for discussions of fieldwork, and Dr. Meehan began with these assignments to introduce students to the world of published qualitative, ethnographic research. Her own enthusiasm for ethnography was evident as she walked students through assignments such as drawing a picture of their research process or constructing found poetry from field notes. Directions like "Use your five senses!" and "Look for patterns" encouraged students as they pored over field notes to create

summaries of their progress or recounted highlights from the field to their classmates. Professor Meehan's approach was lively, personal, and warm, and students responded in kind.

While she expressed frustration to me in private conversation over lack of student effort and persistence, Dr. Meehan's demeanor in class was positive and encouraging. Likewise, while most students expressed some degree of distaste or confusion regarding the requirement for an ethnographic, narrative-based research paper, they were actively engaged during class, verbal in discussions, and clear stakeholders in their research results. While only one of the four participants from this class said that she enjoyed the course, all four students liked their self-chosen research topics, and all thought their papers were at least somewhat interesting. As Dr. Meehan commented in our interview, "This is one of my goals always, in research writing, that it become something less hateful than it was when you came in, and it might still be hateful but at least you spent some time doing something that you cared about, a little bit."

The Hand of the Writer: Joining Your Voice to Another's

For Theresa Young, the research writing classroom is a place to explore the textual knowledge constructed by others, and then use that understanding as a bridge to building one's own knowledge-based texts. The metaphor of building to describe research writing served Professor Young well through the first half of the semester, and the stages of construction she led students through were well defined. Professor Young had experience in building a program within the English

department as well, since she helped design the liberal studies course offerings and the vision they represented for university students. Like Dr. Farnham, she employed a thematic approach. While the content matter of the course was quite specifically defined (the study of Afghanistan), broader themes emerged in her daily conversations with the class. The terms “voice” and “hand of the writer” were familiar to her students, and they were anchor points in the construction work of the semester, foundational concepts the class returned to throughout the course. Young also invoked the metaphor of a conversation to describe the interplay between the student writer and the authors he or she read and wrote about. As she stated in her course syllabus, “in a research essay you keep track of the voices, you give them credit, and you get to shape the purpose and meaning of the entire conversation.”

Dr. Young had a unique perspective on the research writing course. The “Goals and Methods” she listed on her syllabus were divided into three categories: those designed “to familiarize [students] with the reading practices of researchers,” those that “help [students] develop fluency in the writing practices of researchers,” and those designed to “develop the collaborative skills that ground all inquiry.” Differentiating between authors’ voices was important in Young’s course (“understanding *that* writers disagree and explaining *why* they disagree”), as was the ability to establish one’s own voice and express it independently (“to use and explain the work of others in order to shape your own perspective on that work”) (interview, 3/05).

The class began by reading two books together: *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini (2003) and *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* by Mahmood Mamdani (2004). Dr. Young explained that she usually pairs a novel or other narrative work and a fact-based, political or anthropological text. Students compared the two genres as they alternated reading both books, observing the craft of storytelling as well as expository techniques of citation, summary, and paraphrase. The first major assignment was a five-page essay addressing “any issue, theme, topic, any historical moment that they want to explore” based on the common texts (Young, 2005).

While acknowledging that their subject matter would concern some facet of Afghanistan’s history, culture, or politics, Young stressed the freedom students had in selecting their topic within this broad terrain. She commented: “I ask them to have done enough of that reading to shape an essay that addresses any issue, theme, topic, any historical moment that they want to explore” (interview). Most students followed her in-class suggestion to find a connection between their academic majors and a related aspect of Afghanistan’s politics or society.

By midsemester, the class was engaged in what Young referred to as independent research. After library instruction, Professor Young “just set them free” to write a literature review. She defined this assignment as “a compendium of three sources on a topic defined by them.” This self-defined topic was limited, of course, to the theme of the course, the “contained topic field,” as she described it. Most followed her lead in exploring aspects of Afghan life related to their own academic

majors. Typically, “nursing majors go to health issues, crim majors go to criminal justice and the undeclared kind of go wherever they want.” When I asked Professor Young about including an element of synthesis in this assignment, she replied: “A little bit. But don’t worry about creating your idea. Just be fair, a fair reporter of someone else’s writing.”

The next major assignment for the course, the bridge essay, was also designed to foster independence, as Young explains. This essay was “an attempt to find an idea that will bear inquiry, and not just a report of facts” (Young, personal interview, 2005). Indeed, the bridge essay represents “another attempt to take possession of the reading” (Young, personal interview, 2005). When briefing the class about this assignment, Young challenged students: “Don’t lose your voice; don’t give up your voice to the voice of a researcher who is 15 or 16 years older than you. You’re not just a passive reporter. You’re attracted to a certain locus of events, attitudes...try to show this purpose in your bridge essay” (class discussion, 3/4/05). This call to a strong authorial voice was a model most students adopted, as their essay texts demonstrated.

After completing the bridge essay, students returned to the library to research the issue they had identified. They completed a second review of literature, and then wrote the final essay, an eight-page paper with a Works Cited list. Other elements of the course included collaborative work in groups based on research area, panel discussions, peer revision of drafts, library instruction, and an in-class essay “exam,” which asked each student to write about his or her topic in the form of a “bookless

draft.” This in-class draft allowed students to record their own synthesis of the sources they had read, with some analysis, but without the distraction of formal conventions, documentation and referencing.

Dr. Young compiled a course packet for her students which included complete directions for each assignment and several models for each written assignment. These examples, as well as other student papers displayed on the overhead projector, offered models of successful work for the class. Young discussed these in class often, asking students to find “the voice of the writer,” “the hand of the writer,” stressing again and again the student writer’s task: to grab and use information from sources while building and fortifying one’s own scholarly structure, a structure that would stand on the voice and conviction of the student writer him or herself.

During student interviews, responses to Dr. Young and the course were mixed. All students considered her grading fair, her concern for them genuine. Most agreed that they were glad to have learned more about Afghanistan, though none mentioned having any prior connection or curiosity about the region before beginning the course. Several students did not enjoy spending the whole semester on the same topic, and would have preferred more variety. Some felt that daily class activities such as preparing for panel discussions were somewhat repetitive. All enjoyed peer review, however, and were pleased with their final papers; they looked forward to finishing the course well.

Conclusion

All four of these professors valued research and the doors it could open for their students. While two used thematic approaches, and the remaining two asked students to conduct their own empirical research, each classroom had its own unique flavor. The next chapter discusses student perspectives on these and other aspects of research writing, based on two interviews with each of the 19 student participants in the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE STUDENTS

To enlarge my understanding of the perceptions of student research writers, I interviewed several students in each of the classes I observed. I interviewed most student participants twice—once before midterms, and once during the final month of the semester. While no one withdrew from the study, two of the nineteen student participants failed to complete the second interview. Thus, the student interview data consists of 36 interview sessions—19 first interviews, and second interviews with 17 of those participants.

The following discussion of these interviews is thematic for the most part and represents a summary of qualitative interview data relevant to the question of student engagement. While there are some narrative elements in my presentation of individual students and their learning, I do not offer portraits in the same way that I profiled the four instructors in the previous chapter. I did not have the opportunity to focus on each student individually as effectively as I could focus on their instructors, where 15 hours in each classroom allowed for detailed observation and reflection on the instructors and their approaches. Nor was this my intention in the student interviews, but rather to investigate and compare these participants' responses to specific themes important to understanding their experience of the research writing course and their research projects, which I discuss below.

My goals for the first interview were to explore each student's past experiences with writing and research, and to listen to his/her initial perceptions

regarding the research writing course, with an eye toward emergent themes that might bear a message about engagement, personal connection, and general *matter*ing in essay writing for these students. The second interview focused primarily on a research paper (in some cases, a first draft) that the students had produced for the research writing course, which I asked them to bring to the interview and allow me to keep. I discuss my analysis of these manuscripts in Chapter Six. During this second interview I also offered tutoring, which I had announced as an incentive to encourage participation in the study. Thus, the second interview was often considerably longer than the first: 40-50 minutes in many cases, and more than two hours (divided into two or three sessions) with the students asking for the most assistance. A more detailed rationale for the interview structure I employed, along with the questions I used for both semi-structured interviews, appears in Chapter 3. While the principal data source for these findings was the student interviews, I also used field notes based on class observations and informal conversations with student participants. Remarks quoted here were made by student participants who consented to their use in this manuscript.

Several themes emerged in these student interviews that I believe to be significant to the research questions I proposed and the areas I sought to explore in this study: namely, how do students connect meaningfully to their research projects in research writing classrooms, and what factors do students believe influence their engagement during the research writing process? These themes are discussed in the sections that follow. In addition to discussing themes relevant to student engagement

and comparing responses of these 19 participants, I have included interview comments to help give voice to these student participants.

Topic Selection: Key to Engaged Research Writing?

SK: When you have a choice, what do you like writing about?

Sam: See I don't like writing at all. . . . let me pick a topic. Whatever's easiest.

SK: Well let me put it this way. . . . You have to write a 10-page paper, but you can write it about anything you want. What would you pick?

Sam: I would pick something there's a lot of material on. (interview)

While I once believed freedom in topic selection would produce greater student engagement in virtually all cases, I now see that this assessment was naïve. For many students, choosing their own topic makes all the difference. Susan, for example, commented that “if it's a topic that I can, that I enjoy, first of all, and that I can really sink my teeth into, and have the writing be more conversational, then I'll enjoy writing about it.” For many compositionists theorizing about research writing, topic selection is key to the degree of engagement with which students pursue the task of writing a research paper. For those who foster the inquiry-driven approach, curiosity is the essential motivating factor that leads to students becoming stakeholders in their own research projects, and thus a student-selected topic is crucial (Ballenger, 1999; Macrorie, 1988; Reigstad, 2004). Heilker, Allen, and Sewall express this view in their 2004 essay, “Researching Like a Writer:”

Rather than going through the motions of research, engaging in yet another simulacrum to satisfy the arbitrary requirements of a teacher-driven assignment, the student engages in research because she *wants to*, because she cares about the topic and wants to know more about it. This kind of personal, intrinsic motivation urges students to become *independent* researchers, and it will sustain their efforts over several weeks. (p. 51)

Locus of Control in Topic Selection

As I considered student comments on topic selection in my own study population, I realized that control of topic selection in writing classes was not the all-or-nothing, student-centered vs. teacher-dominated issue I had envisioned it to be. Many students, used to narrowly prescribed writing assignments, believed they had selected their own research topics because they were asked (allowed) to choose a specific focus within a broader thematic area that had been defined by their professors. When describing their College Writing classes (ENGL 101), several students indicated that they “chose” their own topics because their professors offered two or more writing prompts for an assignment, and they were permitted to select the option they preferred.

Teacher guidance sometimes played a role in student-initiated topic selection as well. Professors sometimes suggested topics to students who were stuck for ideas, and this was usually perceived positively, as a means of coaching or helping, by both students and professors. Professors also influenced student selection of topics in more subtle ways. Bob, a student participant, reflected that “things come up in your

head when the teacher's talking, like she'll bring up ideas, and then suddenly it'll magically appear in your head that you have an idea to write about too." James was pleasantly surprised to discover through conferencing with Professor Ingram that "the research paper doesn't have to be on one specific topic, it can break off in different sections."

The issue of teacher control vs. student freedom in topic choice was perceived as important by most student participants. Some students felt restricted in classes where a teacher-selected focus for discussion and/or writing predominated, or frustrated about devoting a whole semester's work to consideration of a single issue or theme. Topic selection affected engagement and enthusiasm for these students. For instance, Ellen wished the research focus in her class had been "more broad, because there's only so much you can write about discrimination (the course theme)." Several students went further, stating explicitly that freedom of choice in topics affected the quality of their written texts. As Tom put it, "I think being able to pick a topic is very key. You tell me to write a book report about a book I hate, it's probably going to be like, a book bashing report. But then, if you let me pick . . . a subject to write about, obviously I'm going to try harder, and enjoy it more. I think you get more out of it, too."

Zeb, in Dr. Farnham's class, made two interesting comments about topic selection. He reflected, "I think everybody writes better when you get to choose what you want to write about. And if you don't want to do it, it kind of gets boring, and then if it gets boring, you don't do as well." When I asked Zeb what he would have

written about had he been free to choose his own topic, he drew a blank initially and responded, “That’s weird. Because we’ve been given topics, and then you get to pick, all you want to do is get to pick your own topic, and then when you get a chance, you don’t even . . .” and there he trailed off, surprised at finding himself momentarily clueless. Karl, a student in Mr. Ingram’s class, had complete freedom in choosing a topic. Like Zeb, Karl found this freedom unsettling, commenting “I usually need topics told to me to do them, and then I do them well.” Ironically, the research topic Karl chose, Wal-Mart and its empire-building business practices, emphasized the negative effects on society resulting from standardization and a lack of individual choice.

Perhaps these two student responses confirm new literacy’s theories that one’s identity as a writer is constructed based on local contexts, and the research writing classroom has traditionally provided a prescriptive, rather predictable educational context and discourse. Roz Ivanič tells us that discourses are “constellations of beliefs about writing, beliefs about learning to write, ways of talking about writing, and the sorts of approaches to teaching and assessment which are likely to be associated with these beliefs” (Ivanič, 2004, p. 224). When presented with the opportunity to choose their own research topics (even hypothetically), these students found it necessary to reframe this academic discourse and the associated beliefs. It is not surprising that this would be a bit uncomfortable for some students.

Favorite Topics and Topic Preference

When discussing topic selection, students also evidenced some overlap between the concept of “topic” and what I would describe as “genre.” For example, when asked about favorite topics, Lacey commented, “I like to do research . . . especially when you get a really good topic, and there’s so much information out there . . . maybe I just like the researching part.” Similarly, Sandra stated, “I really do enjoy doing research topics . . . I love to learn, anything I can write about that I can learn about, and I can really get into.” Susan liked writing about “things that [she didn’t] have to be too formal about.” She “really hate[s] stiff and formal writing.”

When I asked students about favorite writing topics in previous courses, typically not research writing courses, most popular was “myself” or “personal experiences,” mentioned by five participants. When a reason for this preference was given, it was usually familiarity or comfort level. As Leslie put it, “Probably myself, just because it’s easy, I like it, I know what to write about.” Bob contrasted personal narrative with fiction assignments, expressing a preference for “things that actually happened, real stories that actually happened to myself or friends.” Aspects of one’s own life experiences, including the future, were mentioned as favorite topics by several students, particularly choice of major and future career. Students mentioned past professors’ creative approaches to autobiographical assignments. James, for example, remembered an assignment in which he was to imagine himself as an inanimate object. He wrote the piece as a drumhead, excited about helping his owner win an audition for the university’s drum corps. Travel was another favorite

topic, either narrating past trips or describing destinations students hoped to visit one day.

A smaller number of participants mentioned social issues as favorite topics to write about. Lacy stated a preference for “controversial topics” where she could “take sides,” while Hannah commented, “I really like writing about social issues, because I think they need to be addressed.” Finally, two students mentioned an enthusiasm for anything they could research, for the pleasure of exploring a topic to learn about something new.

Topic Selection in the Research Writing Course

In Chapter Four, I described the topic selection process each of the four faculty participants used in his or her research writing course during the spring of 2005. To review briefly, Dr. Farnham and Dr. Young taught thematically based courses, with associated readings, and required students to choose research topics related to that theme. Dr. Farnham’s topic selection process was slightly more prescriptive, since students were assigned a target population to investigate within the class theme of discrimination. Dr. Young allowed students to find their own topics within the course’s focus on Afghanistan. Most, however, took her suggestion to draw a connection between their academic majors and the culture or politics of the region. Dr. Meehan, who taught with an ethnographic approach, asked her students to become participant/observers of a subculture during the semester. Professor Ingram asked his students to choose a topic based on their curiosity, but he

also encouraged those who were unsure of a topic to concentrate on their majors or future professions, and a number of his students followed that suggestion.

While the amount of direction/prescription on student topic selection varied in these four classes, all students exercised some degree of choice. When I asked them about how and why they selected their research topics, several themes emerged. The most common theme was one of efficiency or convenience, mentioned by seven students. Ellen, for example, was placed in a group researching discrimination against children. By selecting school funding as the topic for her midsemester paper, she could use information from her previous sociology course to earn an “easy A.” Bob asked Professor Ingram and his religion professor for permission to submit the same paper for both courses, which influenced his choice of Muslim women’s religious customs as a topic. Allen did his ethnographic research at his fraternity, commenting, “I’m there anyway, I’m not doing anything, I might as well write down what happens.”

Thus, while freedom of choice in topic selection is generally agreed to be the optimum for student research writing (Ballenger, 2004; Macrorie, 1988; Reigstad, 2004), this independence does not automatically produce student engagement or enthusiasm. I would argue, however, that the students who choose a topic based on convenience or efficiency would likely do the same when given a more narrow topic choice. In some cases, as I describe later on, students like Allen discovered a more intrinsic purpose during the research process. When they established this connection to their topics, the endeavor became more satisfying, and they were enthusiastic and

engaged. In several cases, this did not occur, and students who were dispassionate during the topic selection phase completed their projects with a similar lack of engagement. I tell their stories as well in the sections that follow.

Six students used their academic majors as starting points for research topic selection, often at their professor's suggestion. For example, when Kathie could not find sufficient material relating her current major, hotel and restaurant administration, to Afghanistan, she began researching her previous major, education, and wrote about educational reform after the Taliban's demise. Sandra, a dietetics major, wrote about Muslim views on vegetarianism, while James described the educational and career choices for engineers. Susan, an archaeology major, researched the history of Tel Rehov, the Israeli site where she would complete her internship the following summer.

Some of the students mentioned above had additional motivations for selecting their topics. Sandra, a devoted vegetarian, hoped to make the case that vegetarianism be considered as "*halal*" (lawful) and not "*haram*" (forbidden). Other students also mentioned a political or personal interest that influenced their topic choice. Karl, in Prof. Ingram's class, chose to research Wal-Mart's corporate practices and their effects on local communities. He was influenced by Wal-Mart's attempt to open a store in his hometown, and he was also curious about why the chain was so successful. As he researched, he shifted his emphasis to Wal-Mart's dealings with the vendors who supply their merchandise, and how those policies have brought companies like Vlasic Pickles to the point of bankruptcy. Nancy, in Dr. Meehan's

class, wanted to know more about her father's rehabilitation from a life-threatening injury, so she accompanied him to physical therapy, chiropractic, and acupuncture sessions, and interviewed family members about his accident and recovery.

Table 3 lists student participants by instructor, with their research paper topics.

Table 3
Students with Research Topics, By Instructor

Student	Research Topic	Instructor
Ellen	reverse discrimination	Farnham
Hannah	racial profiling of African Americans by the police	Farnham
Mark	discrimination against women in the workplace	Farnham
Sam	age discrimination in the workplace	Farnham
Stacey	discrimination against African Americans in the legal system	Farnham
Zeb	discrimination against gays and lesbians in the workplace	Farnham
Bob	contemporary Muslim women	Ingram
James	engineering: the education and the career	Ingram
Karen	namedropping of fashion brands in rap songs	Ingram
Karl	Wal-Mart's oppressive business practices	Ingram
Susan	history of Tel Rehov, an archaeological site in Israel	Ingram
Allen	musicians' fraternity (communication problems)	Meehan
Leslie	university's athletic training room (athlete injury rehab)	Meehan
Nancy	her father's spinal injury and rehabilitation	Meehan
Tom	snowboarding school (focus on instructors)	Meehan
Brad	criminal justice in post-Taliban Afghanistan	Young
Kathie	education and women's roles since the Taliban in Afghanistan	Young
Lacey	opium trade and alternatives for Afghanistan's economy	Young
Sandra	Muslims and vegetarianism	Young

Student initiated topic selection is not the only key to student engagement in research writing. Later in this chapter, I describe my selection of eight topics raised in

the interviews that I selected as indicators of student engagement. In the next sections, I discuss several additional factors individually, both ways that students make connections and find meaning in their research projects, and ways they signal their “disengagement.”

Additional Influences on Engagement

Definition of Audience

S.K.: How does your dad feel about being the subject of your paper?

Nancy: He was really excited.

S.K.: Are you going to show him the paper?

Nancy: Yeah. He’s already read the first draft. He’s really excited about it.

One of the questions I included in the second student interview asked these writers to envision a hypothetical audience. I wanted to discover whether the students felt their research papers had any value or purpose beyond that of earning a grade, and if so, for whom. As the above excerpt shows, Nancy had a specific audience in mind, one she was excited about—her paper chronicled her father’s courageous struggle to recover from a spinal injury. Most students, like Nancy, had an immediate answer; few had trouble identifying an audience for their work. In two cases, students sought to inform people about a problem or political context; thus, Bob felt his paper would be most interesting to “people who know nothing about the topic.” Most students, however, identified their audiences as those who were already interested in the topic or who would receive some benefit from the information. Thus, Karl’s paper about Wal-Mart would be interesting to people “who want to

spend their money wisely.” Hannah and Ellen thought their papers about discrimination would find their audience with the oppressed, while Leslie’s ethnography about athletic rehabilitation training would attract athletes, most of whom “have been through it.”

