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IMPLICIT RESPONSE: INSTRUCTOR VALUES AND SOCIAL CLASS IN THE
LITERACY NARRATIVE ASSIGNMENT

By

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B.S., Abilene Christian University, 1999
M.A., Abilene Christian University, 2002

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2006

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to
my husband Shane whose constant encouragement, support, and love helped me persist in
completing this degree,
my daughter Elizabeth whose sweet spirit blesses me every day,
and
my grandmother, Lyn Kerr, for teaching me what the word commitment truly means.

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I offer special thanks to my students. The joy I find in teaching comes from the fact that teaching at its best is a dialectical activity—the learning always flows both ways. Thanks to the students I taught at Abilene Christian University, the University of Louisville, and Central Texas College. These students continuously remind me why I have chosen this teaching profession.

I could never adequately express the enormous gratitude I have for my family. To my parents, Ted and Carol Poe, who are my staunchest (and most vocal) supporters. I thank them for the invaluable educational opportunities they provided me and for being two examples of excellent teachers. For their unbounded love, support, and confidence in me, I am and will always be grateful.

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I can imagine no more welcome or joyous distraction than my daughter Elizabeth, whose sweet spirit, beautiful smile, and curiosity about life remind me what are most important. I thank her for being such a happy baby, finding so much joy in learning, and teaching me anew about the magnificence of discovery. She is the most precious thing I know.

I also thank my Lord for His grace and for the courage He instilled in me to pursue and complete such an endeavor.

ABSTRACT

IMPLICIT RESPONSE IN THE LITERACY NARRATIVE ASSIGNMENT: INSTRUCTOR VALUES AND SOCIAL CLASS

Kara Poe Alexander

May 13, 2006

My dissertation examines instructor responses to a popular personal writing assignment, the literacy narrative. Previous studies have shown this assignment to be popular with instructors because of the reflection it is thought to generate; however, nobody has yet looked at what instructors really mean by *reflection*. This study investigates what features of student texts instructors recognize as reflection. I collected literacy narratives and demographic questionnaires from students and surveys, assignments, think-alouds, and follow-up interviews from instructors.

Personal writing, and the literacy narrative assignment in particular, can best be taught by highlighting the rhetorical capabilities of this genre. The results of the think-alouds show that instructors most often consider analytical moves, such as cause-effect and evaluation, as reflection. This emphasis on cause-effect and evaluation arguments demonstrates that the focus of instructor assignments on description and other narrative elements is perhaps misdirected. Two other features also carried cultural capital with instructors but to a lesser extent than argumentative moves: literary elements, including vivid description and metaphoric language, and appeals to shared values. Instructors were more likely to flesh out the connections for students when value-appeals were present,

particularly ones that promote middle-class perspectives. This finding is problematic because students from more privileged socioeconomic and educational backgrounds seemed more able to invoke these shared values, which thus suggests that working-class students' texts were seen as less reflective, and hence, were less successful in fulfilling the goals of the assignment. These results lend some empirical support to claims that the literacy narrative assignment reinforces middle-class perspectives; as such, it may not be as beneficial for marginalized groups of students as advocates of personal writing have asserted. This research suggests educators should be more aware of class assumptions that may influence how they respond to student writing.

I conclude by presenting recommendations on how writing instructors can more effectively teach literacy narratives, including more clearly articulating their goals for the assignment and how they will assess these goals in student writing. By emphasizing what instructors really want, both high school and college writing instructors can make writing assignments more equitable and begin to defend against their own social-class biases in the classroom.

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CHAPTER ONE
SHARED STORIES: LITERACY NARRATIVES IN COMPOSITION
CLASSROOMS

Due to historical currents within literacy studies, narrative theory, feminist studies, and cultural studies, Rhetoric and Composition has begun to focus attention on narratives about literacy. Conference presentations, journals, and full-length books (Brandt, 2001; Daniell, 2003; Heath, 1983; Selfe & Hawisher, 2004; Young, 2004) devoted to the subject of literacy narratives reflect this growing interest. The move has also found its way into the classroom via a fairly new, but extremely popular, assignment—the literacy narrative. Literacy narratives are common in the United States at all levels of the educational spectrum, from middle school (Fleischer, 1997; Walsh, 1997) and high school (Williams, 2003/2004) to first-year composition (Young, 2004), teacher-training courses (Clark & Medina, 2000), and basic writing courses (Soliday, 1994). In fact, in teacher-training courses I have encountered as an Assistant Director of Composition, instructors not only compose their own literacy narratives, but are also encouraged to assign such narratives to their students. The literacy narrative assignment has bolstered widespread adoption in composition classrooms all over the country, where students are now composing literacy narratives in oral, print, visual, and multimodal forms. The assignment now even garners chapters in composition textbooks, such as *The*

Norton Field Guide to Writing by Richard Bullock (2006) and *Writing and Community Action* by Thomas Deans (2002).

The literacy narrative assignment typically asks students to explore and reflect upon their past experiences with language, especially reading and writing, both in and out of the classroom, to better understand how these past encounters have shaped and formed them into the literate beings they are today. Literacy narratives also reveal what happens when we acquire written and/or spoken language (Soliday, 1994), are texts in which writers reflect on their histories with reading and writing (Carpenter & Falbo, 2003; Scott, 1997), and can become sites of “self-translation” when writers focus upon those instances when the self is crossing between language worlds (Soliday, 1994, p. 511). Literacy narratives also attempt to chart the writer’s processes (Ryden, 2002). They are “not simply stories about learning to read and write; they are attempts to define who we are and what we want to become, both as individuals and as a community” (Young, 2004, p. 26).

In published literacy narratives, such as ones by Sharon Jean Hamilton (1995), bell hooks (1996), and Mike Rose (1989), it is more common to see literacy narratives as threads within larger stories, or the means through which stories are told. Let’s look at Rose’s *Lives on the Boundary* as an example of a published literacy narrative. In his account, Rose presents vignettes of what it was like to grow up in a working-class family who lived in a ghetto in Los Angeles. He was labeled (falsely because of a technical error) “remedial” and “illiterate.” He writes about his own education and the mentors he found that helped him succeed in secondary school and college. He eventually lands himself a job at a major research university, where he now strives to change the

American educational system. His stories work to show how remedial evaluation and assessment can hinder remedial students (the “educational underclass”) and prevent them from learning to write well and think more critically.

As an example of a typical literacy narrative students often produce in first-year composition classrooms, I will paraphrase Gwen’s. Gwen’s introduction sets up her entire literacy narrative: she explains that the function of both reading and writing has changed from the time she was a child to now. After this initial set-up, Gwen has several paragraphs in which she gives specific, detailed examples of her reading and writing experiences as a child. She talks about scrapbooking, bedtime reading with her father, her favorite book as a child, and literacy experiences in school. After this, there is a slow change in tone from reading and writing being more fun to it being less enjoyable because it became solely associated with school (in a negative way). She explores how her mom “practically wrote stories for [her]” because “[She] did not have the skills to come up with creative stories” and “had a hard time with comprehension.” After these difficulties, however, there is another shift in tone where Gwen focuses on how reading and writing have gradually become easier for her. She “realized how essential reading was” and has finally come to see the importance of it in college. Her conclusion is also typical: she sums up that reading and writing have “expanded my horizons.” Like her introduction, she again explains that the function of reading and writing changed as she grew older. She then sums up by telling how much she “thrives” off of literacy and how she “would not be whole without my knowledge of these subjects.”

I include summaries of Rose's exemplary literacy narrative and the student Gwen's essay to help readers unfamiliar with this genre understand more about what published scholars and students generally write about in literacy narratives.

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE USE OF LITERACY NARRATIVES IN COMPOSITION STUDIES

The first time the term "literacy narrative" is used, as far I have found, is in Janet Carey Eldred's 1992 article in *College English*, "Narratives of Socialization." Eldred defines a "literacy narrative" as "a fiction that invites us to analyze constructed characters as they negotiate and appropriate various discourses and world views" (p. 686). Eldred's definition focuses on the socializing aspect of literacy—how one negotiates his/her runs with literacy. She uses this idea as a framework for analyzing literary texts.

In "Reading Literacy Narratives," Janet Carey Eldred and Peter Mortensen (1992) define literacy narratives as "stories that chronicle a [person's] attempt to enter a new social (and discursive) arena" and "that foreground issues of language acquisition and literacy" (p. 513). Such literacy narratives "sometimes include explicit images of schooling and teaching" and "include texts that both challenge and affirm culturally scripted ideas about literacy" (p. 513). Their essay provides a global look at the politics of language acquisition by studying George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* as a literacy narrative.

Due to the work of Eldred (1991) and Eldred and Mortensen (1992) who first discuss the possibilities of using literacy studies as a lens through which to read literary texts, instructors began assigning published literacy narratives for students to read.

Students typically read and analyzed “model” literacy narratives, such as ones by Frederick Douglass (1845), Richard Rodriguez (1982), Maxine Hong-Kingston (1985), Mike Rose (1989), Victor Villanueva (1993), and Sapphire (1997). These texts were literary, autobiographical, or biographical in nature and explored connections between literacy and the self (Corkery, 2004). These literacy narratives—written mostly by members of historically-marginalized groups of people—are often praised not only for their beautiful storytelling, but also because they offer positions of resistance to dominant ideologies and challenge positions of power and authority (Young, 2002, 2004).

In addition to contributions by Eldred (1991) and Eldred and Mortensen (1992), the recent proliferation of interest in narratives about literacy development mirrors a larger historical trend in composition. The process movement, which, among other results, pushed personal writing into the fore, in hopes of giving students agency, also shifted emphasis away from students solely reading about the literacy experiences of others to now writing about their own (Elbow, 1993). Wendy Ryden (2002) explains how the process movement promoted writing assignments that encouraged metacognition, or reflection, which “implicitly concerns itself with personal narrative and subjectivity” (p. 86) and is based on the notion that part of writing well is coming to know oneself as a writer. According to Ryden, metacognitive writing assignments were thought to “heighten students’ awareness of themselves as thinkers/writers/readers and their intellectual relationship to text and subject matter” (p. 85), and the literacy narrative specifically concerns “the student’s relationship to and reflection on that process” (p. 86). She sums up by stating, “From a field that often prizes self-conscious reflection, social engagement, process and praxis emerges the metacognitive genre of the literacy

narrative. Perhaps nowhere does composition's interest in student subjectivity and development reveal itself than in this assignment" (p. 86). This assignment thus developed out of our field's interest in metacognitive writing—writing that encourages self-conscious reflection—and states this aim as its main purpose.

Along with process pedagogy, ideologies from the post-process movement, feminism, cultural studies, and New Literacy Studies also influenced the literacy narrative assignment's increase in popularity and shaped the outcomes that instructors envisioned the text producing. These fields of thought asserted personal writing, of which the literacy narrative is a subset, should promote "meaning making" (Newkirk, 1997), be connected to larger social and cultural trends (Newkirk, 1997), and tap into the cultural validity of the public personal (Connors, 1987/2003; Miller, 1996). Furthermore, the argument made by many composition scholars that personal writing is solipsistic (Berlin 1988; Bizzell, 1991; Faigley, 1992; France, 1993; Harris, 1997; Miller, 1991) may have encouraged composition teachers to create new assignments such as the literacy narrative in order to encourage students to place themselves in a larger cultural context.¹ As a result of these ideological shifts, according to Ryden (2002), "[T]rends in writing pedagogies...now len[d] themselves to the adaptation of a form that celebrates an evolving, reflective, public private self" (p. 87).

REFLECTION, SELF-AWARENESS, AND MULTICULTURALISM: POSITIVE CLAIMS ABOUT LITERACY NARRATIVES

Many claims have been made as to the positive outcomes for students when they compose in the genre of the literacy narrative. In this section, I will look at the most

popular claims made by published scholars about the benefits this assignment offers students.

Most often, literacy narratives are credited with being valuable for students because of the reflection involved in the process of composing such a text. Through this act of reflecting, of looking back and analyzing these experiences, students can (ideally) develop into people with broader notions of literacy, can see how literacy is a social activity, and can become more aware of social and cultural factors influencing literacy development. When Stephanie Paterson (2001) assigns literacy narratives, she asks students to “explore the way literacy fits into their lives” and “to *reflectively* examine the structures of their expression” (p. 3, emphasis added). In such texts, students “reflect both consciously and maybe unconsciously about emotional, intellectual, and social benefits that are accrued through literate practices” (p. 3).

Instructors like Paterson who assign literacy narratives see reflection as a key component of the assignment. The belief is that when students reflect, they will come to new understandings of literacy, themselves and others, their experiences, and how they fit into the greater whole. The reflection embedded in the process of writing a literacy narrative and the meta-awareness that comes from such an act benefits students in many ways. According to teacher-researchers,² reflection can foster:

- a greater sense of self awareness about one’s literacy processes and experiences, as well as productive examinations into identity (Bishop, 2000; Brown, 1999; Carpenter & Falbo, 2003; Donovan & Walsh, 1991; Fox, 1997; Newkirk, 1997; Paterson, 2001; Rose, 1990; Sandman & Weiser, 1993; Scott, 1997; Soliday, 1994; Webb, 1999; Williams, 2003/2004; Young, 2004).

- analysis of schooling, education, and dominant sanctioned notions of “literacy” to show the multiple ways students become literate, how literacy is a social process, and how literacy has multiple meanings (Brown, 1999; Carey-Webb 1991; Casanave, 2003; Clark & Medina, 2000; Eldred & Mortensen, 1992; Fleischer, 1997; Fox, 1997; Franzosa 1991; Fulcher, 1996; Kamler, 1999; Kaplan, 1994; Pratt, 1991; Rose, 1990; Scott, 1997; Soliday, 1994; Volk & de Acosta, 2003; Webb, 1999; Young, 2002, 2004).
- more critical sensibilities of literacy and discourse (Brown, 1999; Clark & Medina, 2000; Fleischer, 1997; Fulcher, 1996; Paterson, 2001; Scott, 1997; Soliday, 1994; Young, 2002, 2004). Scott (1997) even argues that literacy narratives must be accompanied by critique to be effective.
- analysis into social, cultural, and political issues and thus highlight the position of social roles in acquiring language (Brown, 1999; Clark & Medina, 2000; Eldred, 1991; Eldred & Mortensen, 1992; Pratt, 1991; Rose, 1990; Scott, 1997; Soliday, 1994; Webb, 1999; Young, 2002, 2004) and highlight the position of social roles, such as gender, social class, race, and citizenship, in acquiring language

In addition to the above assertions teacher-researchers make about this assignment, one additional claim deserves more careful attention—that, due to explorations into social issues, literacy narratives promote ethnic and cultural understanding and diversity and as such are extremely beneficial for marginalized groups of students (Anokye, 1994; Branch, 1998; Brodkey, 1989; Clark & Medina, 2000; Donovan & Walsh, 1991; Eldred, 1991; Eldred & Mortensen, 1992; Hesford, 1990; Meyers, 1996; Rose, 1990; Sandman & Weiser, 1993; Sirc, 1994; Soliday, 1994;

Wallace, 2000; Walsh, 1997; Young, 2002, 2004). Literacy narratives allow for explorations into the complex ideas of assimilation and resistance (Soliday, 1994; Young, 2004), reflection upon negotiation between language worlds (Soliday, 1994; Villanueva, 1993; Young, 2004), and conversations about multicultural education (Soliday, 1994; Young, 2004). In addition, literacy narratives also allow for moments of “autoethnography” in which marginalized writers can arrive at what Mary Louise Pratt (1991) terms the “contact zone,” responding to the way they have been represented and transforming literacy to their own purposes to in turn create their own self-representation (Young, 2004). These voices challenge, resist, and revise dominant (exoticized) narratives on literacy, education, and minorities (Clark & Medina, 2000; Young, 2004) and decrease the gap between white instructors and minority students (Clark & Medina, 2000). In sum, then, the literacy narrative assignment fosters multiculturalism because it is “socioeconomically and culturally inclusive” (Sandman & Weiser, 1993, p. 22).

PROBLEMS WITH THE LITERACY NARRATIVE ASSIGNMENT

However, while many scholars view the reflection associated with literacy narratives as accomplishing these goals, which are certainly noble and worth pursuing, published research is almost never clear about how teachers can assess reflection or reflective content in student products. For instance, in “Translating Self and Difference through Literacy Narratives,” Mary Soliday (1994) cites reflection as a goal of the literacy narrative, but does not give specifics on what strategies writers should use to fulfill such a goal. She simply states, “An author of a successful literacy story goes beyond recounting ‘what happened’ to foreground the distance between an earlier and a

present self conscious of living in time” (p. 514). How exactly does one construct a disparity between one’s past and present beliefs and perspectives? The lack of specificity about what reflection means, as well as the numerous and divergent claims made about the literacy narrative assignment perhaps signifies that the goals of the assignment are unclear and that the assignment itself is under-defined. The absence of clear guidelines could potentially be unfair to students who do not have the educational background to understand what reflection means.

Furthermore, one of the problems with research on literacy narratives and personal narratives in general is that the evidence on which claims are often established is usually anecdotal, based on an individual teacher’s own experiences—or actually his or her own recollection of those experiences. Other claims come from exemplary, published literacy narratives rather than from student-produced texts. In addition, these claims about the reflective nature of the assignment come from non-representative social samples or so small a sample that making such widespread claims is imprudent at best.

For instance, in Soliday’s (1994) essay, the evidence comes from published accounts by racially-marginalized groups of people, such as Richard Rodriguez (1982), Michelle Cliff (1985), Min-Zhan Lu (1987), Eva Hoffman (1989), Fan Shen (1989), and Keith Gilyard (1991). While it is important to see what such writers have to say about literacy, published accounts are much more developed than the literacy narratives students often produce. Moreover, the purpose published writers may have in composing such a text may not be to reflect as is often the goal when students compose literacy narratives. Also, these people may not be representative of the majority of students in first-year composition classrooms.

In addition to the exemplary texts she uses, Soliday also bases many of her claims on two essays from one African-American student taking a basic writing course. Not only is her sample small (one), but she also uses a racial minority. The experiences minority students construct in their essays may be different from privileged students, and the positive claims scholars make about the liberating nature of this assignment may not apply to (or be fulfilled by) other students. The lack of evidence for the overtly-positive claims made about this assignment signifies a need for deeper investigation into the literacy narrative assignment.

While those who make positive claims about literacy narratives hedge somewhat—reminding their readers that not all students and teachers will experience the benefits they maintain literacy narratives offer (Scott, 1997) or that these results only apply when literacy narratives are “at their best” (Soliday, 1994, p. 522)—these claims still warrant investigation and point to the need for high school and college writing teachers to better define what we mean when we state reflection as a goal of the literacy narrative assignment.

Another typical problem with research on literacy narratives and personal narratives in general is that the evidence on which claims are often established is usually anecdotal, based on an individual teacher’s own experiences—or actually his or her own recollection of those experiences. For instance, Paterson’s (2001) study “focus[es] on patterns of moments, or ‘patterns of personas’” and aims to locate “key clues or symptoms” (p. xiii). These patterns that emerge from Paterson’s study may be different from the ones that would materialize out of a more empirical approach. Furthermore, though Paterson “closely read over 100 literacy narratives,” the texts were still composed

by her own students. Likewise, Steve Fox (1997) bases his claims on excerpts from the texts of his own first-year composition students. These grounded theory approaches are certainly valuable, and I do not believe that empirical approaches are superior to other approaches; rather, a systematic analysis of literacy narratives allows us as researchers to look at some of the same questions in different ways.

In addition to the problems with the evidence upon which many scholars base their claims, other critics have argued that personal narrative writing such as the literacy narrative enforces middle-class subjectivities and does not provide the liberation through reflection that the previous scholars have claimed. Lester Faigley (1992), for example, shows how instructors often elicit from students and reward them for producing personal narratives that display a reflective middle-class perspective. This reflective stance may come across as critical and insightful, but, paradoxically promotes middle-class values, which some claim the assignment is supposed to question. Because such reflective writing “may produce testimony that bolsters the hopes to which many writing teachers cling” (Ryden, 2002, p. 90), instructors, perhaps without knowing, are actually promoting middle-class ideologies and values. Moreover, other critics maintain that students do not explore how they have been influenced by various social factors and instead produce writing that is self-indulgent, intrusive, and solipsistic (Berlin 1988; Bizzell, 1991; Faigley, 1992; France, 1993; Harris, 1997; Miller, 1991), as well as self-limiting (Scott, 1997). Such writing also encourages students to present themselves as outside ideology and culture (Berlin, 1988; Faigley, 1986). According to Wendy Ryden (2002), students typically “create heroic tales that are mimesis of prevailing hegemonic conceptions of literacy” (p. 88) Such writing thus reinforces Harvey Graff’s (1979) notion of the

“literacy myth”—the idea that better literacy necessarily leads to personal, social, economic, and cultural progress for all.

