HOW WRITERS SHAPE MEANING:
TRACKING A SHY ANIMAL

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Dedication

To my husband, John;

my daughter, Rita; and my son, Stuart,

for their encouragement and support.

To my students, for their

cooperation and their candour.

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to discover grade twelve students' understanding of essay, and to examine how that understanding might interact with their process of shaping meaning as they write. Shaping meaning was defined as giving form to the content of the essay. The study was conducted in a grade twelve English class of twenty-two students. The information was gathered through observation of and discussion with the students while they wrote and shared their writing, through the examination of their written work, especially learning logs, reading logs, essays and assignments, and through conferences and interviews with individual students.

The study found that many of the students' beliefs about essay, and their behaviours during the writing process were consistent with those reported in the literature. The study also found that students have a fairly consistent, fixed idea of essay as something defined by prescriptive structural requirements. And, furthermore, that this conception of essay interferes with the students' ability to shape meaning according to purpose rather than formula.

The findings also indicate that students should benefit from exposure to a variety of authentic essay models with a focus on understanding how those essays achieve their purpose in the context of their meaning, rather than a focus on studying models to emulate form. In addition, it may be necessary for teachers to actively unteach formulaic understandings of essay in order to facilitate growth in students' writing ability.

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When we ask our students to write an essay in English class, we are asking them to accomplish much more than the production of three to five hundred words of prose text. We are asking them to share a piece of themselves with us and with their classmates; we are asking them to generate a meaningful communication from the substance of their intellect and experience. No matter who they are, or how well they write, that request will begin a multi-layered process of making, shaping and evaluating meaning, which is unique to each writer.

The individual nature of this process is the reason that, although the essay is generally considered to be an expository form, all essays are personal. Even when writers strive to be dispassionate about their subjects, they must still create meaning somewhere between the subjective realm of their own being and the objective realm of their topic. In her article "Narrative Knowers, Expository Knowledge," DiPardo (1990) explains

> Ideally, student writing should reflect such a dialectic. Essays are, as in Montaigne's first use of the word, "trials" - a way of testing one's responses to subjects and situations, of negotiating between the subjective and the objective. Some topics necessarily suggest a more impersonal, expository approach, others a more personal, narrative one; but regardless of the ratio, all discourse, indeed all cognition - performs to some extent both functions. (p. 87)

Because of its personal nature, this negotiation is a process which is emotional as well as intellectual, often involving a writer's sense of competence and willingness to risk vulnerability. It is a negotiation not only between expository and narrative approaches to a topic, but also between the personal subjective of the self and the public objective of the audience. It is a negotiation that each

writer must make in his or her own way if the resulting essay, no matter how overtly expository, is to have any of the writer's self in it. And without the writer's self in it, any essay is likely to sound dry and hollow. Therefore, if we hope to have our students write in their own voices, this negotiation is an element of the writing process which must be on our minds as we help them to discover their own best way to shape meaning in their essays.

Contributing to the students' attempt to create a text which represents their own approach to a topic will be their understanding of what makes a good essay. In other words, when we make the request that our students write an essay, we rouse in them their schema for essay writing. That schema will contain, either at a conscious or subconscious level, the non-fiction prose they have read in the past, previous lessons on essay writing, positive and negative memories of past essay writing experiences, and tips and comments they've had on their own writing and on writing in general.

This background experience is likely to affect the students as they write, and regardless of their individual effort on any given assignment, the result will be something which, according to their negotiation of meaning, is an essay. It is this understanding of what it means to write an essay which I attempt to explore in this study of how writers shape meaning. I wondered: What is the students' perception of essay? And how does their understanding of essay affect the way they shape meaning as they write?

Tracking a Shy Animal

In researching these questions in my classroom, I knew that I would have to look closely at many things besides my students' finished essays. Certainly my request that the students write an essay would result in a stack of finished

prose for me to read and comment upon. And my comments on those papers would possibly contribute to improvements in the quality of my students' future essays. However, English teachers often bemoan the relative ineffectiveness of such commentary, and I am no exception. Although written comments can be helpful, they are never enough. In discussing marked work with my students, I have found that comments usually require some explanation - both from me to the student and from the student to me - before they are really useful in improving the student's writing. In fact, I have found that I should intercede long before the "good copy" if I really want to improve their understanding of how to create purposeful prose.

By the time the final draft comes in, the opportunity for effectively helping the students improve their writing has probably already passed. Many researchers (Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1991; Emig, 1971; Graves, 1983; Shanklin, 1981) advise that to improve the final product, we must work with students while they write. Shanklin (1981) says

> ...teachers need to be careful not to judge students' written
> products as sole indicators of knowledge of textuality. There may
> be elements of which students are aware but do not control in their
> own writing. Those are in the students' zone of proximal
> development and become evident when one observes their writing
> process and/or holds personal conferences with them. (p. 142)

Effective assistance can be provided in desk-side conferences, through in-depth conferences during or after class, and through observation of and participation in peer-sharing and peer-revision.

Although these activities are a regular feature of writing time in my classroom, in the past I have focused that time more on the students' product than on the students' process. My question has been more "What-have-you-

done-and-how-can-we-fix-it?" than "Why-have-you-done-this-and-is-it-working-as-you-intended?" When I work with my students primarily at the text level, I engage in educated guesswork about their underlying processes. I surmise the intentions that went into the creation of their essays by examining their choice of content and structure, and the qualities of their written expression. I guess where they might have an incomplete knowledge of writing conventions and coherence by evaluating their errors and structural weaknesses. But by looking only at the writing outcome, I cannot know if my conclusions are entirely correct. I also cannot know where best to enter the process to assist the students in understanding how to make a more effective connection between intention and expression.

It occurred to me that attempting to understand how students create meaning by looking at text is like trying to imagine an unfamiliar animal by examining the imprints it leaves in the mud. One can garner a great deal of information that way, but not a clear picture of the animal itself. Writing provides only an incomplete artifact of thinking. I realized that if I wanted to understand the animal itself, I would have to go into the woods and track it carefully. I would have to stand quietly and listen and look.

Unfortunately, because thinking is an invisible process, it is a difficult creature to spot. This is especially true in the case of metacognition, when the thinking is about process rather than content. I knew from past experience that I would be able to learn a great deal by listening in and sitting in while the students were generating ideas, drafting, engaging in peer-revision, and revising their work. But I realized that in order to study the relationship between generating and shaping meaning, observation of signs would not be enough. I decided to draw the creature out into the open with some direct questions. I

asked my students in class discussion, in brief interviews, and in their learning logs to describe and comment upon those aspects of their essay writing experiences which I wanted to better understand.

I did not want to pretend to my students that I was not researching the shaping aspect of their writing process, nor did I want to play the research game of pretending to watch for one thing while really watching for another. That seemed uncomfortable to me, like a hunter hiding in a blind. What I wanted was to work with them openly, to hear what they had to say. In a way, I put a road through the habitat of their writing process so I could better observe their habits. Like all open research, this roadway approach has the double effect of providing access to an environment at the same time as it alters that environment. While I recognize that students often give the teacher what they think the teacher wants rather than their honest responses, I felt I could rely on a reasonable level of comfort and openness because either no mark or only a completion mark was provided for their responses to my questions. Also, all the the information gathering practices – class discussions, peer discussions, reading logs, learning logs, reading and writing assignments – were already familiar features in my classroom.

In many cases, in asking my students to describe their own writing practices, I initiated their consideration of something they had previously taken for granted. Aronsky (1983) explains in *Secrets of a Wildlife Watcher* that roadways create wildlife activity in a concentrated area thus making observation easier. Wildlife is drawn to roadways because of the new growth that develops in the cleared space.   Most animals are attracted to the "edges" of things because edges provide open sunlight yet also the possibility of shelter in the nearby brush. Assignments and discussions can be like that, tempting students

to explore new areas of understanding within a familiar landscape. So in setting the assignments in the essay writing unit, I gave myself the opportunity to see which creatures would come out of the woods and how they would interact.

Shaping Meaning

In the same way that a wildlife watcher observes the interrelationships among animals, rather than just the behaviours of the target animal, I was ready to observe all aspects of my students' writing practices. However, I was most interested in how they shaped meaning. Within the process through which students generate meaningful prose, it is possible to identify elements which can be considered independently even though their inter-connectedness is acknowledged. One of these elements, for example, is the generation of content. This element encompasses the means through which a student determines what s/he is going to write about her/his topic. Whether content comes pouring from the end of the pen or results from a great inner struggle, it is the raw material of the student's essay. Another element is the evaluation and revision of content and form. Whether it occurs word by word while the student writes, or as a complete rewriting of the piece after an insightful rereading, revision is the process that connects intent to expression. These elements were both apparent as my students worked on their assignments, but it was the third element, the shaping of meaning which I wanted to examine in more depth.

By shaping of meaning, I mean the process by which students fashion their content, their raw material, into a whole shape, the structure and expression of the essay. Although the shaping of meaning focuses more on how things are said than what it said, the connections between form and content are strong. Writers often generate and shape meaning simultaneously

as they write, to the point where how an essay can best be shaped may become apparent to the writer only upon reflection. A conference I had with a student who was composing her first draft of an essay on a self-selected topic provides a good example of this generating and shaping relationship.

K.N.:	What are you writing about?
Lana:	My beliefs on things.
K.N.:	On various things? Different beliefs?
Lana:	Yeah. All things I just believe.
K.N.:	Do they have a common thread?
Lana:	Yeah. I didn't think they did at first, and I wondered what I was going to do with that, but now I see they do.
K.N.:	What do you think it is?
Lana:	Well, I sort of know but I'm not finished yet. So I just want to keep on writing.

Eventually, the common thread which emerged as Lana generated content became the thesis of an essay on how her beliefs are rooted in both her family's values and her personal experiences. This discovery gave her a focus and a structure for her ideas which she capitalized upon in the second draft.

This generating and shaping relationship is not always obvious to a writer as s/he drafts. Nevertheless, content is never generated in a vacuum. Because language and thought are indistinguishable, all content has form as it is produced. The form may be rough and dissatisfying to the writer; it may be revised as the writer writes, but it is still form. The shaping and revision of content may occur spontaneously as the writer subconsciously selects one word over another, or utilizes conveniently packaged phrases (Chenoweth, 1995). On the other hand, it may be a conscious, careful rewording or even a complete rewriting.

In this way, the writer's shaping of meaning is as closely connected to

evaluation and revision as it is to the generation of content. Deep structure revision in which writers decide to add content, delete content or reword sections of text is in large part the shaping of meaning. Writers also shape meaning when they decide on an approach to topic, a point of view, or a genre. But revision of surface structure, such as sentences and diction, can also have an impact on how text reveals its meaning to the reader. By this I do not mean the editing of mechanics and other writing conventions which deal primarily with clarity of communication, but rather with matters such as the manipulation of syntax and diction; for example, the choice of an antithetical sentence structure to give more power to the expression of opposite ideas, or the choice of one word over another to exploit the connotative power of the word chosen. As a result of the writer's subconscious awareness of connections between meaning and form, these choices may be made automatically as the text is produced. But they may also be deliberate decisions to improve the connection between content and expression. In either case, even small changes can contribute to the essay's shape.

Etymology

The original meanings of the word "shape" reveal its appropriateness to the context of writing. The verb "to shape" in Old English (sceppan) means to create, or to fashion. It probably originated from a Teutonic word meaning "to draw water from a source" and thus its connection to the idea of creation. It was used primarily to refer to the works of God, but later generalized to mean the giving of form to that which was previously shapeless or rough hewn. A later use of the word is connected to tailoring and dressmaking. Shaping meant the cutting out of the pattern. In essence this is what a writer does, when s/he

shapes an essay by focusing it on one aspect of all the possible content provided by life's fabric of knowledge and experience. Also, this is what the writer does by fashioning a draft which is rough hewn into a finished, polished product.

The Old English noun "shape" (sceap) meant the natural character of a thing, the "creature" itself. This meaning is reflected in our modern day saying "That's the shape of things" meaning that is way things really are. It is this elusive creature, I was attempting to track in my students' writing – how they give shape to their ideas.

However, it is another ancient meaning for the word "shape" which became much more the focus of my learning. Shape, (skap) from the Old Norse, also meant the creation or creature, but it had another meaning similar to "ordinance" or "edict." This meaning, too, has a religious origin connected to things being shaped in their true form by God or predetermined, as with fate. In this meaning of shape, we encounter the sense that "to shape" means to have things made as they ought to be. In this case, one thinks of our modern advice to "shape up," to get things back into their correct shape. When writers are composing, their conception of how things ought to be, their beliefs about what makes good writing, can have an impact on how they shape their writing.