Some students had more specific audiences in mind, and I believe this signals a closer connection to their projects, although the nature of the relationship between this well-developed sense of audience and the writer’s motivation—cause, effect, or neither—is multifaceted and difficult to pin down. Did these students feel more excitement about the research process because they had specific readers in mind, or did their enthusiasm and confidence in what they discovered lead them to a desire to share with a more real and immediate audience? Can the answer to this question be, both? I considered several examples based on the students’ interview responses.

Susan hoped an expert in the field of archaeology would read her paper about Tel Rehov, perhaps even one of the archaeologists publishing from the dig itself. Nancy, who wrote about her father’s perseverance through more than ten years of rehabilitation after a spinal injury, spoke animatedly about family members who were waiting to read her manuscript. Allen believed his fraternity brothers would be interested in his study of the organization’s communication problems, in order to get an “outside” perspective on the issues they all shared. James wanted his classmates, and others who might be considering engineering as a major, to get a realistic picture of the requirements and rewards of the profession.

Later in this chapter I include a chart showing the number of positive responses for each student using that value, based on eight interview responses that I selected as primary indicators of engagement. The four students above who named a specific, known audience for their papers all appear in the top half of that ranked list. This finding was encouraging, strengthening my inference of a relationship between engagement and a specific, invoked audience (Ede and Lunsford, 1984; Vandenberg, 1995).

“The Most Interesting Thing I Learned”: The Known-New Connection

Whether or not students were enthusiastic about their research topics, most could name at least one fact or concept they had learned during the research process that had excited or at least intrigued them. I believe that the students who spoke most animatedly about their sources and what they were learning were demonstrating a sense of connection they felt with other thinkers and writers, a connection they had built during the knowledge gathering phase of the research process.

Allen, for example, whose initial comment about choosing his fraternity as his ethnography site began with a rather neutral “I’m there anyway,” was nonetheless very enthusiastic about a published source he had discovered. When he realized he would need sources beyond the fraternity’s published artifacts, Allen decided to read John Maxwell’s *21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* (1998) to see if a business model could shed any light on the communication problems at the fraternity. Allen stepped out beyond his traditional comfort zone, since as a music major he had no prior

experience with publications in business or organizational psychology. He greatly admired Maxwell's theories about effective leadership in organizations, and he applied these ideas to the data analysis in his final paper. He remarked in our interview that Maxwell's suggestions were helping him in marching band as well. In fact, Allen was elected as a fraternity officer while working on the research project, and he looked forward to using Maxwell's ideas for inspiration in that position.

The initial key to Allen's enthusiasm was the connection he made—a connection between the *known*—information about an organization gathered as a participant-observer—and the *new*—John Maxwell's principles of effective leadership (Maxwell, 1998). Because his source discussed a general situation, which Allen applied creatively to a specific context, he experienced the spark of connecting ideas that makes research stimulating. Because he had a stake in the outcome of his research, he was motivated to try out these theories in the field, which supplied fuel for the spark ignited, of all places, in the university library.

I consider this connecting of the known and the new to be a method of scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978), and in some cases a means of theorizing. Before describing another student's journey, I want to acknowledge my source for this terminology, which was a discussion of grammatical coherence by Martha Kolln (2006). Although she uses these terms to discuss sentence-level coherence in student writing, her discussion of connecting known and new ideas was the inspiration for my own description of students' cognitive connection-building during their research. The general strategy of accessing background knowledge to make sense of new ideas

is, of course, well researched in schema theory (McVee, Dunsmore, & Gavelek, 2005) and elsewhere. Transferring new ideas to other learning contexts is also familiar to educators as a critical thinking strategy (Chaffee, 2005).

Allen went from the *known*, the fraternity where he had been a member for some time, to the *new*, an author who could help him analyze and understand the communication problems he had encountered. However, the most frequently described purpose for invoking this connection was to comprehend source authors' ideas that were unfamiliar or otherwise difficult to grasp through a connection to the familiar, and the example I found most interesting was Lacey's.

Lacey's Story

Lacey, a student in Dr. Young's class, connected known and new ideas in quite a different way to research a topic with which she had no personal connection at all—the role of opium in Afghanistan's economy, and political initiatives aiming to give the country a viable economy outside the drug trade. Lacey was shocked when she read about the Afghani people's willingness to follow charismatic leaders in the Taliban, even when their policies clearly violated human rights, dignity, and freedom. She wanted to know what could make people follow a regime “like puppets.” A reference to the Nazis in *The Kite Runner*, the novel Dr. Young's class read together, led Lacey to investigate the propaganda machine of that regime. Because it was a *known* symbol for genocide and the deadly power of propaganda, she used the context of the Nazi system and its manipulation of the public to build her understanding of the Taliban regime. She found a compelling message in one of

Himmler's speeches, in which the Nazi leader commended his aides, who had "shouldered the responsibility for action as well as for an idea," and enjoined his senior officers to "take those secrets with [them] to the grave" (Himmler, as read aloud by Lacey in our interview).

Lacey spoke about being "amazed" by this action of a highly placed official in deliberately duping the public to gain support and cooperation. She went on to find a book by Benjamin Valentino (2004), *Final Solutions*, that discussed the methods used by regime leaders to recruit followers willing to carry out acts of genocide, and the success of these charismatic leaders in gaining "the compliance or at least the passivity of the rest of society" (Lacey, research interview).

Lacey used her schema for a *known* example—that of the Nazis—to gain a more theoretical understanding of the *new* context, the Taliban's repression of society, and to make that new situation more realistic. She also learned about the social and operational phenomena that enable an oppressive political regime to survive. To achieve the known-new connection, Lacey executed a scaffolding movement of three steps. First, she moved from a *new* to a *known* example that was comparable; then she moved to a more theoretical work that described and analyzed the general phenomenon; finally, she applied the theory she had learned to the *new* context of the Taliban's regime. Again, whether her engagement with the topic was a result of this strategy, or whether it served as the encouragement she needed to search creatively, is difficult to discern. I believe, however, that her use of this *known-new* comparison, her willingness to reflect, compare, and verify, were

markers of her engagement with topic and/or task, as was the enthusiasm she displayed to me in our discussion of what she had learned.

Like Lacey and Allen, several other student participants discussed the ways they made connections during their research. The students who described these connections to me recounted narratives that described some type of victory, large or small. Sandra told me about feeling challenged when a new author presented a strong counterargument against Muslim vegetarianism, and about how she developed a strategy using other sources to address that author's point of view. Brad's story concerned his eventual discovery of a library database indexing Afghani government documents, and the difference it made to consult sources written by policy makers in the Afghani criminal justice system rather than by journalists from other nations. It was through the stories these students told that I constructed their engagement with topic, process, and text. These were not the only narratives, however. There were stories of dis-connection as well.

Tales of Dis-engagement

I have already mentioned some of the concerns students shared with me: the monotony of a semester-long thematic course focus, restrictions on topic selection, focus on details of form, grading policies. The risk involved in exposing their dissatisfaction, even confidentially, probably limited student comments regarding factors leading to their lack of connection, which I will call "disengagement." The degree of student self-efficacy and metacognitive awareness varied widely, too, so some of the most disengaged students made only superficial comments about the

course or their own motivation. Still, several participants were quite candid about sources of disappointment, apathy, and anxiety during the course, even though they were not always able to describe the effect of these concerns on their research process.

In addition to those factors mentioned above, some students were challenged to meet the requirements of the research paper assignment, which was often a longer piece than they had ever attempted before. “I realized I needed 12 pages,” Tom told me, “and [transcribing full-length interviews] was a good way to get, like, three” (research interview). Blending library sources and primary research was difficult for many students, and there was often a disconnect between the student’s perception of the problem—having enough “citations”— and the professor’s desire for a deeper exploration of a topic, which students often did not know how to achieve.

The difficulty of finding an adequate number of relevant sources and documenting them accurately was mentioned frequently in student interviews, as was the challenge of organizing source information to create a first draft. When professors encouraged or required alternate writing forms to supplement traditional discourse, some students expressed frustration with the challenge of incorporating these innovations. Adding visual elements to their projects and participating in a conference-style poster session were sources of stress for some students, but so were the detailed tasks of traditional research writing, such as completion of a Works Cited list or using parallel structure in an outline. One student whose story I will remember was Leslie, from Doctor Meehan’s class.

Leslie: A Story of Disengagement

Leslie was upset the first time we talked about her ethnography project. She fidgeted nervously, explaining that she had completed all of her prior research assignments in her high school resource room, with the assistance of tutors who guided her through the process step by step, just as they did for most of her other academic assignments. She discussed the yawning gap she felt between that setting and this sophomore English class, where she was responsible for 15 pages of ethnography supported by library research, all *on her own*.

With considerable encouragement, Leslie made use of the writing center, her professor's office hours, the reference librarians, and my assistance, and she completed her research project, so hers is a success story. Every conversation we had, though, revolved around her anxiety over the many obstacles she encountered, and her doubts regarding her own ability to overcome them. She frequently expressed this anxiety as impatience, annoyance, or frustration:

Susan K.: So, how are you feeling about [your project] overall?

Leslie: I think I'm just annoyed with it. I think I just want it to be done.

Leslie had been told all her life that she needed help to function academically, and although I perceived her as bright and capable, my praise of her progress and successes along the way made no visible dent in her representation of herself as cognitively limited and generally destined to fail. I have no doubt that Leslie had some learning disabilities, that she needed the proofreading help she eventually found to produce a coherent final draft. But she did a fine job of observing and

recording the culture of our university's athletic training room, and she responded to coaching with a complete, well-edited essay, full of the elements of dialogue and vivid description that breathe life into an ethnography.

There was little room in our conversations for enthusiasm about what Leslie was learning, and I suspected that any interest she originally had in her topic had been eclipsed by her constant fear of doing everything wrong, accompanied by a not-surprising distaste for all aspects of research writing. Still, eventually a few comments about her desire to be an athletic trainer did seep out between the cracks of her concerns. I saw a spark when she discussed her own soccer injury the year before, and how intrigued she was by the creative therapies the trainers had used, like the game she played with marbles to rehabilitate her injured toes. I hope Leslie acquired more confidence in herself through completion of her project; she will need it to coach effectively as an athletic trainer some day.

A Summary of Interview Responses Indicating Engagement

While the purpose of qualitative data analysis is to explore the phenomena of the research site and examine cases individually, cross-case analysis also considers repeated patterns and the degree to which certain occurrences are commonplaces. To get a better overview of the student interview responses in this study, I selected eight issues that all students mentioned, either in response to my questions or on their own. I chose these topics as indicators of engagement with either the course, the research process, or the composition of the research paper itself. These items included expressing enthusiasm about one's professor, about the course, and about

the research topic; having had some type of personal experience with one's research topic; considering one's own paper to be interesting; giving a reason why one's paper is interesting; being able to name at least one source author when asked; and expressing the desire to learn more about one's topic for a future paper or project. As explained in Chapter Three, I used a three-interval scale to record responses that were positive (1), mixed or ambiguous (.5), and negative (0). Table 4 shows the students and these ratings, in numerical order by the total (the final column).

Table 4
Interview Questions Relevant to Engagement in Research Paper Task

Pseudonym	Professor	Likes course	Likes teacher	Likes topic	Has personal experience with topic	Thinks his/her paper is interesting	Gives reason why it's interesting	Can name source authors	Wants to learn more about topic	Total
Bob	Ingram	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	8
Karen	Ingram	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	7
Lacey	Young	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	6
Susan	Ingram	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6
James	Ingram	Y	Y	Y	Y	(AMR)	Y	N	(AMR)	6
Brad	Young	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	6
Leslie	Meehan	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	(AMR)	Y	5.5
Sandra.	Young	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	5
Allen	Meehan	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	5
Nancy	Meehan	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	5
Kathie	Young	N	N	(AMR)	(AMR)	Y	Y	Y	(AMR)	4.5
Tom	Meehan	N	N	Y	Y	(AMR)	N	Y	(AMR)	4
Ellen	Farnham	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	4
Stacie	Farnham	N	(AMR)	N	N	(AMR)	Y	N	Y	3.5
Karl.	Ingram	N	N	(AMR)	Y	(AMR)	Y	N	N	3
Hannah	Farnham	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	3
Mark	Farnham	Y	Y	*	*	*	*	*	*	2
Zeb	Farnham	(AMR)	(AMR)	Y	N	N	N	N	N	2
Sam	Farnham	N	N	N	N	*	*	*	N	0

Notes. Y=Yes, N=No, (AMR)=Ambiguous or Mixed Response. For purposes of comparison, responses were assigned numerical totals with the following values: Y=1, (AMR)=.5, N=0. An asterisk (*) indicates that the student did not respond or did not attend the second interview..

I considered several means of grouping students represented in Table 4. In the end, considering the students with the six highest scores as a group, then the middle six, and the lowest seven resulted in a relatively even distribution, without placing students with identical total scores in different groups. Table 5 displays the average response value for each of the three groups of students, which I list with the caution, again, that these are general representations of relationships, like a map drawn for the purpose of finding one's way rather than that of gauging the mileage. I continue with a discussion of the characteristics of students in these groups, noting patterns in the distribution of scores.

Table 5
Mean Interview Responses Reported by Group

Group	Most Engaged	Middle	Least Engaged	All groups
Likes course	.67	.17	.21	.34
Likes teacher	.83	.33	.29	.47
Likes topic	.83	.75	.58	.72
Has personal experience with topic	.67	.92	.50	.69
Thinks his/her paper is interesting	.92	.83	.30	.71
Gives reason why it's interesting	1.00	.67	.40	.71
Can name source author(s)	.50	.75	.20	.5
Wants to learn more about topic	.92	.42	.50	.62

Note: For the Least Engaged group, n=7 for the items "Likes course" and "Likes teacher;" n=6 for the item "Likes topic;" n=5 for the remaining items)

Students with the Highest Number of Responses Indicating Engagement

Bob, Karen, Lacey, Susan, James, and Brad had the highest ratings for the characteristics I selected as markers of student engagement. Since there were only 8

items, there was some repetition of scores—four of the six students had six points, while Karen had seven and Bob had eight. Four of these six, including Bob and Karen with the highest ratings, were in Professor Ingram’s class. The remaining two were in Dr. Young’s class.

All but one of the participants in Professor Ingram’s class were in this group, and their comments about his course were largely quite positive. His students enjoyed the flexibility and freedom of choice he offered, which two students described as “treating [them] like adults.” He allowed his students to choose topics freely and work at their own pace, taking them to the library frequently and allowing for independent work time during class. Professor Ingram also had the gift of establishing an easy, comfortable rapport with students, who appreciated his gentle sense of humor. This relaxed pace seemed to lower student anxiety considerably, and may have had a positive influence on students’ engagement with their research projects.

As I stated above, I consider this numerical data on engagement to be a helpful way of getting an overview of the participants’ interview responses rather than the basis for any precise conclusion. Visual display is a useful way to see patterns, relationships that may not stand out in transcribed conversations or written texts. One such pattern that stood out clearly was the positive response of this group of students toward their professors and the course, especially in comparison with the other two groups.

During the interviews, most students volunteered information indicating a like or dislike of the research writing course without prompting. I also asked students in each interview session, “How is the course going for you?” and occasionally more directly, “How do you like the class?” I rated a clearly favorable opinion as 1, a mixed or uncertain response as .5, and a negative evaluation as 0. I derived and rated responses toward professors similarly. Once again, these numbers represent a rough approximation to demonstrate trends, not exact values.

The average response for the Most Engaged group was .67 toward the course, in comparison to .17 and .21 in the other groups. The Most Engaged group’s response to their professors was .83, while the other groups’ average responses were .33 and .29, respectively. The lack of satisfaction with course and instructor in the other two groups did not surprise me, nor, unfortunately, would it surprise most of us who have taught research writing at some point in our careers. The highly positive response from the six students in this group was surprising and encouraging, and I believe it had a very strong influence on the engagement these students expressed toward individual aspects of the research writing process.

I also noticed that the overall average rating (the total) that I used to group the students was borne out in most of the individual items as well. In other words, this group had more positive responses on six of the eight individual items than did students in the Middle and Least Engaged groups.

One of the two responses that deviated from this pattern came from the item “Has personal experience with his/her research topic.” Lacey and Brad, writing

about post-Taliban Afghanistan, said that they had no experience related to their topics. Both found their topics interesting, however, and both indicated that they would like to research those topics further for a future paper or project. The remaining four students in this group acknowledged some type of experience relevant to their research topics.

While all six students in the highly engaged group thought their papers were interesting and professed at least some desire to learn more about their topics, only three of the six were able to name any author whose work they had read or cited in their research. I asked participants about source authors during our second interview, when most students had recently finished their papers or were completing final drafts. The four students in Professor Ingram's class had also completed an eight-item annotated bibliography earlier in the semester, and Dr. Young's students had completed a review of literature. Some would consider this omission a symptom of the "cut and paste" approach to research in our cyber-times. However, as Nelson (2001) found, students may commodify information they read from bound texts in very similar ways.

For professional academics, a new research project offers the chance to add one's voice to a disciplinary conversation, to join a new community of thinkers, or to compare other researchers' theories with one's own. For many of our students, a research project is a task to be completed—hopefully a stimulating one, as these engaged students describe it, but still primarily a task. For many students, the ideas in a published source represent the building materials for a construction job—

available components whose proper selection and assembly will contribute to a successful finished product.

Responses of the Middle Group

Students in the middle group were members of three classes. Sandra and Kathie attended Dr. Young's class; Allen, Nancy, and Leslie were in Dr. Meehan's class; and Ellen was Dr. Farnham's student. This group was fairly homogeneous in total score (the range was only one point). Four of the six students had personal experience with their topics, and a fifth indicated a prior interest. Four of the six students liked their research topics, and a fifth, Kathie, had a mildly positive response. Still, only three of these six students had any interest in learning more about their topics, only two of the six liked their teachers, and only one liked the research writing course.

Four of these students remembered at least one author they had read for their research projects, and a fifth was able to approximate a name. I did not, however, discern any commonality in these students' responses that distinguished them from those of the other two groups.

Responses of the Least Engaged Students

Stacie, Hannah, Mark, Zeb, and Sam were enrolled in Dr. Farnham's research writing class, while Tom studied with Dr. Meehan and Karl was in Professor Ingram's class. I had incomplete interview data for Mark and Sam; each rescheduled their second interview twice but failed to attend. I did not include these two students in the total average score, but I did include their responses to individual items. Only

one student in this group, Mark, said that he liked the research writing course. Another student had a mixed response, and the remaining five indicated that they did not like the course. Mark was also the only student in this group who liked his teacher, although two more of Dr. Farnham's students included some positive comments in their (mixed) assessment of their instructor. Three of the six students responders said that they liked their research topics, however, and a fourth had a mixed response. However, they did not think their papers were interesting, and four out of five who responded could not name a source author.

Five of Dr. Farnham's participating students were in this least engaged group, and the sixth, Ellen, had the fewest positive responses of those in the middle group. As stated above, though, the large number of difficult-to-define variables and the small group of participants make generalization about this finding inappropriate. Several students in this group commented on Dr. Farnham's emphasis on accuracy in grading their work, as well as the course theme (discrimination) and the associated limits on topic selection.

Most of the students I spoke with considered their professor to be "a nice guy," but they were less positive about class activities. Dr. Farnham utilized a model-based approach, and several class periods were spent in close reading and discussion of essays written by previous students, with considerable attention paid to aspects of form. Since many students did not bring the course packet or textbook with them when readings were discussed in class, they lacked the context needed to participate. Instead, they tuned out at times, playing video games on their cell phones or simply

staring into space. Dr. Farnham provided students with detailed instructions for his assignments, both verbally and in writing, and he was frustrated when many students seemed to ignore these instructions—about as frustrated as the students were with the low grades they received. Perhaps student distraction during class, and Dr. Farnham’s teacher-centered approach, played significant roles in these results.

Two students in this group were from other classes, and in each case, their responses differed significantly from those of their classmates. Tom’s comments about his project and about Dr. Meehan’s class were quite negative, especially in our early conversations. He was not fond of the daily class activities in his ethnographically-focused course. Dr. Meehan’s teaching techniques included using crayons to mark patterns on field notes, writing found poetry from phrases copied onto Post-it notes, and drawing maps of the research process. Tom’s comments suggested that he would prefer to have much less asked of him during class. Yet he did not slump quietly in a corner of the room. Tom sat in front and was a frequent, if somewhat grouching, participant in class discussion. He entertained his classmates with well-timed wry comments and asked questions often, especially about the purpose and intent of class activities and requirements.

Like Leslie, Tom did occasionally allow his enthusiasm for his project to slip out during our interviews, almost in spite of himself. Tom’s ethnography explored workplace relationships at the ski resort where he taught snowboarding, and he told me animatedly about the “jackets on-jackets off” section of his paper, his

interpretation of the work uniform's effect on the perennial adolescence of do-or-die snowboarders.

Identity and the Risks of Engagement

I saw a very accurate picture of both Tom and Leslie in Brooke's (1988) discussion of students in a model-based composition class. Brooke comments that Clark, a student participant in his study, had a very mixed response to his professor's approach.