CULTURAL MASTER NARRATIVES AND AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL THEORY

Some scholars who have researched literacy narratives (Borkowski, 2004; Carpenter & Falbo, 2003; Fox, 1997; Paterson, 2001; Rose, 1990; Young, 2004) argue that students choose from a certain repertoire of dominant, cultural narratives when they construct their literacy narratives. Stephanie Paterson’s (2001) useful study of student literacy narratives highlights how “conventional patterns of narration emerge” when students compose these texts (p. xxii). She argues that students adopt certain “subject positions” when they represent their experiences with literacy: “the student as a ‘rise-to-success’ story, the writer/reader as transgressive, and the student as stigmatized” (p. 57). Drawing from Burke, Carpenter and Falbo’s (2003) work demonstrates that the content of student essays materializes in the language forms uttered or written. Therefore, it is no surprise that students “write within familiar narrative forms” because such narrative constructions are how we organize our realities (pp. 5-6). Thomas Newkirk (1997) also demonstrates that students borrow from the larger culture when they compose personal narratives. He specifically explores how students draw from the powerful traditions of sentimental and motivational writing when they compose personal narratives. His work shows that students incorporate common narratives into their writing because these stories are what they know. Paterson even points out that students borrow from “Hollywood movie representations” when they construct images of themselves, their teachers, and their literacy experiences (p. 70).

In this project, I refer to what Paterson calls “conventional patterns of narration” (p. xxii) as “master narratives.” A master narrative is a cultural story from which students draw to compose stories about their literacy. Because master narratives come from the culture, these stories typically come in pre-formed story formats.

Shirley Rose (1990) also notes that students tend to invoke what I am calling master narratives into their literacy narratives. Not only do the narrative stories students invoke follow a similar plot-line, but the master narratives also varied according to gender: males often viewed literacy as “a means to achieve social autonomy,” while females often considered it as “a means to social participation” (p. 250). Rose argues, “The activity of becoming literate is fundamentally the same for males and females, but the myths they use to represent their roles in the drama at each stage of the process are different” (p. 250). Her findings indicate that students use culturally-available myths to construct their stories.

Perhaps students are performing certain subjectivities because they think their teachers expect them to invoke such stories. Or they may be constructing these narratives because they are familiar with them, due to their experiences with popular culture.

In these texts then, students invoke cultural narratives. In other words, students often write themselves into “master” narratives, narratives that help organize their realities and that might correspond to dominant cultural notions of literacy perpetuated through popular media such as film, television, and literature.

In this section, I will examine narrative and autobiographical theory in hopes of better understanding why students might invoke master narratives into their writing. Also

in this section, I will delve more deeply into some specific master narratives of literacy and the ideas propagated through them.

Theoretical Underpinnings of Cultural Narratives in Student Writing

Students most likely perform certain stories in their literacy narratives because these are the stories they have available to them, the narratives that help organize and make sense of experience. Recent autobiographical theory contends that all autobiography is a performance of the self (Bruner, 1986, 1990; Smith & Watson, 1996). In “The Autobiographical Process” Jerome Bruner (1993) maintains that autobiographical accounts “cannot be a way of simply signifying or referring to a ‘life as lived’” for “there is no such thing as a ‘life as lived’” (p. 38). Bruner goes on to argue that “a life is created or constructed by the act of autobiography. It is a way of construing experience—and of reconstruing and reconstruing it until our breath or our pen fails us” (p. 38). Autobiographical accounts serve as representations in that “there is no such thing as a ‘uniquely’ true, correct, or even faithful autobiography” (p. 39).

Autobiography provides a framework to organize and narrate one’s experiences. It is one way of coming to make sense of our experiences, or as Bruner (1993) puts it, to interpret them, and “[l]ike all forms of interpretation, how we construe our lives is subject to our intentions, to the interpretive conventions available to us, and to the meanings imposed upon us by the usages of our culture and language (p. 38). The meanings that we come to through the performance (or construal and reconstrual) of autobiography helps shape our understanding of ourselves. In *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories of Subjection*, Judith Butler (1997) argues that it is the performance of the narrative that

actually constitutes our identity. Newkirk (1997) takes this idea further in his analysis of the personal narrative essay: he characterizes the personal essay as a strategic performance. The literacy narrative, a sub-genre of the personal essay, is no different: students put on and cast off various identities, or selves, as they construct their literacy stories. The narratives students tell about literacy are clearly performances of identity.

So, too, are the stories that are culturally available to them. Historians hold that all cultures construct their own myths that help them interpret their experiences. These myths are stories passed from generation to generation in which values and beliefs are shared and propagated. According to Joseph Campbell (1949), myths are the projection of a culture's hopes and desires onto a large screen for all to see. Mark Schorer (1960) holds, "Myths are the instruments by which we continually struggle to make our experience intelligible to ourselves. A myth is a large, controlling image that gives philosophical meaning to the facts of ordinary life; that is, which has organizing value for experience" (p. 355). Myths hold cultures together by giving the individuals that make up the culture common ground on which to stand, even if they do not hold true for everyone, and are often falsely attributed as the only lens through which to view the culture.

As such, it is not surprising that students incorporate cultural master narratives into their literacy narratives. Bruner explains, "The principal instruments by which the culture [prescribes how we construct our lives] are its narrative forms, its genres, its modes of 'packaging' forms of life....there is no escaping the broader culture: it is us." (p. 55). Thus, these dominant master narratives provide a framework, a form for describing experiences. Though Bruner (1993) refers to master narratives as "conventional autobiographical genres" that "reflect idealized cultural patterns" (p. 40),

his (1990) brilliant book, *Acts of Meaning*, provides a useful framework from which we can better understand the notion of master narratives in student texts. Bruner looks at how narrative, through human memory, organizes experience. He argues that “the very shape of our lives...our autobiography—is understandable to ourselves and to others only by virtue of those cultural systems of interpretation” (p. 33). We use these cultural systems of interpretation to understand the stories we tell ourselves about our past. He goes on to contend that the understanding we come to of our stories “achieves a form that is public and communal rather than private and autistic” (p. 33). We thus “organize [our] experience in, knowledge about, and transactions with the social world” through what he terms “folk psychology” (p. 35). A folk psychology summarizes how things are and how things should be. We act based on the folk psychology, which “is supported by a powerful structure of narrative culture—stories, myths, genres of literature.” (p. 138).

Smith and Watson (1996) argue that narrators borrow “ready-made narrative templates to structure experiential history” and in so doing “take up culturally designated subjectivities” (p. 9). That they adopt cultural models “attest[s] to and verif[ies] their participation in corporate culture. Becoming a social subject paradoxically sustains the articulation of the ‘private’ individual in our time, when all forms of privacy are so extensively mediated. In getting a life, then, whose life are we getting?” (pp. 9-10). Our stories, then, are always created, informed, and shaped by culture.

The stories we tell ourselves shape our identity and how we understand and make sense of the world. In “Life as Narrative,” Bruner (1994) asserts:

I believe that the ways of telling and the ways of conceptualizing that go with them become so habitual that they finally become recipes for structuring experience itself, for laying down routes into memory, for not only guiding the life narrative up to the present, but for directing it into the

future. I have argued that a life as led is inseparable from a life as told—or more bluntly, a life is not “how it was” but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold.(p. 36)

Bruner maintains that we learn our culture’s folk psychology early on in life: we “learn it as we learn to use the very language we acquire and to conduct the interpersonal transactions required in communal life” (p. 35). Bruner argues that we can only remember experiences because we have organized them through narrative. Narrative helps shape our understanding of the self and does not exist outside of the culture in which they come (pp. 111-115). In other words, to understand meaning, you have to understand culture. The cultural systems of interpretation therefore not only allow us to make sense of our experiences, but they also allow us to *remember* these experiences. As Carolyn Kay Steedman (1987) contends in her poignant book *Landscape for a Good Woman*, it is not so much what has actually happened to us in the past as much as the stories we tell ourselves about what has happened. According to Bruner, the stories that we tell ourselves are ordered by dominant cultural systems.

Thus, when students compose stories about their past experiences with literacy, they draw from cultural stories with which they are already familiar because these myths offer them a possibility to explain and interpret their experiences (Bruner, 1993; Newkirk, 1997; Rose, 1990). Witherell and Noddings (1991) observe, “Stories attach us to others and to our own histories by providing a tapestry rich with threads of time, place, character and even advice on what we might do with our lives. The story fabric offers us images, myths, and metaphors that are morally resonant and contribute both to our knowing and our being known” (p. 1). Furthermore, because they have also ordered their memories into these already established “cultural systems of interpretation,” they also

remember their experiences in these pre-formed story formats and thus write themselves into such structures. Such pre-formed story constructions involve the hero, the rebel, the victim, and the developmental narrative, to name a few.

These readily-available story molds are also accessible to instructors who read and respond to student essays. Thus, students could engage in these performances because they are rhetorically savvy: they read the social and rhetorical situation and invoke certain stories in hopes of earning a good grade or appealing to the values of the instructor. Smith and Watson (1996) claim that that autobiographical narrative is dialogical in nature:

[A]utobiographical storytelling, and by this we mean broadly the practices through which people assemble narratives out of their own experiential histories, cannot escape being dialogical....Autobiography is contextually marked, collaboratively mediated, provisional. Acknowledging the dialogical nature of autobiographical telling, we confront the ways in which autobiographical telling is implicated in the microbial operations of power in contemporary everyday life. (p. 9)

Once we as writing instructors come to understand that autobiography (narrative) is dialogical, then we can come to understand that this dialogical nature has a profound effect on the ways that instructors read student narratives. Our values, experiences, and beliefs shape our reading of and response to student texts. Instructors are part of the dialogical process and if the values promoted in and through these master narratives do not appeal to instructors, for instance, then the student might not be seen as having a successful narrative.

Analysis of the master narratives in student essays might highlight the kinds of performances students put on for instructors, or what students think instructors want. For instance, in terms of gender, men and women might read the rhetorical situation

differently. Some scholars point out that women have different ways of knowing than men and often interpret their lives by looking at their relationships with others (Belenky, et al., 1986; Chodorow, 1978; Mason, 1980; Rose, 1990; Spacks, 1980). According to Shirley Rose (1990), females view acquiring literacy as a means to social participation, and males see it as a means to achieving social autonomy. Thus, men would be more likely to perform roles or adopt identities that are socially acceptable to them, such as the hero or rebel, while women might be more likely to identify themselves as child prodigies and successes, since these narratives present literacy relationally.

In terms of race and class, we might expect underprepared and minority students to invoke stigma or outsider rhetoric more often than White, middle-class students do because of the past experiences that they are narrating. If, however, we find that middle- or upper-class students invoke these narratives more often, perhaps they are more apt to perform these identities because they feel entitled to do so. Students from lower classes might not perceive it as acceptable to tell stories about feeling disenfranchised and misread when their audience is a teacher, someone who may perhaps not be sympathetic to such stories. These differences would be telling.

If the analysis, however, does not reveal differences between demographic groups, this may suggest that students are reading the social and rhetorical situation and performing identities that they think the teacher wants to see or may privilege.

Common Master Narratives Students Perform

The master narratives that I analyze in this project are derived from the works of various literacy scholars who have discussed these dominant, cultural stories in relation

to literacy narratives. These scholars will be discussed individually within the framework of each master narrative.

I have divided the master narratives into three main categories: “positive stories of literacy,” “negative stories of literacy,” and “other stories of literacy.” These three categories are *not* based on how we as readers might feel about the values promulgated through these narratives, but rather on how students construct these identities. Four master narratives fit into the positive stories of literacy category: success, hero, child prodigy, and literacy winner. The stigma and outsider narratives are categorized as negative stories of literacy, while the rebel narrative and “other” (master narratives not included in the other seven) are placed in a third category marked “other stories of literacy.”

I have attempted to use the most popular narratives students incorporate. If I had been looking through a different lens, or if I had read other scholarship on cultural master narratives in student texts, I am sure other stories would have emerged. Here, though, are the eight most common master narratives I have found in published scholarship on literacy narratives.

Positive stories of literacy: The success, hero, child prodigy, and literacy winner master narratives

The four master narratives in this category—success, hero, child prodigy, and literacy winner—are mostly derived from Stephanie Paterson’s (2001) dissertation, *Embodied Narratives: Ways of Reading Student Literacy Histories*. Paterson calls all four narratives “rise-to-success” stories that highlight “individuals who ‘make’ themselves

through ‘luck and pluck’ and the Puritan work ethic” (p. 99). Under this umbrella of “rise-to-success,” three smaller sub-stories of literacy emerge: “literacy as accumulation” (success), “literacy as display” (child prodigy), and “literacy as consumption” (literacy winner).³ These master narratives will be examined in more detail below.

Success: Affirming the literacy myth

The first master narrative in the positive category is the success story, a narrative based on the notion that literacy equals success—in that the more literate you are, the more successful you will be—which is, according to Eldred and Mortensen (1992), a romanticized view where “a flower girl can become a duchess through education” (p. 515), a “myth of the American Dream” (Fox, 1997, p. 20). The success narrative has been enmeshed in our culture since the founding of the United States and is propagated through literary texts, the media, and autobiographies, such as ones written by Benjamin Franklin (2003/1793) and Frederick Douglass (1988/1845) in which writers “show that acquiring written and oral fluency in mainstream American English [is] a means to occupational, social, and political success and power” (Fox, 1997, p. 18). These stories are typically based on the notion of *Bildung*, which “equate[s] literacy acquisition with a progressive narrative of development and liberation” (Ryden, 2002, p. 22). As Paterson aptly puts it, “[V]iewing literacy as a clear progression from ignorance to enlightenment is an irresistible plot for students to plug into” and carries “tremendous cultural cachet” (p. 99).

In his 1979 acclaimed text, *The Literacy Myth*, historian Harvey Graff studies nineteenth-century educators such as Horace Mann who promoted this success narrative,

which he comes to call a “literacy myth”—the assumption that the better one’s literacy, the more successful he/she will be individually, economically, culturally, and socially. He argues that this myth, promoted by traditional academic literacy, views literacy as a necessary tool for success and achievement and paints literacy as pragmatic and utilitarian, a means to economic, cultural, social, and political success. Graff’s research, on the contrary, suggests that connections between schooling and social mobility are not natural ones, and he seeks to dispel this literacy myth. He argues convincingly that actual realities challenge and contradict our assumptions about the inherent connections between literacy and success. Building off of Graff, Eldred and Mortensen (1992) contend that the literacy myth “prompts us to interrogate what are often taken as ‘natural’ assumptions about connections between schooling and social mobility” (p. 512). Paterson also points out, “The formula for success (defined as a determination “to make money”) via literacy is rendered in natural terms in these brief prose moments” (p. 106).

Fox (1997) points out how the conventional literacy success story is a sub-genre of the “American success story.” In his study of his students’ literacy narratives, he found that they often invoked this conventional literacy success story by characterizing their literacy pasts with terms like “development, progression, struggle, growth, evolution, or emergence” (p. 17). Predominant in these narratives was the belief that the kind of literacy represented by a college education will lead to worldly success. He also found that students who invoked success stories also remain optimistic about their literate futures.

This narrative unabashedly promotes middle class values and virtues. In her analysis of the student literacy narratives included in Wendy Bishop’s *The Subject Is*

Reading, Wendy Ryden (2002) points out that the narratives “often fall back on and reaffirm the developmental line of the romanticized power of education” (p. 90). Likewise, Lynn Z. Bloom (1996) in “Freshman Composition as a Middle-Class Enterprise,” claims that much American autobiographical literature (which “is full of success stories”) presents people from all kinds of social backgrounds “rising in status, income, reputation, and self-esteem” (p. 667) because they practice and incorporate middle-class virtues and values: self-reliance and responsibility; respectability; decorum and propriety; moderation and temperance; efficiency; thrift; order; cleanliness; punctuality; delayed gratification; and critical thinking.

As evidence, the typical success narratives that Paterson’s (2001) students compose are highly commodified “literacy as accumulation” stories in which students write about going to school to make good grades so that they will earn more money later. The focus is on future outcomes of success. Paterson posits that students “tend to gloss over these sections” (p. 106) and present the notion of success “in unquestioned and uncomplicated ways” (p. 103). She contends that since the notion of success “is a complicated idea rendered in uncomplicated terms,” a view she shares with Ryden (2002), “*there is great potential for future critical analysis in these passages* (p. 106, emphasis in original).

Not only does the success narrative promote and instill middle-class values, but some claim that instructors are unaware of the middle-class ideological underpinnings of the success narrative. Dovetailing off of Faigley’s (1992) discussion of how (perceived) honesty in student personal writing is “marked by middle-class details that constitute ‘a series of recognitions for a college English teacher’ (125),” Ryden (2002) finds that “the

narrating consciousness of the essays, like the English teachers who are the audience, seem unaware of their imbrication in...middle class discourse” (p. 90).

Hero: Idealizing the individual

Another predominant master narrative, also with ties to the middle-class, is that of an individual hero pulling him/herself up by the bootstraps to succeed to become more literate. Hero narratives distribute heroic attributes such as determination, confidence, and willpower to the narrator who must overcome many obstacles to “rise-to-success” (Eldred & Mortensen, 1992; Paterson, 2001). The hero narrative promotes “[t]he myths of self-reliance and of the self-made man who transcends his environment” and is a typical “rags to riches” story, a “coming-of-age” fiction in which an individual succeeds despite his/her origin to become culturally literate (Eldred, 1991, p. 696). The hero narrative is also known as a “progress plot” in which a low starting point is later measured and assessed by one’s current performance (Eldred & Mortensen, 1992, p. 520). Hero narratives perpetuate the story that says if you try hard, maintain enough persistence and determination, and have enough willpower, you will succeed, despite your origins. This narrative is based on the myth that individual agency is the only factor at work in making one literate. This myth is promoted through stories about individual agency and self-improvement such as Horatio Alger’s (1985/1968) novel *Ragged Dick and Struggling Upward*, Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography*, and Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative*.⁴

In a study of the literacy narratives of new and returning Writing Associates, Carpenter and Falbo (2003) find that the hero narrative is especially empowering for

students who consider themselves to be successful writers. Typically, students construct themselves as heroes and “present literacy development as a succession of skill-acquiring episodes that enable [them] to overcome academic challenges” (p. 6). They describe the hero narrative as going something like this: the hero faces a test of his/her confidence; he/she acquires a particular skill and thus overcomes the obstacle; in turn, he/she is taught something about literacy and about himself or herself. In sum, then, the hero is “confronted at various times by progressively difficult tasks, each of which teaches her something about herself and academic writing” (p. 6).

Child prodigy: Making literacy visible

Another positive master narrative promotes the myth that unless children are exposed to (school) literacy at an early age and learn the values of school early on in life, then they will not be (academically) successful. Child prodigies make literacy visible by being put on display for others to see their brilliance and intellectual acumen in hopes of amazing and astonishing their audience. The emphasis is placed “on the approval of others, and the ability to offer authorities ‘brag rights’” (Paterson, 2001, p. 118). Paterson observes, “There is an element of spectacle to literacy, in which the selves being constructed become like automatons. The significance of these extraordinary, marvelous or unusual accomplishments are mined for their power as status symbols” (p. 116).

The child prodigy narrative, typically told about one’s early literacy experiences, concerns an explicit connection to middle-class values, which place an extreme importance on the (explicit) teaching of literacy from a very early age.⁵ One specific value promulgated through this myth is that book reading is equated with morality.

Steven Bialostok's (2002) notable study of fifteen White, middle-class parents of kindergarten children, demonstrates that reading books is not only associated with middle-class values but also held to be a prototypical literacy. As such, reading is equated to moral worth. Drawing on Bourdieu's notions of social class and taste, he finds that teaching children to read is more about training them to be good moral citizens. He claims, "Books, magazines, television, and schools all contribute to the construction of a kind of moral image of the middle-class that continues to shape and reinforce their self-definition whose actual everyday literacy practices are far more diverse than portrayed, even by themselves" (p. 366).

Even though book reading is associated with values of the middle class, other scholars have found this master narrative to be popular with those from working-class backgrounds. In his study of published narratives of working-class academics, David Borkowski (2004) points out that the majority of narratives by working-class academics "describe their bookish and 'gifted' backgrounds," a theme that "cuts across boundaries of race, sex, and gender, with class shared by all" (p. 101). He observes,

[T]his recurring theme of the "gifted," bookish (man)child originated in that granddaddy of all working-class academic narratives, Richard Hoggart's "Scholarship Boy" in *The Uses of Literacy*. In it, he describes a child (like himself) being identified as intellectually endowed, someone "marked out early" and therefore "set apart" from his working-class environment because "E's got brains," while the books he brings into his home "look like strange tools" to other members of his socioeconomic caste (226-227). In due time, his "brains are the currency" that pay for his ticket out of the working class. (p. 100)

For working-class academics then (such as Rodriguez, Villanueva, Gilyard, Brodkey, and Zandy), being a child prodigy is not only "a common feature in the narratives"—so much so that "Terry Eagleton considers 'the scholarship boy' an archetype (Borkowski, 2004,

pp. 102, 100)—but the story propagated in these narratives “duplicate[s] Hoggart’s and Rodriguez’s accounts of the gifted and bookish child from the working class who rises above his (and her) station” (p. 101).