Beliefs about the shape that writing ought to take can benefit writers to the extent that some mutually understood rules for writing make communication possible. Communication, after all, is the primary purpose of most writing and writers must be able to make text comprehensible to the audience for whom it is intended. Thus, a writer may need to "shape up" poorly expressed or incoherently structured writing by revising more carefully with the essay's purpose and audience in mind. However, if beliefs about acceptable form go

beyond the conventions necessary for clear communication, those beliefs may cease to be a benefit to the writer and become instead unnatural controls upon the possibilities of shape.

When beliefs about form are held as edicts, they may inhibit writers to the point where a functional relationship between form and content cannot develop. In this way, even an essay which meets all requirements for correctness in mechanics and conventional structure, may not communicate its content with optimum effectiveness. The true creature, or most appropriate form for the content, may become obscured or even invisible, not only to the readers of the text but also to the writer.

Background

Although I only recently began to consider a possible connection between my teaching of essay structure and a certain hollowness or lack of personality in my students' essays, I have wondered about the voiceless nature of their exposition for years. I had a conversation early in my career, which, had I pursued it more fully, may have provided good insight into my current question. A colleague and I were marking the essay section of the end-of-semester English exams, and lamenting the students' boring, predictable prose. Given the fact that the essays had been written in a test situation in response to a list of previously unannounced topics, we were willing to be compassionate. But we also recognized that essays written during the semester had not been much more satisfying.

The students' work was not incompetent. The essays were carefully structured, five-paragraph compositions with clear thesis statements, reliable transitional devices, acceptable development in the body paragraphs, and

appropriate summary conclusions. Unfortunately, these competently formatted pieces were utterly unengaging for the reader, and revealed none of their writers' personalities.

We were pleased that the students had grasped the essay format as it had been taught to them, but we wondered why their papers had such weak content. We discussed this question at some length, and in the end we blamed the students: they lacked imagination, they hadn't used the generation strategies we had taught them, they watched too much television, their backgrounds were too limited, and so on. We realized, of course, that we weren't being entirely fair. So we blamed ourselves, too: we hadn't helped them to open up, hadn't given them enough instructional examples, hadn't selected inspiring topics. Somehow, it did not occur to us that the one-size-fits-all format we had so carefully taught may have been the culprit responsible for placing their imaginations beyond the reach of written expression. In our desire to have the students write readable essays, we had forgotten to teach them how to write essays worth reading.

An emphasis on academic, argumentative essay format was common when I entered teaching in the late 1970's, as it still is in many secondary English classrooms twenty years later. In fact, the correct format was carefully spelled out complete with diagrams (Appendix A) in *The Lively Art of Writing,* a Payne (1965) book recommended as an excellent teacher resource. The format was also prescribed by the Ministry in the curriculum guide and resource book (Butler, 1978) which advises that "Only when students have a lot to say about a well defined topic should they be encouraged to organize their ideas into several sequential paragraphs. A technique for outlining a five-paragraph essay is given in Lesson 22... (p. 75). This was the approach that I had been

taught in my first year college introduction to academic writing, and I saw nothing wrong with teaching essay writing this same way. The idea that students might discover what they had to say and how they wanted to say it while they wrote their essays never occurred to me.

Despite my limited understanding of the writing process, some students who had gone on to university came back to thank me for preparing them so well. I now wonder exactly what I prepared them to do. To write formulaic prose for yet another set of teachers who preferred only the structure they expected? Perhaps I did these students a favour. But what might have been their creative potential if they had felt free to let form follow content rather than the other way around? Upon reflection I also remember clearly the frustration of those students who could not make what they wanted to say fit into my format, or who wrote in the format so blandly that their work might as well have been a fill-in-the-blank exercise.

When I began my graduate studies, I finally gave due attention to that conversation of years ago. As background reading for a course on racism and sexism in language, I began to read some books and articles about how writing, especially expository writing, is traditionally taught and evaluated, and how those traditions are not always meaningful or equitable for female students (Caywood & Overing, 1987; Cleary, 1996; Sanborn, 1992). The thesis-driven structure typical of the academic essay, and the positivist way of teaching that essay structure, reflect a view of the essay as a study in opposition. The writer takes a position and supports it; points are either for or against the thesis; argument follows a clear series of steps toward an inescapable conclusion. Such essays are usually expected to reflect a level of worldliness not naturally accessible to the average high school student. Thus, in order to be properly

developed, they require a good deal of research which usually results in a good deal of plagiarism. Alternately, their development is thin and unconvincing, resulting in low marks. This is not respectful of the world view of those students who think more subjectively, who see issues in shades of gray, and who make accommodations and concessions in their consideration of complex issues. Also, it does not recognize the essay as a negotiation between the subjective and the objective, which it must be.

As I read further about gender and composition instruction, I began to realize that I had been teaching in a disguise, that I had adopted a pedagogy that was not comfortable for me. One article (Daumer & Runzo, 1987) described traditional instruction in the academic essay as masculine. I'm usually skeptical about classifications which identify things as dichotomies rather than points on a continuum, yet when I read the authors' depiction of a teacher who typifies the masculine stance, it rang true. And it described me.

If the portrayal had not touched so accurately upon a professional sore spot, I might have laughed at myself, a feminist and teaching like a man. Instead, it shook me. I wrote in my journal at the time:

> I feel like crying as I read this piece by Daumer and Runzo. I feel as though I've betrayed myself at my core. The methodology I've used is that of the patriarchy, yet even my male students have been frustrated. I must change it fundamentally, but how?

This need to find another way led me to read a great many more articles on teaching expository writing. I was astounded, and heartened, to discover how many "experts" condemned the thesis-driven approach and for how many years the discussion had been in progress (Bertoff, 1981; Chapman, 1991; Crowley, 1989; DiPardo, 1990; Emig, 1971; Foley, 1989; Ford, 1991).

Over and over again I read descriptions of student essays and student

attitudes which echoed my own experience and captured my own frustration. I began to wonder how I could have been using so many student-centred strategies in my classroom – response journals, learning logs, peer revision groups – and yet be teaching expository writing in a manner inconsistent with those strategies. Perhaps the inconsistency resulted from my view of exposition as distinct from narration. The certainty of exposition, its grounding in the factual, argumentative and persuasive, seemed antithetical to "creative" writing and to writing as a means of discovery. But I began to see the narrative and expository genres as less distinct, and especially to see the processes involved in developing writing competence in each genre as more similar than different. It is, after all, the personal side of exposition, the involvement of the writer in the topic, and the human interest aspects of a topic which draw readers to good non-fiction writing (Graves et al, 1988; Zinsser, 1995). Good exposition has a certain magic to it in the writing and the reading, a joy that my students seemed to be missing. Ironically, the frontispiece of that resource text by Payne announces "There is no 'magic' in good writing." I knew I could no longer teach as though that were true.

In order to abandon the comfort of the academic essay, I would need to find a more authentic way to help students discover their expository voices. Unfortunately, I found very few suggestions for alternative strategies. Foley (1989) explains that little has been published in this regard.

> Currently our profession is alive with dialogue and research about the writing process, but proportionally little has been published about how form can be taught.... Even teachers who engage in process-centered teaching fall back on the five-paragraph formula when teaching form. (p. 233)

Nevertheless, I knew that since there were many wonderful non-fiction writers whose work I regularly enjoyed, there must be a way to learn to write engaging exposition. Interestingly, I began to consider a new approach by focusing on an aspect of my old approach which had not worked very well.

I remembered preparing an exercise sheet onto which I pasted the opening three to four paragraphs from several newspaper and magazine articles. I had asked my students to locate what seemed to be the thesis statements of these articles by way of helping them to see how professional writers locate thesis statements in their introductory paragraphs. They didn't find this an easy task, perhaps because few of the thesis statements looked like the "topic + opinion" definition I had given them in class. Perhaps because the structure of the articles did not resemble the way they were being taught to structure their essays. The fact of the matter is that professional writers rarely write five paragraph essays with the thesis statement in the introductory paragraph, and it had been a bit of a struggle to find articles to use as examples in the first place.

This reflection led me think about what my students could learn from a more realistic selection of models. I had previously used professional models and exemplary student models in my classroom, but they had been chosen to reveal only the formula I was teaching, so they really shed no light on the real world of expository writing (Appendix B). I found that some researchers recommended the use of models in order to improve the students' sense of text structure in reading and writing (Foley, 1989; Raphael & Englert, 1990), but their methodology involved having students emulate distinct rhetorical techniques – pro/con, compare/contrast, least to most important and so on – as though these were exclusive methods of development. Real world non-fiction, however,

blends these, often employing several techniques in the same paragraph. Thus, a teaching strategy which would have students use these techniques in an exclusive way would be little different from the formula approach which I was trying to avoid.

Despite my concern about using models to have students emulate limited forms, I found that the use of models generally was a technique well-supported in the literature (Brozo, 1988; Chapman, 1991; Freedman, 1993; Knudson, 1989; Shanklin, 1981; Stotsky, 1984; Utolarek, 1994). Also, models, or rather depth of reading, were emphasized by professional writers as one of the most important ways to learn to write. Both writers who work primarily in narrative and those who write mainly non-fiction describe the inspiration that they receive from the writers they admire (Hodgkins, 1993; Zinsser, 1995). As Gallo (1994) discovered in his research on the practices of professional writers: "Although authors give a variety of (sometimes conflicting) advice to aspiring writers, they all agree on one important thing: To be a writer, one must first be a reader" (p. 58). The point is that writers read the work of other writers to enjoy it, not to copy it. Reading is seen as a teacher who influences more than directly instructs. As William Faulkner (as cited in Saltzman, 1993) advised

> Read, read, read. Read everything - trash, classics, good and bad,
> and see how they do it. Just like a carpenter who works as an
> apprentice and studies the master. Read! You'll absorb it. Then
> write. If it is good, you will find out. If it's not, throw it out the
> window. (p. 140)

This advice reflects the findings of researchers and teachers alike in the whole language movement first in elementary education and increasingly in secondary education. An understanding of reading and writing as transactional processes leading to the gradual emergence of literacy competence is well

accepted in the realm of narrative, yet the same understanding has not totally transferred to non-fiction reading and writing (Freedman, 1993; Graves, 1989; Knudson, 1989, 1992; Root, 1983; Rosenblatt, 1991; Stotsky, 1984).

It seemed to me that the techniques I used for narrative, such as reader response journals and sustained silent reading, could also be applied to non-fiction in order to develop in students the same tacit knowledge of exposition as had been encouraged for narration. For about a third of my students, non-fiction immersion was not new. When no novel had been assigned and the selection of silent reading materials was left up to them, they brought magazines. I began to more actively encourage this practice, provided the students were reading the articles rather than skimming through the pictures and captions. More students, those who normally read fiction, began to bring in anthologies, biographies and true crime stories, until the percentage of students selecting non-fiction roughly equalled that of students selecting fiction.

However, I knew that reading alone would not necessarily lead to stronger expository writing skills, which left me with the question of how much explicit instruction to offer and in what areas. Freedman (1993) provided some helpful insights into how to answer this question. In her study of undergraduate law students' writing, she found that the students' law essays displayed syntax, diction, rhetoric and argumentative strategies typical of law essays, and not typical of the students' writing for other courses. Also, she learned that the students had been given no explicit instruction in how to write law essays as a subgenre of academic writing; they consulted no models for the purposes of emulating form; and they were not able to specify any discourse rules for law essays beyond a vague sense that they were different.

Freedman concluded that the students had developed tacit knowledge of

the subgenre through their immersion in the language and logic of the law during their course work. She cites Krashen's (1991) review of studies which explore the relationship between reading and writing, and presents his suggestion that when "learners are engaged with the content in authentic reading tasks, the relevant rules are inferred subconsciously" (Freedman, p.231). She further explains that explicit teaching of genre distinctions leads to explicit rather than implicit knowledge of those genre features. In other words, explicit teaching may enable students to define and even locate certain features of a given genre, yet not lead them to produce those features in their own writing. She does not dismiss the value of explicit instruction entirely, but agrees with Krashen that it should be limited to one or two transparent features such as overall format or mechanics.

Freedman distinguishes between genre instruction and process instruction, and explains that explicit instruction in practices which help students to generate text, consider audience and revise profitably is more likely to be useful than explicit instruction in genre features. She emphasizes that the facilitative role of the teacher in creating a literate environment which exposes students to a great deal of reading is central. "In fact, the relative lack of such exposure with respect to expository writing in general may explain, at least in part, students' relative lack of success in producing expository and argumentative genres" (p. 238). In addition she suggests that teachers collaborate with writers to tactfully encourage their development while they are writing. This suggestion is consistent with the writing conference approach promoted by Calkins (1991), Graves (1983), Murray (1984) and others.