Instead of perceiving the activities of the class as a whole, Clark separated them and, in separating them, obscured the identity [the professor] was modeling. This separation allowed him to justify his different responses to the parts of the course . . . Such a division, it could further be argued, allows Clark to protect his sense of self while still admitting he liked the course—it keeps the elements of the course that prove useful to his “planned” life, and eliminates the elements that challenge it. (p. 33)

Brooke claims that professors and authors are the models, not the texts the students read or the ideas they contain. More recent work (Ivanič, 2004, for example, and Kamler, 2001) consider the text, or discourse, to have a powerful normative role.

In any case, both Tom and Leslie, like Brooke's (1988) participant Clark, had identities they sought to protect, even though aspects of the new identity offered to them as successful ethnographic researchers and writers had appeal as well. For Tom, complaining in class about the workload and generally playing a role that was

a cross between James Dean and Fonzie preserved his identity, keeping him too cool for school. At the same time, it was clear that Tom was enthusiastic about his research site, a snowboarding school, and enjoyed reflecting on that experience and then writing about it. He enjoyed applying his sense of humor to the manuscript and thinking about different audiences who might appreciate some of the stories he told. He very definitely did not care for the daily class activities or the rhetorical requirements of the ethnographic research report. To stay the cynical cool kid, Tom pushed away most aspects of Dr. Meehan's course, but he could not completely hide the pleasure he took in writing a well-phrased, humorous account of his life as a snowboarding instructor.

For Leslie, engagement in the course and her project would imply taking on the new identity of a successful student who could complete assignments without a team of tutors deciding when and how she would do her work. This was a scary challenge to the identity that School had imposed and that she had accepted as fact for years. To try, she had to risk failure. Also, she would have to complete more schoolwork with less help, a scenario she resisted. But Leslie also had an enthusiasm for athletic training that she could not completely conceal, and the perseverance to bring her project to completion.

Karl was in a very different classroom. Professor Ingram's class was much less structured than Dr. Meehan's, and students were welcome (and expected) to find their own best ways of putting together their research. As I mentioned above, most students enjoyed the less-structured atmosphere. Karl, however, might have been

more stimulated by the structure and daily practice Dr. Meehan's class offered. In discussing Professor Ingram's approach, he commented, "It's like stretching . . . not enough tablecloth over too much table. There's not enough there for the entire course." With little pressure to meet intermediate deadlines or show evidence of ongoing work, Karl's admitted procrastination caused serious problems as the due date for his final project approached.

Karl was clearly interested in his research topic, and had been reading about the corporate practices of Wal-Mart on his own for some time. However, he was not committed to reading sources on his professor's timeline or documenting them for accurate citation. Karl was a true inquirer, eager to build meaning into every task he performed; he was, in fact, unwilling to perform any task to fulfill an externally imposed requirement. Unlike many students who appear more engaged in this numerical summary, Karl would do nothing for the purpose of earning a grade, and barely passed his course as a result. The irony of this situation was that Professor Ingram spent considerable time and effort discussing intellectual property and the values inherent in proper documentation, as part of a personal campaign against plagiarism. Perhaps Karl could not see the web-based content he read as the work of individual writers like himself, or perhaps, as on several other occasions, Karl was absent that day.

Karl was able to accept certain aspects of the model of a research writer Professor Ingram presented to the class. He chose a topic he was sincerely curious about, and he wrote the type of voice-filled paper both Ballenger and Professor

Ingram enjoyed. He was not well prepared or particularly motivated to complete tasks that involved following schedules, guidelines, rules, or conventions. While Karl acknowledged the need for bibliographies, for example, in our conversations, he also expressed his impatience with the time conventions of academic writing required.

Only three of the six students who responded from this group had personal experience with their research topics, and none said unequivocally that their papers were interesting, although three students, including Stacie, believed that their work might interest some readers:

Susan K: Do you think it's an interesting paper? Seems like one person at least was interested [referring to her roommate, who had read an early draft].

Stacie: I hope so. I mean, it was to me but I can't say it's going to be interesting to everyone.

Stacie gave an honest, fair response here, and her qualification might certainly be due to modesty or a lack of confidence in her written voice, rather than her research writing assignment. However, ten of the twelve students in the other groups gave clear, affirmative responses indicating that they believed their papers would be interesting to other readers, while all five of the students in this group who responded either avoided the question or gave an ambiguous or qualified reply.

Conclusion

The 36 interviews I conducted with these 19 student participants paint a complex picture of how students create connections with their research projects, and of ways that they disconnect from their classes and research writing assignments as well. In the next chapter, I explore student connection, meaning construction, and engagement through analysis and discussion of these writers' completed texts, individually and in groups. I also discuss a list of characteristics I identified as possible markers of engagement in these essays, and then I consider the students' use of these characteristics, grouped according to the interview data discussed above and then by class section.

CHAPTER SIX

THE TEXTS

I undertook this research in order to explore the phenomenon of student engagement in research writing courses, to identify some ways composition students make the research process meaningful and, hopefully, discover strategies instructors might employ to help students connect with their research topics, source authors, and texts. Once I had conducted observations in four research writing classrooms, interviewed professors and students, and analyzed these data, I turned to the research papers themselves, and I discuss those texts here.

I begin with a general discussion of the professors' assignments and features I noticed in the participants' essays when I examined them globally. Next, I consider the 18 papers in greater detail, describing and comparing the essays of the most engaged, moderately engaged, and least engaged writers, grouped according to the students' interview responses discussed in Chapter Five.

Generally speaking, as I read these 18 research papers, I discovered that most of these writers had constructed their scholarly voices, rhetorical styles, citation of sources, and all other textual features to match the written, spoken, modeled, and implied directions given by their professors as closely as possible. The more specific these directions were, the more narrowly students defined their task, and the closer the resemblance among classmates' essays.

By the time these students arrived in their Research Writing classrooms, they had already learned a great deal about how to be academic achievers—or survivors. Following directions is one of the lessons most reinforced for our students, long before they reach university level (Anyon, 2004; Gatto, 2004). Their research goals were primarily expressed in our interviews as a desire to earn a high (or passing) grade, which they sought to attain by performing according to their instructor's stated and implied expectations. The selection of rhetorical features, organizational patterns, and even point of view by these writers was often a response to an actual or perceived model of a correct research paper.

Some student texts also revealed a deeper, more intrinsic engagement with topic or process that they discovered during their research—while reading, thinking, composing, or revising their texts. In a few papers, the opposite seemed to occur—students who indicated enthusiasm and interest in their topics and projects nevertheless wrote papers that contradicted or at least concealed this engagement. In the following discussion, I give primary attention to the papers that surprised me, the essays whose style or other features seem at odds with the students' reported engagement or understanding of the assignment during our interviews.

I gained additional insight into these 18 research papers when I developed a list of textual characteristics that I hoped could serve as markers to signal a student writer's level of engagement with his or her research project. I present this list of characteristics and discuss factors that may have influenced students' use of those

features in their papers, including teacher modeling, student writing ability, and past instruction in research writing.

Finally, I draw some conclusions based on these findings, which I elaborate further in Chapter Seven.

Overview of the Research Essays

I asked each student participant to bring a copy of a paper written for the research writing class to our second interview appointment. A few brought their final papers, a few brought an essay completed earlier in the course, and a number of participants forgot to bring a text to the interview. I asked students who had not submitted their final essay, the major research paper, to send it to me electronically or to give it to me after class. Most of the 19 participants were kind enough to comply. Sam and Mark turned in shorter drafts of the final essay, Zeb turned in a short research paper originally assigned as a practice exercise, and Ellen never submitted a paper at all, despite several promises to send it to me. I eventually received 18 essays in total, all referencing outside sources to some degree.

Holland (1988) suggests that our conception of a student research paper is based on three aspects of a text: content (which he calls form), text structure, genre, and syntax (formulation), and the style and appearance of the manuscript (formatting). While there was some variation in structure and content based on these professors' assignments, all of these essays were formatted fairly traditionally; they were immediately recognizable as research papers. Most were between five and 15

pages, minus the exceptions noted above. All were typed, double-spaced, with a list of works cited on the last page.

Each professor's course design, however, had some influence on the content and structure of these essays. As discussed elsewhere, the four faculty participants taught the research writing course differently, and their assignments for the final project were distinct as well. This was the first defining feature that stood out as I read these 18 papers—short or long, well-written or otherwise, each paper bore the mark of the student's attempt to match his or her professor's expectations and modeled approach as closely as possible.

Dr. Farnham's theme-based course centered on the issue of discrimination. His teaching method was traditional, employing a model-based approach, and each student was assigned to a group where speaking and writing about one specific minority was required. While students could write their final papers about a different group, most chose to use the topics they had already researched in the group for earlier projects. The assignment was thesis driven, and students had the choice of using an objective or persuasive approach in developing the thesis into a 1,200-1,500 word expository essay. Students were allowed to use personal experience in warranting their essay claims if they had relevant experience and wished to include it. However, the emphasis on published sources was clear: 10 sources were required in the final paper, most drawn from a 20-item bibliography students had completed earlier in the semester.

The formulation and formatting of the final essay were also quite narrowly defined: the first page was to present the essay's thesis statement, followed by a full outline of the essay, utilizing parallel structure throughout. Organization of the essay itself was also discussed in class, accompanied by presentation of exemplary models for effective introduction, conclusion, and body paragraph construction, blending of quoted and paraphrased content, documentation, punctuation, and other textual features. As expected, the five papers from Dr. Farnham's class were formal in style and maintained scholarly distance, although some students expressed passionate responses to injustice.

Dr. Young's theme-based class centered on the history and culture of Afghanistan. The assignment for the final paper stressed incorporating a careful analysis and comparison of source authors' perspectives with a thoughtful response of the student's, in order to achieve Dr. Young's goal of "joining one's voice to the voice of others" (class discussion). This emphasis was discernable in both the content of the essays—with most students following the professor's suggestion to relate Afghanistan to their academic majors—and the structure, where analysis and comparison of source authors was a common approach. Three of the four students from Dr. Young's class wrote papers that were quite traditional, formal in style, while one writer addressed her audience in a more conversational mode. In terms of format, Dr. Young required the eight-to-ten-page essay to begin with an abstract on the title page. To show students what she wanted, and she presented models to the class illustrating correct documentation and presentation style.

Although Dr. Meehan did not define a theme in terms of content, she focused on a common genre, ethnography based on site observation, itself a norming contextual focus—that is to say, her formulation of genre imposed certain guidelines on topic selection and development of the writers' ideas. The students read and discussed published ethnographies, and they completed ethnographic field notes and interviews at a research site, in addition to locating and reading relevant library sources. Like Dr. Farnham's and Dr. Young's students, Dr. Meehan's students had access to models of successful papers through a course packet their professor had compiled.

For the final paper, Dr. Meehan's students completed a 15-page ethnography as part of a research portfolio, which showcased student-selected “working materials” and self-evaluative reflections as well as the essay itself. In contrast to the traditional expository style usually taught in research writing courses, Dr. Meehan's approach emphasized the narrative focus of ethnography: dialogue, vivid description, temporally-anchored narratives, and a focus on specific, observed details. Dr. Meehan's required format included a table of contents and section headings. She instructed students in the art of writing provocative section titles, and her students' essays reflect her call for creativity.

In Professor Ingram's class, students also submitted a portfolio, which included evidence of their field research (observation, survey, and interview notes), a research proposal, and a self-evaluation, along with the final paper, an eight-page “research report.” Professor Ingram imposed no other requirements for the topic,

style, or genre of the final essay, so it is not surprising that the participant essays from his class showed more diversity of topic and content than essays from the other three classes. The five essays I read by his students also varied considerably in style and voice—some were formal in tone, others more relaxed and conversational, and one was quite uneven, as though James, the writer, was attempting to find his own voice, but was unaccustomed to using it in a research-based assignment.

Discussion of Student Essays

Essays of the Highly Engaged Group

The category of most engaged students (again, based on their interview responses as described in Chapter Five) includes Bob, Karen, Lacey, Susan, James and Brad. Five of the six students said they liked their research topics and their professors, and thought their papers were interesting to read. Yet I did not see evidence of this engagement in the first places I looked. For example, three of these writers used stilted language, language that indicated the students did not trust their own voices or perhaps did not feel free to express themselves naturally in this type of assignment. I discuss two of these cases here.

Clearly, previous training in research writing and lack of skill were factors in the writing these students produced. Still, it was surprising to read emotionless prose like the following from students who had indicated enthusiasm, interest and engagement when discussing their research projects. Bob wrote:

Muslim women do not have an easy life. They have always had a hard living for themselves. Even with all the reform their [sic] has been, and the

westernization in all the countries they still don't have an easy life.

Throughout time their lives have slowly become better. They have fought long and hard to get to wear [sic] they are today. Only with more time will they get more freedom. . . . In time they will truly be considered equals to everyone. (pp. 9-10)

Bob's overgeneralization, short, choppy sentences, and basic vocabulary suggest a shallow understanding of his topic, an immature mind, or perhaps an apathetic view toward the task. However, these assessments are not borne out by the quality of the 10 sources he cited in his paper, nor by the interest he expressed in our interview conversations. In fact, Bob answered every engagement-related question enthusiastically during our interviews, praising his course and teacher as well as indicating satisfaction with his own research paper. He had a higher number of positive responses than any other student in the study. By the time we had discussed a discrimination case that Bob had researched about the freedom to wear Islamic garb, his interview of an art professor about her Islamic faith, and his own observation of Palestinian women during a trip to Israel, I expected to read a thoughtful, complex analysis of the plight of Muslim women under repressive regimes.

But Bob's writing throughout nine-plus pages remained stilted and superficial. He reported on his published sources, informant interview, and travel with the broadest possible brush, often omitting parenthetical citation, in passages like this:

The revolution in the 1930's was one for modern reform. The rights of women increased during this time. The status that women had just received was seen as the new modernity of the state. It showed that the state was coming into the time with the rest of the world and that the country will be run separate [sic] from the religion. (p. 6)

Was he rushed, reduced to skimming his sources and padding his prose to reach the eight-page minimum length for the assignment? After hearing Bob speak thoughtfully about his research both before and after completing his paper, I could not draw that conclusion. Was this simply an issue of poor writing skills, as his faulty grammar and choppy sentences would suggest? Clearly, Bob needed training in revision—building complex sentences, for example, and bringing the sophistication of his spoken discourse into his written voice.

But the weakness in this essay runs much deeper than surface errors, or much shallower, since the substance is missing. I have used the word “engagement” throughout this dissertation to suggest interest and meaning-making by student research writers. Bob exhibited that engagement in our discussions, but it was almost nowhere to be found in his essay. He never engaged, never dove into any issue he introduced, preferring to dogpaddle through nine pages of generalizations and platitudes. I was left with two questions to ponder. First, why did Bob think he had done such a good job, despite all evidence to the contrary? And second, why did he fail to risk true engagement in his writing? Before considering these questions further,

I wanted to compare Bob's essay with the one written by Susan, a classmate and another highly engaged research writer.

Susan's essay described the history of an Israeli archaeological site, Tel Rehov. Her language and style could not have been more different from Bob's. Her previous English courses at the university had been honors seminars, and she had developed and written extended research papers for those classes as well as for honors courses in other subjects. Susan's prose was competent, articulate, and carefully documented. Here, for example, is a passage typical of her style and tone throughout:

Radiocarbon dates from timber in Stratus V place the felling of the trees in the tenth century BCE and it is unlikely that the structures they were used to build would have been built over one hundred years after the felling of the trees. It is therefore likely that the pottery found in Stratum V, which matches the assemblages in question from Jezreel, Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer, dates from the middle to late tenth century BCE and supports Mazar's suggested chronology (Mazar, "Dates"). (pp. 7-8)

The overly formal, encyclopedic prose of Susan's essay, reinforced by overuse of the passive voice, keeps the reader at a very remote distance from the subject matter, a distance that has nothing to do with the time period or geographical location of Tel Rehov. It is this detachment, at such odds with the writer's passion for her topic, that links Susan's sophisticated archaeological treatise to Bob's immature summary of the plight of Muslim women.

Susan, like Bob, was very enthusiastic about her project during our interviews. She spoke animatedly about what she had learned, but her paper did not communicate this excitement to her audience because she wanted her paper to sound professional. As I mentioned in Chapter Five, she hoped archaeologists at Tel Rehov would read the paper during her upcoming summer internship at the site. Therefore, she tried to use what she perceived as the voice of professional archaeological publications, even at the cost of surrendering her own voice completely, and robbing her text of the passion that would bring the dry bones of her prose to life. In our interview, Susan talked animatedly about her telephone interview with Dr. Mazar, and the pleasant surprise she felt at hearing his very human perspective on archaeological research. She had enjoyed his descriptions of the friendly banter between himself and another expert at the site, especially the way they joked about their competing theories of Iron Age chronology. Humanizing the research at Tel Rehov brought archaeology to life for Susan. Still, she feared that sharing the same human spark with the readers of her essay would diminish its chances as a serious contribution to the literature of her future profession. She chose the identity of archaeologist—her future goal—over that of the personal-voiced writer her professor modeled.

Three of the highly engaged students wrote research papers that conveyed more of the passion and purpose they expressed in their interviews. I discuss two of them here. Brad, a student in Dr. Young's class, wrote an especially compelling analysis of the criminal justice system in post-Taliban Iraq. Brad, like Susan, wrote a

formal, well-crafted essay that demonstrated both solid research and competent writing. He also issued a powerful appeal, stated boldly in passages like this one:

It is up to America and the other nations of the world to put the pieces of the broken country back together and build a strong governing body on which the legs of criminal justice system can stand. (p. 1)

Again and again, Brad called the United States and other concerned nations to intervene and establish justice in the wake of the Taliban. He chose specific, compelling examples from his sources to justify the action steps he suggested for judicial reform:

[M]any citizens of Afghanistan are worried by the presence of warlords in a majority of the rural areas of Afghanistan (Samar & Nadery 2005). Private armies patrol these areas and are virtually out of the range of control of the United States. Samar and Nadery state that “Afghans want a special court established to ensure that war criminals and other human rights offenders are prosecuted” (Samar & Nadery 2005). The warlords of Afghanistan and their injustices must be either eliminated or regulated to guarantee that democracy is truly granted to the people of Afghanistan. (p. 3)

Brad’s essay demonstrates the power of an engaged writer communicating a clear purpose with skill and passion. Brad is a criminal justice major whose respect for justice predated his compassion for the people of Afghanistan; however, a semester’s reading and writing about the struggles of the Afghani people led to a deeply felt concern for Afghanistan’s future, an engagement he expressed in our

interviews. Brad is more analytical than emotional; he stated his case by presenting a political chronology and a suggested future course of action—backed up by judicial and governmental records and statistics—rather than the personal accounts of Afghani citizens some students chose. His message is clear and uncluttered, presented through effective exposition and argument; his very personal commitment echoes powerfully throughout the paper. This caring concern, coupled with his skill as a writer, led to a powerful, effective text, a result that neither Susan's skill as a writer nor Bob's personal experience in the Middle East could achieve.

As I read, analyzed, and lived with these essays and what they could tell me about student engagement in research writing, I began to associate certain textual characteristics with writer engagement. There were also red herrings, however. After comparing Susan's and Brad's essays, I was tempted to believe that voice and engagement were less evident in essays that were not thesis-driven, or at least those that did not put forward an argument. Could a student's "curious itch" alone (Macrorie, 1988), without the momentum of argument, produce an expository text that would demonstrate the engagement of the writer? Or would exploratory, informative papers appear less purposeful, even when a student had the type of motivation Susan demonstrated in our interview? I wondered whether taking a position on an issue might be a key characteristic of engaged source-based research writing, regardless of scholarship to the contrary (such as Ballenger (2004) and Heilker, Allen, & Sewall (2004)).

Karen's paper helped me address these new questions. Karen, a student in Dr. Ingram's class, bubbled with enthusiasm in our interview conversations, perhaps because she had selected a research topic based on her academic major, fashion merchandising. She chose to explore name dropping, the increasingly frequent practice wherein creative artists accept payment in return for mentioning the names of fashion designers, alcoholic beverage brands, etc. in their song lyrics and music videos. This was the topic she discussed in our interviews; her finished essay included other instances of media participation in the fashion industry.