In spite of the point that working-class academics often perform the child prodigy narrative, Borkowski still maintains that child prodigies stand out as “not-working-class”: “[B]eing bookish potentially differentiates *any* child from other working-class children, and it may, in part, account for why the child is ‘discovered’ as gifted and eventually guided toward academic advancement” (p. 102). Thus, working-class children with such abilities gain cultural capital, which makes moving out of the working-class easier. Moreover, he claims, “Books train working-class kids in the cultural practices of the elite, equipping them with information and discourses not circulating in their daily lives,” which “can sometimes provide upward mobility, the very real escape from a working-class environment seemingly at odds with the bookish child who has been singled out for being different from others in her class” (p. 103). As these scholars point out, child prodigy narratives are invoked by students from diverse classes.

Paterson (2001) also observes that child prodigy narratives could be read as “Act As If” narratives in that students “‘act as if’ they have gained a certain prowess in their literacy or in their overall conception of self that may be a little ahead of where they actually are in their literate capabilities. They posit a slightly idealized self as a necessary step in living into the ideal” (p. 118). She goes on to say, “‘Act as If’ narratives seem closely related to child prodigy narratives in the sense that the self is conceived as exceptional” (p. 118). According to Paterson, “By presenting a flawless self, [child prodigies] attempt to posit at least a textual version of the self that is untouchable and

invincible, or at the very least—powerful” and “signal a defensive and protective way to position the self against questioning or critique” (p. 118).

Literacy winner: Garnering extrinsic rewards

The fourth and final master narrative categorized as positive involves students who present themselves as successful consumers of literacy, or “literacy winners” who “celebrate a relationship between literacy and extrinsic rewards” and “bas[e] success on external evaluation and extrinsic rewards rather than intrinsic accomplishment” (Paterson, 2001, pp. 103, 104). This master narrative draws from an educational system (and an economic system) based on competition. Literacy winners amass “academic currency” such as good grades, high test scores, Young Author’s Awards, and stickers, among other extrinsic rewards for their literacy (Carpenter & Falbo, 2003; Paterson, 2001). Carpenter and Falbo see this master narrative as “speak[ing] to a rather materialistic view of writing—and perhaps of identity, too” in that how they feel about themselves is based on “[w]hat teachers tell them about their writing, what grades they receive, how parents and peers respond, [and] the effects their writing had” (p. 21). They go on to argue that the academic currency students earn is “materialized in the documents and artifacts they create and receive” and “has enabled many of these students to prosper in the educational economy[,] while causing a few...to identify themselves as marginalized” (p. 21). Paterson hypothesizes why the literacy winner master narrative is popular:

Students often internalize a widespread belief in their intrinsic deficits (and it is a multi-faceted deficit—lacking experience, intellectual acumen, wisdom, and fluency in the English language). I think students learn the lesson well that who they are is not good enough. They’ve grown up

surrounded by the rhetoric of *A Nation at Risk* which declares “the educational foundations of [this] society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very nation...” (*A Nation at Risk*, 5). They know they must always be refining, reworking and re-fashioning the self to be more culturally productive and acceptable. They’re culturally constructed to posit a self that needs to be filled up. (pp. 124-125)

Paterson gives the example that “well-intentioned motivational activities such as Read-a-thons and ‘Book-It’ programs, funded in collaboration with libraries or business like Pizza Hut,” actually lead students “to stress the ends over the means—the prize over intrinsic rewards one hopes comes in conjunction with words” (p. 114). As Bruner (1996) smartly reminds us in *The Culture of Education*, “[A] school’s curriculum is not only about ‘subjects.’ The chief subject matter of school, viewed culturally, is school itself...” and so, “education does not stand alone...it exists in a culture. And culture, whatever else it is, is also about power, distinctions and rewards” (p. 28). The literacy winner buys into these cultural notions that “distinctions and rewards” bring power. The idea that the end reward of literacy is what matters is deeply engrained in our culture, and it is difficult for students to shift from such a worldview in the stories they tell about literacy and education.

Negative stories of literacy: The stigma and outsider master narratives

The stigma and outsider narratives are the two master narratives categorized as negative stories of literacy.

Stigma: Narrating pain

Other teacher-researchers point out how students often write about being stigmatized by negative literacy experiences, particularly as they progress in school. Paterson (2001) bases her understanding of stigma narratives on Erving Goffman's (1963) text *STIGMA: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. In stigma narratives, students often write about "feeling 'marked' by sometimes small, but no less traumatic, instances in school" (p. 146). These occasions of stigmatization and the labels students inherit leave lasting (negative) impressions on those who invoke such identities, resulting in "emotional and intellectual ruptures in confidence" (p. 151). According to Paterson, "The label [a student inherits] becomes the alter ego, if not one's primary sense of self" (p. 155). She elaborates further, "Because literacy instruction involves language at its heart and because language is inextricably bound up with one's sense of self, when one uses language incorrectly or when one's reading is called into question, so too is one's sense of self" (p. 146). Stigma narratives typically highlight moments when students have been misread, their identities "spoiled," because of a teacher's comment, a label, an ambivalent educational system, a pedagogical practice, an external assessment, or some other negative moment connected to literacy.

Stigma narratives also tend to overshadow other narratives: the indelible marks left by negative occurrences stay with students and become the lens through which they see schooling and, oftentimes, literacy in general. Paterson claims:

Given the way students tend to narrate instances of stigmatization, it seems at times the fate of their educational life ends up hanging in the balance. Often, although these incidents seem small in the large scheme of things... these crucial moments end up becoming THE metaphor for the students' perceptions of their educational careers. They're worth studying for the ways they leave lasting emotional scars. (p. 148)

Paterson points out that these students often write about being invisible or not welcome into the literate world, blaming someone else for their past negative literacy experiences and sometimes even for the negative associations they have with literacy today.

Examples of such narratives include stories of poor or insensitive teachers, harmful pedagogical practices, how someone took the *fun* out of reading and writing, how reading was forced, how writing was used as a form of punishment, and the notorious red ink permeating the page.

Outsider: Expressing a lack of belonging

Outsider narratives are negative stories in which students construct themselves as an outsider and, through comparison, set themselves up in opposition to something else. There are two primary ways to construct oneself as an outsider: from one's home culture and from the literate/academic culture. Outsiders could be people who do not view themselves as readers or writers (as they are supposed to view themselves), who are not interested in furthering their literacy skills (whereas others are), or who do not fit in with the literate community (as others do).

Borkowski (2004) argues that published narratives by working-class academics⁶ who were child prodigies when they were young typically incorporate an outsider narrative into their stories. This outsider story consists of a time when they feel at odds with their home culture because they have gained education and literacy skills. He draws from Ryan and Sackrey's (1984) *Strangers in Paradise: Academics from the Working Class* who he points out claim, "[W]orking-class academics typically confess how a

‘strain of disconnection from the past’ occurs, especially from parents and siblings, a ‘theme that resounds clearly in a majority of the narratives’ (115)” (p. 97).

This master narrative is common in literacy narratives such as Victor Villanueva’s (1993) and Richard Rodriguez’s (1982) who write about how they did not fit in at home because they were educated and stuck out at school because of their ethnicity and social class. Rather they occupied a “third space” (Bhabha, 1994). While not all students presented themselves as occupying a third space, they did all construct themselves as outsiders, often wishing things were different and expressing regret for the way they feel.

Other stories of literacy: The rebel master narrative

The third and final category, “other stories of literacy,” involves one narrative that does not neatly fit into the positive or the negative category—the rebel narrative—and also has another group marked “other” for master narratives that do not fit into any of the other seven categories.

Rebel: Resisting dominant establishments

This master narrative involves students who portray themselves as rebels attacking established ideologies, beliefs, and/or institutions (Williams, 2003/2004) and challenging certain aspects of literacy, particularly ones that pertain to school settings and academic literacy. Rebels do not necessarily dislike writing or reading, but do portray themselves as resisting the system, or bucking conventions, by choosing to dismiss values and pedagogies promoted in schools, all the while highlighting their own “true” literacy

abilities (Paterson, 2001; Williams, 2003/2004). Carpenter and Falbo (2003) refer to rebels as ones “who can recognize, endure, and subvert a rigid pedagogy” (p. 11) in hopes of “reclaim[ing] some authority in [one’s] past literacy moments and to establish [oneself] in the present as a survivor” (p. 12).

Paterson (2001) refers to these rebel stories as “transgressive narratives,” in which “students often obey the letter of the law in school, but not the spirit of the law. They hold on to a resistant, sometimes playful aspect of the self that simply refuses to conform to prescribed activity” (p. 129). These are mostly narratives about students “resisting the prevailing culture of school” (p. 130). Paterson’s work shows how rebel narratives often promote what Susannah Kaysen terms “a parallel universe” in that students often engage in unsanctioned activities that go unnoticed by the teacher and happen simultaneously while sanctioned activities are taking place (p. 130). Thus, rebel narratives reveal the *underlife* of the classroom, “those behaviors which undercut the roles expected of participants in a situation” (Brooke, 1987, p. 141). Building off of Erving Goffman’s *Asylums*, Robert Brooke explains classroom *underlife* as “the activities...individuals engage in to show that their identities are different from or more complex than the identities assigned them by organizational roles” (p. 143). For instance, the rebel writer talks about his or her talent, yet how unorthodox it is, as well as how he or she has been misunderstood by educators, schools, and others involved in literate development. Rebels do the unexpected and often rebel against certain rules or conventions so as to maintain a certain identity. Rebel narratives include stories about sleeping through classes, getting to do whatever they wanted by taking advantage of their teacher-coach, not seeing the relevancy of the material and thus avoiding it, engaging in non-sanctioned activities such

as writing a note to a friend, or being outspoken in class because they perceived the teacher to be wrong.

“Other” master narratives: Cultural stories that fit elsewhere

I have attempted to find the most popular cultural stories that students incorporate into their literacy narratives. I did add another group, however, to account for “other” stories that did not fit into any of the above master narratives. The majority of the time, “other” represents stories in literacy narratives that were not relevant to the topic or the assignment.

OVERVIEW OF PROJECT

While many argue for the inclusion of literacy narratives in the classroom, no one has yet systematically studied which master narratives are more common to certain sectors of the population and most popular with instructors, as well as what reflection means to instructors in the context of this assignment. My goals for this research are twofold: First, I hope to see if there’s a way to clarify the vague and nebulous instructions associated with this assignment, and, two, I want to take a position on whether the assignment subverts or reinforces middle-class subjectivities. This project will therefore clarify the precise objectives of teachers when reflection is the stated goal in literacy narratives by investigating how teachers define reflection and how they assess this goal in student essays. This study does not seek to produce a definition of reflection or to investigate the nuances of the term; many other scholars have already provided useful analyses and definitions of the term (i.e., Baker, 2001; Schön, 1983, 1987; Scott, 2002;

Yancey, 1998, 2004). Rather, my aim through this project is to investigate how instructors respond to student literacy narratives when reflection is cited as a goal.

In addition to these competing claims, instructions for literacy narrative assignments are often vague, just telling students to “reflect,” as if that concept is self-explanatory. While the goals may seem straightforward—for the students to explore and reflect—often times, assignments do not clearly state how the instructors evaluate these goals in final written products.

So, what are teachers really looking for in this assignment? In particular, if reflection is the primary goal, how do teachers know it when they see it? Is reflection equivalent to critiquing traditional notions of literacy as advocates of this assignment would suggest? Or is it equivalent to supporting middle-class values as the critics of personal narrative would suggest? Or is it something else entirely? And then, who might be alienated when certain features are privileged?

One way to investigate the claims made by teacher-researchers is to look systematically at the master narratives students construct and foreground in this more official or institutional setting of school, stories that often draw from dominant cultural narratives of literacy. Which stories are most popular? Are certain populations of students more likely to chronicle certain master narratives than others?

To examine the master narratives students invoke in their literacy narratives as well as which populations of students were more likely to construct which story, I collected literacy narratives⁷ and demographic data questionnaires from first-year composition students. **Chapter Two**, “*Instructor Goals and Student Performance of Master Narratives in Literacy Narratives*,” outlines the way the data was collected and

analyzed and presents examples of each master narrative from student texts. This chapter also shows what cultural stories students most often draw from when they write about their literacy experiences and which stories are most popular with certain social groups.

Furthermore, I also discuss the results of the survey I distributed to composition instructors who assign the literacy narrative in their classrooms. This survey sought information on what instructors view as goals and purposes of the literacy narrative assignment, as well as the evaluation criteria they deem most important.

Chapter Three, “*Responding to Literacy Narratives: What Instructors View as Reflection*,” builds from Chapter Two and looks specifically at the rhetorical features instructors’ value in student literacy narratives when reflection is a goal. In hopes of getting a clearer meaning as to which features of student texts instructors consider reflection, I conducted think-aloud protocols with seven composition instructors who assign the literacy narrative in their classrooms. This method will highlight what instructors are looking for in literacy narratives when reflection is a stated goal. This chapter unpacks the analytical, literary, and ethical devices at work in the production of master narratives. I specifically examine the logical structure, the values, and the emotions embedded in each master narrative, as well as whether certain populations of students are more likely to invoke specific narratives. In this chapter, I also look at how instructors responded to these specific features and which ones carried the most clout with them.

Chapter Four, “*Social Class Biases in the Literacy Narrative Assignment*,” dovetails off of Chapter Three to look specifically at certain values students invoke in their texts, ones that often appeal to instructor-held beliefs about literacy and education.

Instructor responses to specific “shared values, as well as some overall goals of the assignment, may reveal some social class biases.

Finally, in **Chapter Five**, “*Teaching Literacy Narratives Rhetorically: Findings and Recommendations*,” I summarize the findings and implications of the study and then make some recommendations for high school and college composition, English, and education teachers. My findings suggest that writing instructors need to be more cautious in structuring this assignment by better articulating the goals for the assignment and what we mean when we say we want students to “reflect.” Furthermore, my data also highlights the need for instructors to be more aware of how our goals for the assignment and what we privilege in student texts when we respond to them may actually serve to marginalize working-class students for whom this assignment is said to be liberating and beneficial. Lastly, I suggest additional areas on which our future research should focus.

ASSIGNING LITERACY NARRATIVES: A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE STORY

Based on the optimistic claims about the literacy narrative as well as encouragement from other instructors to assign literacy narratives, I decided to incorporate this assignment into my classroom. It was the first time I ever taught a college writing course, but I was really excited about the possibility that such an assignment presented. I typed up an assignment and distributed it to my classes. From that moment until the students submitted their final drafts as part of their portfolio, the assignment and writing were met with frustration, resistance, and confusion. I was quite surprised by this reaction, especially because of all of the great claims that I had read about the writing assignment. I had assumed that my students would be excited to write

about their past experiences with literacy. I found that they did not see the point to such an exercise, and I did not know how to push them to critique their experiences in such a way that they would produce the type of results other teacher-researchers claimed they did. Furthermore, they also complained about not having anything to write about because they felt that their experiences were the norm and did not see the purposes of remembering and writing about their literacy experiences. Soon, I too became frustrated and confused, questioning the reasons I even assigned the literacy narrative in the first place.

At first, I thought that my experiences belied the research claims of other scholars and my own hopes for this genre as well. However, when I think back on this experience (my first time to assign literacy narratives), I realize that the students' frustration probably came from my inability to give them specifics about the goals and purposes for composing such a text. While I may see the possibilities of this genre, in reality, fulfilling such goals proved more difficult.

For these reasons, I began an investigation into this genre in hopes to learn how students can come to look at this as a more enjoyable writing experience and one in which they can achieve such noble goals as those listed above.

¹ Most composition scholars now argue for the importance of balancing personal with academic by maintaining that such discourse can include social critique and reflection. In "The Nervous System," Richard Miller (1996) explores the extent to which the personal and the academic are at polarized positions and urges compositionists to "think anew about writing as a place where the personal and the academic, the private and the public, the individual and the institutional, are always inextricably interwoven" (p. 267). Also see Wendy Bishop's 1999 article, "Places to Stand: The Reflective Writer-Teacher-Writer in Composition." *College Composition and Communication*, 51(1), 9-31.

² Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan L. Lytle (1993) establish the value of teacher-researchers when they argue for “knowledge of practice” in which teacher knowledge is valued and respected.

³ I use different names than Paterson for all four of the “positive stories of literacy” to focus not only on how literacy is presented in the narrative, but also to highlight the identities students are performing.

⁴ Gregory S. Jay’s (1997) *American Literature and the Culture Wars* offers an interesting perspective on why both Franklin and Douglass “knowingly deployed the rhetoric of heroic individualism despite understanding its drastic limitations” (p. 192). They did so for rhetorical reasons: “Each saw writing in the United States as a rhetorical rather than primarily mimetic art” (p. 192), and “Their autobiographies offer, to use Fredric Jameson’s formula, both the delusive ideology and the desired utopia of individual freedom” (p. 193). Wendy Ryden (2002) also offers an extensive analysis of Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative* in which she argues that the way this text has been used and presented in the classroom—as a progressive narrative from which “lessons” can be learned and where Douglass serves as the iconic figure representing the power of literacy—encourages students to adopt uncritical and unprobing perspectives in their own literacy narratives. She claims that teaching his text this way is conservative and misleading for Douglass’s text is actually about him *taking* literacy as his own rather than it being given to him in a passive manner.

⁵ See Barbara Ehrenreich’s (1989) *Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class*. New York: First Harper Perennial for an interesting look at the rise of the professional middle class in America. She points out how pervasive middle-class ethos is in shaping our culture and values.

⁶ See Dews and Law’s *This Fine Place So Far from Home*; Tokarczyk and Fay’s *Working-Class Women in the Academy*; and Villanueva’s *Bootstraps* for the specific narratives to which Borkowski refers.

⁷ Although the literacy narrative assignment is broadening to include new media texts, such as audio, video, and digital modes (Hawisher & Selfe, 2000; Kress, 1999, 2001; Selfe, 1999; The New London Group, 1996), this project will only examine print-based literacy narratives.

CHAPTER TWO

INSTRUCTOR GOALS AND STUDENT PERFORMANCE OF MASTER NARRATIVES IN LITERACY NARRATIVES

As explained in Chapter One, the goals, guidelines, and instructions for literacy narrative assignments are often vague and unclear. While reflection may be the primary goal of the assignment, how instructors assess this goal in final student products is rarely explained. The lack of clear guidelines as to what instructors are looking for in literacy narratives and personal writing in general can be problematic, particularly for students who do not come from privileged backgrounds and may not intuitively know how to compose this text and meet the (unclear) goals of the assignment.

In Chapter One, I also looked at the history of literacy narratives in composition and the eight master narratives students commonly perform in literacy narratives. The master narratives students incorporate in their literacy narratives are used as a lens in this project to look more closely at this assignment and what instructors value.

In this chapter, I present two of the primary methods I used for this project. First, I will discuss the survey I distributed to instructors, which sought information on what instructors value in literacy narratives. Then, I will describe the methods I used for the discourse analysis of student literacy narratives and report on the predominant master narratives in student texts. In the next chapter, I will introduce the protocol analysis of

instructors that explored what instructors view as reflection in student texts, as well as the coding scheme for the value invoked in the text.

METHODS OF INSTRUCTOR SURVEY⁸

In order to assess instructor goals for the literacy narrative assignment and to come up with a prompt for the think-aloud protocols, I distributed a survey to composition instructors at the University of Louisville who assign the literacy narrative in their classroom. This survey is based upon the one used by Wolfe (2004). I made a few adaptations to the survey to account for the claims made by teacher-researchers about the assignment and what it can do for students. The purpose of the survey was to determine how the goals of teachers at a particular institution compare to the claims by researchers publishing on the literacy narrative assignment.

Participants

Thirteen instructors completed the survey, which consisted of multiple-choice, open-ended, and Likert-scale questions concerning objectives of the literacy narrative assignment in first-year courses. By coincidence, all instructors were females. Nine instructors were graduate teaching assistants, one was a part-time lecturer, two were full-time instructors, and one was a tenured professor. The instructors also had various teaching experience, ranging from one year to 23 years. The average years of teaching experience was seven years. .

Data collection

These surveys were distributed into the boxes of all composition instructors at the University of Louisville. Only those who used the literacy narrative in their classrooms responded by returning the survey to another professor's box. These surveys were completely anonymous. However, if instructors were interested in participating in the think-aloud protocols, they had the option to include their name so I could contact them later. See Appendix A for the letter I included with the survey.