Based on the work of Ellis (1990), Freedman clarifies that there are some aspects of explicit instruction which might be useful to students' acquisition of

genre conventions. She specifies that if students are taught certain genre features in the context of reading models of that genre, such teaching might help the "learners notice and acquire the rules governing those features" (p. 243). She emphasizes that proximity of instruction to immersion in the genre and authentic use of the genre is essential. In consideration of this advice, it seemed wise to me to select a very few key features of essay composition and to focus on those alone in my explicit teaching. Also, I decided to focus on these few concepts in both reading and writing in order to help the students make the connection between the two. The features I chose – thesis, purpose, tone and diction – provided a logical set in that they are all related to intentionality in writing. I concluded that if form were to follow function, I might want the students to become more aware of their own intentions in writing. I decided also to review a few key aspects of the practice of writing such as content generation techniques and proofreading strategies. Also, I planned to have the class continue with conferencing, peer revision, and journals during the essay writing unit.

Although I hoped that my students would increase their implicit knowledge of the above mentioned concepts in their own compositions and in the models, I wanted them to achieve at least explicit knowledge of the terms used to label these concepts. Sometimes when I am encouraging my students to master terminology, I wonder if I am wasting their time and perhaps even confusing them. Nevertheless, I think there is some value in this type of explicit knowledge. In the first place, it does give us a common language with which to discuss their work, and if I keep the terms to a minimum, they may be helpful in this regard. Also, information in their explicit knowledge may facilitate acquisition of implicit knowledge at a later time.

In addition, knowing some terms gives them access to a wider discourse community. When I read or hear book reviews or movie reviews, the critics often use the terms I encourage my students to learn in English class. I always think of those students and how someday they may be listening to something similar and not feel ignorant or excluded. It is perhaps a small argument for not taking a totally naturalistic approach to literacy acquisition, but it convinces me. And I think that if the terms are taught in context, learning them will not be too tedious.

Description of the Study

The study was conducted during a three week unit on reading and writing expository prose (Appendix C). The unit was introduced near the end of November after I had become familiar with the students and classroom routines were well established. Some disruption due to pre-Christmas activities may have had some negative impact on students' focus and retention of concepts.

In this study I collected verbal and written evidence of the students' writing practices and their understanding of essay writing in order to explore what it means from the students' perspective to come to terms with the challenge of writing an essay. Through class and group discussions and through reflective learning log assignments, I asked the students to focus directly on their approaches to and their beliefs about essay writing. Also, I listened to them discuss their work with one another and I conferenced with students while they were writing their essays. As the essays were being completed, I asked the students to consider how they had achieved their own purposes in their writing. Later, after the course and the final exam were complete, I interviewed some of the students further about their writing practices and shared with them some of the things I had observed.

In addition to writing their own essays, the students were asked to read and discuss essays by professional writers (Appendix D) and student writers (Appendix E). The professional essays encompassed several essay types: argument, definition, process analysis, personal narrative, description and persuasion. Although I asked the class to examine and discuss the essays in order to discern some of the strategies writers use to achieve purpose effectively, I did not dwell on the distinguishing features of the different essay genres. My purpose in asking the students to study the models was not to have them try to reproduce each type in their own writing, but rather to heighten their awareness of the variety of structural possibilities available to the essayist. In addition, however, the students were asked to consider elements which the model essays had in common such as thesis, purpose and tone.

The student models the class studied were drawn from the exemplars used to prepare teachers who mark the grade twelve provincial English exam. The class reviewed the holistic criteria used to mark the essay section of the exam. These criteria rank essays on a scale from one to six (Appendix F). Then the students worked in groups reading and evaluating the essays. As they worked they discussed the features of each essay and assigned the essay a position on the marking scale.

Several written assignments were required in the essay unit: one analysis of a professional model essay, two learning logs on the topic of essay writing, six reflective reading log entries on self-selected nonfiction, a free-write on the same topic as the student models, an in-class essay on a previously unannounced topic and a revised essay with a statement of purpose. The revised essay involved at least two drafts, a peer-revision session and a brief conference with the teacher. The unit provided many opportunities for oral

communication during the peer-revision sessions, group work on professional and student models, class discussions and informal peer sharing during the writing of the revised essay. Due to the many quiet reading and writing activities, there were many opportunities to unobtrusively observe the students' behaviours.

Description of the Class

I conducted this study in my English twelve class at Fernie Secondary School. Fernie is a small, Rocky Mountain town with a population of about 5,000 people. The town's economy is primarily resource based, dependent upon the nearby coal mines, although ski tourism contributes increasingly to its employment and development.

About 550 students attend the town's only high school. The school year is divided into two semesters with students assigned to four classes per semester. All students must take English from grades eight to twelve and must complete a provincial exam in English after completing the grade twelve course. In provincially examinable subjects, the school mark is sixty percent and the exam mark forty percent of the students' final grade. Students must write an impromptu essay in one section of the exam.

The school population is mainly Caucasian with a small number of First Nations students and other students of non-European descent in attendance. For the most part, the students come from homes which are well able to provide for them, and about 30 to 50 percent of the students go on to some type of post-secondary education within the first few years after graduation.

The class with which the study was conducted was a fairly typical English twelve class for Fernie Secondary School. At twenty-two students, it was smaller than usual, which is one of the reasons I chose it for the study. There

were ten girls and twelve boys in the class, and the students ranged in their language ability and their interest in the subject area. The class average at the end of the semester was seventy-one percent. All students successfully completed the provincial exam.

Some of the students had been in my English classes in previous years, but the majority were unfamiliar to me. The class had about three identifiable groups of students and did not seem to develop a whole group identity during the course of the semester. However, the tone of the class was generally cooperative and congenial.

The class was informed of the nature of the research in advance and given an opportunity to request that their oral contributions and written work not be quoted in the report (Appendix G). For the purposes of this report the students will be identified either by their first name or a pseudonym according to their preference. All students cited individually in the report have given their written consent to be quoted or to have their work quoted.

Results and Reflections

Much of what I learned from being a wildlife watcher in my classroom, I learned from noticing consistencies and inconsistencies. For example, in some cases, the students' explanations of their writing practices were consistent with the behaviours I observed as they wrote, sometimes not. Sometimes their responses and behaviours were consistent with the reports in the research literature, sometimes not. Sometimes their behaviours and responses were consistent with my expectations, and sometimes they surprised me. I will try to describe accurately what I observed in my classroom and to make sense of the ways in which my observations either did or did not match my expectations.

Generating Practices

The first consistency, ironically, is an inconsistency. Few student writers had exactly the same method for getting started on their writing or keeping their writing from stalling, which is true of both professional writers (Gallo, 1994; Root, 1983) and student writers studied by other researchers (Calkins, 1991; Flower & Hayes, 1981; Graves, 1983). In a class discussion on the question of how the students went about writing once they had a topic, the class gave a variety of responses. Some used brainstorming and webs to generate ideas, some used point-form outlines, some used doodles, some used free writing, and many reported they went straight to the first draft and wrote until they run out of ideas. Several students prefaced their explanation of this last strategy with apologetic phrases such as "I know this is wrong but..." and "I know you're not supposed to do it this way but..."   Obviously they had heard the message that they should plan first and write later if they wanted to get good results.

This advice, however, is not consistent with the practices of all professional expository writers, many of whom also go straight to draft (Root, 1983). It is also inconsistent with some students' experience. One of the strongest writers in the class regularly goes straight to draft and does very little revision. He described his method as follows: "I just write it how it seems logical in my mind and then do a good copy to check for spelling and punctuation" (Ben). Despite his lack of a formal plan, and little work on revision, Ben's writing is clear and logical. It may be that this student has a greater sense of audience in mind as he writes; whereas, others who need to revise more deeply to achieve clarity, tend to focus on their own meaning more in the draft stages and to consider audience only once the first draft is complete. For example, in describing her revising process another students explains:

Amy: Most difficult would be going over it and trying to fit in everything that you missed. I find it a bit hard to describe everything because you, the writer, already picture it so you assume everybody else can picture it also. But that's not the case.

These differences in audience focus and their connection to differences in revision strategy are consistent with the research of Beach (as cited in Shanklin,1981, p.128).

Other factors, such as background knowledge on the topic, the physical environment in which the writing takes place, and the value the students place on the assignment, contribute to variability in the students' writing practices. Several students reported that their approach depended upon the topic and how much they knew about it. Obviously for topics not in the realm of general knowledge they would need to do some research, and in that case most preferred to complete a more formal plan before drafting. During writing, some students reported using strategies such as brainstorming to get around writer's block, but most said they just took some time to think more about their topic or asked their friends or the teacher for ideas. In this case they also reported that the strategy depended on the cause of the block and whether they were writing alone or not, so their choices were not the same on all occasions. The value students saw in the assignment was an important factor in determining their approaches to writing. Mark's comment is typical in this regard: "For some assignments, I'll do more stuff to get it right because I care about the topic or it's worth a lot of marks." All of the above mentioned factors are part of the context in which the text is created, and that context has an impact on how the text is created. This explains how writing practices can be different not only from one writer to the next but from one task to the next.

Recursivity of Writing Practices

However, the processes of the writers in the class were consistent with one another and with those reported in the literature in regard to the recursivity of the writing process. Writers do not move step by step in a linear fashion from generating to shaping to evaluating and revising and then on to editing (Bertoff, 1981; Calkins, 1991; Flower & Hayes, 1981; Graves, 1983; Shanklin, 1981). The students, even those who went straight to draft, activated various elements of the writing process as they wrote. Some students were very conscious of the recursivity in their writing practices.

Ryan: I'm sort of a sentence by sentence writer. I write a bit and then I check to see what I think about it, if it's right. Otherwise I just get off track and then I don't do well.

Sherri: I just start writing and thoughts and information come to me as I do. I think this is because once I get thinking about it, one thing triggars another.

Jonathan: I write the essay from beginning to end, editing as I go along.

These students are describing the interactions between generating, shaping, evaluating and revising which occur almost simultaneously as they write.

Other students, even those who insisted they just "let it flow," often stopped in their writing to think quietly for a moment, then made some small change and moved on. Often students would stop to check conventions such as spelling and punctuation before returning to their train of thought. Also, small concerns connected to the shaping of meaning such as word choices and matters of appropriateness of diction would interrupt the flow of their writing. Although the practice of simply leaving the details for later revision worked for some writers, for many it was an impossibility. Yet they were able to refocus

quickly and move on productively once those "small" issues were resolved.

Peer Sharing

Often the students resolved these small concerns with a quick peer consultation. In fact the students placed a high value on having the freedom to discuss their work at all stages of its development. Their perception of the value of classroom talk is consistent with the literature on the value of collaboration as an element of the writing process. For example, Sweigart (1991) found that small group discussion around a topic before writing significantly increased the students' ability to develop that topic well in their writing. Calkins (1991) emphasizes the importance of students collaborating in what she calls a "sea of talk." This is not to say that the classroom should be noisy. Quite the opposite is true, and some students commented that they hoped the writing time would be quiet because they couldn't concentrate if it was noisy. To create a reflective atmosphere, the class policy was that students were allowed to consult briefly at a whisper while they worked. Time for more extended, general discussion of topics and other writing related concerns was provided at the beginning and end of each quiet writing session. Also, the students selected a small group of classmates with whom to exchange their essay for a more complete discussion and peer-revision.

The importance of peer sharing is strongly indicated in the literature (Grubaugh & Speaker, 1991; Macrorie, 1984; Shanklin, 1981). Although the students did seem to wander off task quite regularly while discussing their writing, most of their learning log entries reflected the benefits of peer sharing.

Andrea: Peer sharing is important to my writing process because
I need to know that readers can understand what I'm trying
to get across.

Kevin: Peer sharing is very beneficial to the writing because sometimes people can give you ideas which you probably wouldn't think of by yourself.

Vanessa: I find it fairly beneficial to ask my peers about certain things when I write. If a sentence is a little confusing to them, I can change it so it is more understandable.

Ryan: My Peer help me alot on basic in english rule that I have neglected to learn over the years. Slowly I am picking up on the little thing like punctuation and spelling.

Julie: Peer sharing is extreamly beneficial to me because alot of the time I am stuck for a suitable word to use or I need help with spelling. I find it also useful to talk topics over with my peers because it gives me ideas and thoughts that I'd over looked or not have realized beforehand.