Although she was sometimes tentative about composing and revising her manuscript, Karen was confident when discussing name dropping, which she had researched primarily through popular culture sources. Her paper, while not as skillfully written as Brad's, nor as profound in its analysis, still included a strong authorial presence, even though Karen never took a position for or against the practice of name dropping. She might have strengthened her paper if she had chosen to do so, and if she had narrowed her focus to name dropping alone and added a deeper level of analysis. Still, the text contains a strong voice, and Karen expresses her commitment to the topic in several ways. For example, she uses techniques of participant/observation to describe the impact the series *Project Runway* had on her and her roommate:

I myself became addicted from the first episode. Wednesday night's [sic] at nine o'clock sharp my world completely stopped to ensure I didn't miss a minute of each episode. . . . My roommate and I would pick our

favorite designers and predict the winners for each episode as well as for the overall show. By the final episode I had become so caught up in the excitement that anxiously clutching a pillow, occasionally screaming out exasperations or cheers and even jumping around became typical behavior for that hour. (p. 2)

Karen also used techniques of the personal essayist in the Montaignian tradition, sharing philosophical reflections on her own fashion decisions, first as a consumer:

I don't go to the extreme of trying to stand out for attention; I just don't want to wear the same Abercrombie & Fitch or American Eagle clothing that everyone else is. Don't get me wrong, I do own apparel from these companies but very little. So in response to the topics of media influences on the fashion world I have covered, I have to say I feel I'm more influenced by fashion magazines and things that are actually going on in the couture world than what is in the stores or movies. (p. 6)

then as an aspiring designer:

[W]hen I'm designing clothes for myself, I typically do not pull my ideas from any media sources. The way I design is from the feelings and visions I get from the particular fabric I'm choosing to use. Whatever comes to mind from touching it, the way in which it drapes, and color of that fabric is what I draw my ideas from. Every once in a while, I might create something

from an inspiration, but I know in this industry if I want to make it, I've got to be able to come up with my own ideas that somewhat stand out. (p. 6-7)

Karen never directly opposed name dropping, or the general media trend blurring the lines between advertisement and entertainment. But as the above passage indicates, she understood the manipulative intent of these propaganda techniques and saw them as incompatible with creativity and true self-expression, at least in her own case. Her passion for fashion is evident in these examples, demonstrating the engagement she communicated in our interviews. This engagement is felt despite the weakness of her neutral and rather superficial conclusion, which nonetheless hints at what was missing in her analysis:

This [research] may not have taught me an abundance of new information but it did help me to realize the dependency of fashion on media as well as the co-dependency of the nation as a whole and the fashion industry. Without one or the other where would we be today? As a [sic] head forward into my career I think I'll do so with more of an open eye to what is going on in the entertainment business. (p. 7)

Most of Karen's sources were drawn from popular media: fashion magazines, fan websites, and commercial fashion sites. This information was appropriate for her topic, but did not provide her with any help in developing a critical perspective on media involvement in fashion. When she did cite an analytical source, the information was inserted into the text in a rather disjointed way, rather than functionally or coherently. I discuss this weakness in greater detail in the next section,

so I will simply note here that it is symptomatic of the larger problem in Karen's essay—a failure to find and effectively use scholarly sources that might have stimulated critical thinking and led her to a deeper level of analysis. This analysis would probably have helped Karen grow in her consciousness about media influences in a larger sphere, and would have strengthened her written voice and her essay as a result.

Essays of the Moderately Engaged Group

The six student writers in the moderately engaged group included all four of the participants from Dr. Meehan's class (Allen, Leslie, Nancy, and Tom), and two of Dr. Young's students (Kathie and Sandra). As noted in Chapter Five, the moderately engaged students differed from the highly engaged mainly their negative responses toward the research writing course (five of the six students) and/or toward the instructor's approach (four of the six). Most moderately engaged students said that they liked their research topics (five of the six) and believed their papers would be interesting to read (four of the six). However, only two of the moderately engaged students indicated a definite interest in further research on the same topic (compared to five of the six highly engaged). Because the responses that divided these two groups were not primarily related to their research topics, I was interested to see whether there would be much difference between their texts and those of the more highly engaged writers.

Allen, Leslie, Nancy, and Tom, from Dr. Meehan's class, wrote ethnographic essays based on a combination of site observation, interview, and library research.

None had previous experience with ethnography, and the how-tos of field research occupied a much larger role in the semester's activities than they did in Professor Ingram's class. By the time they drafted their final essays, these students had been coached in the power of detailed descriptions, sensory images, and dialogue in ethnographic writing, as well as traditional research writing skills such as paraphrase and source documentation.

As I indicated in Leslie's story (in Chapter Five), much of her negative response to the course came from a lack of confidence in herself as a writer and thinker. I wondered whether I would see evidence of this fear of composing in the text itself. Perhaps there would be a reluctance to draw conclusions, a superficial approach to her topic (athlete rehabilitation in the university's athletic training facility), or a lengthy retreat into the safely distant passive voice. While Leslie's analysis did lack depth, I saw frequent evidence of her efforts to follow her instructor's directions and communicate the real story of her research site using ethnographic tools. Practicing the writing techniques her professor had taught, Leslie wrote this vivid scene of an athlete's injury on the field:

Amanda receives the ball and takes it up the field for a break away. All she can hear is the crowd cheering . . .

"Beat them with your speed!"

Two aggressive defenders breathe down her back trying to prevent her from scoring. Without any thought but winning, one of the defenders slide tackles her from behind, which forcefully knocks her down taking her legs

from beneath her. A popping sound, pain, the referee's whistle blows. Here it is. The moment she has dreaded as an athlete, an injured ankle. She tries to stand up, but her ankle throbs. She falls back down to the ground as tears begin to fill her eyes. As she looks up, the first person she notices is one of the athletic trainers who has come running onto the field. (p. 1)

Leslie's descriptive essay lacked the critical analysis that would have given it more direction and purpose, even though Dr. Meehan had encouraged her students to use a critically conscious lens in preparing their research reports. Still, scenes like the above brought me close to the terrifying moment of an injury on the field and the high stakes of college athletics, where scholarships and professional careers can be crushed as easily as ankle bones and shoulder joints.

Whenever Leslie told a story, I found that I connected with her through the text. However, when she paraphrased source information about sports rehabilitation, she seemed to vanish from her text; the essay lost vitality as her prose became stiff and encyclopedic. This effect was more pronounced when quoted and paraphrased material appeared unexpectedly in Leslie's paper, neither introduced nor integrated into the surrounding discussion:

From 8 a.m. to 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. to 12 p.m., [the university's] Athletic Training room is dedicated strictly to rehabilitation. *The goals of rehabilitation are to restore strength, motion, and functional ability, and to eliminate pain, swelling and instability. Traditional strengthening exercises will restore most of the strength to the muscles around the injury (Flegel).*

After the athlete has come in the morning during treatment hours, athletes return in the afternoon to get taped, wrapped, braced, and in most cases athletes will get another round of treatment. (p. 5, italics added)

Leslie inserted Flegel's general comments about the goals of athletic rehabilitation in the middle of a specific description of the university's policies and procedures, without a signal phrase, introductory comment, or explanation. As a reader, I found the uncued shift in perspective confusing. The net effect of several of these "parachute drops" of source material was a loss of coherence and an absence of the writer's voice linking the source material to her own text. As a researcher, I know that Leslie did not understand the importance of introducing source authors to her readers. However, if I had not been aware of Leslie's struggles with the formulation of academic discourse, I would have suspected this problem to be the result of carelessness, incompatible with an engaged effort to construct a meaningful, communicative text.

Allen's and Nancy's papers shared this weakness as well. Coherence suffered when these writers incorporated content from published sources into their own texts. Both of their essays contained passages that appeared to have landed suddenly, in the middle of paragraphs with some slight lexical or contextual tie to their subject, but without any real semantic connection. I suspected that these students were so concerned with the new challenges of ethnographic data collection that they did not focus on library sources until they were well into the drafting of the finished essay.

Professor Meehan is well aware of this issue and has cautioned her students about sprinkling citations carelessly throughout an essay “like salt and pepper” (personal communication, 2006). She also informed me that the university’s Liberal Studies faculty has discussed weaknesses in students’ use of sources, since other professors have observed similar problems with coherence in their students’ papers. Dr. Meehan added that the sample essays in *Fieldworking* (Sunstein & Chiseri-Slater, 2004), her course textbook, contain few citations from published sources, so the models students follow do not encourage them to consult relevant professional literature.

While awkward placement or integration of source material does not always signal a lack of student engagement, writing that interprets and reacts to information cited from sources does relate positively to engagement, since it is a constructive act of meaning making. Sandra, a student in the moderately engaged group, wrote about the religious implications of vegetarianism for Muslims. She demonstrated a commitment to her thesis not only by explaining her own decision to be a vegetarian, but also by responding to the authors she had read and comparing their positions with her own, as in this passage:

In his article “Feeding the Children of Abraham: Islam and Vegetarianism,” Robert Tappan points out that “there can be no doubt that animal use is condoned by the Qur’an” (Tappan 1). Yet, when the text is looked at more in depth there is an indisputable “teaching of kindness and concern for animals, teachings that may indicate Muslims need to take

another look at the animals they eat nowadays” (Tappan 1). For instance, butchering of animals in factory farms is unethical and not compassionate, so should Muslims choose to go without them? It is quite possible this may be the case. Tappan looked at Allah’s words, and found that the text has “a view of animals that shows them not merely as resources, but as creatures dependent on God, organized into social groups . . . [and] engaged in the active worship of God” (Tappan 2). The Qur’an seems to contradict itself here; yet, what it is preaching is a call for the humane treatment of animals, no matter if they will be used for food or not. (p. 4)

Sandra placed herself, that is, her authorial voice, right in the middle of her text, and she interpreted the voices of other writers from there. One of the ways she accomplished this was by referring to source texts as ideas belonging to human writers—people who held opinions and defended them, people she could question and engage in dialogue as she clarified her own position. This active conversation is even more appealing to the reader when contrasted with the “parachute drop” approach to the use of cited material found in papers of student writers who are less skilled, less careful, or in some cases, less engaged. As noted earlier, Professor Young encouraged students to evaluate and compare the ideas of source authors boldly.

Tom, like Leslie, was less than positive about Dr. Meehan’s class, though for a different reason. He did not enjoy academic writing, and was especially dissatisfied with the daily in-class practice activities, which he criticized often with a quick and sardonic wit. Tom readily discussed his desire to earn a passing grade with minimum

effort, letting me know during a tutoring session that he was “the kind of student who is happy with a C.” His essay was sharpened in places by the same wry sense of humor he shared with his classmates and instructor, but contained softer elements as well, especially when Tom discussed his love for snowboarding, and in this passage, where he recalled his reaction to the other instructors who befriended him:

Going into this job I totally thought it would just be like any other job but on snowboards. I thought it would be like a business and have those artificial work friends that you are friends with only at work. Boy was I ever wrong about that. . . . I found myself hanging out with these people weekend after weekend, on and off the mountain. Shark even spent the night at my house a couple of times. It had to be one of the funniest things I have ever seen when I saw 39 year old Shark playing beer pong with a bunch of kids in their 20's as I had a small get together when my mom was out of town.

(p. 10)

Passages like the one above and some of the conversations I had with Tom convinced me that his enthusiasm for snowboarding was genuine. Nevertheless, Tom was apathetic and at times dismissive when discussing the tasks required to complete his ethnographic project. He did not, to my knowledge, follow suggestions to look for additional sources on related topics, for example, when he could not find the requisite number of articles or books on snowboarding. He did select and frame cited text appropriately from the two published sources he included, as this passage illustrates:

It occurred to me that this was going to be more than just a job and these people were going to be more than just snowboarders. In my research I found an article that said *Snowboarding is a lifestyle more than a sport.* (Neil) That phrase really started to make even more sense after meeting all of these people. (p. 10, italics in original)

Despite the articulate writing he displayed in this passage, when Tom reported on his interviews with co-workers, he transcribed their remarks verbatim and repeated his questions in each case, without any synthesis or analysis. When I asked Tom why he had transcribed his interviews verbatim and did not write anything about their content, he replied, “I needed 12 pages, and I knew this way I could get three.”

The uneven quality of Tom’s essay, with source information quoted out of context in some instances, yet skillfully integrated in others, with thoughtful reflection in some sections and a lack of analysis in others, resulted from a lack of engagement with his course and with the process of academic research. As an interviewer who had promised Tom confidentiality, and an observer in his classroom, I used background information to reach this conclusion. However, even without this context, Tom’s paper offered an important clue: he had demonstrated that he *could* integrate source information effectively, reflect on his experiences meaningfully, and present his data in an organized way, and yet, he did not consistently do so.

Essays of the Least Engaged Group

The least engaged group consisted of seven students, all of whom answered fewer engagement-related interview questions positively than did other participants. However, one of these seven students did not turn in an essay, so I considered only six for this chapter's discussion. Five of these six attended Dr. Farnham's class; I begin my discussion with the essay submitted by the sixth—Karl, a student in Professor Ingram's class.

As discussed in Chapter Five, Karl's essay, "The Wal-Mart We Know and Love," concerned a topic he had researched on his own for some time. He completed an annotated bibliography, surveyed the public, and wrote an astute, entertaining essay that was both an expose of Wal-Mart's corporate practices and an analysis of the store's consumer appeal. However, Karl included only one parenthetical reference in his paper, even though many of the facts he reported had clearly originated elsewhere. He did not submit a works cited list, and his paper fell one page short of the minimum length for the assignment. As a result, Karl, an excellent writer who had expressed a clear message to a well-defined audience, very nearly failed his course.

Karl was able to use source information effectively, as he demonstrated in this excerpt from his reference to a detail from his survey data:

I am not proposing that all shoppers should take a hit to the wallet in order to vanquish this retail giant. Let it be known, you can get Wal-Mart sized prices at other stores. You just need to work for it. I interviewed a twenty-five year

old, working, married man who does not shop at Wal-Mart to get his groceries and everyday needs but still keeps a tight budget. What I asked him how he accomplished this seemingly impossible task, he replied “We cut coupons every weekend. My wife and I wait till the things we need go on sale at Giant Eagle and then we buy them. If we need something that isn’t on sale, Giant Eagle offers triple coupon discounts.” What they essentially have done is sacrifice a little convenience for a Wal-Mart par price. (p. 6)

Karl’s essay, like Brad’s plea for judicial reform in Afghanistan, issued a call for action to its readers. However, where Brad introduced source authors to his audience and added their credibility to his message, Karl failed to credit most of his published sources. As he explained in our interview, he had read widely but had no record of where most of the facts he recalled had originated. He was also an admitted procrastinator, so it was very late in the process when he finally accepted that he would have to tie specific points in his essay to the original sources where he had read the information.

Karl’s description of the negative effects a proposed Wal-Mart would have on his own hometown demonstrated his personal commitment to the issue. His observations of other towns nearby, where local businesses and traffic flow were indeed harmed by Wal-Mart stores, warranted his claim. However, the authority with which he grounded his ideas was diminished by the lack of published sources and documentation.

Karl was committed to his thesis—of that I have no doubt, and on that ground he was certainly as engaged as Brad and other students in the most engaged group. He was, however, much less committed toward the scholarly conventions of research writing and therefore unwilling to meet even Dr. Ingram's minimal requirements for academic discourse. Undocumented sources in a student's research paper can signal any number of problems—lack of confidence in expressing one's own ideas, lack of effort or time, lack of skill. In Karl's case, his disregard for the conventions of academic style and the authority of published authors led to a loss of his own credibility in a text that, otherwise, slung some stinging blows against a low-price, high-cost corporate Goliath.

The other six participants in the least engaged group were in Dr. Farnham's class (Ellen, one of the six, did not submit an essay for the study and is not included in this chapter's discussion). While most of Dr. Farnham's students were cooperative about selecting topics within an instructor-selected research area, as they were in Dr. Young's class, these students were less enthusiastic toward their projects overall when compared with students in the other three classes. Only two of the five said that they liked their topics, only one had personal experience with her topic, and none thought their papers were interesting.

As discussed in Chapter Four, Dr. Farnham sees Research Writing as a gatekeeping course and a preparation for graduate level research, and he sets his requirements accordingly, acknowledging his discomfort with the more relaxed

standards of today's composition programs, particularly in their acceptance of poorly edited prose and inaccurate documentation.

Considering this context, I was especially interested in determining whether these students' essays would convey a sense of engagement to the reader. I found that most did not. All of Dr. Farnham's students expressed concern for the accuracy that they knew their professor required to assign a high grade, and I occasionally felt this anxious scrutiny in the stiffness of the formal prose I read. Mark, for example, wrote

The Age Discrimination in Employment Act took effect in 1967 as an amendment to the Fair Labor Standards Act. This law protects workers over the age of 40 from decisions being made on firing, hiring, pay, promotions, or transfers on the basis of age. The ADEA only protects workers who works in places were the staff is over 20. The only states that protect under 40 workers are Vermont, and Virginia. (p. 2)

Most of these traditional, thesis-driven research papers were similar to others I have read by English composition students over the years. Each paper opened with a general statement framing a territory of research, presented sources one after another to support a thesis, and maintained a formal, rather neutral tone throughout most or all of the text. There was some variation in writing ability, however.

Sam and Mark were clearly challenged by the demands of the assignment; like Bob, Dr. Ingram's student from the highly engaged group, both Sam and Mark used a very basic level of vocabulary and sentence structure; in addition, their

accuracy in proofreading and source documentation were inconsistent. The repetition in Sam's essay also suggests some difficulty in reaching the 1,200-word minimum for the assignment. Stacie, Zeb, and Hannah turned in essays that were more coherent.

For most of these writers, across coherence and skill levels, the identity and authority of source authors receded into the background of their texts, while the quoted or paraphrased material was emphasized. These writers made frequent use of the passive voice, avoided signal phrases, and did not compare the perspective of one source author to that of another. The effect was a sensation of distance—a vast breach between writer and audience, and between writer and source authors as well. Neither did they comment on author bias, despite Dr. Farnham's emphasis on critical analysis—except, that is, for Hannah.

Hannah's essay, "Portrayal of Blacks in the Media," was an exploration of racial profiling. Hannah, a reporter for the student newspaper on campus, had come to the university from the Caribbean and described herself as being "of African descent." Assigned by her professor to the group investigating discrimination against African Americans, she found the issue of related personal experience to be complex and uncomfortable. Hannah told me, "I wouldn't say I really had any [related] experiences to say. Sometimes it feels that way but I don't really like to put it in the papers, because that's really personal." While Hannah did not tell stories from her own life, she did address her audience very personally, in a series of compelling

rhetorical questions like the ones in this passage, which discusses the media depictions of four youths suspected of murder:

Why are these four boys illustrated differently if they all committed murder?

Does one's race justify the crime that he commits? To illustrate, there was no mention of Derek and Alex King being handcuffed. However, the emphasis was placed on their emotional state. Is the news media implying something to its public? (p. 4)

The journalists writing the accounts Hannah analyzed for racial bias were not discussed individually in her paper, and were only identified in parenthetical references. Hannah's comments about their reportage always referred to "news coverage" or "the news media," as in this excerpt:

However, the news media constantly highlighted [Andrea Yates'] suffering from postpartum depression whenever they discussed the killings of the Yates' children. Did the news media intentionally emphasize Andrea Yates' depression to suggest that she was innocent of murder? It is clear that the journalist of the following article is portraying Yates as a victim of mental instability which developed after giving birth to five children Would the news media claim an African-American woman as mentally ill, if she had committed the same crime? (p. 5-6)

Hannah's rhetorical questions reached for and successfully established a link with her audience. Her distaste for the biased coverage she encountered makes her decision to maintain distance from source authors understandable. However, by

painting “the news media” as one anonymous body, referring to even the individual writers she quotes as “the journalist,” she replicates the acts of overgeneralization and stereotyping she condemns, in her own accusations directed to all members of her future profession.

Characteristics of Student Essays Suggesting Engagement

In order to learn more about writer engagement as reflected in these student essays, I needed more than close analysis of these texts could teach me. I needed to back up and to be able to see the texts more clearly in relation to each other, and as a group. I therefore created a list of characteristics that I determined to be associated with student engagement, and coded the essays to record the number of times these features appeared. I hoped my analysis of this data would allow me to accomplish several goals:

- to discover whether these characteristics appeared more frequently in the essays of students who expressed a high level of engagement in their interviews than in those of other participants, and to discern patterns in the characteristics these writers used most
- to suggest models for the development of engagement that might explain variations between a student’s reported engagement and the extent of his or her use of these characteristics in the research paper
- to draw a conclusion as to the usefulness of this list of characteristics as an aid in assessing and describing student engagement in research-based texts

As discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three, I developed this list of characteristics based on general discussions of student engagement in research writing, Ballenger's (1999) survey of student research writers, and my own felt sense (Perl, 2004) of the features I have seen over the years in the research-based texts of committed, engaged students.

The list consists of 20 specific writing features, grouped into six categories. Five of these six categories refer to features indicative of a writer's connection to the topic, a specific issue, or a source author's idea; the sixth group identifies language features that appear to distance the writer from his or her topic, source author, or audience, suggesting a possible lack of engagement or connection. The list of characteristics, organized by category, appears below. A description of each of the six categories appears in Chapter Three. The complete list of characteristics, with explanations and examples from participants' essays, appears in Appendix E.

List of Characteristics Related to Engagement

Note: Categories I – V list characteristics whose presence suggests writer engagement. The characteristics in Category VI suggest a lack of engagement, creating distance between writer and topic, source authors, or audience.

- I. Expression of opinion regarding issue or controversy
- II. Evidence of engagement with source
 - a. Explanation/interpretation of source-based information
 - b. Reaction/evaluation in response to a source
 - c. Comparison of source author opinions or value systems
 - d. Sympathy or aversion expressed toward subject of research, author of source, or issue being explored
 - e. Selection of source material with powerful impact
 - f. Insider talk (jargon)
 - g. Narrative (per instance, not per sentence)

- III. Reflection on research process
 - a. Discussion of thesis or essay development
 - b. Expression of challenge or satisfaction in finding sources or information
 - c. Mention or discussion of learning, progress, or intellectual growth in understanding experienced during the research and/or composing process

- IV. Markers for voice
 - a. Pronouns (“I”, “We”, “You”)
 - b. Appeals to audience
 - c. Word choice showing intensity, creativity in thought

- V. Evidence that student interacts with source authors as people, rather than research texts as commodities
 - a. Signal phrases
 - b. Discussion of source author’s position or beliefs
 - c. Juxtaposition of opposing authors as persons with different views

- VI. Neutral Forms
 - a. Passive voice where ambiguity results
 - b. Neutral language
 - c. Vague phrasing

I labeled the student essays with the alphanumeric code for each characteristic wherever it appeared, looking at each sentence as a unit. That is, I coded a characteristic only once per sentence, but I did count other characteristics in that same sentence if they were present. Table 6, below, displays the tally for each characteristic, as well as the total number of characteristics appearing in each essay.