Four main parts comprised the survey. The first part asked for demographic information. The second part involves questions based on a 5-point Likert scale. This section looked at how much importance instructors place on certain criteria when evaluating and grading literacy narratives. Part 3 explores the purposes instructors have for using the literacy narrative assignment in their courses and is based on a 4-point Likert scale. I chose a 4-point scale because I wanted instructors to be forced to choose agree or disagree. Part 5 entailed open-ended questions that asked for instructor definitions of reflection and explored the role of exemplary, model texts in individual instructor's courses. See Appendix B for the abridged instructor survey.

Data analysis

The survey was analyzed for themes and patterns about instructors' attitudes toward reflection. Each Likert question was analyzed to find the mean, median, and standard deviation.

Results

The results of the survey demonstrate that instructors considered reflection both as a purpose for assigning literacy narratives and as a criterion used to evaluate the student texts.

Table 1 highlights what instructors viewed as purposes for the literacy narrative assignment. Out of 13 different possible purposes from which to choose, instructors ranked reflection as the most important purpose of the literacy narrative assignment. Reflection also had a low standard deviation, which means that instructors mostly agreed on reflection as a main goal.

Table 1: Instructor Purposes for Using the Literacy Narrative Assignment in First-Year Composition Courses

#	Purpose for students	Average (based on a 4-point Likert scale)	Standard Deviation
1	To demonstrate reflection	3.46	0.52
2	To explore their own ideas	3.38	0.51
3	To display critical thinking	3.27	0.53
4	To demonstrate the significance of something	3.08	0.50
5	To develop skills in description	3.00	0.58
6	To investigate literacy experiences that have not been investigated	2.69	0.95
7	To illustrate some “turn” or change in	2.15	0.69

	their beliefs		
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Other popular purposes with instructors were for students to explore their own ideas, display critical thinking, demonstrate the significance, and develop skills in description. The last two rows of the table (investigating literacy experiences that have not been investigated before and to illustrate some “turn,” or change) are based on popular claims about this assignment that I mentioned in Chapter One. These last two purposes were not viewed as highly by instructors, which suggest that instructors do not see it as important for students to critique “naturalized” literacy experiences or to show some “turn” in their paper.

In addition to identifying the purpose of the literacy narrative assignment, the survey also asked instructors to rank the criteria that they use to evaluate literacy narratives. Table 2 illustrates some of the results of this section. Out of 32 possible options, once again reflection (#2) was regarded as the second-most important criterion of evaluation: it carried a score of 4.08 on a 5-point Likert scale and had a low standard deviation. Personal engagement (#1), while deemed as the most important evaluation criteria, had a relatively high standard deviation, which means that instructors varied quite a bit on the importance of this criteria, which suggests that instructors were more consistent on regarding reflection as an evaluation criterion.

Table 2: Criteria Instructors Use to Evaluate Student Literacy Narratives in First-Year Composition Courses

#	Instructor Criteria	Average (based on a 5-point Likert scale)	Standard Deviation
1	Personal engagement	4.23	1.01
2	Reflection	4.08	0.76
3	Evidence of critical thinking	4.07	0.86
4	Movement from description to analysis	3.77	0.73
5	Authentic voice	3.69	0.63
6	Explains significance of events	3.69	0.95
7	Well-told description	3.62	0.77
8	Awareness of sociopolitical issues	2.92	0.95
9	Student has a broad understanding of literacy	2.62	0.96
10	Awareness of multicultural issues	2.62	1.04
11	Provides critiques of schooling and educational experiences	2.54	1.20
12	Awareness that literacy is a social process	2.54	1.13
13	Student has changed in some way in the writing	2.54	1.13
14	Evidence of personal growth	2.46	1.33
15	Includes stories that challenge dominant	2.38	1.19

	notions of literacy acquisition		
16	Evidence of resistance	2.31	0.95
17	Critiques dominant, sanctioned notions of literacy	2.15	0.80
18	Student has distanced self from past	1.88	0.77

While Table 1 shows that the instructors in this study, like the teacher-researchers that I discussed in Chapter One, viewed reflection and critical thinking as important purposes of the assignment, Table 2 shows that they did not share the same belief in the importance of other claims made about this assignment. For instance, instructors did not deem an awareness of multicultural issues and a broad understanding of literacy to be that important. Not only this, but they also carried quite high standard deviations, which shows that instructors disagree on whether or not these factors should be a part of the evaluation criteria.

Furthermore, I also want to point out that whether or not students provide critiques of schooling (#11), dominant notions of literacy acquisition (#15), or traditional notions of literacy (#17) are not viewed as important evaluation criteria with instructors. Not only is the score quite low, but the standard deviation is quite high. This finding suggests that not all instructors view as important the claims made by teacher-researchers about what this assignment can do. In addition, I also want to mention that instructors say they do not evaluate or place importance on critiques of academia; however, as I will show in Chapters Three and Four, the anti-academic appeal was extremely popular with some instructors.

This sample is small. More surveys would need to be distributed and analyzed to better evaluate instructor criteria and purposes for this assignment. However, the results point to the important role instructors view reflection as playing in the literacy narrative assignment

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF LITERACY NARRATIVES⁹

This section presents the results of my discourse analysis of student literacy narratives. A systematic discourse analysis allows us to see trends across multiple student papers. In particular, I evaluate the master narratives that students commonly invoke, which I described in Chapter One, as well as look at the age of the student during the event. By looking at literacy narratives, we can see how students looking back over their lives construct themselves as literate individuals at different points in their lives. Examining the literacy narrative will also be useful for teachers to know when, where, and why students are resistant to certain literacy practices or situations, their attitudes toward reading, writing, home, and school, and what identities they construct for themselves as writers.

Participants

During the fall 2003 semester, first-year composition instructors at the University of Louisville who assigned the literacy narrative assignment in their courses were invited to volunteer their students for participation in this study. Six composition instructors volunteered their courses, and there were nine courses total. All of the courses were first-

semester composition courses, except for one which was a first-semester honors writing course.

A total of 137 students volunteered to participate in this study. 102 students submitted all of the required documents (consent form, demographic data questionnaire, and the first teacher draft of their literacy narrative). I also chose to exclude students based on my own selection criteria: students were native speakers of English and were under the age of 25. In addition, I only used assignments that met certain criteria, which I explain later. In all, 35 students were not included because they had incomplete files; 10 students were not included because of my selection criteria. This process left me with 96 students in the study. Based on MacNealy's (1999) recommendations, I randomly selected 60 essays to use in this study.

The classes were taught by six different instructors with varying levels of experience: four instructors were graduate students and two were full-time high school teachers working as part-time lecturers. Table 3 describes the individual instructors, course information, the instructor's assignment, and the number of participants from each class.

Table 3: Description of the Six Instructors, Course Information, Individual Assignments, and the Number of Participants from Each Class

Instructor	Instructor background	Course information	Instructor's assignment	# of students in study
Anne	European-American, female aged 25-30, graduate teaching assistant	2 courses: English 101: Introduction to College Writing; English 105: Advanced	"Compose a literacy narrative that explores some aspect of your literacy background and development....Then reflect on these stories and experiences." Explicitly mentions reading, writing, speaking, and	34

		Composition for Freshmen	technology. 3-4 pp.	
Cynthia	European-American, female aged 25-30, graduate teaching assistant	2 sections of English 101: Introduction to College Writing	“Compose a literacy narrative that explores your background with reading and writing and reflect on how these experiences have shaped you today.” Explicitly mentions reading, writing, speaking, and technology. 3-4 pp.	6
Elaine	European-American, female aged 30-35, part-time instructor	English 101: Introduction to College Writing	“Write a literacy autobiography that <i>explores</i> your memories and experiences with language learning and <i>reflects</i> on how you feel about the writer you are today.” Emphasis on writing. 3-5 pp.	2
John	European-American, male aged 40-50, part-time instructor	English 101: Introduction to College Writing	“Write a literacy narrative in which you describe your history with literacy (reading and writing) and reflect on these experiences.” 4-5 pp.	7
Valerie	European-American, female aged 25-30, graduate teaching assistant	2 sections of English 101: Introduction to College Writing	“Write a personal narrative in which you reflect on your literacy skills and incidents in your lives that have led up to your possession of your current level of skill.” Explicitly mentions reading, writing, speaking, and listening. 3-4 pp.	11

Sixty students participated in this study. Twenty five students were male and thirty-five students were female. Eleven students were African-American, three were Asian-American, one was Hispanic, and 45 were European-American. All but five were first-year students. Sixty-four students were under 21 years of age, and six were between 21 and 25 years old. Over 80% of the students were from Kentucky.¹⁰ Table 4 gives a breakdown of student gender and ethnicity.

Table 4: Student Population by Gender and Ethnicity

	African-American	Asian-American	Hispanic	White	Total
Male	3	1	0	21	25
Female	8	2	1	24	35
Total	11	3	1	45	60

In addition, 47 students attended public high schools while 13 students attended private high schools.

This study also included students from a spectrum of income levels: eleven students came from homes where the total family income was less than \$40,000; 19 came from homes between \$40,000 and \$80,000; and 27 students came from homes where total family income was greater than \$80,000. Three students did not know their total family income and marked “unknown.”

The parental level of education also varied: 13 students came from homes where the highest degree earned by one or more parents was a high school degree (GED, high school); 44 came from homes where one or more parent earned more than a high school degree (some college, technical, associates, bachelors, masters, professional, graduate); the highest level of education for the parents of 3 students was unknown.

Though this is a small sample of students, we can still learn about possible trends among various groups and then use this information as a springboard for conducting more research on specific populations.

Data Sources

Two main data sources were used in this part of the study: the first drafts of student literacy narratives and a demographic data questionnaire.

Student literacy narratives

I collected first drafts of literacy narratives that students submitted to their instructors.¹¹

Criteria of literacy narrative assignment

One tension I faced before I gathered instructor assignments was that these student literacy narratives were produced in various contexts—different assignments, different instructors, different prewriting activities, etc. I was not present when the assignments were handed out, and I could not know what instructions were given in addition to the printed assignment or what discussions took place about literacy in the context of the course.

Therefore, to deal with this issue of context, I decided it was important to use only assignments that met certain criteria or that asked for certain outcomes in the papers. Each assignment included in this study asked for the student to explore instances of both reading *and* writing, to reflect on how these experiences shape them today, to investigate several stages in students' literacy journeys (from their first memory of reading and/or writing to their current experiences with literacy), and to be between three and five pages.

Based on these criteria, the literacy narratives from one instructor's class, Julie's, did not qualify because she had asked her students to analyze one literacy event, rather

than trace their literacy history over a longer period. Six students in her class had submitted their drafts, and I discarded these because they did not fit the criteria.

There were some variations between instructor assignments. Cynthia, Valerie, and Anne encouraged students to explore alternative literacies, such as composing music, speeches, web pages, and comic strips. Three out of the five instructors also encouraged students to connect their literacy narratives to Brandt's (1998) idea of "sponsors" of literacy.

It is important to note that the variations in assignments may have played a role in what the students wrote. Because this particular writing situation is one that occurs in school—a somewhat artificial writing environment—students in different classes might have written different stories because of what their particular assignment entailed. I tried to diminish these differences by coming up with the criteria mentioned above; however, it is still important to allow for variances in student texts due to other forces.

Name of assignment

I faced another tension in what I was going to call the assignment for this study. This assignment is most often referred to as a "literacy narrative" (Bishop, 2000, 2003; Clark & Medina, 2000; Eldred & Mortensen, 1992; Fleischer, 1997; King, 1997; Paterson, 2001; Scott, 1997; Soliday, 1994; Walsh, 1997; Williams, 2003/2004; Young, 2004) or "literacy autobiography" (Bishop, 2000; Brown, 1999; Danielson, 1989; Fox, 1997; Rose, 1990). A literacy narrative has also been called a "writing autobiography" (Sandman & Weiser, 1993), a "literacy memoir" (Fleischer, 1997), a "language memoir"

(Kaplan, 1994), a “language autobiography” (Meyers, 1996), a “literacy history” (Paterson, 2001), or “analyzing a literacy event” (Trimbur, 2003).

I chose to call this assignment a “literacy narrative” rather than a “literacy autobiography” in accordance with Scott’s (1997) reason. He points out that using the term “narrative” rather than “autobiography” or some other term to discuss the genre “highlight[s] the constructedness of students’ accounts; the word narrative blurs the fictional and nonfictional elements of their stories” (p. 109). Because I believe that these literacy narratives are constructed accounts and can never be a representation of the real and because these stories take into account the stories of others as well as the individual writing the story, throughout this essay, I will use the term “narrative” rather than “autobiography” to describe the genre.

Demographic data questionnaire

Students also completed a demographic questionnaire eliciting information about gender, age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and high school attended (i.e., private or public school system). I compared the questionnaires to student texts to look for trends between the master narratives and student backgrounds. See Appendix C for the abridged questionnaire.

Data Collection

In all nine courses, the students had already written a draft of their literacy narrative before I invited them to participate in this study. The participants were informed that this research study would analyze “students’ experiences with reading and writing”

in order to find out “how these experiences shape their current literacy practices” (Consent form). They completed the demographic data questionnaire at the same time I invited them to participate in the study.

I gathered the literacy narratives in three different ways: the student made an extra copy for me when he/she submitted it to the instructor, the student emailed me his/her essay, or I made a photocopy from the draft submitted to the instructor. All student essays submitted to the teacher and thus to me had already gone through the peer-review process. The draft I collected was the first draft the teacher saw.

Coding and Analysis

After I collected the literacy narratives and questionnaires from the participants, I coded them using an “event” as my unit of analysis.¹² For this analysis, an event refers to an instance when a person writes about a specific sequence that has a recognized beginning, middle, and end. I defined an event based on Barton and Hamilton’s (1998) definition: “observable episodes which arise from [literacy] practices and are shaped by them” (p. 7). I coded the twice, specifically looking for the type of master narrative being told, which I outlined in Chapter One, and the age of the student during the event. First, I will explain how I coded the master narratives; then I will describe how I coded for the age of the student during the event.

Master narratives

In addition to the seven master narratives that came from published teacher-researchers, I added another category marked “other” to account for stories that did not

fall under any of the other seven master narratives. It is important to note that since I coded the master narratives systematically by event (rather than by looking at the paper as a whole), student papers could theoretically contain all master narratives. As an example of what I mean, in writing her own literacy narrative, Paterson (2001) explains how she sees herself in all three narratives she analyzes (“rise to success,” “transgressive,” and “stigma”). All of the text in student essays fell under the rubric of an event, meaning that all text including the introduction, conclusion, transitions, etc., was coded. Each event was only used once. A random sample of the literacy narratives were coded twice according to the master narrative, once by me and once by an independent rater. The interrater reliability was estimated with Cohen’s Kappa and found to have excellent agreement: $K = .86$. See Tables 5, 6, and 7 for my coding categories, the literacy scholars whose categories I used, and examples of each master narrative from literacy narratives of students in this study.

Table 5: Positive Stories of Literacy

Description of master narrative and coding schema	Examples of master narratives from student texts
Success. (Eldred & Mortensen, 1992; Fox, 1997; Graff, 1979; Paterson, 2001; Ryden, 2002). Based on Graff’s notion of the “literacy myth,” that literacy ultimately leads to success. This narrative is a progressive story that equates literacy acquisition with development, progression, and liberation. Literacy is regarded as utilitarian and useful, a means to economic, cultural, social, and political success. <u>Coding schema:</u> ▪ connection between literacy and success ▪ equates literacy acquisition with development, progression, and liberation ▪ emphasis on improving reading or writing <i>skills</i> and/or student’s <i>ability</i>	Whether it is reading, writing, computers, or even television, they have all shaped me into who I am today....When it comes down to it, it doesn’t matter how much these things have already influenced my world, because they will all continue to do so in the future. Every lesson I have learned through them is not only one I will carry with me throughout my life, but lessons that will follow me as I continue to grow as a person. (Claire) In my opinion, literacy is a survival tool in our society this day and age....As a whole, I have learned that literacy is ever changing and moving forward. Everyone, poor or

(often made in abstract, general references) ▪ emphasis on a student's belief in literacy, and his/her attitude toward it ▪ emphasis on <i>literacy</i>, rather than the individual ▪ invoke terms like "development," "struggle," "growth," "evolution," "progression" ▪ invoke optimistic rhetoric and look forward to the future ▪ view literacy as utilitarian	rich can gain something from literacy. Literacy is extremely essential because it is the stone on which the people of the 22nd century will expand on and further. (Anna) Although I still use many of the [writing] methods I was taught as a child, I have acquired many more. Both help me with my daily performance as a student and literate human being. The road to knowledge never comes to a dead end, and my journey in literacy has only begun. (Amy) I guess that my literacy narrative could be best described as a roller coaster of events....I don't know what kind of journey is ahead of me, but I think that the worst has passed. At this point it is up to experience and practice to...turn me into a successful person in our society. I don't believe that one can ever be too literate, and I think that we should all strive to better our communication skills through reading and writing. (Jack)
Hero. (Carpenter & Falbo, 2003; Eldred, 1991; Paterson, 2001;). The student is the hero of his/her literacy story and has heroic attributes, such as perseverance, determination, and self-reliance. <u>Coding schema:</u> ▪ connection between literacy and success ▪ equates literacy acquisition with development, progression, and liberation ▪ emphasis on <i>individual</i> achievements and successes, rather than abstract references to literacy. ▪ characteristics of hero: perseverance, self-reliance, self-confidence, determination, personal motivation ▪ promotes the American belief of upward mobility ▪ must overcome a struggle or obstacle ▪ "present literacy development as a succession of skill-acquiring episodes" (Carpenter & Falbo, 2003, p. 6).	By the time I got into third grade, I began tackling actual books. I didn't quite realize at the time that Michael Crichton's <i>Jurassic Park</i> was way out of my league, but I read it every year since for about 8 years, until I was confident I understood the whole thing. (Brad) I would read everything I saw. I spent hours reading stapled paper books in which three word sentences accompanied the bright illustrations....I just enjoyed reading because I was good at it, and it made me feel smart when I could do it. (Charlie)

Child Prodigy. (Paterson, 2001). A student who excelled at reading and writing from an early age and is put on display for others to see his/her brilliance and intellectual acumen. <u>Coding schema:</u> ▪ moments on which literacy is put on display for other to see ▪ people who were read to by their parents and do not remember not knowing how to read. ▪ abundant exposure to literate texts ▪ trips to the library or bookstores ▪ tales of prolific reading	As I entered public schools, I noticed that I was ahead of most of the other children. I even knew how to write in cursive! I found that I enjoyed writing, and looking back I think it was because I had little competition. It seemed pretty easy to impress the teachers with my knowledge of the English language. I began to view myself as a prodigy in the area of reading and writing....My teacher actually assigned me to sit at the front, and help the other students when they got stuck on a word. (Jack) Before my sisters and I had even mastered the alphabet, we were surrounded in a world of literacy. My mom decorated our dresser drawers with magazine clippings of clothes, and labeled each for what was inside. This not only helped us find our clothes easier, but also opened our minds to a world of words. We would play flash cards, sounding out the different consonants and vowels. We would sing songs and make everything into a game, never allowing a second pass for the opportunity to learn. (Amy) At five, I started using writing in school assignments....as I thought about it and talked about it, I learned to actually write the language....I know that my level of literacy grew exponentially during my elementary school years. By the third grade, I had a strong understanding of common usage of the English language. (Brandon) I remember that I started reading when I was three. Now, I'm not sure if I should say I started reading then, or if I should say I started memorizing what my mother read to me so that I could repeat it back to her and make it sound like I was reading. I will never forget the book. It was called <i>Brown Bear, Brown Bear</i>....I will never forget
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	how proud of myself I was when I could read every word to my mother, and if I couldn't read it, due to the fact that the book was being held upside down, I had it memorized. (Claire)
Literacy Winner. (Carpenter & Falbo, 2003; Paterson, 2001). Base success on extrinsic rewards and prizes; successful consumers of literacy who amass “academic currency” by winning extrinsic rewards, awards, and prizes for their literacy, such as Young Author’s awards, good grades and high test scores, and verbal compliments. <u>Coding schema:</u> ▪ tales of winning extrinsic awards, rewards, and prizes for one’s literacy ▪ affirmation could come in the form of good grades, high test scores, stickers, free pizza, etc.	As early as third grade, I remember being praised for some of the short stories and poems we were assigned to do. I entered and was entered in numerous contests for English for my writing abilities. I could form a picture with words like no other. I can remember winning a “Young Author’s” contest in my elementary school, that day I was on top of the world. My teachers raved about my book. You would have thought Stephen King or Danielle Steele had dropped by our school. (Tomika) In fifth grade, my teacher challenged me to enter a governors cup competition, in which I would compete against other students from around my district by writing a theme. At first I was reluctant, but I soon gave in to his requests, and submitted my essay. When the results came back, I had placed first, and was rewarded a medallion, which I still wear to this day. Okay, I don’t really wear it, but it was pretty cool. (Jack)