Nathan: Asking my peers questions and comparing myself to them helps me a lot. Not that you are a bad teacher by any stretch of the imagination, it is just that my friends work on the same "playing field" as I and can explain things to me in easier terms and can cite examples of some things we may have done together in the past.

Jan: Peer sharing helps a lot. Other students help you with ideas and can tell you if it's boring or confusing.

It is interesting to note that the students indicated the importance of peer sharing for all aspects of their process from generating ideas to fixing spelling. Also, the importance of their common interests and backgrounds is a factor in the value they place on the input they receive into their writing.

However, not all students find peer sharing beneficial, and two expressed their minority opinion. Although these were the only negative responses, they do highlight the two aspects of peer sharing which give me as a

teacher the most concern.

> Jonathan: Peer sharing does absolutely nothing for my writing - most "peer sharing" tends to venture far from the work at hand.

> Mark: I do not feel that peer sharing is of any benefit at all to our essay writing process. Unless all of the students know their spelling and know the elements of a good essay.

I do not like to think that students view any classroom activity as a waste of time or an opportunity to waste time. However, I try to keep in mind the benefits perceived by the majority of the students, and the fact that these two students have many opportunities for teacher conferences which may address their perceived need for more focused or sophisticated feedback.

In regard to the concern about peer discussion wandering off topic, students can be encouraged to focus on task, but the problem with being too restrictive is that often content difficulties are worked out in very round about ways, so a good deal of latitude may be helpful. In addition, peer feedback, even by students less aware of surface conventions, can be beneficial to writers simply because a peer reader brings a fresh perspective. Grubaugh and Speaker (1991) found that writers are so "powerfully cued" by their own writing that it is very difficult for them to see the need for revision, even after letting the draft rest for a week. Sometimes, the egocentrism of a writer requires that an external audience help the writer become aware of weaknesses in the piece.

Teacher Conferences

Many students described benefits for teacher conferencing similar to those for peer sharing, with the exception of the role of teacher as audience. Their description of the benefits is consistent with the literature on teacher

conferencing (Calkins, 1991; Graves, 1983; Murray, 1984), but there are some ways in which the teacher conference may not be as helpful as the literature suggests. For example, it is interesting that students saw the teacher as providing useful assistance with idea generation, and with writing conventions and structure, yet none made comments indicating recourse to the teacher for feedback on whether the essay was "boring or confusing."

Ultimately, the teacher is seen as an evaluative audience rather than as a real audience. This is consistent with Shanklin's (1981) discussion of the importance of having students become one another's audience.

> When persons function as readers of others' work in real life, the evaluations they make are usually not like those of most teachers reading students' texts. Readers assume writers have messages they want to convey, and they read attempting to grasp these messages. In contrast, many teachers read student writing looking for ways in which the messages fail. (pp. 144 - 145)

This understanding of the teacher as squarely situated in the evaluator role is consistent with the students' more frequent mention of the teacher's input as being related to corrective instruction or improved marks (italics mine).

> Lana: Teacher conferences helped me to *fix* things I wouldn't have thought of on my own. Sometimes I was writing in formats I had just learned and I wasn't clear what to do. Then when I was told what to do instead, I could do it *properly*.

> Mark: The teacher conferences were of great help. You *caught* some of our *mistakes* before we had to hand it in, which gave us a chance to *fix* them before they *cost us marks*.

> Danny: Teacher conferences are good because if I was really stuck on a topic or how to start off an essay, I could go and ask the teacher and she would put me on the *right* track.

Jonathan: Teacher conference is good. I am always open to
constructive *criticism* of my work - it is the *only way* it will
ever improve.

It may be that the teacher perceives herself as providing advice and guidance regarding the overall process and shape of the writing, while the students regard her more as the ultimate editor and critical evaluator. This discovery was a little hard on my ego, I must admit, but important to the refocusing of my awareness on how the teacher's intervention in the process need not be, in fact probably should not be, central to the students' growth as writers. This is reminiscent of Freedman's (1993) explanation of how the teacher's most important function may be to facilitate a literate environment in which writing growth can take place.

Topic Selection

One regard in which the students were highly consistent with one another and with the literature was in the importance of self-selected topics. Professional writers who offer advice to novices often tell them to write what they care about (Fox, 1988; Goldberg, 1986; Saltzman, 1993; Zinsser, 1994). Although this is certainly good advice, students are more often compelled to write on teacher chosen topics than invited to choose their own. When topics are imposed, students often have difficulty in generating content. Shanklin (1981) explains that this is often viewed as a problem of invention when in fact it is a problem of motivation.

The writing problem may be due to the fact that many tasks/topics
have no link to writers' backgrounds nor to their functional
purposes. The factor to be explained here is not invention per se,
but a better understanding of the circumstances under which the

impetus to write occurs. (p. 132)

This question of motivation seems a plausible explanation for the the fact that topic imposition was the most common cause of a "worst essay writing experience" for the students in the class.

> Andrea: Bad essay writing experiences result when broad topics are assigned, such as: The Effects of WW2 on the World. Too much information floods my brain and leaves me feeling helpless and incapable.

> Mark: The worst experience would have to be a topic that I do not enjoy and leaving it until the night before it's due.

> Julie: My worst experience with essay writing has been when I've been stuck with a topic which I do not like and know nothing about. The kind the teacher assigns to you or on a history or science test.

> Ryan: My worst experiences with essays are when I don't have good info. or the topic does not interest me.

> Danny: The worst experience I had with essay writing is not knowing about the topic I have to write on, and when I write it I would get a bad mark.

Obviously, on the reverse side of this matter are students' best experiences which also centre around topic selection.

> Lana: My best writing experiences are topics I am interested in or know a lot about.

> Vanessa: My best essay experiences were when we chose a topic of our choice, not limited by anything. I got to express my opinion along with my own experiences in life.

> Nathan: Best experience - writing about something you enjoy or have knowledge of.

> Julie: The best are when I have just chosen a simple topic and

been able to write the whole essay in one shot. Plus it
makes better sense.

The question about best and worst experiences in essay writing wakened in students strong feelings about their own control over their writing. Clearly, the imposition of a topic to which the students cannot relate interferes with their ability to negotiate effectively between the subjective of the self and the objective of the topic. Such imposition may reach even deeper to effect the way students feel about themselves. Their sense of having nothing to say, and the resulting difficulty they have with the whole process of the writing, can lead to feelings of frustration and incompetence.

In regard to topics, though, two students gave a divergent opinion. Although both were competent writers, they felt that they required some direction from the teacher to help them focus.

Mark: My worst experiences with essay writing, as with any writing, are ideas. I can never get the ball rolling on my own. If you just give me a topic, then I can write about it. Toying with my own ideas takes me forever.

Sherri: When I have to explain something, it is easier. When the essay topic comes in the form of a question rather than a word, it is easier for me because I know what my goal and outcome is.

These students feel frustration when they have to choose their own topics. Graves (1983) would say that these students are on "writers' welfare" and that the teacher needs to get them off the dole. Collaboration on topic selection is preferable to topic imposition in this case, because it models for students how they can deal with the challenge of choosing their own topics.

It is true that we need to remove instructional scaffolding for students so

they can develop independence, but it is also true that much of the real world writing done by students after they leave high school will be at someone else's request. Very few English 12 students go on to become poets, novelists or free-lance journalists. So although strong, authentic voices are important, the majority of the students may find frustration if they cannot learn to take their own perspective on someone else's topic. In any case it may be best to also have students practice strategies for developing personal approaches to imposed topics.

For the purposes of this study, students had one essay for which they chose the topic (Appendix H) and one for which the topic - "Being independent can be..." - was assigned by the teacher. The imposed topic was for an in-class essay meant to mimic the circumstances under which the students would write on the provincial exam. Most students find this type of essay test very frustrating. Test situations were the second common cause of worst essay writing experiences. Although it behoves the teacher to prepare the students for such required tests, the validity of the tests themselves is questionable. For example, after the provincial exam, the two most effective writers in the class, insightful students who take pride in their work, were very disappointed in how they did on the essay section, because the dual frustration of a preselected one-word topic combined with a one-hour time constraint robbed them of the opportunity to write to their ability.

Feelings About Writing

When students are free to write on the topic of their choice, have ample class time for composing, have access to teacher assistance and feel comfortable with their peer-revision group, they should be able to relax and

write to the best of their ability. And most do. However there are some aspects of the affective domain which may interfere. For example, some students just don't like English and would rather be somewhere else doing almost anything else. In fact, if English were an elective subject, the enrollment would probably be low. Also, many students write essays just to pass the course, and have very little personal investment in them beyond the mark they hope to receive. Some students simply don't like essay writing, and feel miserable when they are expected to do it.

Ken: My best experience with essay writing is when I don't have to write one. My worst experience is when I have to because I have trouble with them.

Jan: I can't remember any good experiences because I usually end up with an essay that gets a bad mark. This bugs me because I try my best therefore I hate essay writing.

Jesse: I don't remember specific essay's. I think I got an A on an essay, but more often than not I blow it. I have trouble with write. I really can't stand it. But it something you have to do.

Ben: I don't really remember any of my essay writing experiences. When I write an essay, I write it to get it done and get a good mark, and then I usually forget about it.

It is important for English teachers to remember that the writing situation can be stressful or even depressing for some students, and almost meaningless for others.

Conceptions of Essay

Students who feel inadequate or disinterested when faced with an essay assignment, are likely to find a formula for success very appealing. Thus when they are told what the ingredients are for a good essay by a teacher who will

look for those ingredients when s/he marks the essay, they are very motivated to conform to that formula. Even competent and creative students are more likely to care about getting a good mark than expressing their creativity, especially when entrance to college or university depends on their transcript results. Bearing this in mind, it should not be surprising that most of the students in the class had a clear, explicit understanding of how teachers define a good essay.

The formulaic definition of the elements of a good essay which students have mastered shows up clearly in their learning log responses.

Danny: You need to start off the essay with a good thesis statement. You need to have at least at least three body paragraphs starting with the least important example and ending with the most important example. You need to end the essay with a conclusion summing up the thesis and the body paragraphs.

Andrea: I remember learning the 5 sentence / 5 paragraph method in French class. The first paragraph is the introduction, followed by three body paragraphs and a concluding paragraph. Each paragraph includes five sentences. The first is an introductory sentence, followed by three more sentences and a concluding sentence. Last year I learned about different kinds of essays. I think a "how-to" essay is an expository essay. There are also essays that try to convince the reader and others inform.

Ben: The essay must be well-structured with thesis, evidence and warrant. It must have effective and consistent use of paragraphing. It must be grammatically correct, with no errors in spelling or punctuation, and not run-ons or fragments.

Sherri: Some elements are a well developed introductory paragraph showing the main point or points you want to

emphasize, a paragraph on each of the points giving all the facts, and a conclusion tying everything together along with your own thoughts and feelings on the subject. The thoughts and feelings of the writer should be withheld until the conclusion of the essay.

Jonathan: First there should be a thesis statement, and, in the same paragraph, an introduction to what your essay will include. Then the guts of the essay, written with a variety of types of sentences, and seperated into appropriate paragraphs. Finally, there should be a concluding paragraph which summarizes everything you have said in the essay. Also, all paragraphs should run in a logical order and redundant words/phrases should be avoided.

These student responses and many others like them reveal a fairly consistent understanding of essay, which bears little or no relation to the structure of authentic essays. Of course essays do have introductions, bodies and conclusions, and they usually have a thesis or main idea, and they are written in sentences and formed into paragraphs. Also, most readers expect to read essays written according to the conventions of spelling, syntax and punctuation. Beyond these few basics, the other features described by the students are not readily found in the essays they read in magazines or non-fiction books.

In fact, these traits were rarely mentioned by students when they were asked to explain what they thought of as a good essay from a reader's perspective, nor did they mention them in their responses to their self-selected reading (Appendix I). Students enjoy essays which "grab their attention" and "put them right in the situation." They want a good writing style that "flows" and is readable without too many "pretentious" words. Students want to read essays on topics of interest to them or "at least where the writer makes the topic

interesting." Essentially, the students focused more on how an essay appeals to its audience than on how it is structured.

> Vanessa: A good, understandable piece of work. Something written well and having good points and, I think, with life experiences.

> Julie: A good essay is one that the reader can relate to and has no trouble to understand. It is really the content that matters.

> Jonathan: It's hard to say what makes a good essay, but when I read an essay, I always know whether it was any good.