Table 6
Occurrences of Characteristics in Research Papers Related to Writer Engagement

Student & Prof.	Essay Length (pages)	Inter-view Engage-ment	Characteristics (See Page XX for List of Characteristics)																			Total of Cate-gorie s I-V¹	
			Characteristics Suggesting Writer Engagement																	Characteristics Suggesting Lack of Engagement			
			I	IIa	IIb	IIc	IId	IIf	IIg	IIIa	IIIb	IIIc	IVa	IVb	IVc	Va	Vb	Vc	Via	VIb	VIc		
Tom Meehan	10	4	74	7	27	0	24	1	5	9	4	2	6	82	3	59	13	5	0	6	0	1	328
Allen Meehan	13.5	5	58	8	38	6	15	6	11	2	0	2	4	52	1	38	19	23	0	6	0	0	282
Nancy Meehan	15	5	30	15	15	3	14	3	13	3	0	4	8	27	8	47	14	15	0	2	1	3	219
Karen Ingram	6.5	7	38	11	10	7	25	4	8	0	1	2	5	43	5	48	8	1	0	1	0	2	216
James Ingram	12	6	34	16	2	1	3	7	2	2	5	0	14	53	30	18	12	3	0	2	4	4	202
Karl Ingram	6	3	35	6	2	4	17	0	2	2	2	0	1	36	26	53	3	1	1	0	0	0	191
Sandra Young	5	5	31	16	9	5	17	8	1	0	13	4	7	16	6	19	15	5	0	4	2	0	178
Kathie Young	8	4.5	37	27	13	2	11	8	0	0	2	1	3	4	0	20	19	7	0	1	0	0	154
Brad Young	8	6	50	5	3	3	9	4	3	0	0	0	0	9	8	34	11	11	2	1	0	0	152
Lacey Young	8	6	23	4	10	1	4	13	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	19	33	1	0	1	0	0	111
Hannah Farnham	6.5	3	24	0	17	6	13	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	21	0	9	2	0	0	4	110
Bob Ingram	9.5	8	33	27	18	5	3	0	0	1	0	0	0	5	1	11	2	1	0	9	0	0	107
Susan Ingram	9	6	10	8	1	2	0	0	13	6	0	0	0	3	4	15	7	4	2	10	11	0	75
Leslie Meehan	11.5	5.5	13	0	3	0	11	1	2	2	0	0	0	2	0	11	3	1	1	3	0	0	50
Stacie Farnham	5.5	3	17	6	1	0	3	4	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	11	0	0	0	1	0	2	45
Mark Farnham	3	2	13	0	4	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	11	3	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	35
Zeb Farnham	1	2	10	1	2	0	6	1	0	0	0	1	0	4	3	4	1	0	0	0	1	0	33
Sam Farnham	4	0	4	0	2	0	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	6	3	8	4	1	0	7	0	0	33

1. Category VI measures characteristics suggesting a *lack* of engagement. Thus, these characteristics are not included in the total of engagement characteristics

2. Zeb submitted a short essay originally assigned as a classroom exercise (one typed, double spaced page).

Limitations of the Instrument

One variable that affected the reliability of these numerical data was the length of each student's essay. Although a range in word or page count was specified by each professor, the length of the finished essays varied considerably, often outside those ranges. The essays varied from Zeb's very short source paper to Nancy's 15-page ethnography, although 13 of the 18 essays were between five and twelve pages long. All of the essays were double spaced, using standard 12-point fonts and similar margins.

Table 6 shows that the number of characteristics used by these writers varied from a low of 33 to a high of 321. The shortest essays (five pages or less) ranged from 33 to 171 characteristics, while papers that were 10 pages or longer included 50 to 321 characteristics. I considered basing my analysis on the average number of characteristics per page, to minimize the effect of these differences in length. However, I soon realized that the structure of these essays would skew any measurement that treated all pages of a paper as equal. Most papers contained introductions and conclusions of similar length, regardless of the total length of the essays. Furthermore, most student participants, especially those enrolled in the same class section, were addressing objectives that were similar in scope, using similar numbers of sources, for example, even though some were more concise and others more extensive in their approaches to the task.

The length of each paper did affect the total number of characteristics students used to some degree, especially for characteristics that recurred frequently in

the essays where they appeared. For example, three students used first and second person pronouns over 50 times in their essays. All three of those essays were at least 10 pages long. To help compensate for the effect of variation in length, I have included a page count for each essay (to the nearest half page) in Table Four. As the following sections demonstrate, only the three shortest papers differ from the others in a way that seems attributable to their very short length (1-4 pages). Even among those essays, both Zeb's one-page essay and Sam's four-page paper contained the same number of characteristics, so other influences were at work in those essays as well.

In addition to differences in length, several subjective factors affected my precision in the coding process. For example, "vague phrasing" (VI-c), was a challenging characteristic to quantify. I suspect that many composition instructors would say along with me, "I know it when I see it." I compiled written descriptions and examples for all categories to increase consistency (see Appendix XX). I also reviewed my results more than once and discussed my list of characteristics with a colleague trained in discourse analysis. However, like any instructor commenting on a student's essay, I cannot guarantee that I would mark the identical passages as examples of vague language, given unmarked copies of these essays a year from now.

While noting the caveats above, I believe these data are consistent enough to support several observations regarding student research writing, especially in triangulation with the other data I collected in this study. I begin discussing these

essays in groups based on my assessment of student engagement in the interview data. However, as the subsequent section reveals, I was led to group the essays differently in the process of looking more deeply at this information.

Engagement-Related Characteristics and Their Use, by Engagement Group

Based on the students' interview responses, I had previously grouped Bob, Karen, Susan, James, Lacey and Brad as highly engaged writers. They all expressed motivation for their projects, they thought their papers were at least somewhat interesting (James gave a mixed response), and all but one (Susan, an honors student in her first non-honors section) liked their instructors and the course.

As I have already discussed, some of these students did not write the essays our interview conversations and my classroom observations had led me to expect. My surprise increased when I saw the total number of characteristics in their essays. I had expected a strong relationship between the number of engagement-related characteristics appearing in the essays and their interview comments regarding engagement. When I considered the average use of characteristics by group, however, a pattern emerged. These data are displayed in Table 7.

Table 7
Average Number of Engagement-Related Characteristics Appearing in Student Essays, Grouped According to Student Interview Responses

Characteristic	Highly Engaged Writers	Moderately Engaged Writers	Minimally Engaged Writers
I	31.3	40.5	17.16
II-a	11.8	12.16	2.17
II-b	7.3	17.5	4.67
II-c	3.16	2.66	1.83
II-d	7.3	15.3	6.67
II-e	4.3	4.5	2.67
II-f	4.5	5.3	.5
II-g	1.5	2.67	.33
III-a	1	6.3	.5
III-b	.33	2.2	.16
III-c	3.17	4.7	.16
IV-a	19.2	30.5	9.83
IV-b	8.0	3.0	7.67
IV-c	24.16	32.3	16.5
V-a	12.17	13.83	1.33
V-b	3.5	9.33	1.83
V-c	.67 (4)	.16 (1)	.5 (3)
VI-a ¹	4.0	3.67	1.33
VI-b ¹	2.5	.5	.33
VI-c ¹	1.0	.67	1.0
Avg. Total for Categories I-V	143.5	200.7	73.5

¹The characteristics in Category VI seek to measure a writer's distance rather than engagement, so the most engaged writers would, in theory, use *fewer* of these characteristics.

The papers written by the moderately engaged students (based on their interview responses), when considered as a group, contained higher numbers of

almost every characteristic than did the texts of highly engaged writers. Furthermore, the characteristics in Category VI, those I had negatively associated with engagement, appeared *less* frequently in essays by the moderately engaged students, continuing the trend. In other words, almost every characteristic showed a relationship between the essays of the highly and moderately engaged groups that was the exact opposite of what I had expected to find.

Only the essays of the least engaged group contained these characteristics in the pattern I had expected, and some of those essays were so short (three of them were four pages or less) that I was not comfortable inferring much about their composing process or their engagement based on this finding.

Searching for Patterns in Student Use of Engagement-Related Characteristics

The results displayed in Table 7 were not only surprising, they were disconcerting. I immediately wondered whether student participants had been forthcoming in our interviews, although I was comfortable with the trust we had established during the weeks I spent in their classrooms. Next, I revisited my list of individual characteristics and the data in Tables 6 and 7. Had the results been truly random, I would have questioned the design of my list. However, Table 7 demonstrated that there was a relationship of some type between these groups of students and the decisions they made about using these characteristics in their papers. Clearly, I was measuring something—I just didn't know what.

As I examined these data again, I noticed that when I ranked the list in Table 6 by the total number of characteristics in each essay (using Categories I – V only),

rather than by student engagement as demonstrated in the interviews, a very marked relationship emerged. Students in the same class sections were clustered together. I had noticed a similar tendency in the interview results as well, but I had attributed it to students' level of satisfaction with their course and instructor. I had expected that the students who were most engaged would use these characteristics more frequently, and I planned to discuss the instructional methods in their classrooms when drawing implications for pedagogy.

But what would make *less* engaged students include *more* of the characteristics associated with interest, motivation, confidence, and constructive involvement in their texts, when compared to other writers who were more positive about their research writing experience, as well as more confident in themselves as writers? As attached as I am to valuing individual writers and their individual stories, these students were responding similarly in groups, and I needed to look at them within these groups to know why.

Instructor Influence on Student Use of Engagement-Related Characteristics

When I added instructor names to the information in Table 6, the pattern instantly became clear. Table 8, below, displays these data in an abbreviated form.

Table 8

Student Use of Engagement-Related Characteristics, Listed with Instructor Name and Interview Grouping

Student	Instructor	Total Number of Characteristics Used (Categories I – V)	Engagement Based on Interview Response
Tom	Meehan	321	Moderate
Allen	Meehan	283	Moderate
Nancy	Meehan	219	Moderate
Karen	Ingram	216	High
James	Ingram	202	High
Karl	Ingram	191	Low
Sandra	Young	172	Moderate
Kathie	Young	154	Moderate
Brad	Young	152	High
Lacey	Young	111	High
Hannah	Farnham	110	Low
Bob	Ingram	107	High
Susan	Ingram	75	High
Leslie	Meehan	50	Moderate
Stacie	Farnham	45	Low
Mark	Farnham	35	Low
Zeb ²	Farnham	33	Low
Sam	Farnham	33	Low

As Table 8 indicates, most student participants who were classmates used similar numbers of engagement-related characteristics in their essays. Most interestingly, the three students whose essays differed most from this pattern were those I had noted as unusual, those whose stories I have already told in the sections above or in Chapter Five. I will review their stories briefly here in light of this

numerical data and will then discuss the remaining 15 essays by class section, looking at instructional approaches which may have influenced students' use of engagement-related features in their research papers.

Leslie, Bob, and Susan: Uncharacteristic Research Writers

Leslie, from Dr. Meehan's class, was intimidated by the very thought of writing a research paper on her own, since she had always depended on the intensive tutoring and resource room assistance she had received prior to entering college. Her ethnography, which dealt with the university's rehabilitation of injured athletes, was a major accomplishment but still a work in progress. She had difficulty locating and then integrating appropriate material from published sources, and her lack of confidence showed up in the essay as a lack of voice—whenever Leslie cited source material, her own voice and purpose seemed to disappear. So it was not surprising to see that her use of the characteristics in categories I – V was quite low, since many of these characteristics relate to voice and the creation of a meaningful connection between source authors, writer, and audience. Leslie used 50 characteristics in her 11-page paper, while her classmates' totals ranged from 219 to 321.

Bob and Susan were in Professor Ingram's class, and I discussed their essays in sequence earlier in this chapter because both students were confident in their skills as research writers and pleased with their finished papers, yet their essays did not match the enthusiasm and commitment they expressed in our interviews—for very different reasons. Bob's essay on the political realities of Muslim womanhood was

hobbled by its very basic vocabulary, generalized approach, and lack of critical analysis, despite Bob's hard work investigating primary and secondary sources, including an interview and reflections on a trip to Israel. Bob was still a developing writer; weakness in syntax, vocabulary, and mechanics also affected his use of the characteristics I counted, especially in categories IV (voice) and VI (neutral language), where vocabulary skills and appropriate use of the passive could make a difference. Bob used a total of 107 characteristics.

Susan's essay, on the surface, appeared to be more fully developed than Bob's. There were very few mechanical errors, and the text displayed the writer's obvious comfort with the lexicon of archaeology, Susan's future profession. The essay's historical summary of the Tel Rehov region had the coherence and technical competency Bob's paper lacked. However, in her attempt to write a professional paper directed to an audience of archaeologists, Susan gave her essay neither the life of a human voice nor the momentum of a stated thesis or purpose. Her nine-page paper contained only 10 instances where she expressed her own opinion (I), while her classmates' essays ranged from 33-38 examples of that characteristic. Avoiding the expression of her own opinion, while using the passive voice and neutral language more frequently than her classmates, were elements in Susan's attempt to appeal to her specialized audience.

Susan's exaggeratedly formal perception of professional writing, like Bob's immaturity as an academic writer and Leslie's fear of source-based writing, demonstrates how confounding factors distorted the picture I finally saw emerge, a

picture in which teacher modeling was very definitely in the foreground. I will next attempt to paint that picture, both numerically and in words.

Characteristics and Classrooms

Chapter Four provided an extended description of each professor's classroom and teaching philosophy with reference to research writing. Only in reconsidering this numerical data in the light of instructor influence did I come to see how important the professor's approach can be as an influence on student writing decisions, even at the level of word choice in some cases. .

The three essays containing the highest total number of characteristics from my list were written by Tom, Allen, and Nancy, students in Dr. Meehan's class, with totals of 321, 283, and 219, respectively. Dr. Meehan's students wrote ethnographic reports based on site observation, participant interview, and library research, guided by the model ethnographies and essays in *Fieldworking: Reading and Writing Research* (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2002). They also had access to model essays and detailed descriptions of assignments through a course packet.

Dr. Meehan led her students through a variety of creative class activities, many designed to train them in the arts of reflection, vivid description and self-expression. Perhaps these activities led to Tom, Allen and Nancy's comfort with storytelling (II-g) and using creative language for emphasis or humor (IV-c). These students also showed particular strength in their use of characteristics that involved stating one's own perspective and taking a stand within one's text. They were fluent in expressing their own opinions (I), discussing source authors' positions on relevant

issues (V-b), and evaluating and comparing sources (II-b, II-d), especially their own research participants from the field. These students also included more instances of questionable use of the passive voice than most students in other classes, which appears to be contradictory to the points just mentioned but did not greatly detract from the sense of presence, of writer embodiment that I experienced reading these essays. Perhaps most importantly, these writers established a visible presence in their texts (IV-a and, again, I), with considerably more use of first and second person points of view than did writers from other classes. Again, Dr. Meehan and the authors of *Fieldworking* encouraged this perspective, presenting it as a primary feature of ethnographic writing.

Students from Dr. Ingram's class wrote the next three essays in sequence. Karen, James, and Karl were very differently motivated, based on their interview responses, but they were quite close in the total number of characteristics used in their essays, ranging from 216-191. This surprised me initially, since during the weeks I spent observing Dr. Ingram's class, I did not hear him assign or advocate any one specific writing style or aim. He did assign primary research during the first half of the semester, including an interview and a survey, and ask students to include some of their findings in their research papers. He also offered students an "alternate genre" option, though none of the students participating in my study chose to use it.

Still, since this professor gave students free rein in topic selection and few directives in terms of format or style, I was surprised to see that three of the five essays by Dr. Ingram's students used these characteristics in similar ways. This was

even more noticeable since one of these writers, Karl, was disenchanted with his project, the course, and academic writing in general, while Karen and James were motivated, excited about their papers, and pleased with their professor and course.

Before examining these characteristics, I had formed an impression of Dr. Ingram's class as the one in which students were most independent in designing and composing their research projects, a setting where I could observe a discovery-learning approach to the research paper, at least to some degree. In fact, since the pattern of individual characteristics these three classmates used differed to some degree, I might have considered Karen, Tom, and Karl's similar totals to be a coincidence, or perhaps a commonality in the type of student who would volunteer for a study like mine. I might have considered these similar totals for student essays from the same class to be of little importance except for one thing—the clustering of totals for essays from each of the other classes as well, a clustering I attribute to the explicit messages those professors shared with their students about voice, authority, epistemology—and appropriate styles for research writing.

I wondered whether less explicit messages about the kind of writing Professor Ingram valued could have influenced his students. Perhaps his explicit teaching, which encouraged students to find their own Way of research writing with his support, was compromised by a covert curriculum modeling a specific approach as the recommended style for a successful paper. The categories Karen, James, and Tom used most in comparison with other students were similar to those Dr. Meehan's students favored: expression of the writer's opinion and use of the writer's

distinctive voice (I and IV). I found three clues to the origin for these preferences, most significantly the course textbook, *The Curious Researcher* (Ballenger, 2004).

Ballenger drew a distinction between the “informal research essay” and the “formal research paper,” pointing out that the essay, in the tradition of Montaigne “is often openly subjective and frequently takes a conversational, even intimate, form” (p. 11-13). Ballenger’s model research essay, a reflection on “The Bothersome Beauty of Pigeons” (p. 16-23), is faithful to this tradition and to that of the I-paper (Macrorie, 1988), the research writing model that clearly influenced Ballenger’s own approach. Like Macrorie, Ballenger invited students to embody their own work, showing up in the first person and narrating some of the interesting moments in their research journey, within the essay itself. I saw a strong foundation in Ballenger’s text for construction of research essays rich in the characteristics these students used most, features I included in categories I, III, and IV (expressing an opinion, reflecting on one’s research process, and using the writer’s voice).

In addition to the model essays presented in their textbook, Professor Ingram distributed an article via e-mail that contained a research essay. Karen described that essay and its influence on her writing this way:

[Professor Ingram] sent us an article to read and it was like showing a way in which this woman wrote her paper and used a lot of her personal experiences and just all kinds of stories to prove her point and show her research. So I tried to write a couple of paragraphs that had to do with myself, but I don’t know where I want to put them (interview).

The third clue I noted to Professor Ingram's influences on student writing style and tone is more anecdotal in nature. Months after I had collected these data, I found myself in a meeting with a group of colleagues, discussing qualities of student writing and the influence our own taste can have on our evaluation of student work. Ed Ingram smiled somewhat sheepishly and said to the group, "I have to admit, I enjoy reading a paper with voice." And don't we all?

Before leaving this discussion of Professor Ingram's students, I want to return briefly to Susan's paper, the very formally written history of Tel Rehov. Ironically, given the context above, Susan's attempt to take on the neutral and rather distant voice she associated with the professional literature of archaeology, despite the instructional emphasis in her classroom on a "personal voice" approach, presented very strong evidence of engaged, independent writing. Although her paper's didactic content gave no clue to the passion she felt toward her topic, she, more than any of her classmates, took a risk by writing for an audience beyond the classroom, composing a historical summary relevant to the research community she planned to join.

The four essays composed by Dr. Young's students appear next highest in sequence, based on total engagement characteristics used. Sandra, Kathie, Brad, and Lacey's essays contained 172, 154, 152, and 109 total characteristics, respectively. These essays represented the mid-range in use of the characteristics I had identified with engagement, both by virtue of these totals and by the distribution of the individual categories. Dr. Young's students read two books about Afghanistan as a

class—Hosseini’s novel *The Kite Runner* (2003) and Mamdani’s *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (2004). As Dr. Young explained, “we notice that in the academic scholarly book a professional researcher uses citations, uses other sources, making knowledge, and working with the other non-academic text [they] make their own knowledge.” Students build on this foundation by selecting a research topic within the broader territory of Afghanistan’s history, current events, and culture. By the end of the semester, each student has composed a short paper based on the common readings, a review of literature, a bridge essay, in which they develop the topic for their final paper, and the final essay itself, an 8-page summary/analysis of published sources, although students may also conduct interviews in the course of their research.

For Dr. Young, successful research writing “makes room for other people’s words, and is daring enough to talk about them.” Accurate summary and paraphrase is a goal in her classroom, and students have several opportunities for guided practice in these skills. Dr. Young presents model essays to the class often from past semesters’ papers, pointing out strong moments and less successful passages to the class. While she considers voice an important aspect of research writing, she points out that voice does not have to be expressed as an emotional reaction on the page. “That’s walking away from your sources,” she tells her students. Professor Young teaches her students to read carefully, making certain they have understood each author’s position and paraphrased it accurately before adding their own response.