Table 6: Negative Stories of Literacy

Description of master narrative and coding schema	Examples of master narratives from student texts
Stigma. (Fox, 1997; Kamler, 1999; Paterson, 2001). One stigmatized by negative literacy experiences, especially in relation to school and teachers (red ink, bad teaching, school-based reading and writing). <u>Coding schema:</u> ▪ stigmatized by negative literacy experiences, in or out of school ▪ blames someone else for negative literacy experiences ▪ talks about how someone <i>took the fun</i>	I said something inappropriate to another kid, and my mother made me write a two-page paper as punishment. So, I wrote the paper and I hated it. I would say that that probably spurned in me distaste for writing in any fashion at the time. (Aaron) In Intermediate School, I was introduced to a program called “Accelerated Reader.” The system was very flawed. Students would take tests for their friends so they wouldn’t have to read as much, take tests

out of reading and writing.	blindly, or watch a movie and then take the test, just to meet the quota at the end of the term. Accelerated Reader turned me off of reading for pleasure for quite some time, since I was forced to read from a list pre-approved by the school in order to achieve a passing grade in reading classes. I had to neglect books that looked enjoyable in order to read books that were on the limited list of approved books. Accelerated Reader was mandatory until I entered high school. (later) I find it ironic that a program that was intended to get students to read more books actually did more harm to me than good. (Jeremy)
Outsider. (Bhabha, 1994; Villanueva, 1993). Student portrays self as outsider in relation to something else in the story, such as literacy, pedagogy, other students, the school system, etc. <u>Coding schema:</u> ▪ attitude about being an outsider is typically negative or apathetic ▪ outsider identity can be invoked implicitly or explicitly ▪ no real blame assigned ▪ student may feel a sense of hopelessness toward literacy ▪ students who do not feel they fit in at home or school and are therefore located as an outsider in a third space ▪ use of comparison	I always sit around and wish I had the ability to write page turning novels, as long as anyone would never be required to read them. I guess as I get older I realize that writing is a talent I lack. (Claire) As a young teenager I tried to keep a diary....I didn't write near as much, and tended to neglect my diary quite a bit. None of my family ever really stressed as much importance on writing as they did reading. Although I've written a few things that I'm proud of, I'm not near the writer that I wish I could be. I come up with really good ideas in my head, but I have difficulty expressing them. This comes from not getting enough practice with my writing. (Shelly) Throughout my life I have struggled expressing myself. As a young child I was extremely shy, and I hardly would ever speak. I would do my best to express myself by simply pointing my finger, shrugging my shoulders, or nodding my head....Eventually my parents took me to a speech therapist because I would only speak when it was absolutely necessary. (Charlie)

Table 7: Other Stories of Literacy

Description of master narrative and coding schema	Examples of master narratives from student texts
Rebel. (Carpenter & Falbo, 2003; Paterson, 2001; Williams, 2004). Attacks established beliefs and/or institutions and rebels against them, particularly in school settings. <u>Coding schema:</u> ▪ narrative can be positive, negative, both, or neither ▪ students who transgress what is typical or conventional ▪ writer talks about how he/she has been misunderstood by educators, schools, etc. ▪ Rebels do not necessarily dislike writing or reading, but they rebel against certain aspects of literacy, especially in school settings ▪ tales of subversion and resistance	...the book got me into plenty of trouble. I remember cutting school and going to the library at least once to read the book. Very early on, I learned that I could “take the bus” to school, and in actuality just walk over to the library. Generally, I’d just play on the Internet all day, but this time I was learning more than any school could teach me. It was pouring down rain outside as I read thru the climax of the book....I just remember looking up after finishing the third section of the book, and the sun had just come out. It was one of those profound personal moments that you just really can’t put into words, I suppose. I vowed to finish the book before I went to sleep that night, and I succeeded in my goal just as the sun was coming up....I slept for about forty-five minutes before waking up and, uh, not going to school. (I hope my mom doesn’t read this.) (Craig) I was always a reader. I enjoyed losing myself in books. In fact, I usually got in trouble for reading in class. I specifically remember several times in fourth grade I got in trouble for reading. Also, throughout math classes in high school, I was usually reading my reading assignment for my English class. All because I just enjoyed reading. (Claire) I learned how to cheat and get around the work to just get by so I basically learned nothing all the way through grade school. (Lance)
Other. Narratives that did not fit into any of the other seven master narrative categories. <u>Coding schema:</u> ▪ Does not fit any of the previous master narrative categories	In college, I hope to be able to find the time to read a nice mystery novel or another of Joy Adamson’s autobiographies. I don’t want the procrastination, the homework, or the dim computer screen to interrupt. I want it to be just me, a comfortable chair,

	and the wondrous black words against an array of white canvases. (Allyson) I can remember as far back when I was four years old running around my grandparents' house, not because I didn't want to get my hair combed. I was running around the house because I didn't have to go to school that year! I couldn't go to kindergarten due to my birthday being in December and school started in August, Shelby County would not let me attend. (Shelecia) At about this same point in my life my family got our first computer. It was a Christmas present and like most other Christmas presents it was, to me, a toy. For the first few years, the computer's only purpose was for playing games. Some of my games were educational, like "Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego", and some were action packed, like "Duke Nukem" and "Doom II." It wasn't until the fourth or fifth grade I that realized computers could be used for something other than games, like writing papers. (Roy)
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Age of student during master narrative

In addition to coding the student essays for master narratives, I also coded the events by looking at the age of the student during the story in order to analyze how the stories students tell (master narratives) coincides with the student's age during the story. It seems useful to look at the age of the student during the master narrative they perform to see how students report seeing experiences when they were young and how they report viewing them as they progress through the school system up to their present view of their experiences. I broke the age of the student down into seven categories: before school, elementary school, middle school, high school, college, don't know, and abstract. Although I categorized most events on the basis of a student's typical age during their

current level of schooling, the story students performed did not have to occur within the confines of school, only during those specified years. Said differently, the experiences could have taken place outside of school even though the category was designated as “elementary school.”

This second coding according to age of the student during the master narrative occurred twice, once by me and once by an independent rater. The interrater reliability was estimated with Cohen’s Kappa and found to have excellent agreement: $K = .91$.

Table 8 offers the coding scheme of each category.

Table 8: Coding Scheme for Age of Student during Event

Category	Description
Before school	Experience occurs before student enters school
Elementary school	Experience occurs when student is between kindergarten and 5 th grade (experience does not have to occur within the confines of school, just during the years when a student is in school)
Middle school	Experience occurs when student is between the 6 th and 8 th grades (experience does not have to occur within the confines of school, just during the years when a student is in school)
High school	Experience occurs when student is between the 9 th and 12 th grades (experience does not have to occur within the confines of school, just during the years when a student is in school)
College	Experience occurs during the years one is attending college (experience does not have to occur within the confines of school, just during the years when a student is in school)

Undeterminable	The context does not give me any clues as to the age of the student and so I marked I could not determine the age.
Abstract	The student is speaking in an abstract, generalized, and/or detached manner; the event is not tied to any specific age.

Results

The 60 literacy narratives were coded and 734 events were found. The average student paper had 12.23 events.

Master narratives

The average student essay included at least five of these master narratives (5.28); one essay contained all eight and no essay had less than three.

Three-fourths of the time, students invoked one of the following four master narratives: success (29%), stigma (19%), hero (16%), or child prodigy (11%). The four least common master narratives were the literacy winner (8%), those marked as “other” (7%), rebel (5%) and outsider (5%). See Table 9 for the most common master narratives of literacy.

Table 9: Most Common Master Narratives of Literacy

Master Narrative	Total Number of Events	% of Events by Master Narrative
Success	219	30%
Stigma	137	19%
Hero	112	15%

Child prodigy	81	11%
Literacy winner	56	8%
Other	54	7%
Rebel	39	5%
Outsider	36	5%
Total	734	100%

The success narrative was by far the most common master narrative with almost two-thirds of all events following this pattern. Because this narrative is so prevalent in our culture, it should not be surprising that success narratives were employed by almost all students in this study (97%). Only two students did not incorporate a success narrative into their literacy narrative at all, a significant finding, $\chi^2 (1) = 22.77, p < .001$. Perhaps students perform this narrative more than others because they know how much this myth permeates our culture. Their whole educational training has been defined by how well they do in school, and so it should come as no surprise that writing about an unwavering belief in the power and necessity of literacy is common.

Furthermore, success narratives were significantly more often located in conclusions of student essays than any other master narrative, $\chi^2 (1) = 66.78, p < .001$. Even though students might have detailed negative experiences throughout their literacy narrative, they still ended their essays on a positive, forward-looking note, expressing optimism about their literate futures.

Almost two-fifths (19%) of all events were stigma narratives, the second most common master narrative. When students are writing about language, literacy, and

education, they tell stories of being stigmatized and misread. 80% of students incorporated at least one stigma narrative into their essay.

The hero narrative, another popular master narrative with students, was the third most common narrative found in student essays, used over 16% of the time, and incorporated at least once by 85% of the students, a significant finding, $\chi^2 (1) = 9.34, p < .01$.

Demographic differences in use of master narratives

Gender

Based on a limited analysis, gender does not seem to be playing a major role in how students are performing master narratives. The average number of literacy events per paper was approximately equal for males and females.

Ethnicity

There were also very little differences between races, although more minority students would need to be included in the study for a more accurate analysis. The child prodigy narrative was used somewhat more often by white students than any other ethnic group, $\chi^2 (1) = 4.05, p < .05$.

When comparisons are made between White students and African-American students (since these groups constitute a representative sample in this study), White students tell more success narratives ($\chi^2 (1) = 3.90, p < .05$) and African-Americans tell more literacy winner narratives ($\chi^2 (1) = 5.71, p < .025$), which are somewhat significant

findings. However, more literacy narratives would need to be collected and analyzed to make further claims.

Socioeconomic status

The most significant differences existed between socioeconomic groups and the types of narratives they invoked. I will explore these class-based differences in more detail in Chapter Four.

Location of narrative: In-school or out-of-school

Students were significantly more likely to incorporate the child prodigy narrative about experiences outside of school than inside of school, $\chi^2 (1) = 56.54, p < .001$, while students were significantly more likely to incorporate the literacy winner narrative ($\chi^2 (1) = 9.62, p < .01$) and the stigma narrative ($\chi^2 (1) = 46.24, p < .001$) when they were writing about literacy experiences in-school than when they were writing about non-school literacy experiences.

It is not surprising that the literacy winner narrative related more often to in-school experiences, given the school set-up where grades determine success and drive promotion, or that the child prodigy narrative centered around experiences outside of school. However, the point that the stigma narrative was more likely to come in school experiences perhaps signifies that students see themselves as failures within the boundaries of the educational system, but not perhaps when they write about literacy experiences outside of school. The passage from home to school culture proves problematic for many students.

Age

The stories students tell also varied according to the age they were at the time of the story. Over one-third of all the events were written about experiences in elementary school, and over one-fourth of all events were written about experiences in high school. See Table 10 for the breakdown.

Table 10: % of Time Master Narrative Was Invoked According to Student Age¹³

Age of student during story	Number of events	Master narratives
Elementary school	195	26.57%
Abstract	171	23.30%
High school	141	19.21%
Middle school	81	11.04%
Before school	70	9.54%
College	68	9.26%
Don't know	8	1.09%
Total	734	100.00%

Over half of the stigma narratives occur when students are in middle school or high school, a significant finding, $\chi^2(1) = 8.29, p < .01$.

In terms of specific narratives, sixty percent of the literacy winner narratives were told when the students were writing about experiences at the age one is during elementary school, a significant finding, $\chi^2(1) = 16.56, p < .001$. This finding suggests that as

students grow older their experiences with language and literacy serve to stigmatize them in some way. Paterson (2001) claims,

In the early years, reading is self-sponsored and imaginative and it is reading conducted in relation to another person. And then, inevitably, the shift occurs in parental goals. Schools reinforce this shift in their linear forward-marching notion of literacy lessons that are divided up into hierarchical groups. Students remember the shift from storytelling to reading-for-evaluation with fear and trembling. (pp. 120-121)

Students were more likely to incorporate the hero narrative in high school than at any other age, $\chi^2 (1) = 5.62, p < .025$.

When students invoked the rebel narrative, forty percent of the time the student was in high school, a significant finding, $\chi^2 (1) = 11.00, p < .001$. Sixty-five percent of the time, the student was either in middle school or high school, another significant finding, $\chi^2 (1) = 22.10, p < .001$.

Interestingly, over half (56%) of the success narratives did not tie in specifically to a time period in one's life, but were rather told abstractly, meaning that when students wrote about a specific literacy event and invoked the success narrative, a significant amount of the time it was written without reference to a specific time, place, or instance in their lives, $\chi^2 (1) = 52.25, p < .001$. Rather, they were making more abstract, general assertions. This point will be explored more in Chapter Three.

In the next chapter, I will also explore what features of student texts instructors viewed as reflection. I hope to come to recognize concrete features of reflection in order to teach students how to more adequately fulfill the stated goal of reflection when they compose their literacy narratives.

⁸ All Human Studies policies in effect at our university were followed. This study, Study no. 516.03, was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the Human Studies Committee.

⁹ This study, Study no. 518.03, was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the Human Studies Committee. All instructor and student names used here are pseudonyms.

¹⁰ Public school students from Kentucky have written portfolio pieces since they were in the fourth grade, which could cause them to create certain “types” of pieces, or write in certain ways they were taught in K-12 schools. In 1990, the Kentucky Supreme Courts ruled that Kentucky’s public schools and the way they were financed were unconstitutional, which led to the passing of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA). This legislation led to drastic changes in Kentucky public schools. One change was that all students now had to create a portfolio of writing in the fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades.

¹¹ I also collected the final version of the student literacy narrative. This draft will be analyzed in future research I conduct.

¹² While most of the time an event matched up to a paragraph unit, sometimes students had several different ideas, or sequences, in one paragraph or were not familiar with paragraph conventions and, so therefore, I did not use a paragraph as my unit of analysis.

¹³ This figure excludes those moments where the student’s age could not be determined and in moments where the student was writing in an abstract manner, or generalizing rather than telling a concrete story.

CHAPTER THREE

RESPONDING TO LITERACY NARRATIVES: WHAT INSTRUCTORS VIEW AS REFLECTION

As stated in Chapter One, the literacy narrative assignment is popular with instructors because of the numerous possibilities it offers students for reflection. The survey that I discussed in Chapter Two also demonstrates that student reflection is important to instructors: they listed it as the most important purpose of literacy narrative assignments and as the second-highest criterion (out of 32) for evaluating these literacy narratives. In this chapter, I read and analyze literacy narrative assignments to see what instructors view as reflection in theory and then I compare these values to what teachers regard as reflection in practice in their responses to student texts.

To learn what aspects of literacy narratives instructors value and view as reflection in theory, I analyzed eleven literacy narrative assignments: one print-based assignment written by an Assistant Professor, two that were available online, four that were included in composition textbooks, and five from the instructors who volunteered their classes to participate in my project. My findings show that instructors seem to mostly regard student's use of vivid description and metaphoric language as reflection, as evidenced through the assignment overviews, goals and objectives, and the invention questions typically included in the assignment. Secondly, they also value when students explore the "significance" of their experiences.

One assignment from an instructor in this study provides a useful illustration of what instructors often view as reflection in these literacy narrative assignments. Anne's assignment, found in Figure 1, reads:¹⁴

Figure 1: Assignment Overview and Goals for Anne's Literacy Narrative

Assignment

Assignment Overview:

For this class, you will compose a 4-5 page Literacy Narrative that explores some aspect of your literacy. You will write about your important experiences with reading, writing, and/or speaking, considering the degree to which written communication has shaped your assumptions, your attitudes, and your life. In other words, tell the story of your literacy. You should trace your literacy journey over your lifetime (from early experiences to now), rather than just writing about *one* memorable literacy event.

Goals:

The primary purposes of this assignment are to:

1. examine and reflect on your own personal reading and writing practices;
2. examine the familial, educational, cultural, and historical values that have shaped these practices;
3. and initiate a semester-long (maybe even life-long) *metalinguistic* awareness about your own literacies, a conscious awareness of your language and literacy practices.

Anne's assignment overview demonstrates that she views reflection as the exploration of memories. She obviously values story-telling because she wants students to write about their "important experiences" with literacy. The fact that she wants students to explore how writing has shaped them also illustrates that she regards evaluation as reflection and an important component of her assignment. In addition, Anne seems to value metaphoric language because the overview asks students to trace their "literacy journey," which suggests that students should construct some sort of developmental text, perhaps even incorporating a journey metaphor throughout their essay.

In addition to Anne’s assignment overview, her goals also signify that she values memory and vivid description as reflection. She wants students to look at their “personal reading and writing practices,” as well as the sociocultural influences that have shaped these practices to help develop a long-term metalinguistic awareness of themselves.

Elaine’s assignment in Figure 2 also shows that she considers description as reflection and thus hints that students are fulfilling her goals when they explore and reflect on these memories. Elaine’s entire assignment can be found in Appendix G.

Figure 2: Excerpt from Elaine’s Literacy Narrative Assignment

Literacy Narrative—Project 1 In your literacy narrative, you should: ▪ Explore your memories and experiences with reading, writing, and language learning. ▪ Reflect on these experiences and how you feel about the writer you are today. You cannot truly progress as a writer if you do not understand WHY you read and write the way you do.
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Elaine’s assignment, like Anne’s, specifically asks students to describe their memories and reflect on these experiences. She even explains that the point is for students to “understand WHY,” which clearly demonstrates that she values metalinguistic awareness. Her statement at the end—that students cannot progress as writers if they are not aware of why they read and write the way they do—is further evidence that Elaine values causal connections.

In addition to Anne and Elaine, Sherri, the Assistant Professor, also seems to view description as a key component of fulfilling the goal of reflection in literacy narrative assignments. Her goals highlight the importance she places on the telling of the story: she asks her students to “explore some aspect of [their] literacy background and/or

development and describe how this background influences” them today. Furthermore, when she gives students advice on how to get started with the assignment, her instructions as well as the invention questions she includes focus on description, which establishes that what she values the most and what she wants her students to focus on when composing their essays are the vivid portrayal and description of their memories.

Likewise, in the literacy narrative assignment included in Richard Bullock’s (2006) *The Norton Field Guide to Writing*, Bullock too emphasizes compelling narration and vivid description. The three “Key Features” that he lists as important, found in Figure 3, are a well-told story, vivid detail, and some indication of the narrative’s significance.

Figure 3: Abridged Literacy Narrative Chapter in *The Norton Field Guide to Writing*

Chapter 6 Abridged: Writing a Literacy Narrative	
Key Feature / Literacy Narratives	
<u>A well-told story.</u>	As with most narratives, those about literacy often set up some sort of situation that needs to be resolved. That need for resolution makes readers want to keep reading. We want to know whether Nichols ultimately will pass the proficiency test. Some literacy narratives simply explore the role that reading or writing played at some time in someone’s life—assuming, perhaps, that learning to read or write is a challenge to be met.
<u>Vivid detail.</u>	Details can bring a narrative to life for readers by giving them vivid mental images of the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures of the world in which your story takes place. The details you use when describing something can help readers picture places, people, and events; dialogue can help them hear what is being said. We get a picture of the only treasure Bragg has ever known though the details he provides: “a water-damaged Faulkner,” “a paperback with two naked women on the cover,” books “wrapped in fake leather.” Similarly, we hear a three-year-old’s exasperation through his own words: “I’d like to see a menu.” Dialogue can bring a narrative to life.
<u>Some indication of the narrative’s significance.</u>	By definition, a literacy narrative tells something the writer remembers about learning to read or write. In addition, the writer needs to make clear why the incident matters to him or her. You may reveal its significance in various ways. Nichols does it when she says she no longer loves to read or write. Bragg is more direct when he tells us he would not trade the books for a gold

monkey. The trick is to avoid tacking onto the end a statement about your narrative's significance as if it were a kind of moral of the story. Bragg's narrative would have far less power if he'd said, "Thus did my father teach me to value books of all kinds."

Bullock's "Key Features" signifies that he values three elements in literacy narratives: a well-told story full of conflict; a narrative full of vivid, descriptive details; and an indication of the story's significance. His explanation of each "Key Feature" highlights that when students incorporate dramatic tension and narration into their essays, they will be successful.

In addition to the three characteristics Bullock deems as important elements of literacy narratives listed in the "Key Features" section, in his analysis of three model essays, he also states that he values additional elements: suspense, complexity, rich dialogue, present reflections on the past, exploring the effects of some story, emotion, tension, and capturing readers' attention. However, while he views these specific qualities in literacy narratives as important, they are not included in the "Key Features" section. For example, though it is obvious from his commentary on Bragg's essay that one way to invoke significance is to look on past events from a present perspective, Bullock does not include this point under "Key Features," which implies that he does not deem such a goal as essential in student texts, only that students might have a better literacy narrative if they include such a move. Thus, while Bullock's commentary about the three sample literacy narratives seems rather important in terms of what students should do in their own texts, because he places it at the end of each essay rather than in a more prominent place, such as the "Key Features" section, the commentary becomes less significant: students might not even refer back to this section when composing their own essays. Bullock implies a reflection-related expectation but does not state it clearly.