When they read essays, the students want to be engaged in the topic and respected by the writer. They have a tacit understanding that structure is only one feature that contributes to a good essay, but when they switch from reading to writing they elevate its importance.

Despite the disparity between what students have been taught to think of as a good essay, and what they appreciate in their free reading, the students did not seem to think that the "rules" for essay form were incorrect in any way. Also, when examining the professional essay "A Jerk" (Appendix Dv) students had difficulty in locating and explaining elements which did not specifically correspond to their explicit understanding of essay structure. Even identification of the thesis was difficult when it did not appear where expected.

> KN: Do you think you've located the thesis statement?
> Jan: Is this it? (indicating the last sentence of the first paragraph)
> KN: What makes you think so?
> Jan: Well, doesn't it have to come here, at the end of the introduction?
> KN: It can, but it doesn't have to.
> Jan: Well, how do you know where it is then?

Also, most students found it very difficult to explain how the essayist was developing his main idea, and several students mislabelled his use of definition as a use of example. Several students misapplied concepts associated with narrative. "Isn't he foreshadowing here?" and "That's the climax, isn't it?"

Although this assignment was early in the unit, some students did not significantly improve in their ability to analyze expository text structure, as was revealed in the class's weak performance on the questions on the essay "Black English" (Appendix Dviii). However, in identifying features in their own essays, students were better able to demonstrate their grasp of thesis, purpose, tone and diction. In their reading response logs, very few students applied the concepts we were studying in essay writing, despite work with these concepts in class and encouragement to include them in their responses. Some students demonstrated a strong grasp of analytical skills in their responses to the model essays. This is a response to "Beauty and the Beef" (Appendix Div).

> Jonathan: This is an expository essay the purpose of which is
> to expose the trickery of advertising – specifically the
> production of a Burger King hamburger you might see on a
> TV ad. The tone of the essay is one of humerous
> criticism (and somewhat of sarcasm). An example of the sort
> of diction used to set the tone is: "since bubbling blood is
> not a desirable special effect (sarcasm), "the stylist, like a
> prissy microsurgical nurse continually dabs at the burger
> with a Q-tip."

Most students, however, continued to respond to the meaning of the articles and to make mainly personal connections to their content. This response to "As They Say, Drugs Kill" (Appendix Dvii) demonstrates a fairly typical response which considers the essay's effect on the reader but not the means by which that effect was achieved.

Sherri: This story is told by a young woman who realizes from
this incident how stupid doing drugs is. Until you
experience something like this yourself, you never really
realize it could happen to you. Most people don't take
drugs seriously but they should think twice about it before
something like this incident happens to them.

It would seem that for purposes of analysis, knowledge of the target essay concepts did not become implicit for all students. On the other hand, Rosenblatt (1991) explains that readers adopt different stances toward the material they read, sometimes reading for information and sometimes for personal interaction.

In the same way that students usually "just read" and do not analyze as they read, many reported that they never consciously think about the "rules" of a good essay as they write their essays. They just write what makes sense or seems logical to them. Students report that if they give attention to concepts like thesis or transition at all, they do so only after the first draft is finished. Despite this lack of conscious awareness, most of the essays students wrote under pressure, when they had no opportunity for revision, conformed to their description of a good expository essay: the five paragraph model. The exceptions to this form were those essays written as personal narratives, another familiar school writing form. Thus, an implicit knowledge of certain essay types must inform their writing process despite their lack of conscious intention that it do so.

Contrary to Freedman's (1993) explanation of knowledge acquisition, this would seem to indicate that explicit instruction in essay genre features and structure has become implicit. Although this may be inconsistent with her explanation of Krashen's hypothesis, it could also be that the students' reading

of and production of several models of those familiar essay forms has led to their internalizing the formula. In any case, both their explicit and implicit conception of expository essay are limited to an oversimplified, schoolish subgenre, and that conception may be interfering with their ability to consider other possible ways to shape meaning. Flower and Hayes (1981) found that predetermination of form can interfere with a writer's ability to develop an effective relationship between form and content. "Often creative thinking proceeds best by assembling topics and arguments in an unordered fashion, and then developing a form to suit the material. This process could easily be disrupted by focussing on form too early" (p. 51). When students have mastered one convenient form, they are likely to overgeneralize its use to situations where other forms would be much more effective.

Perceived Restrictions of Genre

Another way in which students' conception of essay narrowed their ability to generate and shape meaning was in their view of narration and exposition as exclusive genres. This arbitrary dichotomizing of the genres is inconsistent with good non-fiction writing. "An effective expository text inevitably contains a narrative component, one's experiential base conveying commitment and fostering engagement even where it remains a tacit underpinning" (DiPardo, 1990, p. 81). Even after reading professional essays which provided examples of writers drawing on their personal experiences to develop their topics, several students did not feel they could do the same in developing their own topics.

Two particular writing conferences revealed how disabling this misconception of genre distinction could be. In the first case, the student had rewritten several openings to an essay with a fact-based, expository focus, and

she was feeling very frustrated.

KN:	You're not getting very far there.
Julie:	Well, I'm trying but I just can't do this.
KN:	What are you writing on?
Julie:	I'm writing about how people hurt other people, and I'm thinking about, you know, why they do that.
KN:	So you're trying to write about what makes people want to hurt one another?
Julie:	Yeah, can I do that?
KN:	Sure, that's an interesting topic.
Julie:	Yeah, but I'd have to go to the library and look up on that, right?
KN:	No, you don't have to. Just write from what you know, your own experiences and observations.
Julie:	Can I do that?
KN:	Yes!

Julie wrote an effective ten paragraph reflection on an important personal experience she had when enrolling in a new school. By switching to a more narrative approach, Julie was able to explore her topic in a way that was meaningful to her.

In the second case, the student had made an outline for an essay on the game of golf. He had a few instructional paragraphs on how to choose a club and so on, but he was totally stuck for what to say in the rest of the essay. He seemed uninspired by his own topic, even though he was an excellent golfer. Danny is a student of few words, so his asking for help was an indication of how stuck he was.

Danny:	I'm trying to write on golf, but I'm having a hard time.
KN:	What have you got there?
Danny:	It's just about golf, how to and stuff.

KN: You really love golf, right?

Danny: Yeah.

KN: Could you write more about that? About why you love it or how it feels on a great day?

Danny: (relieved) Okay, I can do that.

At first, Danny had been convinced that his essay must be factual or instructional, though he clearly was not enjoying that approach. In the end, Danny's essay kept a fairly traditional structure but the focus was on his formula for success in golf, the personal traits and practices that had developed his talent. It went from being an instructional piece to being an informational piece with a touch of tongue-in-cheek humour. His knowledge of his topic and pride in his ability and accomplishments came through clearly. Danny displayed an implicit knowledge of this type of informative essay and was able to switch to this subgenre simply by changing his purpose. This example is consistent with Freedman (1993).

Use of Professional Models

In regard to the explicit use of model essays, I expected that if students encountered models which demonstrated structures and content quite different from their understanding of essay, they might be able to broaden their awareness of the variety of expression available to the essayist. Some students' learning logs did indicate a developing ability to conceive of essay in broader terms.

Stephanie: Before we started studying professional essays, I thought an essay was what you wrote for socials class using information from the library. I had no idea it was something you wrote to express your own thoughts and ideas.

Jonathan: The main thing that I got from the professional essays was that I don't have to stick to the classic structure I'd been taught up until now. In these essays I was able to see some different ways of essay development. Also, it's good to see <u>examples</u> of what makes a good essay rather than just learning points.

Julie: By studying professional essay it was helpful because I was able to see all of the different structures and formats used. It also let me see all of the wide topics people wrote on. It gave me ideas on how I wrote my own essay and how I could approach my topic.

Vanessa: I found that by reading the professional essays helped me get my mind out of thinking that an essay was a four or five paragraph piece of work. I don't think it has done anything remotely dramatic in my reading of other essays, however.

None of the students cited above wrote their own essays in the typical five paragraph format. In fact, over half the class abandoned the five paragraph format in their revised pieces.

However, another response to the professional models was not what I had expected. Several students did not see the models as providing a wider range from which to choose, but rather as providing more formats which should be copied to ensure good writing.

Ben: I think that the studying of the professional essays helped my writing because it gave me ideas as to what a good essay should look like.

Jan: The professional essay helped me to get the idea of structure and methods of writing better.

Ryan: The professional models gave me a guide line to follow and

alternatives in how to structure my essays.

It is clear to me now that models used in class *as* models are likely to be interpreted by students as formats to be emulated rather than possibilities to be explored. Unfortunately, students will find themselves frustrated if they take this approach, because as was discussed earlier in this paper, a text artifact cannot reveal the processes which went into its creation. It is at the generating and shaping stages where students must authentically create text and, as was mentioned earlier, there is no one correct way to write.

Nevertheless, there remains an idea amongst some students that there is a formula for success, that there is in fact "no magic in good writing." This premise is likely to be the very thing which interferes with the students' growth as writers. As Flower and Hayes (1981) explain:

> The first premise of a problem-solving approach is that there is no single "correct" way to write. There are only alternative approaches to the endless series of problems and decisions writers must confront as they work through the process of composing. Some of these alternative approaches, however, have a better chance of producing a good solution than others. The ultimate goal of a process approach to writing, then, is not to prescribe a proper process, but instead, to give writers increased awareness of alternatives as they work through the problem of writing. (p. 56)

If students do not learn to view writing as an exploration of possibilities toward the most effective form for a given topic or context, they may be more likely to have difficulty as they come across unfamiliar writing demands in their lives after graduation. Very few real life situations require the type of essay taught in schools, and schools cannot possibly teach every form or genre which will be required in the students' lives.

Use of Student Models

Whereas the class had inconsistent reactions to the work with professional models, their evaluation of the student models was consistent. The students worked in groups to determine the ranking of a set of student essays based on a scale of one to six described in the "Composition Scoring Guide." Their results in this exercise were accurate in terms of the original ministry rankings and consistent from group to group with only a few exceptions. In their discussions of the rankings, the students demonstrated a good grasp of most of the concepts covered in the guide.

The anonymity of the essays seems to have contributed to the class's accuracy in ranking them. Anonymous essays by peers who are not classmates can be discussed openly with no chance of hurt feelings or hidden prejudices, so the student models served an evaluative purpose not readily served by peer-revision. Also, the student models offered some range of structures and approaches to the same topic, so again the idea of the variety of options available to the essayist was reinforced. The peer models had the added advantage of not being perfect. Professional writers, like professionals in any field, make that which is very difficult seem very easy, and thus professional model essays may be as likely to intimidate students as they are to inspire them.

One important drawback to the use of the student models was that while they contained two fairly solid examples of engaging student prose, the class tended to focus more on mark values than on the qualities which made the prose enjoyable. Most felt they could never write a six paper in a test situation, and many saw the four paper as a reasonable goal to aim for. This sort of glass ceiling mentality may be why mainly four papers were written in the simulation in class.

Problems with Formulaic Conceptions of Essay

The formulaic essay which many students favour in a pressure writing situation is clearly described in the "Composition Scoring Guide" for the provincial exam, along with another familiar form, the personal narrative. These forms are rated as a four out of six, only a C+ essay.

> The 4 paper offers conventional personal narrative with identifiable beginning, middle and end and often some purposeful dialogue. Alternately, it offers a standard (five-part) expository structure with suitable but predictable introduction and conclusion. Some variety is evident in diction and sentence structure. The reader follows the paper's meaning and purpose with relative ease, if not interest.

Of all the negative opinions I read on the five-paragraph essay, this is in many ways the most damning. It artificially separates narrative from exposition as though they could be, or should be, exclusive of one another for convenience sake. Worse, it is an admission that students likely have been prepared to regurgitate these essay formulae, and that the teaching of the five-paragraph structure is still standard practice throughout the province. The mark value assigned to this form indicates that when it is competently done, it demonstrates the ability to write middle-of-the road, boring, useless prose. Why would we want our students to write this way?

It is no mystery why some of our students would want to write this way. It will give them a pass or better for the essay section of the exam, it is fairly easy to master and it doesn't take much thought when they have to get something down in a hurry. After all the students must write under the two conditions they hate the most: an imposed topic and a time-limited test. Only those who are capable of being inspired under those circumstances, or who want very badly to do well could possibly be motivated to do better than a four out of six.

Some teachers will argue that the pressure under which students must write in exam situations is a good enough reason to provide the students with an essay formula to fall back on. A few years ago, I would have agreed with them. Now, however, I understand that students who learn the formula do not view it as only one of many possible options, and a poor one at that. They view it as the definition of the expository essay.