Thus, it is not surprising her students used signal phrases more effectively

than others (V-a), and expressed their own opinions frequently about the issues they discussed (I). Although these four students were motivated for different reasons and to different degrees, although they wove connections between their sources in very different ways and varied in maturity as writers, the way they used these characteristics pointed to an underlying thread of similarity not apparent in a superficial reading of their texts. These students used fewer of the characteristics I had selected as markers for voice than Dr. Meehan's and Professor Ingram's students—fewer first and second-person pronouns (IV-a), fewer appeals to the audience (IV-b)—with Brad a notable exception, and fewer instances of creative language (IV-c). I wondered whether the lack of personal experience or connection with Afghanistan made the difference, since Meehan's and Ingram's students were writing about more familiar contexts. The styles of writing modeled in the course clearly played a major role as well.

Still, from Sandra's informal discussion of vegetarianism and Islam to Brad's sophisticated use of *pathos* in his appeal for judicial reform, to Lacey's solution-oriented analysis of the opium trade, these students did use their voices effectively as they explored aspects of contemporary Afghani culture. They took control in their essays, as they interpreted and explained source material (II-a), selected effective passages to quote within their text (II-e), and committed their own views to the page (I), an especially courageous act given the challenging territory they explored—the cultural and political reality of a post-war nation none of them had seen.

The five essays written by Dr. Farnham's students contained far fewer

characteristics than others, with one exception. Hannah's exposé of racial profiling in the media, discussed in more detail above, contained more than twice the total number of characteristics as her classmates' essays, especially in categories I, II, IV, and V: Hannah expressed her opinions confidently, engaged with sources through critical evaluation of their biases and motives, and delivered powerful, fact-based and emotional appeals to the reader.

Stacie, Mark, Sam, and Zeb all used less than 50 characteristics in their essays. While Stacie's paper was five and a half pages long, the other three were quite short, which had some influence on the totals. However, when I looked at the average number of characteristics per page for all participants, Stacie, Mark, and Sam still showed a significantly lower use of these characteristics than most other students. Zeb, meanwhile, demonstrates the difficulty with an analysis based on average characteristics per page. Zeb's one-page argument against homophobia contained 33 characteristics, and while he did express his own opinion (I) and react in response to source information (II-b) more than Stacie, Mark or Sam, his use of the other 17 characteristics was similar to theirs; however, the average number of characteristics per page for those three essays ranged from eight to eleven. Had Zeb expanded his paper using the critical lens he began to develop here, he might have created a more effective, persuasive argument for compassion and fairness, with some of the critical consciousness and writer's voice several classmates did not achieve. As is, I could not apply this type of analysis to his work with any validity.

Dr. Farnham's students received a greater number of models of effective

research writing than the other participants, and these models occupied a more prominent place in his classroom than in the other three. More class and homework time was spent reading and discussing published and student essays, and Dr. Farnham emphasized their importance regularly as a helpful guide to use while planning, composing and revising. Class analysis of model essays by past students, the main type of model-based discussion I observed, focused on organizational, syntactical and mechanical features rather than on content. Perhaps this emphasis, along with the low engagement students in this class reported, produced the lower use of these characteristics, particularly in categories II (engagement with source content) and V (interaction with source authors within one's text). The short drafts I received from Mark and Sam reflected their struggle to produce a full-length research paper meeting the requirements for the assignment.

Based on our conversations, I would attribute this to a lack of writing skill and the commonly experienced dislike for academic writing with which many students enter the research writing course. This lack of engagement, coupled with an emphasis on accuracy in the instructor's grading system, led to diminished participation and practice during the semester, and thus little improvement in the end result. Dr. Farnham clearly cared about his students and offered support and assistance while demonstrating the traditional, professional standards he expected in their work. However, the lack of progress in these students' writing is much more the rule than the exception in college-level research writing courses (Davis & Shadle, 2000). The remarkable observation here is not so much the lack of enthusiasm in

this class, which is an unfortunate commonplace in research writing classrooms, but rather, the instructional approaches and learning strategies that professors and students have developed to overcome this phenomenon. These findings demonstrate that teachers and students can create engagement in students who come to us so prepared to dislike and detach from their research writing assignments.

Categorical Comments

Categories III and VI, which measure writer reflection and neutral language, along with Characteristic II-f (insider talk), merit some brief individual comments before I conclude the discussion of these characteristics.

Most of these students were asked at some point to reflect in writing on their research process—where they felt successful, which methods of organizing source information were helpful, where problems arose, which information from peers was useful, and so forth. This type of written reflection was required in either mid-semester projects or the final research portfolio by three of the four professors, but was only stressed as an element within the research paper itself by Professors Ingram and Meehan. Most students in those two classes included reflective comments within their essays at least three times (see Category III in Table 6), with Bob and Susan the exceptions. Kathie and Sandra, in Dr. Young's class, also included characteristics from this category.

These eight students had the highest overall use of characteristics (the total of all categories counted). However, the majority of these participants, 10 of the 18 total, referred to their own process or learning once or not at all within their papers,

and these 10 used fewer characteristics overall as well. While it might be tempting to correlate this result with writer voice or engagement, I believe each instructor's modeled view regarding metacognitive reflection within research papers had a greater effect.

Category VI, Neutral Forms, grouped characteristics that might lessen clarity and connection between writer and audience, such as ambiguous use of the passive voice, vagueness in references, or expressing ideas in excessively neutral terms (for specific examples, see Appendix E). In some cases, use of these features might express a writer's reluctance to commit to a point of view or to claim ownership of one's ideas. I initially considered the presence of these characteristics to be a negative marker of engagement, and they are labeled in this way within Table 6. There was no relationship between students' stated level of engagement and their use of these characteristics, however; in fact, I saw little or no pattern in the frequency of their use. Perhaps students use these formal patterns of language as a function of automaticity--however strong the intention to follow the instructor's lead, however specific to the writer's voice most of a text is, the fact is, traditional academic discourse still sounds a lot like this, and occasionally we do too.

I found Characteristic II-f, Insider Talk, to be problematic. Initially, I thought it would be a useful marker of a student writer's comfort level with the discourse of his or her research territory or topic. In fact, I saw that frequent use of specialized terms could also represent a lack of comfort, since paraphrase or interpretation might be more of a challenge than depending on the exact terminology used by source

authors. It was interesting to note Tom's use of snowboarding terms or Bob's casual references to Islamic women's garb in the Middle East, but in the end, I could not see enough consistency in the use of insider talk to draw any conclusions about the writers' intentions.

Models of Writer Engagement

As I pondered this lengthy examination of students' research papers, I was impressed by the degree to which all of us cling to our ideas of what a text should do and be. A poem should (or should not) rhyme, a journal article should present findings definitively but hedge (perhaps) in drawing conclusions, a dissertation should be expository, English should be written in standard edited American form, and on and on. Almost all of these student writers were faithful to their understandings of what a research paper should be, and, to the degree that their skills permitted, with the help of models, executed that conception consistently throughout their texts.

In several cases, this schema of what research writing is, and is not, was developed in high school or earlier. For these students, new approaches such as writing in the first person or critically evaluating the ideas of a published author fell outside their definitions of a research-based assignment and were difficult to assimilate. In most cases, however, this conception of a college research paper came from the student's professor, who, after all, represented the expert research writer and who were also the judges of their performance and dispensers of their grades.

Chapter Seven considers the questions I originally began with, offers an

explanation of how my primary emphasis shifted during the study, offers a model of engagement and attempts a detailed justification of the model. The chapter concludes with implications for professors, students, program directors, and theorists, along with suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Conclusions: Addressing the Research Questions

Two years have gone by since Jeannine Fontaine and I began discussing this research topic, and it has been over a year since I spoke with the professors and students who participated and who welcomed me into their classrooms. Still, it is challenging to step back far enough to gain an overall perspective on these findings. I am reminded of my increasingly frequent presbyopic search for the right distance from a printed page; when I consider the participants in this study and their teaching, learning, and texts from close up, I lose focus squinting to see details. Move everything away, and the details become tiny, the distance too great for a clear view. To adjust my vision and perspective, I returned to the questions I started with, considering also the ways some of those queries have changed along the way.

The research questions I initially developed explored several issues I considered indicative of problems and their solutions within research writing instruction. In those questions, I defined several terms rather narrowly, particularly “personal experience” and “voice.” As I read, observed, and analyzed data from this study, my definitions of those concepts grew to accommodate the realities of students, classrooms, and teachers, and I saw other influences on student engagement and meaning construction emerge, factors that I had not thought to ask about. Thus, my focus shifted significantly, along with my definitions of several key terms in the questions below. In the following sections, I respond to these questions

with, hopefully, a fuller understanding of these concepts and, more importantly, of research writing professors, students, and texts.

The Professors

My first group of questions concerned each professor's openness toward students' personalizing their research topics by including autobiographical narratives, using a first-person point of view, and perhaps deviating in style from formal academic discourse.

- How do professors of research writing view student engagement in research assignments? More specifically,
 - do professors believe that they assist or encourage students to include personal experience and a personal voice in research writing assignments? If so, how?
 - What perceptions do they believe influence their approach to personal experience and voice in student-authored texts?
 - How do professors view personal content when included in research writing assignments? How do professors say that they respond to such content?

To address these related questions, I first have to confess that my definition of “personal” was very narrow when I initially asked this question, and both Dr. Young and Dr. Fontaine were extremely helpful in broadening my awareness.

I began with a very psychological view of the personal. I considered

personal writing to be confessional, emotional, and very “me-focused.” I would now define personal writing as any text that has an intrinsic value for the writer, that engages the writer’s thoughts, passions and/or emotions, that awakens the writer to new, intriguing ideas. Thus, Susan’s essay on archaeology, while written in a formal voice that appeared extremely distant and impersonal to me, was actually extremely personal to her, since it revealed her perceptions of the discourse of archaeology, her future profession.

Dr. Young encouraged her students to take a stand within their essays by asserting their own opinion or argument and daring to disagree with published experts rather than yielding automatically to their age, academic credentials, or published status. Sandra and Brad, in particular, rose to this challenge admirably; taking this sort of risk is extremely personal. Meanwhile James, in Professor Ingram’s class, wrote about his process of career selection as he described the requirements of an engineering degree and the challenges of the profession. His point of view and voice shifted frequently as he wrote, probably because he was unaccustomed to describing reflective thoughts and emotional responses within a research-based text. This, too, was very personal.

Dr. Farnham challenged his students to expand their spheres of awareness and empathy by reading and writing critically about the social realities of discrimination. For Hannah, who researched racial profiling in

journalism, her future career, the research project was extremely personal, although she never referred to her identity as a woman of color or a reporter for the school newspaper in her formal, expository prose. Likewise Nancy, Dr. Meehan's student, chose to refer to her father by his given name in her ethnography, but this did not diminish the personal nature of her research into his physical and spiritual rehabilitation from spinal injury.

I would now say that all four of these professors encouraged their students to engage in the course and to look for a "personal" commitment to their topics and projects. In Dr. Meehan's and Professor Ingram's classes, this personal commitment was more inner-focused, inviting students to reflect on their own growth as they completed their projects. Dr. Young and Dr. Farnham helped students expand their sense of what mattered to them "personally" by taking a caring interest in people they might previously have identified simply as Other. Dr. Young, in particular, asked the writers in her class to take a stand and state a claim rather than retreating into the background of their own texts or deferring to any academically published opinion, making very personal commitments to their ideas.

When I originally asked these professors about their response to "personal" content in student work, I used a specifically autobiographical interpretation of the term, and they all responded positively, indicating their openness to students' telling their own stories if they chose to do so. Dr. Young also pointed out that developing control over when and how to

express an emotional reaction within source-based writing is also the mark of a maturing writer.

The next group of questions addressed the daily classroom practices employed by these professors, and their perceptions of the role those instructional practices played in student engagement.

- How do the practices of professors seem to relate to their stated positions in this regard? Specifically,
 - if professors of research writing feel that they encourage student engagement, how do their syllabi, course materials, and classroom practice reflect this?
 - How do professors say they develop topics for assignments in research writing courses, if instructor-designed topics are used?
 - How do professors say they explain and facilitate topic selection if students develop their own topics for research writing assignments?
 - How do professors respond to assigned writing from sources when personal experience is included? How do they evaluate the writing?

The limiting preferences and assumptions I held when I formulated these questions are apparent to me now. I assumed that student-selected topics and the inclusion of autobiographical content were necessary ingredients for student engagement. The results of this study indicate that for

many students, selecting one's own topic and including an autobiographical focus do indeed increase engagement. It is equally clear that there are many additional ways of encouraging student engagement, including collaborative practices, conferencing, attention to content in grading, student-centered class activities, and useful, hands-on library instruction.

The professors in this study expressed a range of opinions about their success in encouraging student engagement. Dr. Meehan was concerned about the barrier of library research to students' achieving engagement in their research, so she increased the number of common readings her class discussed. She selected articles many students would be able to add to the bibliographies for their own projects, as a useful intervention in an area most of her students perceived as a challenge. She also included the class in decisions about revising deadlines, grade distributions, and other management issues when they arose in class. She encouraged students to become involved at their research sites and to share successes, problems, and surprises with their peers in class, hoping to foster a sense of community participation. The nature of participant/observer research and the ethnographic report in themselves encourage engagement because they require immersion, focused observation complete with sensory detail, time commitment, empathy for research participants, and other types of involvement from the researcher.

Dr. Young's classroom practices sought to establish and encourage a

community of scholarship in which students were engaged as knowledge seekers and critical thinkers. She employed panel discussions, peer review, model essays and common readings to encourage thoughtful group engagement with source authors and their ideas. Dr. Young also scaffolded written assignments, with a bridge essay in the middle of the course especially designed to increase confidence and engagement at a point in the semester where attrition in research writing courses typically occurs. She saw her theme-based course as an opportunity for building layers of knowledge as the students progressed through the course.

Of the four faculty participants, Dr. Farnham expressed the least overt concern with stimulating student engagement. He was committed to student progress and offered his class numerous instructional aids, especially in the form of models. His choice discrimination as a course theme also reflected a desire to facilitate his students' research. He explained in our interview that in the many years he has been teaching this course, there has always been an abundance of current sources on this topic in a variety of media. Like the other three instructors, Dr. Farnham was available to check rough drafts during conferences, so students had the opportunity to receive feedback before receiving a grade. He was particularly interested in stimulating critical thinking and comparison of sources, and used class discussion to accustom students to this method of connection with source ideas.

Dr. Farnham believed in the value of consistent, daily practice—he

checked attendance and used it as a significant portion of the semester grade, he offered extra exercises when he detected areas of weakness in student texts, and he frequently asked students to write during the class and then shared small excerpts of student responses with the group.

Professor Ingram encouraged engagement through efforts to stimulate his students' curiosity about their topics and about the world around them. Taking his cue from their textbook (Ballenger, 2004), he frequently discussed topics he was interested in with the class, modeling intellectual curiosity by sharing the questions that occurred to him as he recounted these unusual phenomena. Ingram also encouraged creativity in student work, and he accepted artwork, media products, and other "alternate genre" forms as elements in students' final project, bringing in students' talents and accommodating various learning styles. The relaxed atmosphere in Professor Ingram's classroom reflected his philosophy of student engagement as well. Students were permitted to work independently with brief, general guidelines, and their results were usually shared in class discussion or conference.

Approaches to topic development and topic selection varied among these instructors. The two instructors who taught theme-based courses, Drs. Farnham and Young, required topics related to these themes but also provided for some individual choice. Dr. Meehan's students had approximately the same degree of restriction in selecting a topic, since they needed to locate a research site where they would be able to gain access and

observe a subculture. Dr. Ingram gave students the most free rein in topic selection, asking only that they choose a topic in which they have a genuine interest. Drs. Young, Ingram, and Meehan also encouraged students who were searching for research topics to explore their academic majors. Hence, Brad, a criminal justice major in Dr. Young's class wrote about the reestablishment of the Afghani criminal justice system, while Sandra, a nutrition major, researched vegetarianism in the context of Muslim dietary laws.

All of these professors indicated that they accepted examples and/or stories of personal experience within student research papers. Drs. Ingram and Meehan particularly encouraged students to reflect in this way. The general consensus was that these sections of a student paper would be evaluated in a fashion similar to other textual content, although ethnographic and inquiry-based research, as methods, do encourage and preference reflective writings within research reports.

The Students

The next group of questions I asked at the outset of this study focus on the student participants drawn from these four classes:

- How do students become engaged in their research writing courses and assignments?
 - How do students select topics for research-based assignments, when they are permitted to do so?

- When and to what degree do research writing students feel comfortable incorporating personal experience in their essays?
- What features of research writing assignments do students perceive as most valuable? Most meaningful?
- What qualities of their completed texts are they most pleased with?

The most universal comment I heard from my student participants regarding selection of research topics (and topic selection for other writing courses as well) was an expressed desire to pick one's own topic. Many students commented that they had not expected to have this freedom of choice, and when they encountered it they were much more interested in and excited by their projects. A few students were ambivalent about this lack of restriction on research topics, perhaps because they were unaccustomed to it.

When I asked students what types of topics they picked when given the option, most expressed a preference for topics they termed "personal," that is, those relating to experiences they had had in the past, such as travel or friendships from their high school and college years. Some preferred to write about their future careers or current events, but most students preferred autobiographical topics, especially stories.

Most students in these classes were comfortable including autobiographical content and personal opinions in their essays, but when students did not feel comfortable with the professor, or what they viewed as

his or her values and beliefs, they were more cautious, and in some cases completely inhibited. Students in Dr. Farnham's class who considered themselves to be politically conservative were reluctant to expose these opinions in their papers, although they were more forthright in class discussion. Controversial and sensitive topics, such as racism, also affected students' willingness to include opinions and autobiographical illustrations in their papers.

The features of papers these students perceived as most valuable varied considerably from class to class and from student to student. Although I expected responses to this item in our interview conversations to reflect instructional emphasis by classroom, student responses were more varied. For several students, learning correct academic style and documentation were significant aims. For others, information learned from sources was perceived as valuable for other academic and non-academic tasks, such as writing additional papers on the topic in the future, submitting the paper for professional publication, sharing the ideas with family members or friends, or serving a specific potential audience, such as students considering the academic major James wrote about, or the brothers in Allen's fraternity who were seeking better organizational communication. Critical consciousness and critical thinking were also mentioned, though not with those terms. Hannah, for example, learned much more about the extent of racial profiling in business as well as police settings, and about the subtle ways media reporting

reinforces this damaging bias.

Sometimes the most valuable lessons gained from the research writing project were not connected to learning new ideas about one's topic but to other aspects of the task. Thus, Karen learned to schedule the component tasks of a research project more efficiently; Sandra rediscovered resources about vegetarianism she had read years ago and developed a bibliography to use in educating others about her dietary choices; and, in a hard-won victory, Leslie realized that she was capable of writing a paper more independently than she had previously thought possible.

Conclusions Based on Student Texts

The final set of questions concern the student participants' research papers, and my responses draw mainly on the information found in Chapter Six of this extended research paper.

- Do certain textual features appear more frequently in the research papers of engaged student writers than in those of less engaged writers, and if so, which ones?
 - What signals of writer identity do students employ in their texts?
 - If students include personal experience in their essays, how do they integrate these elements into the text?
 - How and when do students maintain their own writers' voices and express their own opinions while incorporating others' ideas within assigned research-based texts?

Of all the questions I initially asked, the first one in this group (“Do certain textual features appear more frequently in the research papers of engaged student writers . . . ?”) opened the most interesting doors. Since there was little difference between the essays of highly and moderately engaged students in the traits I counted, the answer to this question is not particularly useful, as Table 7 reveals. The moderately engaged group used more of almost all of the features (characteristics of engagement) I counted than did the highly engaged students. However, the minimally engaged writers did use considerably fewer characteristics (in all cases) than either of the other two groups. When I organized my numerical data to answer the question, “Do certain features appear more frequently in the research papers of some professors’ students than in the papers of others?” the numbers told a very different story.

There was a pronounced relationship between the identity of a student’s instructor and the number of characteristics that student included in his or her essay, as Table 8 shows. Furthermore, those students who used a different number of characteristics from other students in the same class were those whose essays I had already noted as unusual in my qualitative descriptions of these students and their texts. So, while there was little pattern based on the students’ engagement as revealed in our interview conversations, there was a very definite clustering in the use of these characteristics based on classroom teacher.

Some of these characteristics are specific and it would not be difficult to incorporate or avoid them by conscious decision (use of the first-person pronoun, for

example). Others, however, are much less obvious and less likely to be intentionally used (or avoided) by student writers, who are still experimenting with the use of different writing voices for different purposes. Examples of characteristics in this category include II-b, “Reaction/Evaluation of a Source,” and IV-c, “Word Choice Showing Intensity, Creativity in Thought.”

While it might be true that students with the same instructor would incorporate similar features into their texts, it seems doubtful that most would be able to exercise the degree of control necessary to keep track of so many characteristics and use them in frequencies so consistently similar to their classmates over the length of a six to ten page paper, all while attending to conventions of documentation style, accuracy in paraphrasing of source information, and more.

I believe a much more likely explanation for these similarities is that students did take on a writing identity based on their professor’s signals, so their writing reflected this model to an extent far beyond what conscious imitation could produce. After all, creative writing workshops often ask writers to select a writer they admire and imitate that style, and even these texts, by writers devoted to the craft, vary in degree of closeness to the model they consciously attempt to imitate. While conscious, deliberate, simultaneous manipulation of these textual characteristics seems insufficient to explain the students’ clustering by class section, if each student did take on “a writer’s identity” (Brooke, 1988) through exposure to professor modeling (both obvious and implicit), this might explain the similarities in use of the characteristics I coded.