In addition to the goals and overviews/key features mostly emphasizing vivid description as important in assignments, most invention prompts and questions focus on stimulating past memories of reading and writing. In other words, instructors accentuate memory gathering and selecting by providing students with specific questions to help generate descriptive content for their essays. Out of the eleven assignments I studied, ten instructors included an entire section that comprised invention questions meant to prompt students to remember events in their literacy histories. Typical questions include those found in Anne's assignment below in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Invention Questions Included in Anne's Literacy Narrative Assignment

Getting Started:

For this assignment, you will need to prepare by culling your memories. You might use questions like the following to prompt your memories:

- What was reading and writing like in elementary school? In middle school? In high school? In college? What did you write when you weren't in school?
- For what purposes did you write and to what kinds of audiences?
- Where did you write? Were you alone? With other people? How did people react to your writing?
- What did you write? Why did you write?
- Did you enjoy writing when you were younger? Middle school? College? Why/Why not?
- How do you write? Pen and paper? Computer? Has the way you write changed over the years?
- What were the significant events or circumstances in your life as a writer that stand out in your memory now? Why?
- What teachers particularly influenced your writing development?
- What philosophies do you think motivated the teachers you have found most (or least) effective?

Invention questions, such as those from Anne's assignment above, focus on the process of gathering and selecting memories and seem useful in aiding students to begin thinking about memories they can incorporate into their essays. Questions such as those listed above reveal that instructors regard students' remembering and describing past literacy experiences as fulfilling the goal of reflection.

While instructors provide specific invention prompts for describing the experiences, instructors are not quite as specific in telling students what to do with these memories once they recall them. Out of the eleven assignments I looked at, for instance, ten instructors include an entire section on remembering the literacy events but none of them mention how students can move beyond description to reflection. While instructors could intend for description merely to be the avenue for students to get started on their literacy narrative, not including prompts that encourage students to move beyond the descriptive content to explaining what these experiences meant to them demonstrates that instructors value students remembering the experiences more than explaining, analyzing, or evaluating them.

Only one assignment I analyzed included questions that would prompt students what to do with these memories once they generate them. The assignment in Bullock's textbook includes some questions to spur thought about how students might incorporate the significance of their stories:

- How did [the experience] change or otherwise affect you?
- What aspects of your life now can you trace to that event?
- How might your life have been different if this event had not happened or had turned out differently?
- Why does this story matter to you? (p. 33)

These questions provide students with specific strategies on how they can analyze the significance of the events. These questions, however, are buried under a third-level heading near the end of the chapter, which indicates that Bullock does not really deem them that important. In addition, because the other instructors do not provide questions to

generate such a metalinguistic awareness in students—even though several do mention that they regard such a consciousness as important in fulfilling the goals of the assignment—it seems that they do not really esteem it as important a goal as they do the description and exploration of memories.

The survey results in the previous chapter illustrate that instructors see reflection as the number one goal of the assignment and as the second highest criterion for evaluating student essays. From these assignments, we can gather that most assignments stress student's abilities to generate and describe memories as essential to fulfilling this goal of reflection. In other words, assignments suggest that instructors are setting students up to provide description. Thus, we might hypothesize that teachers will want to see in student literacy narratives 1.) narrative conflict, 2.) vivid language, and 3.) evaluation or giving the significance. These first two elements have to do with describing and telling the story; the last with conveying meaning, or becoming more metalinguistically aware.

So what are teachers really looking for in this assignment? In particular, if reflection is the primary goal, how do teachers know it when they see it? What features of student texts signify reflection to instructors? Based on the above analysis of instructors' and textbook assignments, we might expect to see instructors evaluating students on vivid description and narrative conflict/resolution. We might also be looking for how students describe the significance of an event or how they evaluate their previous experiences.

In addition to the above questions, research on personal writing suggests that instructors' middle-class subjectivities might influence their evaluations of student texts. George Otte (1995), for instance, argues that when we as teachers read and evaluate student writing we respond to what we want students to say because we want to see and

hear ourselves in the writing. Thus, instructors are likely to read student narratives with a moralizing tendency (Bloom, 1996; Newkirk, 1997; Ryden, 2002), inclined to, according to Judith Summerfield (1996), “conflate text with life” (p. 158). Therefore, we might also find instructors evaluating texts based on students’ adherence to particular middle-class narratives, such as the literacy-equals-success myth. Consequently, we might also ask: to what extent then are instructors’ reactions to what they mark as reflection motivated by the values they hold about literacy?

This chapter thus seeks to understand what instructors mean by reflection, not by asking them for a definition, but by seeing how they respond to reflection when they observe it in student texts. Making sure that students understand our goals and our definitions of reflection will help ensure that unstated criteria are revealed to students.

METHODS

Instructor responses to student literacy narratives¹⁵

To obtain a closer look at how instructors responded to and defined reflection in student literacy narratives, I conducted think-aloud protocols on composition instructors who assign the literacy narrative in their courses. I have decided to include extensive excerpts of student text and instructor responses to create an “open text” in which students and teachers can hopefully speak for themselves to “create a polyphony of informant voices” (Chiseri-Strater, 1991, p. 128). I have decided to leave both student text and instructor responses as they were originally written, or spoken, instead of editing them for grammar or style so that the reader can also be involved in analyzing the information.

Participants

I recruited instructors during the spring of 2005 to participate in these protocols by asking for volunteers in the Composition Program at the University of Louisville who use the literacy narrative assignment in their courses. Ten composition instructors agreed to participate in the protocols, but because of scheduling and logistics, I was only able to collect seven protocols. These seven instructors had no prior contact with this study and are different persons from the ones who volunteered their classes to participate (described in Chapter Two) and whose assignments I discussed above. By coincidence, these instructors were all white females; however, they differed in age (ranging from 24 years of age to over 55) and teaching experience (from 1 semester to 23 years).

Data Collection

Think-aloud protocols

To permit observation of the participants' immediate reactions to the reflection in student literacy narratives, I asked the participants to read the literacy narratives I collected in the first half of the study using a method known as "thinking aloud." This research methodology is widely used in cognitive psychology to study problem solving (Ericsson & Simon, 1980; Flower & Hayes, 1977; Newel & Simon, 1972); within Rhetoric and Composition, this method is often used to study reading and writing processes (Hayes & Flower, 1983; Flower & Hayes, 1977, 1983). While there are drawbacks to using think-alouds, such as the unnatural environment, bias, and lack of a representative sample, this method provides insight into instructor responses to student writing and also helps frame questions for future research.

From the larger sample of student literacy narratives I collected for this overall project (the method of which was described in Chapter Two), I randomly selected 12 essays to use in these think-aloud protocols. Because one instructor failed to arrive for her think-aloud, I disregarded one, which left 11. Each essay was read by two different instructors, which meant that each instructor read at least three essays. These think-aloud protocols took place in an office in the English Department. Each instructor was compensated for her time.

Before the think-aloud protocols began, each instructor was given three documents:

1. Instructions for the think-aloud protocol and sample think-aloud text:

Immediately before each instructor's think-aloud, I explained what a think-aloud protocol was based on MacNealy's (1999) definition: "an audiotape recording of a subject carrying out some task while thinking aloud...subjects are asked to say whatever pops into their mind while doing the task" (p. 208). I explained that they needed to try to verbalize every thought that they had about the text.

After I explained think-alouds protocols, I modeled a sample think-aloud for each instructor. I used the first three paragraphs from one student's literacy narrative to model the process. This particular student narrative was used in the overall study, but was not one of the eleven essays read in the think-alouds. Because I did not want to be too leading, I did not look for reflection in this text as the instructors were asked to do; instead, I evaluated and verbalized my own reading processes. This training took approximately 5-10 minutes, after which I answered any questions the participants had and clarified anything about which they were confused.

After the training session, I described the purpose of this study and then explained that they would be looking for moments in the texts that suggest reflection. They were to “underline passages that suggest reflection” by marking “the smallest unit possible.” See Appendix D for the specific instructions given to instructors.

2. Original literacy narrative assignments:

As mentioned above, I collected literacy narratives from five different courses for the overall project. The eleven student essays included in the think-aloud protocols came from three of these courses. Because these students were from various courses, I decided to distribute the original literacy narrative assignment that accompanied the respective essay to instructors. This assignment was provided to give the instructors a context as they read and responded to these literacy narratives. The assignments were similar in that each required the students to reflect, to examine past and present experiences with literacy, to explore instances of both reading and writing, to investigate several stages in their literacy development, and to write between three and five pages. They differed in their definitions of what constitutes literacy.

3. Student literacy narratives:

Eleven essays were read and marked for moments of reflection by the participants. The students whose essays were used came from five different courses. Five of the essays were written by males and six were by females. Nine students were white and two were African-American. The instructors did not know the race, class, or gender of the students, although many deduced this information based on what the students wrote about in their literacy narratives. I also excluded student names from essays. The

instructors were not told anything about my coding scheme, only that I was looking for reflection.

I limited my role as much as possible during the think-aloud session so as not to disrupt or distract the instructors from their task. I sat behind the instructors as they conducted their think-alouds. Instructors were told they should ignore me as much as possible, and I only prompted them to verbalize their thoughts if they grew quiet for a period of time. I took notes as they spoke, which I used to form questions for the follow-up interviews. While the participants varied greatly in the amount of their commenting, none had any apparent difficulty with the thinking-aloud method.

Follow-up interviews

Immediately after each instructor finished reading and responding to all student essays assigned to them, they were interviewed. In these interviews I asked instructors to discuss the rationale for their responses and to explain particular moments that they marked as reflection (i.e., “Why did you mark it as reflection?”, “What was reflective about it?”) and also asked questions about other places they did not mark (such as those places marked by another instructor who read the same essay, or places that were inconsistent with other places they did mark). I also asked the instructors questions about their goals for the literacy narrative assignment, their definition of reflection, and how they assess reflection in student writing.

All think-aloud protocols and interviews conducted for this study were audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded according to the procedures described in Coding and Analysis below. See Appendix E for the transcription codes.

Coding and Analysis

Though not possible in all cases, I transcribed most of these interviews within 48 hours of their recording so that I could more accurately supplement the transcriptions with my observational notes from the think-aloud. I coded the think-alouds by matching up the moments that instructors underlined as reflection to the master narrative events detailed in Chapter One. The event was either viewed as reflection or not reflection. Remember that an event refers to an instance when a person writes about a specific sequence that has a recognized beginning, middle, and end.

After coding these events according to what instructors marked for the entire master narrative, I then assigned each event a “proportional reflection score” that took into account the amount of the event underlined as reflection (i.e., one word or one phrase marked as reflection versus an entire event being viewed as such). When the instructor underlined *less* than half of the event as reflection, the event was categorized as “weakly reflective;” when the instructor underlined *more* than half of the event, it was categorized as “strongly reflective.”¹⁶ This proportional reflection score was calculated by giving a numeric count to moments the narrative had “no reflection” (0 points), was viewed as “weakly reflective” (1 point), or was seen as “strongly reflective” (2 points). This number was then divided by the total number of events to give each master narrative a proportional reflection score.

Value invoked in the text

In addition to the think-aloud protocols, I also coded each event according to various values invoked in the text so as to see what values instructors specifically

responded to as they marked reflection. I coded the events for three values that are particularly prevalent in Rhetoric and Composition: literacy equals success, anti-academic critiques, and literacy as a shared activity. Each event was coded by each individual value. In other words, I coded each event once by the literacy-equals-success value, once looking for anti-academic critiques, and once looking for literacy as a shared activity. This approach meant that these events were double- and sometimes triple-coded. Thus, each event could theoretically contain more than one value. In this instance, double-coding is necessary because these values overlap. For instance, the values promoted through literacy equals success could easily have instances in it where people are engaging in literacy activities together (literacy as a shared activity). Table 11 offers the coding scheme of each category.

This coding by each value occurred twice, once by me and once by an independent rater. For literacy equals success, the interrater reliability was estimated with Cohen's Kappa and found to have excellent agreement: $K = .95$. For anti-academic critiques, the interrater reliability was estimated with Cohen's Kappa and found to have excellent agreement: $K = .90$. For literacy as a shared activity, the interrater reliability was estimated with Cohen's Kappa and found to have excellent agreement: $K = .87$.

Table 11: Coding Scheme for Value Invoked

Value invoked	Description
Literacy equals success	The notion that literacy leads to success and upward mobility. The idea that literacy is powerful and can transform lives and society. This notion is promoted through all four master narratives in the “positive stories of literacy” category (success, heroes, child prodigy,

	and literacy winner).
Anti-academic	Critiques of academia, academic writing, and other things associated with schooling, such as teachers, pedagogies, mandatory reading and writing, and standardized testing. This value was particularly evident in the stigma master narrative.
Literacy as a shared activity	The idea that literacy is a social occurrence where many people influence one's literacy development. This value is evident when students write about how teachers and/or parents helped them with literate activities, as well as when people are sharing in a literacy activity.

In future research, I will continue coding for other values to see what sort of additional information we can learn about the values students invoke in their texts and which ones might appeal to instructors.

RESULTS

The coded data from the protocols were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The analysis was designed to answer one question: What features of student texts did instructors view as having the most reflection?

Sixty-nine percent of the time instructors marked a passage as reflective they mentioned causal or evaluative arguments; 20% of the time they mentioned descriptive or metaphoric language; 11% of the time they seemed to be responding to some kind of shared value.

Instructors view the logical, analytical structure as reflection

Well over two-thirds of the time (69%), instructors regarded the logical structure as reflection. The two primary analytic moves instructors most often marked were cause-effect arguments and evaluation.

Cause-effect

By and large, my research suggests that instructors view students to be reflecting when they make causal arguments. Few literacy narrative assignments explicitly ask for cause-effect arguments, but this relationship between reflection and causal argument was quite consistent across instructors. Instructors do not want students to merely re-tell a story they remember, as some of the assignment instructions might suggest; they want students to make connections by demonstrating how something that happened in the past impacted them then or continues to influence them today. Whenever the cause-and-effect structure was explicit, the narrative was almost always noted as containing reflection.

Instructors value this rhetorical cause-effect move.

Take Laura's text as an example. Laura writes,

Entering the confusing days of middle school, I took a turn down the path where friends, boys and the latest gossip were ten times more exciting than The Big Red Book. I was no longer given the opportunity to choose the books I read, so slowly I had to say good-bye to the page turning days of "The Babysitters Club", "The Boxcar Children", and "Goosebumps". Books for social studies, math, English, and computer class all took their place, and as they did, my interest in furthering my literacy diminished.

One instructor noted reflection in the last phrase because the student was making a connection between the changes in curriculum that served to "hinder her love of reading." She's "reflecting on what it was that did that in that sentence."

Another student wrote about how her cousins made fun of her for not being able say words such as “purple” and “world” due to a speech problem that inhibited her from correctly pronouncing the letter “r.” The student writes, “I never really enjoyed reading out loud in class until I started seeing a special teacher for my problem.” As one instructor read and evaluated this student’s paragraph, she noted that the student was “reflecting on the fact that the slight speech impediment *caused* her to not really enjoy reading out loud in class” (emphasis mine). She viewed the student as incorporating reflection because the statement of the problem, or cause, and the resulting consequences, or effects, were clearly explained. Another instructor similarly viewed this student’s story as reflection, claiming, “She realizes the root of one of her attitudes. She doesn’t just say, ‘I never enjoyed reading out loud in class.’ She says, ‘I never enjoyed reading *because*’.” This instructor viewed the word “because,” which is clearly a causal connector, as a signal for reflection.

Instructors considered cause-and-effect elements as reflection for other reasons as well. When one instructor read a student’s narrative about his negative experiences with Accelerated Reader, she viewed it as reflection because he was “explaining why.” Making connections between causes and results also meant reflection to some instructors. For example, one instructor states, “[The student] gives an explanation to her previous comments about how she felt. This is how something happened. This is the connection that she’s making.” Another instructor deemed one student’s text as reflection because it “indicate[s] a sort of drawing together, of thinking about the connection, the cause and effect among things.” Other instructors regarded terms that linked causes to effects as reflection, such as the phrases “As a result,” “Due to these experiences,” or “Although I

didn't realize it at the time." Being explicit was also viewed as a reason that cause-effect statements were deemed reflective. Students who make connections between causes and effects write essays in ways that appeal to instructors.

In sum, cause-effect arguments appeal to instructor definitions of reflection. All of the instructors mentioned cause-effect multiple times, and this phrase was also the number one recurring phrase overall. One instructor, Trisha, sums it up best in her follow-up interview:

I was having a hard time seeing it as reflection, and I think the reason was because I had this very concrete notion of what reflection should be at this point. So, I know that I underlined, "As a result," because to me cause and effect statements are reflective. I guess that's one of my, I don't know that I could have articulated it, but it's obviously one of my criteria for what I consider to be reflection. Explaining things in the past amounts to reflection for me, and so does including strong cause and effect statements.

Evaluation

In addition to cause-effect arguments being at the root of instructor definitions of reflection, making an evaluation also signified reflection to them, and was particularly strong when the evaluation came immediately after the causal argument. In the two master narratives to which instructors responded most favorably—stigma and success—the cause-and-effect structure was typically followed by an evaluation, which perhaps was why features of these two master narratives were so often viewed as reflection. In other words, the evaluation is specifically tied to the experiences preceding the evaluative judgment. The evaluation in stigma narratives more often took the form of criticism rather than praise. In success narratives, though, the evaluation is typically more implicit and less about making an evaluative judgment (giving praise or criticism) and more about

summing up or generalizing about the previous experiences, as well as making abstract claims about literacy.

Take Rachel's narrative as an example. After she describes the problems she had with Kentucky's mandatory portfolio system, she writes, "Even if I had been a free-lance writer at home, I neglected the pencil and paper outside of the classroom and cringed at the mention of writing." One instructor, Trisha, comments, "This evaluative statement about what happened to her as a result is reflection because it implies that the changes caused her not to want to write." Trisha views Rachel's negative evaluation of her experiences as reflection. Note, too, that Rachel's negative evaluation is closely tied to the preceding causal clause that detailed the experiences.

Like Trisha, Julie and Nina also regarded making an evaluation as reflection. Garrett writes about his lack of effort in English class: how he always put work off until the night before and how he cheated off his friends. After this, he asserts, "Yes, it is morally wrong. But it does not bother me because learning should be enjoyable and not forced. It does not matter what genre is being taught, it can always be made intriguing." Both instructors viewed Garrett as being reflective because of the evaluations he made of himself—that he was a procrastinator and a cheater.

Instructors also viewed students' evaluations as reflective because students were, in effect, generalizing from their experiences. In the following example, Julie appreciates how Matt is evaluating and thinking about the reasons that he does not enjoy reading:

In combination with the experiences I underwent with my family, school greatly impacted my view of literacy. "Reading is Fun!" slogans that were placed in the hallways and walls of the classroom were pumped down my throat only to be backed up by numerous reading assignments out of my "always-entertaining" history books or teacher-chosen novels. Usually these novels consisted of a non-fiction based story depicting the tale of a child undergoing difficult

circumstances—stories that left me so depressed I wanted to scream at the teacher for making me read. Because of such reading assignments, reading a book has always seemed to me a chore and strictly school related. Thus, today I have no desire to read a book that hasn't been assigned by a class in school.

Julie considers the passages marked above as reflection because the student is “generalizing, making evaluations.” When Sarah read Matt’s narrative, she underlined the last two sentences of the event as reflective because the writer was “drawing conclusions, evaluating.” Matt’s narrative points to how closely the evaluation structure of the stigma narrative is tied to the cause-and-effect structure: writing about the cause leads to the effect, which, in turn, leads to him making an evaluation of the situation.

Instructors viewed student evaluation as reflection for other reasons, too. Julie liked it when students re-evaluated or re-interpreted past events. One student wrote, for instance, “*I always stayed ahead, but I could have gone further.*” Julie claims, “But I could have gone further” seems like she’s reflecting on [the first part] because she couldn’t know back then that she could have gone further. This is something she’s only reflecting on now. So it’s reflection in that she’s kind of reevaluating the event now.” Julie viewed a different stigma narrative as reflection because, “The student is reflecting back, reflecting in the sense of evaluating this event, today, having a new perspective today on something that happened to him in the past....The student is thinking about this event in a different way today.”

Even when instructors commented that the text was lacking a causal chain, they accepted these narratives as reflective because they appeared to “sum up” their experiences. In these sum-up moves, students typically made generalizations about their previous experiences, which involved evaluating them. Jeremy, for instance, incorporates a summing up statement into his conclusion. He writes,

Luckily, the joys that reading offered prevailed in the end after being burned out by reading so much literature that didn't interest me.