There are two main problems with this understanding of essay. First, it seriously interferes with the students' ability to recognize other valid ways to shape meaning. It gets into their writing process even when they are unaware of it and because they know it as an edict, it supplants other more effective forms. Secondly, it is not easily removed. Even with study of alternative models and encouragement to write in whatever form they wish, many students remained with the five-paragraph structure. If the fall-back argument were valid, the simplified expository form would be a scaffold which the teacher and students could slowly remove. Instead, it has become a unhealthy dependency.

Conclusion

The thing about wildlife watching is that once a creature emerges from the underbrush and you get a more accurate idea of what it is like, you can never return to an incomplete notion of it based on its tracks alone. Now that my students have helped me to better understand how they shape meaning, I can not return to teaching practices which do not recognize that understanding. Also, it is clearer to me now how road making affects the environment through which the roadways pass. Therefore, I must consider carefully the effect of assignments, topics and grading on students' writing practices and attitudes toward writing.

In order to recognize my awareness of how writers shape meaning, I will need to use alternative strategies to encourage my students' development of expository writing skills. I will need to take Foley's (1989) suggestion and actively "unteach the five paragraph essay." I will want to give students large blocks of time for reading and writing self-selected materials as well as opportunities to analyze models which reflect real-world exposition. The focus with the models will be on the meaning of each text and how it achieves its purpose as an individual text rather than as a type to be imitated. Thus, students will be encouraged to slowly acquire implicit knowledge of the structures and techniques they can employ to shape meaning according to their own purposes.

Students will be helped to negotiate between the personal and the public, the objective and the subjective according to the demands of their own approaches to a topic. The distinguishing traits of narration and exposition will be presented as existing along a continuum rather than as identifying exclusive genres. However, in order to recognize the way in which genre knowledge develops from reading, I will try to facilitate non-fiction literacy by employing the student-centered approaches commonly used to help students appreciate narrative writing: response journals, discussion groups, learning logs and so on.

I will encourage students to view writing development as a slow process of trial and error in which error can be an acceptable sign of growth. I will remember that teachers can facilitate that growth, but they cannot accelerate it by providing students with prescriptions for success that narrow rather than broaden the students' growth as writers. Writing development is the slow accretion of small solutions to small problems, of thousands of observations of

how other writers have worked out those problems according to their way of shaping meaning. In *Speaking of Journalism*, McKean, a writer of essays on science, advised Zinsser's (1994) students:

> Learning to write, like learning any skill, is easier with good instruction,... but teaching only communicates those aspects of a craft which can be codified, boiled down to concepts and expressed in words. Real craftsmanship is richer than that. It involves many things that you can learn only by doing them. So the best way to improve your writing is to write often. Practice is the best teacher of all. (p. 48)

It is, I think, most important for teachers and students alike to not confuse the explicit codified representation of what it means to write an essay, for the act of writing itself. A writer with an implicit understanding of essay can allow the text to appear from the undergrowth at the edge of a roadway, like magic.

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List of Appendices

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Appendix B	"Labelling Animals" – a student model of the five-paragraph essay structure
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Appendix A

52   THE LIVELY ART OF WRITING

Introduction

Thesis

Concession,
followed by
pro **argument**

It is true, of course, ...
.... But ....

Extension of
pro **argument**

In fact, ...

Second
concession,
followed by
pro **argument**

Undoubtedly, ...
.... Nevertheless, ...

Third
concession,
followed by
pro **argument**

And even though ....
........................., still ....

All *pro*

Furthermore, ...

All *pro*

Moreover, ...

All *pro*

And ....

All *pro*

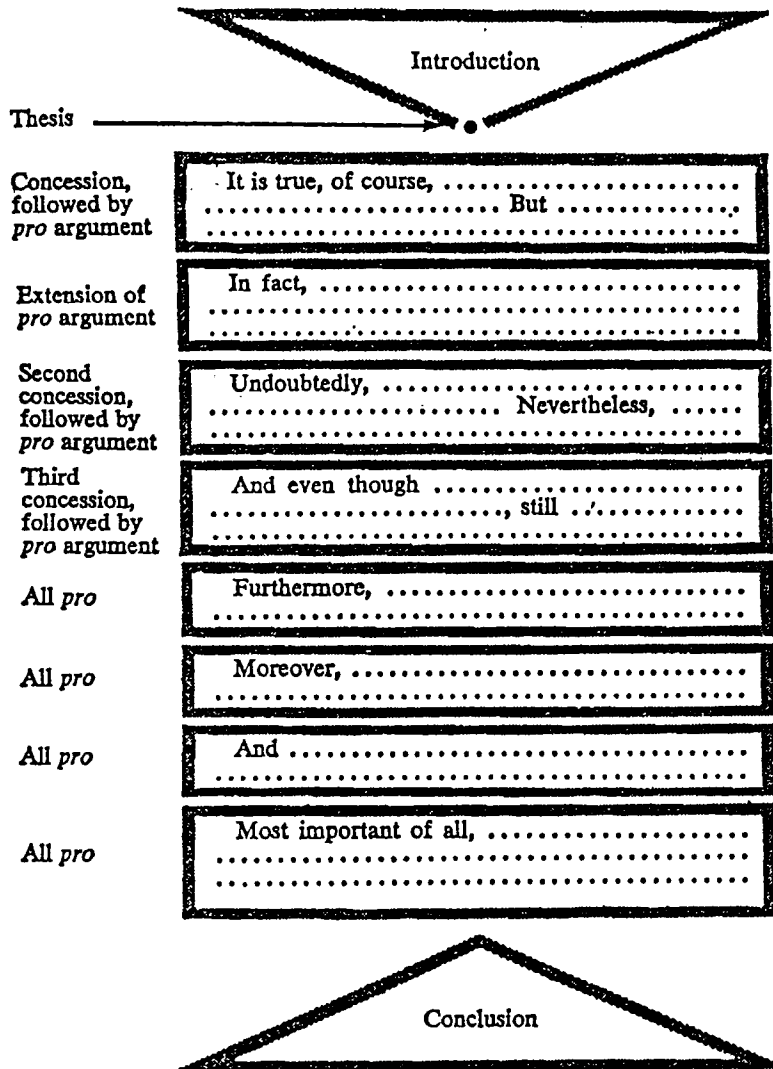Most important of all, ...

Conclusion

Figure 5—The Longer Essay *

* Bear in mind that the arrangement of early paragraphs here is suggested only. You may want to devote an entire paragraph to a concession or add extra "extensions" of *pro* arguments. But later paragraphs should concentrate on *pro* arguments only, as shown.

Appendix B

Labelling Animals

a.   In some ways, the human race seems to be in its childhood. Our attitude toward animals, for example, makes us seem like a seven-year-old pulling the wings off flies. Instead of respecting all animals as important part of the chain of life, we rate them according to how useful they are to us. We consider animals to be either products, toys or monsters.

b.   There are the products. These are the animals such as cattle, pigs, and sheep that provide much of our food. For this reason, we think of them less as living creatures than as growing crops. We fatten them up, herd them into slaughterhouses, and carve them into edible portions. These animals are useful to us so we have generally positive feelings about them. Our actions show that we are not actually fond of them. We are willing to lock baby calves into dark boxes for months and then kill them for veal, or cram thousands of chickens into tiny pens and allow them to live for only six weeks. Increased production, not humane treatment, is the bottom line.

c.   Perhaps the most harmful label we pin on animals, though, is that of monster. We have no use at all for these creatures. We are all taught from birth that sharks, snakes, bats, and alligators, for instance, are evil and dangerous. The facts about these animals make no difference to our emotions. The fact that being attacked by a shark is less likely than being struck by lightning does not stop us from holding shark killing contests. The fact that a snake is harmless does not stop us from crushing it. Very few of us will ever be mauled by a grizzly or bobcat or torn apart by wolves, yet we are willing to see these animals exterminated.

d.   We also label some animals as toys. These are the lucky ones, the puppies, kittens, pandas, koala bears, bunnies and porpoises we consider cute. Toys make us feel sentimental and protective. We are willing to devote five minutes on the evening news to a baby panda, we stock our children's toy room with stuffed bunnies, and we make movies about friendly, funny porpoises. We would not think of holding puppy-shoots or koala-killing contests. Toy-like animals may occasionally be neglected or abused by individual owners, but we would never allow them to be destroyed on a wholesale basis.

e.   Labelling animals is not a harmless little quirk we humans have. This practice has dulled our respect for other living beings and even led to the destruction of entire species. We dominate animals, but we have forgotten to be their caretakers.

Appendix C

Unit Outline

Note: Activities were presented in the order given in each section, but reading and writing activities were integrated with some from each section throughout the unit.

Introductory Activities

- Learning log questions. Emphasis placed on there being no correct answer to the questions.

    Questions:

    1. What are the elements of a good essay?
    2. What essay-writing tips do you recall from past years?
    3. What writing processes do you use when you are asked to write and essay?
    4. What are your best and worst experiences with essay writing?

- Discussion of research project and consent forms.
- Class discussion of students' individual writing processes.
- Librarians talk on non-fiction and selection of non-fiction materials for those who do not have their own. Non-fiction for free-reading this month.
- Review of reader-response log requirements: citation, summary, response. Fifteen to twenty minutes at the beginning of each class, two reading logs per week.
- Booklet of professional models provided for prereading at home.

Professional Models

- Reading and brief discussion of the essay "A Jerk"
- Notes and discussion on concepts to be applied to analysis of "A Jerk"

    1. Purpose: what a writer hopes the piece will accomplish with the reader - audience focus
    2. Thesis: the central or controlling idea of the essay - similar to theme in a short story - may be explicit or implicit
    3. Tone: the writer's attitude toward the subject and/or audience - like tone of voice
    4. Diction: choice of words - should be appropriate to purpose, tone and audience - denotation and connotation of words

- Partners confer on the essay's overall purpose and development.
- Overhead modelling of analysis of the essay "A Jerk." Emphasis on how all aspects contribute to purpose (anecdote, background, various methods of definition, example, explicit thesis, restatement of thesis, tone, diction, and so on).
- Jigsaw exercise: small groups become specialists in one of six model essays, then regroup with one member of each group in the larger group. Experts share the analysis of the specialist group.

Corner Store	As They Say, Drugs Kill
Shame	Beauty and the Beef
Sounds of the City	That Lean and Hungry Look

- Independent analysis of professional essay: What's Wrong with Black English.

   Questions:
   1. What do you think is the overall purpose of this essay?
   2. How does the title signal the essay's purpose?
   3. What is the view of many blacks toward standard English?
   4. How does Jones define black English?
   5. What arguments does Jones use to show that standard English does not diminish a person's cultural identity?
   6. How does Jones use narration (anecdote) to support her thesis?

Student Models

- Clarification of the handout "Composition Scoring Guide"
- Small group discussion of the student model essays (after reading time)
- Group ranking of student models according to criteria on the holistic scale - groups asked to account for their placements, especially when not consistent with other groups

Writing Activities

- Summary and discussion of students' responses to the first learning log.
- Three freewrites (10 minutes) - topics: Remembering, It Takes Courage to Stand Alone, New Year's Resolution
- Discussion of freewrites - how long students could stay on topic, different

approaches to topic, generation of additional approaches

• Exercise in reading Little Red Riding Hood in different styles - (parodies)

• Pretentious language riddles (diction / dictionary)

• Revised essay: drafting time in class, small group topic discussion, small group revision sessions, teacher conferences, statement of purpose during final draft completion, one week to polish and submit.

• Statement of Purpose: Identify and explain the following aspects of your essay:

1. What are the title and topic?

2. What is the thesis? Is it implicit or explicit?

3. What is the overall purpose of your essay?

4. What is the tone of your essay? How do specific words and phrases contribute to tone?

• In-class essay: to be completed according to ministry instructions for the essay section of the final exam. See below.

PART E: COMPOSITION

Value: 24 marks   **Suggested Time: 55 minutes**

INSTRUCTIONS: Using standard English, write a coherent, unified, multi-paragraph composition of 300–500 words on the **topic** below. In your composition, you may apply any effective and appropriate method of development which includes **any combination** of exposition, persuasion, description, and narration.

Use the page headed **Organization and Planning** for your rough work. Write your composition in INK on the pages headed **Finished Work**.

9. Write a multi-paragraph composition on the topic below. Your response may draw upon any aspect of your life: your reading, your own experiences, the experiences of others, and so on.