I developed this list of characteristics in response to the first follow-up question above, “What signals of writer identity do students employ in their texts?” While some of these characteristics were intended to measure factors other than writer identity, I have concluded that this finding (the similarity in characteristic use among classmates) suggests that most of the items on the list may very well measure that function. Exceptions include the Neutral Forms in Category VI, where results were inconclusive, and Characteristic II-f, Insider Talk, which I now believe to be ambiguous, since use of terminology can result from comfort with a topic or an overdependence on close paraphrase of published source material. These characteristics appear in Appendix E along with explanations and examples that describe each textual attribute in detail.

The next question, focusing on ways students integrate “personal experience” in their texts, turned out to be far less relevant than question that follows it. (“How and when do students maintain their own writers’ voices and express their own opinions while incorporating others’ ideas within assigned research-based texts?”) When I read and analyzed these 18 essays, I discovered that the ways students integrated source material into their essays were sometimes poorly conceived and almost random, affecting coherence of the paper dramatically. Source quotations, in particular, were inserted by the less sophisticated writers without a clearly indicated purpose, or the content of the cited material was not appropriate to the purpose stated in the surrounding text. I believe along with Doug Brent (1992) that there is a gap that falls between source selection, which is addressed in library workshops as

well as in class and composing the first draft, where previous experience, classroom practice, and conferencing provide group and individual support. We often neglect what happens in between—the piecing together of source information, the building of connections, where either engagement can spark student learning or, through lack of strategies for selective reading and organization of ideas, frustration, disengagement, and sometimes abandonment of the project can occur.

Implications of the Study

The conclusions above review the findings from this study. While reviewing this amount of data was challenging, writing the conclusions was a fairly straightforward process; considering implications of this study has been much more complex. Like some of our students surprised by new ways of writing research, I encountered a text structure which I thought was familiar, only to discover that my understanding of its cognitive and rhetorical nature was incomplete. I found myself underprepared for this chapter of the dissertation adventure, and at a very late point in this process. In many ways this has been the most challenging phase of the dissertation project.

I eventually deduced that this section is rather freely interpreted, with quite a bit of flexibility in its definition and boundaries. Considering my philosophical leanings regarding academic discourse, it is ironic that I found this lack of prescription/definition troubling. Eventually, I was guided by suggestions from Drs. Fontaine (personal communication, June 21, 2006) and Jalongo & Isenberg (personal communication, June 21, 2006). The following sections represent the

opening moves in my reflections on the findings of this study. I hope the ideas presented here will be useful to readers in their own scholarship and teaching.

Thoughts on Engagement

Research writing is the most challenging composition course for most instructors and for students as well. As the literature documents, it is often the course with the highest attrition, the lowest professor enthusiasm, and the greatest disconnect between teacher aims and student achievement (Ballenger, 1999; Bishop & Zemliansky, 2001; Zemliansky & Bishop, 2004). In this study, only 6 of the 19 participants said that they liked the research writing course, only 8 of the 19 were pleased with their professor, and only 8 could list even one author of a source they had consulted, although I asked this question while most students were completing final drafts of their research papers. Our professional literature makes it clear that this is not at all uncommon. Teaching lore suggests that alternative approaches such as the use of field experience (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2004) or inquiry-based projects (Ballenger, 1999; Macrorie, 1988) can increase student and teacher engagement; my own teaching experience with multigenre projects adds credence to these claims; the findings of this study neither support nor contradict the value of these more recent approaches.

Certainly, with teacher behavior as important as this study reveals it to be, the instructor's enthusiasm for a specific approach may in itself lead to increased student engagement, increased participation, and more effective, thoughtful research papers. However, specific components of the research writing course such as the means of

topic selection, the number of daily assignments, and the weighting of various elements in grading have a greater effect. Based on my own findings, attention to these issues may have a greater effect on student engagement than changing the course format from a current-traditional approach to a multigenre one.

Keys to Engagement: Topic Selection

From the constant polling of public opinion to niche marketing, our consumer-oriented media deifies the power of individual choice, and this is especially prevalent in advertising geared toward youth. Our popular culture promotes the values of self-investment, self-awareness, and self-determination as well. Pair these influences with the natural search for self-knowledge and identity that occurs in young adulthood, and it is not surprising that most of our students are particularly motivated by the freedom to choose. Macrorie's (1988) finding that students are more engaged when they develop their own research topics has been duplicated in the literature many times since (Ballenger, 1999; Nash, 2004; Reigstad, 2004; Romano, 2000), and in the findings of this study. It is equally true that complete freedom to choose can be overwhelming for some. In the light of this pattern, I believe students will be more engaged when offered the opportunity to develop their own research topics for major projects. Offering guidance to those who find that freedom overwhelming would be the obvious and natural corollary to that recommendation, and something most teachers would do with any aspect of the course a student found overwhelming.

The subject of topic selection relates closely to my original interest in

undertaking this study, namely, to explore the ways students connect personally with the research writing process. As our professional literature establishes, and as these participants confirm, students enjoy writing about their own experiences. Whether it is through identifying a curious itch (Macrorie, 1988) or exploring a territory new to them (Atwell, 1998), students who move through the autobiographical experience of the personal that they valued so highly as college freshmen, to a broader context of the personal as mattering in their research writing course a year or two later, will continue to grow as writers and as thinkers. Atwell (1998), Ballenger (2004), and Kirby, Kirby, and Liner (2003) suggest student-centered activities that help writers find direction and select topics for research writing projects, activities that can help students develop a broader definition of what the personal can be.

When Sommers and Saltz (2004) studied 400 undergraduate writers for four years, they found that “if students are only writing to understand their personal experiences, if their expertise comes only from their personal connection with the material, or if they see the personal and academic as opposites, their writing remains a form of self-expression, and they generally lose interest in academic writing by junior year.” Students move forward intellectually by asking questions that are significant to them and to others as well—“to have *both* a personal and intellectual stake in these questions” (p. 146).

Allen, Nancy, and several other student participants in my own study selected topics based on personal involvement, access or convenience and then had breakthroughs that enlarged their perspective through exposure to new ideas that

stimulated them. They made the forward move Sommers and Saltz describe, although they began their projects with differing levels of motivation and engagement. Thus, it would seem that students who feel at least some connection to their research topics may expand that connection and intensify their engagement through interaction with new ideas, using their investment in a “personal” topic to move via that connection to the known into newer and more challenging terrain, owning those new ideas more fully by connecting them to topics that matter to them. Perhaps then they will see the academic as more inherently valuable, more connected to the rest of their lives. This movement may occur more frequently on the Harvard campus where Sommers and Saltz (2004) conducted their study, or at least, it may be more expected. But I believe our students will rise to the challenge of valuing their research if they engage and connect with primary, texts by other writers, and, most of all, their professors.

Teaching Approach

Students must feel some sort of positive connection, some reason to care, in order for engagement to occur in a research writing course. This study suggests that some teaching approaches facilitate this connection, especially those where student input is most encouraged, class time is more flexibly structured, and fewer practice activities are graded. Clearly there is a trade-off between the value of frequent, graded practice activities for student skill development and the increased pressure these frequent evaluations impose, particularly if students perceive class activities as “busy work.” Student writing was less technically proficient when this graded practice

was less frequent, at least in the student papers I read. However, engagement was greater, at least among most of these participants. It may be that other factors I failed to notice or measure contributed to the engagement these students reported, such as the “democratic” classroom atmosphere Richard Boyd (1999) describes.

Highly structured assignments and grading systems, particularly when the emphasis is on form and mechanics, seem to have the opposite effect. While high penalties to student grades for structural and mechanical errors in Dr. Farnham’s class did lead to some increase in technical proficiency, for example, the dampening effects of this approach on fluency and student morale need to be considered, as such practices seem to offset important gains in motivation and engagement.

Likewise, the many daily activities in Dr. Meehan’s class helped produce the thick description and suspenseful scenes that added life to her students’ ethnographies.

They generated negative reactions as well, especially when students did not see the connection between these assignments and their research writing projects.

Theme-based, Genre-based, and Implicit Course Designs

The theme-based research writing course is typically engaging for faculty members, who use this course design to introduce students to an area of research the professors enjoy and to construct a foundation of shared knowledge over the course of a semester which prepares students for their own research. However, if students do not develop an interest in the course theme, their own projects may not engage them either. Most of the participants in this study did not like their research writing course, and dissatisfaction with the course’s focus was the most frequent reason

given.

Do research writing students become enthusiastic about world diplomacy, anti-discrimination law or the avant-garde as a result of a semester's study and their professor's enthusiasm? Certainly some do, and I am tempted to assert maternalistically that they are the better for it. However, many more students find the semester-long focus tiring, especially toward the end of the course when persistence is the most challenging. Furthermore, students who resist what they perceive as an ideological perspective in the course theme are more profoundly affected when this focus lasts for the entire semester. This type of challenge to their beliefs may be positive for the learners' overall development, but it may also lead to disengagement from an assigned research topic and from the student's own project.

Perhaps students are not prepared for this type of intense focus as sophomores. Sommers and Saltz (2004) found that while the freshman students who improve most as writers are those who "allow their passions to guide them," juniors and seniors will continue this growth by "cultivating the disciplinary expertise in content and method that is necessary to question sources, develop ideas, and comfortably offer interpretations" (pp. 145-146). Since the research writing requirement typically occurs earlier in the student's college career, a compromise might be a booklet or online guide to specific sections of research writing, so that students can select either a theme-based course that appeals to them or a more eclectic approach not constrained by a theme.

Perhaps a semester-themed research writing course would engage students

more successfully as a senior seminar, a capstone course, or a section designed for juniors and seniors who share similar majors. Dr. Fontaine suggests that students might best focus this type of time and energy on a single topic by completing a research project outside the boundaries of a course, working individually with the assistance of online resources, a senior mentor, a faculty supervisor, and a “research writing center” (private correspondence, June 22, 2006).

Genre-based courses also teach research writing through a specific focus, such as field experience, creative non-fiction, or narrative research. Some students may discover a new enthusiasm for research through one of these approaches. However, as Dr. Meehan’s students attested alternate forms of writing such as ethnographic or narrative research are not necessarily more engaging than traditional forms of bibliographic research and research reporting. Again, a course in ethnography for anthropology majors or one in creative non-fiction for English and history majors might produce a very different level of student engagement.

The current research writing course, a liberal studies requirement most commonly taken by sophomores, is a necessary stepping stone for students preparing to write research papers in their academic majors. Thus, if theme-based and genre-based courses continue as courses that meet this requirement, perhaps a guide to specific sections and their focuses could be provided for students, their advisors, and professors teaching the research writing course. If students understand the focus of a specific research writing section before registering, or at least early enough to move to a different class if they are uncomfortable, more student and

professor engagement may result.

Finally, I would caution myself and all compositionists to remember that there is always a focus, always a subtext in a writing course. In other words, those courses that do not advertise a semester-long theme are not necessarily eclectic or focus-free, any more than they are free from the professor's values or instructional preferences. Just as we work constructively to acknowledge the "contact zones" in our classrooms (Pratt, 1991) and to allow for resistance without condemning our students or ourselves (Boyd, 1999), we should not hesitate to include our own research interests and values when appropriate, hoping that this acknowledgement will encourage students to engage meaningfully in projects reflecting and further developing their own interests as well.

Professors as Models

When I began this study, I used the term "model" to represent a text presented by a teacher as a guide for students to imitate, or occasionally as an example of errors to avoid. Coincidentally or providentially, just as I discovered that my 20 characteristics of engagement were used in remarkably similar patterns in the papers of students who shared the same professor, I read Robert Brooke's (1988) Lacanian description of the writing teacher as model. For Brooke, teachers and the writers whose texts they introduce to their classes are the true models, not the sample essays the student writer seeks to imitate these models in a transference process that occurs both within and outside conscious control. When students are reasonably comfortable with their instructor and with the writing identity the instructor models,

this transference occurs, which might also be described as commitment to the task or engagement. These students accept the identity of academic writer as modeled by their professor and compose accordingly, imitating the professor's desired text to the degree that their writing proficiency and their individual voices allow.

I believe this phenomenon explains the detailed nature of the similarities I found between student essays within class sections, and the implications of this theory are quite striking. First, as instructors we are modeling much more than the essays we place in course packets or on overhead transparencies. Overtly and covertly, we send messages about what we like, what we expect, and what we do not appreciate in student texts. When students do not actively engage in a course or in their own projects, they may be expressing resistance to the identity we model. Specifically, if an instructor is courteous to students but feels skeptical about their ability to progress, or perhaps holds an aversion toward research writing as a "service course," I believe this is sensed by the students, who may become discouraged about their progress as well. More globally, if the identity of "academic writer" as modeled by the published authors students read appears to be impersonal, objective, and passionless, this too will affect students' ability to engage.

Unfortunately, I believe we must also relinquish the view that if we avoid the use of a textbook or specific approach, students will automatically strengthen their own voices and develop their own ways of writing. I believe students will be more expressive in a workshop-oriented class where free-writing, self-exploration and reflection are included in the research process. This approach also models an identity

to students, as my experience in Dr. Ingram's class demonstrates. This expressivist model is one I am comfortable with, and I believe it to be a rich and productive means of connecting to published authors and their ideas, as do Elbow (1998), Graves & Kittle (2005), (Murray (1985), Tobin (1991), and Brooke (1994) (see also Ballenger, 1999; Reigstad, 2004; Romano, 2002, and Heilker, Allen, & Sewall, 2004). It is not, however, a methodless approach. The findings of this study show that students perceive and imitate their professors' textual desires, both when this modeling is conscious and the imitation is recommended, and also when professors deliberately attempt to leave their own preferences outside the classroom, to make room for student voices.

We might be tempted to view the imitative quality of student research writing cynically; I know I initially did. Comparing participants' essays with their interview comments, I viewed these data as the outcome of limited, instrumental goals—to earn high grades, to save time, to curry favor. However, imitating a model is the way humans learn to do everything, the only way we know, really; it is not specifically Aristotelian, Lacanian or Bartholomaeian, and it is not a weak alternative to forming one's own identity, but rather a stage in that process.

Thus, attending carefully to how we model ourselves as writers and thinkers is critical, so that we can help students become more aware of what they are imitating and why. Exposure to a variety of models and discussion of their features may also be helpful, through guest lecturers, different approaches during the semester, or team teaching (Fontaine, personal communication, June 22, 2006). When students

practice writing for varied audiences and learn to recognize their own voices within differing styles of text, they may become more powerful writers, better able to express their own messages and keep their own voices while communicating the words of others (Moore, 2001). According to Brooke (1994), the most important step we can take is to avoid specific, prescriptive answers when we model research writing to our students. As ardently as the student seeks a prescriptive answer for *how* to write research, in Brooke's view, the student's real need is to follow the imitative process without absolute answers, in order to find some of those answers for herself.

Whether we take our tone in research writing from Elbow and Murray, from Freire and Canagarajah, or from Bartholomae and Bizzell, and whether we ask our students for self-reflection, critical source evaluation, or vivid narratives of field research, if they are comfortable in our classrooms, students will imitate the model of research writing we represent to the best of their ability. More importantly, students can discover their own purposes and their own voices while being guided by these models. To the extent that we encourage these writers to envision their own audiences and find their own purposes within the tasks we assign, to the measure that we allow flexibility and breathing room for this self-investment to occur, we facilitate the process of engagement.

Suggestions for Further Research

Ballenger (2004) and Macrorie (1988) claim that a curious itch always leads to the most important research a writer can do, and that a successful project often

ends with more questions to be answered. The unanswered question I find itchiest as I conclude this phase of my research concerns the measurement of student engagement in written texts. Can we determine anything about student engagement in research writing through the examination of the papers themselves?

When I looked at the distribution of characteristics used by the student writers in my study, I was fascinated both by what the patterns revealed and by what the characteristics had not measured. Before continuing with any additional collection of data, I will use additional raters to validate my own coding and analysis of the essays in this study.

As stated above, I was unable to conclude that any specific type of research writing project, method or syllabus would, in and of itself, lead to increased student engagement. However, I continue to believe that teaching approach is one of several factors that can indeed make a difference. Since I will be teaching two sections of the research writing course at this university in the fall, I plan to continue my research by assigning a different type of final project in each course section. One class will complete a multi-genre project, the other an I-Search essay, and I will apply to our institution's Internal Research Board for permission to collect and analyze final research papers and evaluative reflections, with my students' consent. While researcher bias is certainly an issue I will have to address in publishing these findings, I think these data will add another dimension to the qualitative data I have already analyzed. Teaching research writing is challenging for most of us; like the contributors to Zemliansky and Bishop's (2004) anthology *Research Writing*

Revisited: A Sourcebook for Teachers, we need to continue to publish stories of success, both to energize and renew us (Jalongo & Isenberg & Isenberg, 1995) and to share ways of personalizing and humanizing the research writing classroom.

Given enough time and the consent of all involved, I would like to collect the final papers in several sections of a research writing course, including multiple sections taught by the same instructor. I would repeat the analysis I used in this study on these new texts and then compare those findings with a more systematic measure of student engagement, perhaps a survey of student perceptions regarding the research writing course, the research topic, and the type of projects assigned. If my original findings were repeated, that is, if a larger student population used these characteristics very similarly when taught by the same instructor, with little correlation to engagement, I would continue studying student writing identity and instructor modeling, and would research engagement by other means.

I would recommend two types of research at the institutional level: first, a qualitative, longitudinal study collecting and summarizing seniors' perceptions of the value of their research writing course with a year or more's perspective behind them (Fontaine, personal communication, May 2006); and second, a retention study considering variables such as class standing when students completed the research writing course, whether they completed the literature course before taking research writing, whether they visited the writing center, and so forth. Both of these types of research could give us information about the value to our students of any new strategies we might try at the departmental or institutional level. These could include

Supplemental Instruction or other types of organized peer tutoring, course linkages with seminars in specific disciplines, or perhaps a learners community approach to build enthusiasm for student-generated, community-based research. If we attempt institutional initiatives such as these, then quantitative research showing any improvement in student persistence or subsequent GPA, along with student and teacher narratives to fill out these portraits, could assist us in designing broader studies of effective research writing strategies focused not only on our own institution but nationally and internationally as well.

Final Reflections

As I began to step back and look at the terrain I have covered in this study, I appealed to a number of sources. One was Harper's (2001) dictionary of etymology. After living with these participants' words and their texts for over a year, participating in their classrooms, transcribing and rereading their words, I am still struggling to step up to the challenge of the term "implication." Have I expressed the "involvement" and "interweaving" I experienced?. I am certainly "entangle[d] and connect[ed] closely." Implication sometimes paints the language with darker tones as well, and these also describe aspects of this dissertation experience—through my research I am not only engaged, involved, and committed to the professors, students, and this process. I am also "implicated," implicated and in collusion with an epistemology that perpetuates the myth of separation of knower and known, one that has left me, as I have undoubtedly left many research writing students, in a state of confusion.

Perhaps this is the only way to both *connect* with the struggle of student

research writers and *reflect* on what I have learned—through expressing my own resistance to the constraints of the dissertation-as-assignment, my own struggle for representation within an impersonally-registered rhetoric. If I express only my resistance to the traditional discourse of research, I will make no room for the reader and create, at most, a dramatic but not very useful experiment, at worst, an incoherent exercise in dissonance. On the other hand, if I surrender to the discourse and the identity of academic writer and leave my individual struggle for voice out of this conclusion, I surrender my self, and I re-inscribe the expository silencing I set out on this journey to address, as I relive the silencing I experienced as a child and adolescent. I am committed to helping my students break silence, and I have learned that they can create voice in many more contexts than I thought possible. I have also found that self-expression is a more constructive term for the Art-formerly-known-as Resistance, just as joining my voice to the voices of generations of scholars in my field is a valid representation for what I considered to be a surrender of text, voice, and self.

When I began, I had declared war on academic discourse, and I believed personal topic selection, personal narrative, and a general inward focus would transform a much-hated element of composition instruction, the research writing course. I had much more grandiose dreams as well; I believed that adding these elements to research writing could eventually lead to a different sort of research writing, a different type of visibility for authors in their texts. I hoped this visibility/vulnerability would lead to more responsible writing, more committed

stances, more involvement in outcomes, a softening of the hard line dividing quantitative and qualitative methodologies, and a more human understanding of the flaws inherent in any research design. My vision did not lack grandeur, and I wanted to paint it, to inscribe it, as much for the teachers and students I have worked with as for the readers of this manuscript.

I would now say that my own textual desires (Lillis, 2001), my own preferences as a writer and thinker imprinted the research questions I wrote and blinded me in many ways to the research design that would best answer them. I am so grateful to the methodological sources I consulted that told me to continue questioning, to leave the field open to new questions as well as to conclusions. My original questions were loaded with my own agendas for our profession: “How can personal narrative influence student research writing?” was one I remember scribbling early on. “How can we personalize the genre of academic discourse?” was another. My interest in these questions remains, yet I am now much more aware of the narrow vision of the personal they imply. As I began to ask more exploratory questions such as “What is personal to research writers?” and “How does engagement appear in teachers, students, and their texts?” my methodology appeared and huge terrains opened up to my view.