Amanda viewed the entire sentence as reflection and remarked, “Those two sentences are sort of racking up in the reflective kind of way.” The phrase “racking up” is good evidence that instructors appreciate the summing up function of evaluative arguments.

These examples demonstrate that instructors want students to include cause-effect arguments and evaluation into their literacy narratives. Instructors marked passages as reflection because of these analytic, argumentative moves 69% of the time. These findings also reveal how closely-tied the cause-and-effect structure is to the evaluation at the end. The causal structure opens the door for students to make some sort of abstract evaluation or generalization about the experiences they had just mentioned.

Even though logical, argumentative elements were what instructors most valued in the literacy narratives, they also cited two other rhetorical features that aligned with their definitions of reflection, although to a lesser extent than the argumentative appeals of cause-effect and evaluation did. These rhetorical moves included using descriptive and metaphoric language (20%), which is not surprising for a personal narrative essay, and invoking appeals to shared values (11%). I will first explore how students' inclusion of descriptive and metaphoric language was noted by instructors as reflection. Then I will examine how students connected themselves to their instructor-audience by making appeals to “shared” values.

Pathetic appeals to vivid, descriptive, and metaphoric language

First, students were savvy in using vivid, descriptive language that appealed to the pathos of instructors so much so that instructors viewed such moments as reflection. The

language of a passage was mentioned 20% of the time instructors identified a passage as reflection. Instructors often noted particular words as reflective, such as “haunted,” “cringed,” “neglected,” and “annoying.” Other instructors viewed descriptive language to be reflection because it made the story more than about merely remembering an event; the pathos actually took the reader back to those places being described and even encouraged, according to one instructor, “visceral” responses.

In one instance, Rachel incorporates vivid, descriptive words to describe her negative experiences. She writes,

College entrance essays took up most of my time and I ended up being accepted to all the universities that I applied. Scholarships were given and I chose to attend the University of Louisville where I had no anticipated expenditures. It was the anticipated part that got me in trouble. After a year of breezing through classes in high school, college came as a brick wall—I couldn’t go through it, under it or around it. Reading and writing was to be a daily task to keep up with classes and I was used to it on a bi-weekly basis. Needless to say, this wasn’t good. I struggled through my freshman year, not because I wasn’t a proficient reader or writer but because I took more time to complete (or not complete) readings and papers than I should have.

One instructor who read Rachel’s paper responded that she particularly liked “the use of the phrase ‘brick wall—I couldn’t go through it, under it or around it’ because it was “another evocative moment through use of descriptive language that is stronger than just recounting the event.” So instead of Trisha viewing Rachel’s words as a mere recounting of events, she viewed the passage as reflective because of the incorporation of powerful and evocative metaphorical language. This pathos functioned rhetorically to make her text more reflective.

Like the instructors who noticed pathetic appeals in vivid, descriptive language, other instructors perceived reflection when students incorporated emotion into their texts. When the emotional content is high, the instructors seemed both to enjoy reading these

parts and to consider them to be reflection. Jocelyn, for instance, expresses emotion when writing about the problem she had with instructors who critiqued her writing:

In the beginning, the new way of writing I was learning bothered me. It always felt like someone was forcing me to write their way and if it wasn't the way they wanted it to be, it was incorrect. But my main question was how? How can you tell me what I'm writing is wrong? It is my opinion; it's what I think. I could never really understand how someone could take the freedom of writing and make it seem like I was forced to write down words I didn't agree with or didn't find interesting.

What Trisha noted as reflection in this passage—the emotional content—was categorized as “weakly reflective.” but noted the emotional content in this passage. She says, “The writer is starting to try and figure out what it means to write in a certain voice and whether or not that voice can be her own. So, her expression of what it felt like, I’m underlining ‘felt like’ because she’s reflecting on the experience and interpreting it.” Trisha underlines “bothered me” and “felt like”—two emotionally-charged words that heighten the pathos and serve to charge the reader as well. Jocelyn then uses this pathos she has created with those two phrases to her advantage by following up with questions directed at the teacher who wrongfully critiqued her writing. Trisha responds to these questions not only by underlining them as reflective, but also by reading them as something the student could not have expressed at the time. Trisha claims, “I consider [the questions] reflection because I’m not willing to believe that she could articulate it in that way at that time. I think she’s looking back and making sense of this experience, what was probably a difficult time in terms of her literacy experience.” Jocelyn’s anger for being wronged comes through as reflection. Students’ selections of such evocative, emotional words proved to be effective rhetorical choices because instructors found reflection in such moments.

Instructors also found reflection in moments when students incorporated journey or travel metaphors, particularly the journey-towards-literacy-brings-success-motif, which ties in with middle-class values in its propagation of the belief that literacy automatically leads to success and upward mobility. In these journey-towards-success metaphors, students typically detailed their experiences with literacy, from early on to now, usually ending on a positive, forward-looking note. It seems that the way the success narrative ties into the literacy myth is through these journey metaphors. Since students expressed optimism about their literate futures in success narratives, these journey metaphors resonate with the whole idea of social mobility, progress, and the literacy myth. (And, they kind of validate education, and indirectly, teachers, too.)

Rachel's introduction to her literacy narrative serves as a prime example of the rhetorical manner in which the journey metaphor functioned. She begins,

Literacy for me is not a destination, but a journey that began earlier than my memories and hopefully will never end. My journey can be compared to an uphill hike. There are no times during this journey that I ever regress, but some instances weren't as steep as others. It is in those steeper moments that I have had a sponsor, someone or something impact my reading or writing. Combining the experiences from the various sponsors will best explain my literacy journey.

Both instructors who read Rachel's literacy narrative noted this particular event as reflection. Julie remarks, "'Journey' is a word I associate with reflection, and I guess I associate reflection with metaphor, especially personal journey metaphors." In this case, Rachel's inclusion of a journey metaphor worked to her advantage since instructors viewed it as reflection.

Another student, Terrence, also applies a journey metaphor to his narrative, which one instructor marked as reflection. He writes:

My mother is a compulsive shopper; we go to Borders more than we do the grocery store in my family. Going to the bookstore opened a new door for me.

One instructor, Nina, regarded “the bookstore opened a new door for me” as reflection.

When asked in the follow-up interview why she underlined this phrase as reflection, she comments:

I think he’s sort of acknowledging that the bookstore held more value in his life and in his mother’s life than a grocery store. It’s a huge moment of reflection that books and words are more important than food....I like that phrase, “the bookstore opened a new door.” Bookstores have doors. I don’t know. It sort of paints a visual that you’re opening this door and it’s a really important moment in this person’s life.

While Terrence could merely be stating that he notices the bookstore caused some change in his life, the instructor instead seems to stretch for more complicated meaning than the student probably intended by considering as reflection the student’s symbolic use of language and the visual imagery that his words about the bookstore and the door create. All in all, students capitalize on vivid, descriptive, and metaphoric language, such as the journey-towards-success metaphor, to make successful papers.

Ethical appeals to shared values

In addition to vivid, descriptive language, I also looked for phrases in instructor commentary that cited agreement with the students’ position and deemed these moments “shared values.” Instructors made comments, such as “In my opinion,” “I agree,” “Yes, definitely,” and “I feel that way, too,” which are clear indicators of shared values. One instructor, Ashlie, responds to a student’s passage by saying, “This is good. Those sentences are reflective. I definitely agree that writing is an outlet, and it’s even

therapeutic for her. Nice.” Instructors respond to the value-appeals students make and note reflection in such instances.

There were three values in particular to which instructors seemed to respond positively: literacy equals success, anti-academic, and literacy as a shared activity. Because students are writing these essays knowing that teachers are their audience, they read the rhetorical situation and choose content that matches the values (they assume) their instructors hold, thus creating a bond between writer and reader and using ethos effectively. Students understand their audience enough to know that writing teachers most likely hold certain values about literacy, teaching, reading and writing, and specific pedagogies. Thus, in their texts students often perform such values, mentioning teachers who made a positive impact on their lives, celebrating beliefs in community and diversity, and professing an unwavering belief in the power of literacy and education to transform lives and society.

The first value-appeal—literacy equals success—was widely utilized by students: 68% of all events promoted this belief that literacy brings success. Perhaps this value-appeal was so common in student texts because it promotes much of the same beliefs that instructors hold about literacy. In fact, instructors often responded positively to the literacy-equals-success appeal and noted reflection because students performed this value. Instructors typically responded positively to this value-appeal: it was marked reflective 69% of the time and carried a relatively high proportional reflection score (0.87). One instructor, for instance, seems to appreciate that Terrence highlights the importance of reading in his essay. Terrence writes,

Reading has always been extremely important in our home. My mother is an educator and my father had some college experience. I think growing up in a

home where reading had two purposes (for pleasure and information) influenced my literacy. These values of literacy have shaped my attitudes towards life and education.

Ashlie, the instructor who responded to Terrence's essay, noted the first sentence as reflection and stated, "I'm glad he recognizes that reading is important." This statement shows that the instructor is marking the statement because she agrees with it. She goes on to point out, however, that the first sentence is "kind of a global reflection," or "overly generalized reflection." Still, she marks it and notes, "He follows it up with some more descriptive information about how that particularly worked." She further states, "There's a sense in which that's not terribly reflective, but he's generalizing about the role of reading in his home, so he's reflecting on how it worked." Perhaps because the student is appealing to her own beliefs about literacy, the instructor views him to be reflective.

In the same way instructors responded positively to the value-appeal of literacy equals success, instructors also noted reflection in moments where students incorporated anti-academic critiques, particularly when they argued that academic, school-based writing stifles creativity. In anti-academic appeals, students made appeals to instructor beliefs that personal writing is scholarly, standardized tests are biased, equality and access are essential, and certain systems are unfair and partial. The most common critiques by students were aimed at academic writing, current-traditional rhetoric, and academia as a whole. Anti-academic value-appeals came through in critiques of such things as the Kentucky portfolio system, Accelerated Reader, research papers, and *required* reading and writing. In the following example, for instance, Michelle seems to respond to the anti-academic critique Kristy incorporates into her paper. Kristy writes,

I still continue to love to write but my aspirations to become a writer drifted after starting high school for the simple reason that I felt like I couldn't really even

write what I wanted to write. I had to write about what was assigned and I couldn't just let my mind go free. The required course materials are what kind of tore down my love for writing.

Michelle's response to Kristy's passage is lengthy, but I want to include it in its entirety to show just how much interpretation Michelle is doing for the student:

I think this would be a common situation for students since, in my opinion, school kind of kills our creativity, and this person felt the same way—that she wanted to be a writer, but maybe as she advanced through the school system wasn't told that it was a practical occupation and lost her desire to become a writer. And I think it's interesting that this person again has connected school with both her initial desire to be creative and also losing her creative streak later on in high school. So, what I'm underlining as reflection are the instances where this person highlights specific things that quote-unquote tore down her love for writing. And I think this is what most students feel happens to them—that they are required to do things that aren't as interesting.

It is obvious that Michelle agrees with this student's anti-academic critique and marks it as reflection because of this student's position. In her response, she gives many reasons for considering the two parts to be reflection: the student is generalizing and being analytical, remembering/describing the event, and noting a transitional moment or change. While Michelle's inferences are not far fetched, the assumptions she makes about this student's experiences go beyond what is actually in front of her in the text: she brings her own biases towards personal writing into the text as she reads and infers and interprets much of what she believes this student to be saying. Though the student does not elaborate on why her writing "drift[ed] after starting high school" or explain what it was about the "required course materials" that "tore down [her] love of writing," it seems as if Michelle interprets these places as reflection because of the values she reads into them. This is evident when Michelle remarks that this student's situation is "common" for students because of her belief that "school kind of kills our creativity." In this case,

because of her own biases in favor of personal writing, perhaps Michelle considered places as reflection that might not have otherwise been so had she disagreed with the student's perspective. The student effectively plays to this instructor's biases towards personal writing, even though the student did not know Michelle. The student thus seems to have tapped into a fairly common teacher belief

The third value-appeal to which instructors often responded positively was the belief in literacy as a shared activity—that literacy is a social occurrence and that many people have influenced an individual's literate ability, development, and success. This value-appeal also suggests a purpose for literacy—to foster greater community and diversity between peoples thus creating a sort of “social” literacy. Instructors often singled out phrases such as “community,” “together,” and “diversity,” or moments when students incorporated social commentary or explored how they are a part of a “global community,” all of which are strongly-held values in Rhetoric and Composition. One instructor, Nina, marked the following passage in Terrence's paper as reflection:

This was my turning point. I finally had a teacher who would allow me to rebel, but also taught me how to “play school.” She gave me the tools to be an independent thinker but operate in the “norms” of school.

When I asked her in the follow-up interview why these passages signified reflection to her, she stated,

I think that this student is smart. He understands that school is a game. It's not necessarily always about learning. It's about learning—it's not always about learning the things that you think you should be learning in school, but about learning how to be a student. Learning how to be a learner. And debate is a very structured and rigorous activity, and the student is acknowledging, reflecting on how that's what school is. It's structured and it's rigorous and it's social. And there are rules. Debate has rules, and I think that that's a key moment of reflection. And then he acknowledges that this teacher influenced him and that she shared in his literate understanding.

Nina viewed this value-appeal to shared literacy as reflection. She mentions that Terrence seems to understand that debate is “social” and involves several people. She also appreciates that the student recognizes how the teacher “influenced him” and “shared in his literate understanding.”

Instructors make the connections for students when certain values are invoked

Not only did instructors recognize such value-appeals as reflection, but they were also more apt to flesh out the causal connections for students when these particular value-appeals were present. In other words, instructors noted reflection when students made appeals to their values, even when the analytical structure was weak or underdeveloped. Instructors were especially apt to fill in the blanks for students when they incorporated anti-academic critiques. Michelle, in particular, highly valued these critiques and noted reflection in almost every such instance. Look at Michelle’s responses to Kristy as an example. In the following passage, Kristy writes about being nostalgic for the time when writing was not mandatory and was instead something creative and imaginative. She writes:

Writing, for me, is something that I enjoy doing when I get the time. I would love to be able to just sit down somewhere quiet and write; get back to my childhood imagination. However, writing for me can be very difficult now that I am in college and have grown up.

Michelle views the last two sentences as reflection and states,

This person is working within these boundaries of school writing, and she’s able to be successful, but I’m not sure she gets a lot of pleasure out of it except for the fact that she’s making good grades, so she gets that extrinsic pleasure from that, but not really intrinsic pleasure from the writing....She’s driven in her academic writing to write for teachers, but she really desires to write for herself and to write what’s important to her.... She must want to be a creative writer, and perhaps she could have

been if that desire was fostered a little more, or if she didn't give in to the pressures of writing academic prose.

Note how much Michelle fleshes out the connections for the student in her response. She surmises, "I'm not sure she gets a lot of pleasure, except for the fact that she's making good grades," and "She's driven...to write for teachers, but she really desires to write for herself." Michelle even infers that the student *wants* to be a creative writer because the student says that she would love to return to her "childhood imagination." She seems to be reading into this person's text what she would like to see rather than what this student is actually saying. Her comments suggest that what she seems to value is the critique of academic writing, rather than the need for a strong causal argument. Because the student implies that she may feel differently about personal writing and academic writing, Michelle is willing to fill in the blanks and make assumptions about this student's attitude toward school-based writing.

Most instructors cannot help but bring their own ideologies and beliefs to some extent into the reading and assessment of student texts; Michelle's responses, however, go further: she views these appeals to her own anti-academic values as reflection. While Michelle's interpretation is certainly plausible, it is not inevitable. The anti-academic bias expressed in student papers earned them cultural capital with Michelle.

In addition to the above illustration, in the example I included earlier in this section about the student whose writing "*drifted after starting high school*," Michelle's comments were again highly interpretative. She said,

I think this would be a common situation for students since, in my opinion, school kind of kills our creativity, and this person felt the same way—that she wanted to be a writer, but maybe, as she advanced through the school system, wasn't told that it was a practical occupation and lost her desire to become a writer....And I think this is what most students feel

happens to them—that they are required to do things that aren’t as interesting. Maybe this person really liked the openness of her third grade teacher and then didn’t have the same openness with future teachers.

There is certainly merit in Michelle’s interpretation. She notices in student papers this split between how students write and feel about academic writing and personal writing. She implicitly understands that students think school writing is no fun (the cause) so they dislike it (the effect). However, it seems as if Michelle is more willing to complete the thoughts for students and find reflection in discourse structures that fall into this value than she would be if the student articulated a value with which she agreed less. The assumptions she makes about this student’s experiences go beyond what is actually in front of her in the text: she brings her own biases for personal writing into the text as she reads, infers, and interprets what she believes this student to be saying. This is evident when Michelle remarks that this student’s situation is “common” for students because of her belief that “school kind of kills our creativity.” Though the student does not elaborate on why her writing drifted after starting high school or explain what about the required course materials tore down her love of writing, Michelle still views these instances as reflection, perhaps because of the student’s anti-academic appeals, ones that obviously align to Michelle’s own opinions about school and academic writing.

Another interesting point to make is that when I asked Michelle in the follow-up interview how she determined when a student was incorporating reflection, she responded by bringing up the split between personal writing and academic writing, which suggested that such a critique was a large part of her definition of reflection. She said,

I think a lot of the students had clear distinctions between writing for the self and writing for school...[W]e think that students don’t pick up on that, but I think that shows that they really do feel that there is a difference between writing for a school—writing for a portfolio system—and writing

for the self. And that was a common theme in all of them. So moments when they discussed the school literacy versus writing poetry or writing in a journal, that's reflective, to me, about how they view literacy and what their relationship is to reading and writing. And I think it's reflective in that students are entering the discourse of education and of assessment, or trying to enter that conversation, when they have not been invited previously. So in a lot of ways, they are using their literacy narrative to say, "Well, these teachers have been influential, and I am thankful for these people, but the standards that are established by school, many times, stifle my creativity." And I think that in those moments they are trying to join the conversation of assessment and standards and all the things that we talk about in academia, but that students rarely get the opportunity to voice concern and opinions about. And those are opportunities for more reflection. I mean, sometimes the students weren't being very reflective about it, or weren't developing it enough, but I think it is opportunities or windows toward greater reflection, more conversation about literacy practices and schooling. I'm also reading it because I've had a lot of assessment classes, so maybe someone else reading it won't see that as reflective, but because of my background and what I've learned, to me that was a chance to get students to engage more in those conversations.

Michelle's comments demonstrate that what she seems to value are the student's anti-academic appeals—ones that obviously align to her own opinions about traditional, academic literacy—rather than the need for a strong causal argument. Since neither Kristy nor Tim were Michelle's students, their texts may very well be remarkable for the way students read the generic teacher-as-audience. Both narratives might have been deemed as reflection by Michelle because the students reflect what Michelle believes is an empowering subject position to occupy in relation to literacy.

Another instructor, Sarah, responded to one student's critique of the "teacher-chosen novels" he had to read in school. She deemed his negative assessment of required reading to be reflection and pitied the student, filling in the blanks that "obviously the teacher never fully explained the purpose for reading these depressing stories."

Like they did in anti-academic critiques, when the literacy-as-a-shared-activity appeal was performed, instructors also fleshed out connections for students. As an

example, Kristy concludes her literacy narrative by suggesting a few purposes for writing—writing to express herself and writing as a form of survival. Her words point to the idea that literacy is a shared activity in our world. Her success master narrative focuses on literacy and the utilitarian aspect of needing to know how to write in order to survive in the world. She writes,

Without writing, I would have no way to really express myself emotionally. To me, writing is another language, a language that we all have to know in order to survive in the world....

Kristy's words suggest a purpose of literacy, one that points to a joint community of literate beings. The two instructors who read her text both viewed the second sentence in Kristy's conclusion as reflection yet regarded it incomplete. Michelle for instance responds to Kristy's conclusion by stating, "Very trite, conventional ending" and thinks the sentence "needs more explanation." In spite of this, both instructors still emphasized the potential of this passage and in doing so suggested how this passage resounded with their own views on literacy as a shared activity. Listen to Ashlie's comments as evidence:

This is the best sentence in terms of reflection and reflective writing that I have encountered so far. If only she had qualified that better now and throughout the paper. I don't know what that means to her because she didn't really express it in the paper; and "in order to survive in the world," that's where the community idea comes in—having to function in a certain type of world, in a certain community, so you have to learn to write in certain ways. If I go back and reconstruct her arguments and especially her reflective bits, in my mind it makes sense. It is logical, but as it is now, it is pretty difficult to read.

This instructor seems to bring up this notion of a global community out of nowhere.

Perhaps this instructor considered the sentence as reflection because the student appealed to the instructor-held belief that literacy is a shared activity, a value "shared" between instructors and student.