Topic:

<u>Conclusion</u>

• Learing Log entry:

1. In what ways was the study of professional essays helpful? Unhelpful? Answer the same question for student models.

2. What benefits, if any, do you see in peer sharing? Teacher conferencing?

3. From your perspective as a reader, how would you define a good essay?

Appendix D

Most of the professional essay models in this expository reading and writing unit were selected from Rosa & Eschholz (1989) *Models for Writers.*
The essays are listed below.

1. Eudora Welty	The Corner Store	pp. 60 - 63
2. Dick Gregory	Shame	pp. 212 - 216
3. James Tuite	The Sounds of the City	pp. 241 - 244
4. Joey Green	Beauty and the Beef	pp. 271 - 277
5. Sydney Harris	A Jerk	pp. 278 - 280
6. Suzanne Britt	That Lean and Hungry Look	pp. 316 - 320
7. Laura Rowley	As They Say, Drugs Kill	pp. 365 - 369

One essay was taken from Goshgarian (1995)*Exploring Language.*

1. Rachel Jones	What's Wrong With Black English	pp. 290 - 294

The first page of each of these essays appear in the appendices (Di - Dviii) which follow.

Appendix Di

THE CORNER STORE

Eudora Welty

*Eudora Welty is perhaps one of the most hon-
ored and respected writers at work today. She
was born in 1909 in Jackson, Mississippi, where
she has lived most of her life. Her published
works include many short stories, now available
as her* Collected Stories *(1980); five novels; a col-
lection of her essays,* The Eye of the Story *(1975);
and a memoir,* One Writer's Beginnings *(1987).
In 1973 her novel* The Optimist's Daughter *won
the Pulitizer prize for fiction. Welty's description
of the corner store, taken from an essay about
growing up in Jackson, will recall for many read-
ers the neighborhood store where they grew up.*

Our Little Store rose right up from the sidewalk; standing   1
in a street of family houses, it alone hadn't any yard in
front, any tree or flower bed. It was a plain frame building cov-
ered over with brick. Above the door, a little railed porch ran
across on an upstairs level and four windows with shades were
looking out. But I didn't catch on to those.

Running in out of the sun, you met what seemed total obscu-   2
rity inside. There were almost tangible smells—licorice re-
cently sucked in a child's cheek, dill pickle brine that had
leaked through a paper sack in a fresh trail across the wooden
floor, ammonia-loaded ice that had been hoisted from wet cro-
ker sacks and slammed into the icebox with its sweet butter at
the door, and perhaps the smell of still untrapped mice.

Then through the motes of cracker dust, cornmeal dust, the   3
Gold Dust of the Gold Dust Twins that the floor had been swept
out with, the realities emerged. Shelves climbed to high reach
all the way around, set out with not too much of any one thing
but a lot of things—lard, molasses, vinegar, starch, matches,
kerosene, Octagon soap (about a year's worth of octagon-
shaped coupons cut out and saved brought a signet ring ad-

Appendix Dii

SHAME

Dick Gregory

Dick Gregory, the well-known comedian, has long been active in the civil rights movement. During the 1960s Gregory was also an outspoken critic of America's involvement in Vietnam. In the following episode from his autobiography Nigger *(1964), he narrates the story of a childhood experience that taught him the meaning of shame. Through his use of authentic dialogue and vivid details, he dramatically re-creates this experience for his readers.*

I never learned hate at home, or shame. I had to go to school   1
for that. I was about seven years old when I got my first big lesson. I was in love with a little girl named Helene Tucker, a light-complexioned little girl with pigtails and nice manners. She was always clean and she was smart in school. I think I went to school then mostly to look at her. I brushed my hair and even got me a little old handkerchief. It was a lady's handkerchief, but I didn't want Helene to see me wipe my nose on my hand. The pipes were frozen again, there was no water in the house, but I washed my socks and shirt every night. I'd get a pot, and go over to Mister Ben's grocery store, and stick my pot down into his soda machine. Scoop out some chopped ice. By evening the ice melted to water for washing. I got sick a lot that winter because the fire would go out at night before the clothes were dry. In the morning I'd put them on, wet or dry, because they were the only clothes I had.

   Everybody's got a Helene Tucker, a symbol of everything you   2
want. I loved her for her goodness, her cleanness, her popularity. She'd walk down my street and my brothers and sisters would yell, "Here comes Helene," and I'd rub my tennis sneakers on the back of my pants and wish my hair wasn't so nappy and the white folks' shirt fit me better. I'd run out on the street. If I knew my place and didn't come too close, she'd wink at me

Appendix Diii

THE SOUNDS OF THE CITY

James Tuite

James Tuite has had a long career at The New
York Times, *where he once served as sports edi-
tor. As a free-lance writer he has contributed to
all of the major sports magazines and has writ-
ten* Snowmobiles and Snowmobiling *(1973) and*
How to Enjoy Sports on TV *(1976). The following
selection is a model of how a place can be de-
scribed by using a sense other than sight. Tuite
describes New York City by its sounds, which for
him comprise the very life of the city.*

New York is a city of sounds: muted sounds and shrill   1
sounds; shattering sounds and soothing sounds; urgent
sounds and aimless sounds. The cliff dwellers of Manhattan—
who would be racked by the silence of the lonely woods—do
not hear these sounds because they are constant and eternally
urban.

The visitor to the city can hear them, though, just as some an-   2
imals can hear a high-pitched whistle inaudible to humans. To
the casual caller to Manhattan, lying restive and sleepless in a
hotel twenty or thirty floors above the street, they tell a story
as fascinating as life itself. And back of the sounds broods the
silence.

Night in midtown is the noise of tinseled honky-tonk and vio-   3
lence. Thin strains of music, usually the firm beat of rock 'n'
roll or the frenzied outbursts of the discotheque, rise from
ground level. This is the cacophony, the discordance of youth,
and it comes on strongest when nights are hot and young blood
restless.

Somewhere in the canyons below there is shrill laughter or   4
raucous shouting. A bottle shatters against concrete. The
whine of a police siren slices through the night, moving ever

Appendix Div

BEAUTY AND THE BEEF

Joey Green

A native of Miami, Florida, Joey Green is a graduate of Cornell University. (He was almost suspended for selling fake football programs at the 1979 Cornell-Yale homecoming game.) Editor of the Cornell Lunatic, *Green was also president of the National Association of College Humor Magazines. After college, he served as contributing editor for* National Lampoon *until he wrote an article for* Rolling Stone *in which he explained why* National Lampoon *wasn't funny anymore. He has worked at the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency, where he wrote a television commercial for Burger King and won the Clio award for a print ad for Kodak. Editor of* Hellbent on Insanity—College Humor of the 70s and 80s *(1982), Green is currently a contributing editor for* Spy *magazine and is working on a novel. In the following selection from* Spy, *Green explains what goes on behind the scenes during the filming of a Burger King commercial.*

When was the last time you opened a carton in a fast-food   1
restaurant to find a hamburger as appetizing as the ones in the TV commercials? Did you ever look past the counter help to catch a glimpse of a juicy hamburger patty, handsomely branded by the grill, sizzling and crackling as it glides over roaring flames, with tender juices sputtering into the fire? On television the burger is a magnificent slab of flame-broiled beef—majestically topped with crisp iceberg lettuce, succulent red tomatoes, tangy onions and plump pickles, all between two halves of a towering sesame-seed bun. But, of course, the real-life Whoppers don't quite measure up.

The ingredients of a TV Whopper are, unbelievably, the same   2
as those used in real Whoppers sold to average consumers. But

Appendix Dv

A JERK

Sydney J. Harris

For over forty years Sydney J. Harris wrote a syndicated column for the Chicago Daily News entitled "Strictly Personal," in which he has considered virtually every aspect of contemporary American life. In the following essay from his book Last Things First *(1961), Harris defines the term* jerk *by differentiating it from other similar slang terms.*

I don't know whether history repeats itself, but biography certainly does. The other day, Michael came in and asked me what a "jerk" was—the same question Carolyn put to me a dozen years ago.

At that time, I fluffed her off with some inane answer, such as "A jerk isn't a very nice person," but both of us knew it was an unsatisfactory reply. When she went to bed, I began trying to work up a suitable definition.

It is a marvelously apt word, of course. Until it was coined, not more than 25 years ago, there was really no single word in English to describe the kind of person who is a jerk—"boob" and "simp" were too old hat, and besides they really didn't fit, for they could be lovable, and a jerk never is.

Thinking it over, I decided that a jerk is basically a person without insight. He is not necessarily a fool or a dope, because some extremely clever persons can be jerks. In fact, it has little to do with intelligence as we commonly think of it; it is, rather, a kind of subtle but persuasive aroma emanating from the inner part of the personality.

I know a college president who can be described only as a jerk. He is not an unintelligent man, nor unlearned, nor even unschooled in the social amenities. Yet he is a jerk *cum laude,* because of a fatal flaw in his nature—he is totally incapable of looking into the mirror of his soul and shuddering at what he sees there.

A jerk, then, is a man (or woman) who is utterly unable to see himself as he appears to others. He has no grace, he is tactless without meaning to be, he is a bore even to his best friends, he is an egotist without charm. All of us are egotists to some extent, but most of us—unlike the jerk—are perfectly and horribly aware of it when we make asses of ourselves. The jerk never knows.

Appendix Dvi

That Lean and Hungry Look

Suzanne Britt

Suzanne Britt makes her home in Raleigh, North Carolina, where she is a free-lance writer. In 1983 she published Show & Tell, *a collection of her characteristically informal essays. The following essay first appeared in* Newsweek *and became the basis for her book,* Skinny People Are Dull and Crunchy Like Carrots *(1982), titled after a line in the essay. As you read her essay, notice the way that Britt has organized the points of her contrast of fat and thin people.*

Caesar was right. Thin people need watching. I've been watching them for most of my adult life, and I don't like what I see. When these narrow fellows spring at me, I quiver to my toes. Thin people come in all personalities, most of them menacing. You've got your "together" thin person, your mechanical thin person, your condescending thin person, your tsk-tsk thin person, your efficiency-expert thin person. All of them are dangerous.

In the first place, thin people aren't fun. They don't know how to goof off, at least in the best, fat sense of the word. They've always got to be adoing. Give them a coffee break, and they'll jog around the block. Supply them with a quiet evening at home, and they'll fix the screen door and lick S&H green stamps. They say things like "there aren't enough hours in the day." Fat people never say that. Fat people think the day is too damn long already.

Thin people make me tired. They've got speedy little metabolisms that cause them to bustle briskly. They're forever rubbing their bony hands together and eyeing new problems to "tackle." I like to surround myself with sluggish, inert, easygoing fat people, the kind who believe that if you clean it up today, it'll just get dirty again tomorrow.

Some people say the business about the jolly fat person is a myth, that all of us chubbies are neurotic, sick, sad people. I

Appendix Dvii

As They Say, Drugs Kill

Laura Rowley

Laura Rowley was born in Oak Lawn, Illinois, in 1965 and graduated from the University of Illinois at Champaign—Urbana in 1987 with a degree in journalism. While in college, Rowley was the city editor for the Daily Illini. *After graduation she worked at the* United Nations Chronicle *in New York City. Currently the sales director for a Manhattan dress company, Rowley continues to work as a free-lance writer and hopes some day to travel and work in Africa under the auspices of either the United Nations or the Peace Corps. In the following essay, which first appeared in* Newsweek on Campus *in 1987, Rowley argues against substance abuse by recounting a particularly poignant personal experience. As you read her piece, notice how she attempts to persuade without preaching.*

The fastest way to end a party is to have someone die in the middle of it.   1

At a party last fall I watched a 22-year-old die of cardiac arrest after he had used drugs. It was a painful, undignified way to die. And I would like to think that anyone who shared the experience would feel his or her ambivalence about substance abuse dissolving.   2

This victim won't be singled out like Len Bias as a bitter example for "troubled youth." He was just another ordinary guy celebrating with friends at a private house party, the kind where they roll in the keg first thing in the morning and get stupefied while watching the football games on cable all afternoon. The living room was littered with beer cans from last night's party—along with dirty socks and the stuffing from the secondhand couch.   3

Appendix Dviii

What's Wrong with Black English

Rachel L. Jones

*Rachel L. Jones was a sophomore at Southern Il-
linois University when she published the follow-
ing essay in* Newsweek *in December 1982. Jones
argues against the popularly held belief of both
her fellow black students and black authorities
that speaking "white English" is a betrayal of
her blackness.*

Wﬔilliam Labov, a noted linguist, once said about the use   1
of black English, "It is the goal of most black Ameri-
cans to acquire full control of the standard language without
giving up their own culture." He also suggested that there are
certain advantages to having two ways to express one's feel-
ings. I wonder if the good doctor might also consider the goals
of those black Americans who have full control of standard En-
glish but who are every now and then troubled by that colorful,
grammar-to-the-winds patois that is black English. Case in
point—me.