Beyond my own arrogance in arriving at the doors of research with my preferred answers in hand, the greatest challenge in representing these teachers and writers has been my desire to please those involved, a mistaken need to honor and respect their commitment to research and their kindness to me by minimizing the

failures I saw in our teaching of research writing. It was not easy to tell the stories of frustration along with those of success, regardless of pseudonyms. I do not feel my study has given voice to the large number of students who fall by the wayside in this course, who represent the failings of research writing in composition programs everywhere, not only at our university. All of the students who participated in this study passed their research writing course, although several received a semester grade of D. These were, then, the successes of this course by the university's standard of measurement; however, based on this outcome alone, they were not fully representative of the range of students enrolled in the research writing course. Even so, this sample represented so many more stories than those I reported, stories of success, boredom, enthusiasm, and desperation. The teaching strategies and teacher behaviors that challenged me along with the many student stories I have not told will influence my own approach in the future, just as the generosity those professors modeled for me in opening their classroom doors has influenced the way I will respond to requests from graduate students for participation in their research.

There is absolutely no way to end a research study of these dimensions or a text whose composition has inscribed me more profoundly than I can ever imprint on these pages. As I enter into conversations of research with my own students this fall and consider ways that these ideas might serve others in our profession, this study will continue.

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Appendix A

Terms and Definitions

engagement	active, interested participation by a research writing student in class activities, and especially in the preparation, drafting, or revision of his or her research paper
essay	used synonymously with “paper,” this term here indicates any assigned text in a composition classroom
model	an example text provided by an instructor or textbook for student use, composed either by a student or by a professional writer
professor	anyone teaching a college-level course (Professors, Instructors, and Teaching Associates)
research paper	any academic assignment involving citation of primary or secondary sources within the text; where the research site is the context, any text assigned in the research writing course
research writing	the form or genre of academic composing used to create texts referring to primary or secondary sources
student	anyone registered for a class at an educational institution; where the context is the research population, individuals (usually college sophomores or juniors) registered in the research writing course at the research site campus
voice	the quality of a text that reveals the identity of the writer; according to Vygotsky, “translated inner speech” (1986, originally 1934); for Bruner, “a story in our heads, waiting to be told” (Williams, 2000); for Peter Elbow, “the writer’s point of view,” and the quality of a student text that “captures the attention and interest of readers, without training, without skill, and from the first day of class” (Elbow, 1995b)

Appendix B

Class Handout to Recruit Student Participants

Opportunity to Participate in a Research Study

Based on your enrollment in Professor _____'s _____ (meeting time) Research Writing course, I am inviting you to participate in my dissertation research study. Participants will:

- meet with me twice during the semester for 20-40 minutes (each time) of taped conversation about your research writing course, with possible follow-up by e-mail to clarify points

AND

- allow me to keep a copy of one paper or other assignment you complete for the Research Writing course this semester.

ALSO,

If you participate, I will provide a FREE tutoring session to you during the second interview appointment. We can focus on a specific paper, or on general topics such as developing your ideas more completely, using MLA style, or any other writing issue that you choose. This tutoring session is optional; it is not required.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

I will not inform your professor or anyone else as to who participates in this study. If you decide to participate, you may reveal your own participation to whomever you wish. I will keep your interview responses and your writing completely confidential; your real name will not appear in my dissertation.

I believe participation in this study will offer you several benefits:

- Find out how "real research" is conducted here at (university)
- Add an item to your resume ("Participated in qualitative research study")
- Receive tutoring in your writing, on a topic of your own choosing
- Reflect on your Research Writing course to get more from the experience

If you would like to participate, please contact me by e-mail: [\(address\)](#)

Thank you,
Susan B. Kanter

Appendix C

Instructor Consent Form

Document of Informed Consent

Thank you for expressing an interest in the study I am conducting as part of my doctoral program. I have included the information below to explain the topics and procedures involved in this research study, so that you can make an informed decision about participation in the study.

This study explores some of the ways Research Writing instructors assist their students in developing research topics. The study also considers each instructor's perceptions and teaching experiences with narrative and personal content in the research writing course.

Participation in this study will involve

- (1) approximately two hours of your time during the spring 2005 semester (primarily during two scheduled interviews) to discuss teaching experiences and perceptions with regards to research writing,
- (2) member-checking by e-mail to be certain that I have represented your statements and opinions accurately
- (3) permission to observe your Research Writing class during four (4) class sessions and take notes on a laptop computer,
- (4) permission to describe my project briefly to your Research Writing class and to hand out a written notice inviting potential student participants to contact me via e-mail,
- (5) permission to offer students my tutorial consultation on an assigned essay as an incentive for their participation in the study,
- (6) permission to read student reflections on the Research Writing course if you assign these, when the student indicates his/her consent, and
- (7) permission to read a copy of your course syllabus and other course materials you are willing to share, and permission to quote from these within the dissertation.

During the first interview, we will explore how you structure your research writing course, including syllabus and course materials. I will also ask you to share some of your

goals and teaching philosophy with regards to the course. In the second interview, I will ask you to share more specifically about the current semester's class, including experiences that you consider significant to the group's progress.

No risks or discomforts are connected with this study. I will use a pseudonym to protect your confidentiality in the dissertation, and I will not discuss your comments or the content of classes I observe except when discussing data analysis with members of my dissertation committee. I will not share the names of student participants with you before the end of the semester, in order to remove any possibility of student perceptions that the decision to participate might influence their Research Writing grade. It is my hope, however, that the self-reflection engendered by these research activities will have a beneficial effect on both instruction and student writing during the course.

With your permission, I will audio-record our interview conversations. I will not record the class sessions I observe. These tapes will be securely stored, along with the transcripts of their contents.

Your consent to participate in this study is voluntary, and may be withdrawn at any time by contacting me. If you choose to withdraw from the study, your relationship with me or the university will not be adversely affected. If you request to be withdrawn from the study at any time, all information pertaining to you will be destroyed. If you choose to participate, I will protect all information regarding your participation with strictest confidence. Your identity will be kept secret in any publication of the material generated by this study. If you are willing to participate, please sign the attached Voluntary Consent Form.

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This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Phone: 724/357-2223).

VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM

I have read and understand the information on the attached pages, and I consent to volunteer as a participant in this study. I give my permission for the audio recording of interview sessions held as part of this study, and for the use of my syllabus and/or other course materials strictly for the preparation of Ms. Kanter's dissertation. I understand that my verbal responses and written materials are completely confidential and that I have the right to withdraw from this study at any time. I have received a copy of this document to keep in my possession.

Name (PLEASE PRINT) _____

Signature _____

Date _____

I certify that I have explained the nature and purpose, potential benefits, and the absence of any known risks or discomforts associated with participating in this research study to the individual named above. I have answered any questions that he or she has raised and have witnessed the above signature.

Date _____

Investigator's Signature

Appendix D

Student Consent Form

Document of Informed Consent

Thank you for your interest in the study I am conducting as part of my doctoral program. I have included the information below to explain the topics and procedures involved in this research study, so that you can make an informed decision about participation in the study.

In this study, I will explore some of the ways Research Writing students develop their research topics and write their essays. I plan to observe Research Writing classes, talk to students individually, and look at student essays for linguistic features and aspects of each individual writer's style.

Participation in this study will involve

- (8) spending approximately two hours in conversation during the spring 2005 semester (primarily during two scheduled interviews) to discuss your experiences and perceptions with regards to research writing, with possible follow-up by e-mail to clarify points,
- (9) sharing some writing you have completed for the Research Writing course with me, and allowing me to keep a copy, and, if you like,
- (10) a free tutoring session with me on an assigned essay for the course (this is optional).

During the first interview, we will discuss your research writing course and the assignments you have completed so far. In the second interview, I will ask you to share a paper you have completed for the course (or a draft in progress), and we will discuss aspects of its development and your opinion of the finished paper. If you like, I will also give you a tutoring session on any paper you are working on for the course during this second meeting.

No risks or discomforts are connected with this study. To protect your privacy, I will use a pseudonym (an imaginary name) when discussing your work in my dissertation, and I will not discuss your comments or your essay except when discussing data analysis with members of my dissertation committee. I will not tell your professor whether or not you are participating in this study. If you do participate, however, I hope our discussions will help you improve your thinking and writing skills this semester.

With your permission, I will audio-record our interview conversations. These tapes will be securely stored, along with the transcripts of their contents. Neither your classmates nor your professor will know what we have discussed during the semester. After grades have been submitted, I may ask your professor about classroom issues we have discussed, in order to improve my understanding of these issues.

Your consent to participate in this study is voluntary, and may be withdrawn at any time by contacting me. If you decide not to participate, or withdraw your participation later, this will not influence your Research Writing grade or affect your relationship with this university in any way. If you request to be withdrawn from the study at any time, all information pertaining to you will be destroyed. If you choose to participate, I will protect all information regarding your participation with strictest confidence. Your identity will be kept secret in any publication of the material generated by this study. If you are willing to participate, please sign the attached Voluntary Consent Form.

Investigator: Susan B. Kanter
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This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Phone: 724/357-2223).

VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM

I have read and understand the information on the attached pages, and I consent to volunteer as a participant in this study. I give my permission for the audio recording of interview sessions held as part of this study, and for the use of a writing sample I have written for the Research Writing course, strictly for the preparation of Ms. Kanter's dissertation. I understand that my verbal responses and written materials are completely confidential and that I have the right to withdraw from this study at any time. I have received a copy of this document to keep in my possession.

Name (PLEASE PRINT) _____

Signature _____

Date _____

I certify that I have explained the nature and purpose, potential benefits, and the absence of any known risks or discomforts associated with participating in this research study to the individual named above. I have answered any questions that he or she has raised and have witnessed the above signature.

Date _____

Investigator's Signature

Appendix E

List of Engagement-Related Characteristics with Explanations and Examples

Characteristics in Research Papers Related to Student Engagement

VII. Expression of opinion regarding issue or controversy

I used this category to label each instance where the student writer expressed his or her own point of view regarding any issue within the text. I did not apply this category to material students cited from other sources, whether paraphrased or directly quoted.

Example: When Brad wrote, “the laws [in Afghanistan] should be created according to the will of the people” (p. 1), he was expressing a personal opinion.

In contrast, this sentence—“Major inconsistencies were visible in the outcomes of trials of equal crimes’ (Thier 2004)” (p. 1)—clearly came from an outside source, and so I did not code the sentence as an example of Characteristic I.

VIII. Evidence of engagement with source authority

a. Explanation/Interpretation of source-based information

In some cases, students explicated source material for their readers:

Example: “‘An American wit once described a civil engineer as a man who can do for one dollar what any darn fool can do for two’ (Overman 9). **What this means is that a civil engineer may do his work efficiently for a cheaper pay rate.**” (James, p. 2, emphasis added)

I also used this category when essay writers offered their own interpretations of cited ideas:

Example: “Job positions [with a Ph.D. in engineering] include the same as that of a M.S. degree except that a starting salary of \$69,079 is acquired (Occupational Outlook Handbook 132). **Overall, the higher up the ladder you reach, the better off you will be in your career as a civil engineer.**” (James, p. 7, emphasis added)

b. Reaction/evaluation in response to a source

I used this category when student writers expressed judgement of a source author or of cited ideas. Sometimes these judgements were straightforward:

Example: “The third part of the shariah or family law is the subject of inheritance. ***This is an area that really helps out women . . .***” (Ben, p. 5).

In other instances, the writer’s evaluative comment was less direct:

Example: “Even though the reason of reproduction [for marriage] may seem to be largely old fashioned, it is still one of the main factors of marriage in modern Islamic culture” (Ben, p. 4).

c. Comparison of sources or value systems

I applied this category when a student writer compared the points of view of two or more cited authors. I also used this code when a writer compared two value systems, as Sandra did in her discussion of Islam and vegetarianism:

Example: “The words of Allah say to practice compassion, stewardship, and good health. Vegetarianism in its many shapes and forms suits this model naturally” (p. 5).

d. Sympathy or aversion expressed toward subject of research, author of source, or issue being explored

Example: I found 17 instances of this characteristic in Karl’s essay, probably due to his strong aversion for his subject, “The Wal-Mart We Know and Love.”

In addition to the expressions of distaste for the company (“Wal-Mart has taken the small businesses, chewed them up, and left them with nothing but a shell” (p. 5)), Karl also expressed sympathy in a few instances: “They don’t tolerate late shipments, which is understandable” (p. 5).

e. Selection of source material with powerful message

This category identifies quotations (and occasional paraphrased references) that make a point in an expressive, powerful, personal, or especially persuasive way.

Example: Kathie selected the following quote, documented by Pasquini, to demonstrate the satisfaction Afghani women feel about attaining educational rights: “‘I felt like I was blind. Now I can read everything. This is what is important to me’ (Pasquini, 1)” (p. 4).

f. Insider talk (jargon)

Insider talk demonstrates membership, a comfortable familiarity with a research topic or site of observation, as the following examples demonstrate:

Examples: “Phat Farm has become such a success across the nation not only among **urban teens** but also among many celebrities” (Karen, p. 3, emphasis added).

“Tel Rehov takes up ten **hectares** of the Beth Shean valley and consists of two levels of five hectares each” (Susan, p. 2, emphasis added).

g. Narrative

Seven of the eighteen student writers in this study used at least one incidence of storytelling within their expository essays. Susan’s essay, though one of the most formal in style, contained six narrative passages.

Example: “. . . Elijah, a prophet of Yahweh, was angered by Jezebel’s advocacy of the worship of a pagan god and killed her prophets, after which he fled for his life. During his flight Elijah was confronted by Yahweh and given a number of tasks to fulfill, one of which was to anoint Jehu king of Israel (Kuntz, 247)” (p. 4).

Nancy’s narrative of her father’s accident and its immediate aftermath is less scholarly in tone; the situation is much closer to her, both temporally and relationally:

Example: “At 5:30 a.m. the family was told they were allowed to see Brian. He was gray, cold, and on life support. The doctors told them it was a severe head injury and he was in a coma. He told them to call his loved ones . . .” (p. 1).

IX. Reflection on the research process

The items in this category (III a, b, and c) refer to the writer’s metacognitive comments, if any appear within the essay. Nine of the students made one or

more reflective comments in their written essays.

a. Discussion of thesis or essay development

Sandra made frequent reference to her research process:

Example: “Early in my research, Islam’s concern for the health of its followers was shown to be a central concern” (p. 2).

James’ introductory comments record his process of topic development:

Example: “Why civil engineering? Aren’t there other fields besides civil engineering? In fact, there are other fields, however, I am considering civil engineering as a major. My intention throughout the rest of this paper would be to learn and teach others who are focusing their attention towards civil engineering” (p. 1).

b. Expression of challenge or satisfaction in locating useful information

Students occasionally included comments in their essays related to the search for answers in the research process:

Examples: “In my research I found an article that said ‘Snowboarding is a lifestyle more than a sport’ (Neil). ***That phrase really started to make even more sense after meeting all of these people***” (Tom, p. 10, emphasis added).

“Tappan had me empowered, thinking my ideas were right on target” (Sandra, p. 5).

c. Mention or discussion of learning, progress, or intellectual growth experienced during the research and/or composing process

Examples: “There are so many more ways that media is involved in the fashion industry than I had ever imagined” (Karen, p. 7).

“Now that I have taken an outsider look at the meetings . . . I’ve gotten a new perspective on how meetings are run . . .” (Allen, p. 12).

X. Linguistic markers for voice

I use the term “voice” here in some of the ways Peter Elbow (1995b) defined it—a quality indicating that the writing comes from an individual person. Voice in this sense is “resonant of the writer’s identity,” “distinctive,” “recognizable”

and/or “authoritative.” While no list of features can quantify this type of “felt sense” (Perl, 2004), I selected three markers that I believe point toward a rich authorial presence in student research papers.

a. First and Second Person Pronouns (“I”, “We”, “You”)

While some students deliberately avoided use of the first and second persons as a feature of academic discourse, others used these forms to give personal evidence, narrate primary research, address the reader, or discuss their own learning process (Webb, 1991).

Example: “For myself, I could tell you that I never took physics or calculus in high school” (James, p. 3).

b. Appeals to audience (Addressed, Invoked, or Recalled)

Hannah, who had experience in journalism, appealed to the audience with rhetorical questions:

Example: “Did the news media intentionally emphasize Andrea Yates’ depression to suggest that she was innocent of murder? . . . Would the news media claim an African-American woman as mentally ill, if she had committed the same crime?” (pp. 5-6).

Brad invoked an international audience in his appeal for humane justice in Afghanistan:

Example: “It is up to America and the other nations of the world to put the pieces of the broken country back together . . .” (p. 1).

c. Word choice showing intensity, creativity in thought (or loaded language)

While academic discourse is often matter-of-fact, neutral in style and tone, some student writers used emphatic language, intensifiers, idioms, or forms of creative expression to make an impact on the reader. Even when phrases were clichéd, I included them if they revealed intensity in tone.

Examples: “The **biggest problem** in the workplace is that employers are trying to get rid of older employees. They try **all types of things** such as forced retirement, demotions, and pay cuts. Older workers are being forced out to make way for ‘**young blood**’ to **revive new life** into a company” (Sam, p. 1, emphasis added).

“Who cares what other people think anyways, if you show them

you care about what they are saying about you, they will keep breaking you down till you are nothing” (Zeb, p. 1, emphasis added).

XI. Emphasis on source authors as people, rather than research texts as commodities

Student writers may commodify quotable bits of text from sources, rather than applying critical thinking to theories and the personalities who create them. Students who include the characteristics described below in their texts may be showing evidence of a connection with source authors and their ideas.

a. Signal phrases

In Allen’s ethnography about his fraternity, he sought explanations for the communication problems members experienced. Allen considered the role of gender, and sought the opinion of Deborah Tannen, an expert on gender issues and communication. He humanized the text he excerpted by introducing Tannen as a partner in his theorizing, as though they had entered into a virtual dialog about the fraternity’s problem and its possible causes:

Example: “Phone calls usually don’t help because not everyone has a cell phone, or keeps it on them. This may be a gender issue; because I can’t remember the last time I’ve seen a girl without her cell phone. **Tannin [sic] takes a stab at explaining this by stating,** ‘Bonds between boys... are based less on talking, more on doing things together. . . . (415).’ (p. 13-14, emphasis added).

b. Discussion (or description) of source author’s position or beliefs

In some cases, student writers referred to the beliefs of a corporate or collective source, as Allen did when he discussed his fraternity’s bylaws, or as Hannah did in her essay about the news media’s role in racial profiling. When a writer described a source group as holding collective beliefs or values, I included that reference in this category (5b).

Example: “Since blacks are generally classed as poor, one would speculate that the news media would portray the African-American woman in Yates’ position as guilty on the grounds of being unfit to rear children” (p. 6).

c. Juxtaposition of authors as persons with contrasting points of view

I included this category because I believe identifying and comparing differing

points of view shows an awareness of source authors as human authorities with differing perspectives. Five writers in the study included this type of comparison in their essays at least once. Susan contrasted two theories regarding the dating of artifacts at Tel Rehov:

Example: “The Low Chronology, posited by Israel Finkelstein, suggests that the boundary between the first and second Iron Ages be lowered by eighty years . . . Amihai Mazar, however, argues that this pushing back of the Iron Age dates requires a reconsideration of numerous archaeological sites throughout the area and is not necessary” (p. 7).

Characteristics of Essays Suggesting A Lack of Engagement

VI. Neutral forms

I used this category to mark characteristics that create a sense of distance between the writer and his/her subject, or between writer and reader.

a. Passive voice

While use of the passive voice is customary in certain contexts, in other cases a student writer’s use of passive constructions omits information the reader would expect to find, resulting in vague or indefinite writing. For example, Bob described an episode in Iranian history this way:

Example: “Along with those two revolutions there was another one in 1905. ***The revolution was not seen as one to increase rights of women***” (p. 7, emphasis added). The writer could be referring to the opinions of Iranian or foreign historians, writing either in the early 20th century or in recent years.

Labeling this feature involves an element of subjective judgement. In some cases, a writer uses the passive voice to avoid awkwardness or to express an idea concisely. For example, I did *not* label the following excerpt as an example of this characteristic:

Example: “Two chronological systems were created to account for this discrepancy” (Susan, p. 7). In this example, the writer uses the passive voice to introduce a controversy, and names the two archaeologists and their systems later in the paragraph.

b. Neutral language

While Susan is extremely articulate in the following paraphrase, I found it difficult to respond to the information with any attention or interest—the content was very distant in time and space, and the language Susan uses here does not close that distance.

Example: “With multiple strata representing continuous occupation from the thirteenth up through the ninth centuries BCE, the tel provides a well-defined and historically expansive archaeological view of the different periods of settlement in the Jordan River Valley with a concentration of levels in the Iron Age (Mazar, “Preliminary”)” (Susan, p. 2).

c. Vague Phrasing (ambiguous pronoun reference, overgeneralization)

Student writers may demonstrate their engagement with a source author’s ideas (and their own) through specific, clear expression of those ideas. When prose is vague, the result is a passage that appears disconnected, fuzzy, or imprecise:

Example: “This may not have taught me an abundance of new information but it did help me to realize the dependency of fashion on media as well as the co-dependency of the nation as a whole and the fashion industry” (Karen, p. 7).S