I'm a 21-year-old black born to a family that would probably   2
be considered lower-middle class—which in my mind is a polite
way of describing a condition only slightly better than poverty.
Let's just say we rarely if ever did the winter-vacation thing in
the Caribbean. I've often had to defend my humble beginnings
to a most unlikely group of people for an even less likely rea-
son. Because of the way I talk, some of my black peers look at
me sideways and ask, "Why do you talk like you're white?"

The first time it happened to me I was nine years old. Cor-   3
nered in the school bathroom by the class bully and her side-
kick, I was offered the opportunity to swallow a few of my
teeth unless I satisfactorily explained why I always got good
grades, why I talked "proper" or "white." I had no ready an-
swer for her, save the fact that my mother had from the time I
was old enough to talk stressed the importance of reading and
learning, or that L. Frank Baum and Ray Bradbury were my

Appendix E

The student models used during the essay unit cannot be provided because no consent has been given for their distribution. They cannot be removed from the classroom in which they are used for instructional purposes. However a brief description is provided below. The required topic for each of these essays was "It takes courage to stand alone."

Level Six Essay: Alone

> This narrative essay is a story about a girl who was an outsider in elementary school and was mocked by others. It retells a day when the girl had to give a talk in front of that class. The narrator admires the girl's courage. The story is strong in its use of language and descriptive detail.

Level Five Essay: Scared for Life

> This personal narrative essay tells of a skin disease which disfigures the narrator and changes his life. It tells of increasing isolation and the difficulties he faces upon his return to school. Language use is not as strong as for the six paper. More expository in its tone.

Level Four Essay: (no title)

> This expository essay follows the standard five paragraph format giving in each body paragraph a different life situation requiring individual courage.

Level Three Essay: Don't Be Shy

> This expository essay follows the standard five paragraph format with less focus and less capable use of language than the four paper.

Level Two Essay: It Takes a Great Deal of Courage to Stand Alone

> This large print, double spaced essay is written as one long paragraph with little focus and simple syntax.

Level One Essay: (no title)

> This brief paper, only one paragraph in length, begins to describe the experience of an adult student facing the provincial exam in a roomful of teenagers.

Appendix F

COMPOSITION SCORING GUIDE

6

The **6 paper** is highly articulate, manifesting sophisticated, wide-ranging vocabulary, perhaps employing literary and rhetorical devices purposefully and/or demonstrating masterful control of a range of sentence structures. It draws upon either a depth of knowledge or a lively imagination. The reader is engaged by the use of language, perhaps by wit or humour and/or by the quality of the mind at work.

5

The **5 paper** displays some manipulation of language to achieve a desired effect. Voice is established and maintained; structure is essentially controlled and purposeful; variety is evident; emphasis is deliberate. It is a good first draft worthy of reworking. The reader is attracted to the thoughtful content.

4

The **4 paper** offers conventional personal narrative with identifiable beginning, middle, and end and often some purposeful dialogue. Alternately, it offers a standard (five-part) expository structure with suitable but predictable introduction and conclusion. Some variety is evident in diction and sentence structure. The reader follows the paper's meaning and purpose with relative ease, if not interest.

3

The **3 paper** features underdeveloped paragraphs, basic and somewhat repetitive transition, and support for obvious and simplistic ideas, frequently in the form of listed details. Some variety in diction and sentence structure is discernible. The reader is aware of a reasonably consistent purpose.

2

The **2 paper** shows familiarity with common spoken language in casual conversation or in the writing of one not fully conversant with the language. It sustains a subject focus with some unity of direction. Simple ideas are simply and/or awkwardly expressed, as they might be in casual conversation, or in the written expression of one not fully conversant with the language. The reader can perceive meaning and detect a purpose emerging.

1

The **1 paper** displays basic vocabulary without a grasp of syntax. It manages a brief subject focus without a controlling idea. The content, usually far short of the length requirement, may also be repetitive. The reader (sometimes solely on the basis of brevity) puzzles to determine direction, meaning, and/or purpose.

N.R.

A blank paper or one with less than a complete sentence is given NR or No Response. A paper manifesting an achievement less than that outlined in scale point 1 may, after consultation with the Marking Committee Chair or designate, be given a zero.

Appendix G

Consent Form

The unit of study we are about to begin will involve you in a focus on non-fiction reading and writing, especially essays, magazine articles and newspaper editorials. As you study these texts on your own and in your groups, you will be asked to keep a reading log of your responses to the texts and record your reflections on your own learning. Also, you will be writing your own essays on topics of your choosing. I will be trying to better understand the strategies you use to make sense out of what you read and to create sense in what you write. I will be especially interested in your developing ability to write purposeful, engaging and well-structured non-fiction prose. As always, the content of your journals is as confidential as you wish to make it.

My purpose in this unit will be not only to check your individual progress, but also to check the literacy development of the class as a whole. I will be making observations and keeping my own journal as part of my ongoing effort to improve my teaching, and also as a part of a research project requirement for the completion of my Masters of Education degree at the University of Lethbridge. In order for me to cite any of your writing as part of my final report on our work in this unit, I require your consent. Although I will write about the class's work generally, I will not quote any student's writing without his/her express permission to do so.

Of course it will be helpful for me to have your permission, but I assure you that you have every right to withhold your consent and that your decision to do so will have no negative impact on our teacher/student relationship or on my evaluation of your work in this class. If you do give permission to have your work cited, I will share with you the final version of my project so you can see how your words have been used to illustrate my conclusions. If you give your consent and then wish to withdraw it at any time, you may do so. If you wish to contact the University of Lethbridge with questions regarding my research, you may call Dr. Craig Loewen (403-329-2455) or Dr. Cynthia Chambers (1-800-666-3503).

I ask that you discuss this consent form with your parent(s)/guardian(s) before signing.

Please sign in **one** of the spaces below, and then print your first and last names on the line following. Thank you.

A.   I consent to having my work in this unit cited by Ms. Noakes.

_____   _____

B.   I do not consent to having my work in this unit cited by Ms. Noakes.

_____   _____

C.   I consent to having my work in this unit cited by Ms. Noakes but I wish to have my name altered in the final report to disguise my identity.

_____   _____

Appendix H

<u>Title List: Student Selected Essay Topics</u>

1. Hockey: A Game Everyone Can Play
2. A New Start
3. A Typical Morning
4. A Vacation in Florida
5. An Outlook on the Game of Hockey
6. Favouritism Follies
7. Friendship
8. Golf
9. Literacy
10. Love
11. Popular Downhill Sports
12. Popularity: What's All the Hype?
13. Rejection
14. Riding the Bus
15. Sleep
16. The Future
17. Violence in Hockey
18. What I Believe
19. Why Do People Have to Be So Fake
20. Why Do They Treat Us Like Shoplifters?
21. Why I Love Hunting
22. Working After School

Appendix I

Sample List of Student Selected Free-Reading Materials

Note: Incomplete information in the citations is due to incomplete information
provided in the student journals.

Magazine Articles

Zimmer, C. (1997, November). The web. *Discover.*

McLean, J. (1997, December). The greatest showdown. *Golf,* 102 -105.

Johnston, N. (1997, December 15). Heart-stopping bug. *Macleans,* 54.

Hugh-Berman, A. (1997, May). Touch me, heal me. *Ms,* 38 - 41.

The new drug generation. (1994, April). *Seventeen,* 149.

No time to be a teenager. (1997, November). *Seventeen,* 174.

The most popular girl. (1997, November). *Seventeen,* 136.

Crothers, T. (1997, December). A tough question. *Sports Illustrated,* 59 - 61.

Farber, M. (1998, January). Looming large. *Sports Illustrated,* 42 - 44.

_____. (1997, December). Decor by Iron Mike. *Sports Illustrated,* 56 - 58.

Hersch, H. (1997, April). Unmasking the MVP. *Sports Illustrated,* 22.

McGregor, E. (1997, September). TD Twins. *Sports Illustrated, 86,* 10 - 11.

Montville, L. (1997, December). Rising to the occasion. *Sports Illustrated,* 78.

O'Brien, R. (1997, October). All bets off. *Sports Illustrated,* 27.

Politi, S. (1997, November).Will it get fina' in Carolina?*Sports Illustrated,* 19 -21.

Price, S. (1997, November). On top of the world. *Sports Illustrated,* 40 - 42.

Silver, M. (1997, October). Wake up call. *Sports Illustrated,* 24 - 30.

Swift, E. (1997, October). Battle cry. *Sports Illustrated,* 66 - 70.

_____. (1997). No regrets. *Sports Illustrated,* 30 - 33.

Taylor, P. (1997, September). Tangled web. *Sports Illustrated,* 66.

Werther, J. (1997, November). World champions. *Sports Illustrated,* 60 - 64.

Clark, C. (1997, October). Duck's star Kariya won't talk until he gets a new
contract.*The Hockey News,* 16.

Carpiniello, R. (1997, November). Langdon provides Rangers with their share of

punch. *The Hockey News,* 33.

Duhatschek, E. (1997, October). Stillman play nice surprise. *The Hockey News,* 17.

Kurri eighth to net 600 goals. (1998, January). *The Hockey News.*

Layden, T. (1997). Crimson pride. *The Hockey News,* 29 - 31.

Luecking, D. (1997, November). No-name guys make impact. *The Hockey News,* 34.

Mackenzie, B. (1997, October). Passing fancy. *The Hockey News,* 9 - 10.

My friends lured me into a cult. (1997, November). *YM,* 64.

Books

Bailey, G. (1995). *The perfect puppy.* Hong Kong: Readers' Digest.

Berger, G. (1990). *Violence in sports.* USA: Watts.

Black, A. (1981). *Basic Black.* Toronto, ON: Penumbra Press.

Canfield, J., Hansen, M. & Kirberger (Eds). (1997).*Chicken soup for the teenage soul.* Deerfield Beach, FL:Heath Communication, Inc.

Duplacey, J. (1993). *1000 point players.* Toronto, ON: Dan Diamond, Inc.

Evans, E. (1988). *The kayaking book.* Markham, ON: Penguin Books.

Jones, F. (1991). *Murderous women.* Toronto, ON: Key Porter Books.

Mathews, A. (1991). *Making friends.* Los Angeles, CA: Price, Stern, Sloan Publishing.

Mendelson, J. & Mello, N. (1986). *PCP: The dangerous angel.* New York, NY: Chelsea House Publishers.

_____. (1986). *Cocaine* .New York, NY: Chelsea House Publishers.

Pateman, R. (1995). *Denmark.* New York, NY: Marshall Cavendish Corporation.

Statler, O. (1984). *All-Japan.* Agincourt, ON: Methuen Publications.

Switzer, M. (1985). *Nature's children: Deer.* New York, NY: Joseph R. DeVariennes.

Name _____

Format of Thesis/Project:

1. Title Page - sample attached _____ ❏

2. Signature Page - sample attached _____ ❏

3. Dedication (if any) _____ ❏

4. Abstract _____ ❏

5. Acknowledgement (if any) _____ ❏

6. Table of Contents _____ ❏

7. Tables/figures (if applicable) _____ ❏

8. Body of Text

   A) Headings - sample attached _____ ❏

   B) Spacing

   • double spacing throughout _____ ❏

   • single space or double space for block quotes (40 words or more), references,

      appendices _____ ❏

   C) Page Numbering, Margins, Pagination

   • Prefatory pages are numbered consecutively beginning with the Title ❏
      page (which does not bear a number). Prefatory page numbers are
      printed in small Roman numerals centered at the bottom of the page.

   • page numbering at top, bottom, center (2 cm from paper edge) ❏
      All pages of the main body of the thesis must be numbered consecutively
      with Arabic numerals. This includes pages containing illustrations,
      references and appendices.

   • 1 1/2" left margin _____ ❏

   • 1" other margin _____ ❏

9.   References

    •   references - single space, double space between individual references   □

SAMPLES of Books and Journals

Abbs, P. (1974). <u>Autobiography in education</u>. London: Heineman Educational Books.

Berk, L. (1980). Education in lives: Biographic narrative in the study of educational outcomes. <u>Journal of Curriculum Theorizing, 2</u> (2), 88- 155.

10.   Appendices - page 251 - 252 of APA Manual   □

11.   **Quality of Paper**   □

    •   one side of paper

    •   any standard type acceptable

12.   Disc   □