In the following example in Tim's paper, Ashlie again responds positively to this view of literacy as a shared activity, a way to communicate with diverse groups of people. Tim writes,

All in all, being able to read has been one of the most important things that I have learned in my life. Reading is very essential to everyday life and can also be a very enjoyable pastime for many people. The creativity involved isn't like the creativity involved in other arts. Writing can express feelings and ideas from people of one background to people of a completely different background and bring them together in support of those ideas. Reading has opened my eyes to multitudes of different point of views and facets of other people's lives.

Ashlie (and the other instructor, too) considers Tim's narrative as strongly reflective.

Ashlie responds positively to the way Tim suggests purposes for literacy:

So, writing can express feelings and ideas, and he does talk about expressing feelings and the emotional aspect of literacy and playing upon reader's feelings and bringing them together in support of those ideas. We're talking about a community of readers and writers. This one sentence about writing has everything he would need for a reflective paper....This sounds promising, but I can't follow.

Even though Ashlie notices some problems with the manner in which the student expresses himself, the student's positive ending about what writing can do—its function—seems to be the reason she regards his narrative as reflection. She even makes connections for the student by bringing to the text this idea of a community of readers and writers and viewing his conclusion as “promising.” It seems that her own values regarding community, or shared literacy, coincide with the student's and thus impact her reading of this student's text.

Not only did instructors respond positively to instances where students appeal to instructor-held values, they also responded negatively to moments in which students did not. Garrett's success narrative, for instance, expresses an apathetic attitude toward literacy. His indifferent attitude causes one instructor to not respond to the moments in

which he makes literacy-equals-success and literacy-as-a-shared-activity appeals. Garrett writes:

Now that I am in college in Kentucky and my parents are in Michigan, I write and read more than I used to. It is not novels or poems that I read or write, just letters, e-mails, and greeting cards, but only because I have to if I want to keep in touch. Now and again I will get on the internet and search for something, or Instant Message one of my friends from the seven states I have lived in. Other than those few examples, reading and writing really only take place when it comes to my studies or English class assignments. Such English assignments have been essays on classroom viewed movies, current world problems, or responses to a particular authors essay. Taking notes from teacher's lectures and doing the multiple readings for different classes is how reading and writing have truly played a part in my life today.

To Garrett, reading and writing are something he has to do to function in this world, and he holds their purposes to be practical and utilitarian. Even in the writing he does to friends and family, he expresses how he only does it to keep in touch with them. Garrett's apathetic attitude might have caused Nina to not view any part of this success narrative as reflective for after she read the event, she responds, "Sounds miserable." Perhaps Nina does not respond to the cause-and-effect structure because the student is not appealing to "shared" values. Even though Garrett mentions the purposes that literacy serves in his life, it seems as if Nina wanted him to feel differently about these purposes—to see beyond its usefulness and practicality to make some other sort of statement about it. In spite of Garrett's apathetic attitude towards reading and writing, his success narrative still suggests purposes for literacy. So, while this narrative clearly has a cause-and-effect structure and utilizes the summing up function, and while one instructor saw it as reflective for these reasons, Nina seems to be responding to values rather than the analytic structure. For Nina, perhaps just incorporating cause-effect was not enough; the student also had to agree with her. When the values appear to be shared, as in some of the

previous examples, the instructor felt justified filling in the blanks and making connections for the student, but when the values were not shared, the instructor did not make such connections.

Instructor responses to unsuccessful value-appeals—unsuccessful in the sense that they were deemed less reflective or not reflective—are evidence that instructors respond to values in these texts. When students did not invoke a “shared” value, their narratives were less successful and seemed to be more challenged by the instructor.

DISCUSSION

The instructions, overviews, and invention questions in the assignments I analyzed in the introduction mostly regarded description as reflection. Such assignments emphasized and prioritized generating content for the essays rather than examining, analyzing, and reflecting on these experiences. My data, however, suggest that description is not really what instructors value and view as reflection. Thus, the way teachers prioritize their assignment sheets and what they emphasize are perhaps not consistent with what they really value. Though the instructors hinted that they valued causal connections and wanted students to incorporate them in their texts, they failed to include any explanation of specific concrete moves or what these moves would look like in practice. Instructor assignments in no way emphasized this analytical facet to the extent that the results from the think-alouds show they do.

Let’s return to Elaine’s assignment (Figure 2) as an example. Elaine explains that the point of composing a literacy narrative is for students to “understand WHY,” which suggests that she values causal connections. Her lack of emphasis on this causal

connection, however, seems to discount how much she truly values cause/effect.

Furthermore, her lack of elaboration does not provide students with real moves that they should make to explore any of the *whys* of their literacy development and may misdirect students on which goals are the most important to fulfill.

Unlike the misplaced focus of the literacy narrative assignments, the findings of this study point to clear ways that students can fulfill this instructor goal of reflection: cause-effect arguments; evaluation; vivid, descriptive, and metaphoric language; and appeals to shared values. When we create instructions for the assignment, we should highlight these four features. Not only should we explain to students that these elements are what we value, but we should also stress that including them in their texts are the means to which they can effectively fulfill our goal of reflection. Thus, if reflection is one of the main goals of the assignment, then it seems that more time should be spent explaining what exactly this means for students in practice so that students can understand that reflection is valued by instructors.

In addition, although literacy narrative assignments tended to consider vivid description as reflection, the think-alouds demonstrate that the most important characteristic teachers should encourage students to incorporate into their literacy narratives are logical, analytical moves, such as cause-effect arguments and evaluation. Thus, we should explicitly teach students how to incorporate cause-effect statements and evaluation into their papers.

Many composition readers, such as *The Longman Reader* by Nadell, Langan, and Comodromos (2005), include a chapter on “cause-effect.” Whereas textbooks typically separate “cause-effect” into its own chapter as one of several “modes” of writing, the

results from my study demonstrate that cause/effect should also be incorporated into literacy narrative assignments as a specific rhetorical and linguistic strategy students can use to fulfill the goal of reflection. Teaching students how to construct cause-effect arguments seems especially valuable in literacy narratives since cause-effect analysis is crucial to fulfilling the goals of the assignment. The following quotes by Sarah demonstrate how important causal arguments are to instructors:

That's cause and effect...the cause signifies reflection...reflecting on the circumstances or the assignments and then drawing conclusions from it. I think that could be considered reflection.

(later)

I didn't really think about [whether or not cause-effect arguments are reflection] before I started reading these, but it seems like that is a huge part of reflection because you're obviously...thinking about what caused something, even if it's not something today, maybe just cause and effect in general. Reflecting on something to see how it influenced something else.

Instructors value cause-effect moves and we should explicitly teach students how to create such arguments.

In addition to teaching students to incorporate cause and effect into their essays, we must also teach students to include evaluation. These results demonstrate that instructors regarded evaluation as an important feature of reflection and deemed incorporating it as essential to fulfilling the goals of the assignment. Look at Julie's comments as evidence:

I guess what I'm doing is defining reflection as the student writing, thinking back and making some kind of evaluation or analysis of an event. Kind of generalizing from it.

(later)

I think reflection can mean evaluating, like a reflection on an experience can be an evaluation; they're kind of evaluating what they think of an experience.

In addition, we should also be clear as to what we mean when we ask students to evaluate their experiences. The instructors in this study felt that evaluation came in the form of generalizing, summing up, and making judgments. We need to direct students to incorporate these specific types of evaluative moves into their essays.

Since these two rhetorical features—cause-effect and evaluation—are a large part of instructor definitions of reflection, we need to re-structure the assignment to make clear that these analytical moves are what we expect students to incorporate into their texts. Literacy narrative assignments, such as Anne's in Figure 1, would be stronger if they included a specific statement that asks students to make analytical moves, such as cause-effect and evaluation. Assignments could say, for instance, "Give both the cause and the effect of these events." Students can also make sure that if they include a memory, they tell *why* they are including it, why it mattered to them then or now and what kind of effect it had on them. Both instructors and assignment sheets should highlight these two elements when listing the goals and objectives of the assignment. Furthermore, these analytical moves are critical thinking moves that may be useful elsewhere. Teaching students such rhetorical techniques can aid them in other writing they will do.

In addition to being explicit in what we value in writing assignments, we also need to provide guidance and direction for how students can move from rendering to reflection. Few assignments, barring Bullock's (2006), specifically ask students to think about what these past experiences mean/t to them, or how they feel/felt about the

experiences, or why they may have certain attitudes toward reading or writing, prompts that could spur students into thinking more about the results of these experiences.

Revised literacy narrative assignments should instead give prompts for how to get students thinking about the effects of the experiences they include in their essays. We could ask questions including:

- What do these experiences mean to you today?
- How has this experience shaped your past and current attitudes toward reading and writing?
- Explain why you included this specific memory.
- Explain how these experiences shaped your sense of identity.

Questions such as these will move students beyond mere memory to the quality reflection that this assignment is capable of producing and that instructors want to see in student papers. Including metalinguistic invention prompts will also signify to students that instructors really value analysis and evaluation and that they want students to spend a great amount of their text thinking about the effects of the experiences. In addition to including questions that analyze and evaluate experiences, we also need to accentuate such questions by placing them in prominent positions where students are likely to look, unlike Bullock whose questions were buried near the end of the chapter under a third-level heading whose purpose does not seem to be explaining how students can better meet the goal of reflection but instead help them “generate[e] ideas and text” (p. 31). Placing questions that analyze and evaluate experiences in significant places communicates to students that reflecting on these questions is a priority for fulfilling the

goals of the assignment. Perhaps when students make such reflective cause-effect moves, the positive claims people make about this assignment can be fully realized.

In addition, instructors should also make clear where student emphasis should be placed when composing their assignments, so as to avoid problems of confusion in what the priority goals are. Sherri, for instance, grades student literacy narratives by using a rubric, which she returns to students with their essays. In this rubric, she breaks down different features that she evaluates in student texts, as well as the percentage of the grade: 35% of the grade is based on reflection, 20% is on organization, etc. Although she mentions these percentages on the rubric, she does not list these percentages on her assignment sheet, so students do not know how much different criteria are weighted when they are composing their essay, only when they receive their essays back, which seems to be too late to do much good. If students knew these percentages while composing their essays, perhaps they could more adequately fulfill the instructor's goals. If reflection is worth 75% of the assignment, then instructors should list this on the assignment sheet so that students will understand that a large part of their grade will be based on their quality of reflection. If, however, instructors deem the description/exploration part more important, then they should explain this as well. Lack of clear evaluation guidelines is unfair to students and leaves students guessing as to what their essays should focus on to fulfill instructor goals. By making our evaluation criteria clear, students can be more prepared to meet our guidelines.

Even if instructors purposely do not give specific guidelines as to how they will evaluate reflection in student literacy narratives—whether to give students ownership of their texts or to empower them—instructors still have evaluation criteria in mind and

should reveal such criteria to students. Lester Faigley (1992) points out in *Fragments of Rationality* that we need to reveal our criteria to students because of the role of power in educational relationships. He states:

The freedom students are given in some classes to choose and adapt autobiographical assignments hides the fact that these same students will be judged by the teachers' unstated assumptions about subjectivity and that every act of writing they perform occurs within complex relations of power. (p. 128)

Faigley cautions teachers to be aware of the way that writing assignments are not as innocent as they appear to be because they are embedded with certain criteria, criteria that often go unstated but that are there nonetheless. He argues for the importance of teachers revealing our expectations when it comes to personal writing.

Though causal arguments and evaluative turns were what instructors most often considered reflection, instructors in this study also wanted students to include vivid, evocative, and emotional language. The instructor assignments tend to already be calling for students to include descriptive language. What the instructor responses add, however, is that instructors really value personal journey metaphors in these essays. In our assignments we should thus highlight the consequences of students including metaphors into their text since this is what we value—that students are showing, through metaphor, how their experiences have moved them down their developmental path. Furthermore, we should teach students to use this pathetic appeal that incorporates journey metaphors in ways that tie into the logical, analytical structure so that the metaphor brings out the analytical structure and makes the text seem even more reflective. We should teach students that metaphors should be used for specific purposes, such as its effect on the audience and how it can draw greater attention to the cause-effect parts. Instructors might

provide examples of good journey metaphors when explaining how to effectively compose a literacy narrative and other personal writing. Using these forms of analysis may help students learn more about their literacy background, so that they will get more of what teachers want them to get out of the assignment.

The fourth feature instructors viewed as reflection are appeals to shared values. Although appeals to shared values are somewhat more arbitrary in terms of whether or not they were considered reflection by instructors, these results suggest that instructors still place some importance on such appeals.

Even the invention prompts included in the assignments I looked at in the introduction demonstrate that instructors hold certain values about literacy. For instance, asking students which teachers particularly influenced their writing development, as Anne's assignment does (Figure 1), implies that she, as the reader and evaluator, values moments when students talk about past teachers. Moreover, other questions instructors often ask indicate that instructors value the notion that literacy equals success. Nonetheless, while instructors allude to these values in their assignments, they are not typically mentioned specifically.

We in Rhetoric and Composition tend to share certain values, values not too different from those that these teachers favor in their over-reading of students' reflection. While most students might be able to figure out that teachers value the literacy-equals-success appeal, they may not know they should incorporate anti-academic critiques or literacy as a shared activity. Perhaps instructors could discuss these values explicitly and ask students why they may or may not want to incorporate these values into their texts.

No matter what, though, teachers need to investigate how their values might effect how they respond to student papers.

While comments like the ones included above in the shared values section may be realistic—we can never truly escape ourselves as we read—what troubles me about them is that instructors reward those moments in which students are appealing to their values, not because of the cause-and-effect analytical structure, but because of the positions expressed in them. Additionally, not only did instructors appreciate appeals to literacy equals success, anti-academic critiques, and literacy as a shared activity, but they were more apt to flesh out the connections for students when such appeals were made. When the values appear to be shared, instructors felt justified to fill in the blanks and make connections for the students. If such value-appeals are a goal of the assignment, or if we are going to assess the existence of such value-appeals in student essays, then we need to explicitly state that we want students to incorporate such values.

Whatever our personal feeling about the point that these appeals were often viewed as reflection, if it is our goal for students to look critically at experiences that have been “natural” to students, then we need to reveal this to students and discuss how they can fulfill such a goal. If it is our goal for students to provide critiques of schooling and academia, then we must mention this specifically as well. In the next chapter, I will investigate the class biases of some of these values and show how instructors’ practice of fleshing out the connections for students when certain values are invoked privileges already-privileged students.

In sum, my findings suggest that instructors need to be more cautious in structuring this assignment by better articulating the goals for the assignment and what

we mean when we say we want students to reflect. We also need to make sure that our goals and objectives reflect our priorities; we must emphasize what we see as most important if students are going to be able to fulfill our goals.

Furthermore, if we continue to teach the literacy narrative assignment, we should highlight the rhetorical features that this particular assignment encourages—the logical, analytical structure through the use of cause-effect arguments and evaluation; the vivid and metaphoric language that creates pathos; and the values that are often propagated through stories about literacy that draw on “shared” assumptions between reader and writer. The literacy narrative assignment can provide students with a wonderful opportunity to learn these highly complex rhetorical moves.

¹⁴ Anne’s entire assignment can be found in Appendix F.

¹⁵ This study, Study no. 730.04, was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the Human Studies Committee.

¹⁶ It is important to note that instructors themselves did not say, “This part is ‘weakly reflective’” or “This is ‘strongly reflective’.” Rather, they underlined what they viewed as reflection, and *I* assigned proportional reflection scores to each event based on the amount of the event the instructor marked as reflection.

CHAPTER FOUR

SOCIAL CLASS BIASES IN THE LITERACY NARRATIVE ASSIGNMENT

This chapter dovetails off of the findings presented in Chapter Three, specifically that instructors recognized certain value-appeals as reflection and, in such instances, were more apt to flesh out the causal connections for students even though the causal argument may have been weak. This move by instructors hints at some possible class biases in the literacy narrative assignment and in what instructors privilege as they respond to the reflection in the texts. This chapter will examine in more detail some of these connections between the literacy narrative assignment and social class.

Personal narrative writing has been famed by multicultural educators such as feminists, post-colonial theorists, and critical race theorists for not only being a source of knowledge but also for being able to “name, challenge, and transform oppressive structures and practices” (Sharkey, 2004, p. 496), such as middle-class discourse (McLaughlin & Tierney, 1993; Sharkey, 2004; Spigelman, 2001). As I mentioned in Chapter One, in addition to the numerous positive claims people make about the literacy narrative assignment, some scholars assert that the assignment prompts critiques into middle-class ideologies, and encourages students to explore the influences of social roles on acquiring language. Still others maintain that literacy narratives cultivate multiculturalism and racial diversity and, as such, are particularly beneficial for marginalized groups of students.

At the same time many teachers are praising the literacy narrative as liberating and valuable, other educators have argued against using personal narrative writing, such as the literacy narrative, because of its tendency to reward a middle-class subjectivity. George Otte (1995) sees personal writing as problematic because it does not really free students to write what they want to write; instead, he maintains that when we as teachers read and respond to student writing we really just want to see and hear ourselves in the writing and therefore respond to what *we want* students to say. Moreover, other critics of personal writing maintain that students do not explore how they have been influenced by various social factors as some advocates have claimed but instead produce writing that is self-indulgent, intrusive, and solipsistic (Berlin 1988; Bizzell, 1982; 1991; Faigley, 1986; 1992; France, 1993; Harris, 1990; 1997; Miller, 1991), as well as stories that are self-limiting (Scott, 1997). Such writing also encourages students to present themselves as outside ideology and culture (Berlin, 1988; Faigley, 1986).¹⁷ According to Wendy Ryden, students typically “create heroic tales that are mimesis of prevailing hegemonic conceptions of literacy” (p. 88), thus reinforcing Harvey Graff’s (1979) notion of the “literacy myth”—the idea that better literacy necessarily and automatically leads to personal, social, economic, and cultural progress. Lester Faigley (1992) even claims that personal writing assignments often hide “teachers’ unstated assumptions about subjectivity” and reminds us “that every act of writing...occurs within complex relations of power” (p. 128). This type of personal writing thus seems to encourage a middle-class stance.

In the literacy narrative, this middle-class subjectivity reveals itself in the literacy-equals-success, or upward mobility narrative, which is based on the notion that literacy

automatically leads to success. Many researchers have found this progressive narrative of success and development in their students' texts (Carpenter & Falbo, 2003; Fox, 1997; Paterson, 2001; Ryden, 2002; Young, 2004). That students invoke this cultural master narrative that literacy equals success comes as no surprise. Such a notion has been around in our culture since the founding of the United States and is propagated through the autobiographical writing of people from diverse classes, including Benjamin Franklin, Frederick Douglass, Richard Rodriguez, and Maxine Hong Kingston (Bloom, 1996). The literacy-equals-success/upward mobility story typically "depict[s] immigrants, ethnic and racial minorities, poor and working-class youth rising in status, income, reputation, and self-esteem through the practice of these middle-class virtues" (Bloom, p. 667), virtues such as self-reliance and responsibility, respectability, thrift, efficiency, and order. Steve Fox (1997) even claims that the success narrative is "especially notable in African-American and immigrant autobiographies" for "the authors show that acquiring written and oral fluency in mainstream American English was a means to occupational, social, and political success and power" (p. 18). As both Bloom and Fox point out, this belief that literacy equals success is even invoked by those from non-dominant classes.

Not only do students seem to value this progressive narrative of success and development, but teacher responses to student literacy narratives also point to our middle-class biases in how we reward this literacy-equals-success narrative. Instructors tend to read student narratives with a moralizing tendency¹⁸ (Bloom, 1996; Newkirk, 1997; Ryden, 2002), or as Judith Summerfield (1996) puts it, we tend to "conflate text with life" (p.158). Thus, when we read narratives of upward mobility, or any narrative for that matter, we do not necessarily remember that students are performing these narratives and

their selves in the process (Newkirk, 1997). Instead, we seem to value such myths because they allow us to ignore class differences amongst our students, thus by proxy privileging middle-class discourse. Linda Brodkey's essay, "On the Subjects of Class and Gender in 'The Literacy Letters'," provides a useful illustration. Brodkey tells the story of some graduate teaching assistants ignored the social class and gender differences between themselves and the adult basic writers with whom they were corresponding. This seeming dismissal of values held by the basic writers demonstrates that the teachers may not have valued these types of discussions, thus maintaining an "ideology that classroom language transcends class, race, and gender" (p. 139), and revealing middle-class biases.

Furthermore, Ryden (2002) finds that not only are students unfamiliar with the literacy narrative genre and have insufficient models in exemplary literacy narratives, but also that teachers actually encourage a certain type of narrative, one that follows the popular *Bildung* story of a "progressive narrative of liberatory development" (p. 88), a point also explored by Faigley (1992). This developmental upward mobility narrative may actually hinder students from complicating the notion that literacy equals success. Ryden maintains, "Instead of critiquing the structures in which literacy acquisition is embedded, students, impelled by the developmental momentum of the genre, create heroic tales that are mimesis of prevailing hegemonic conceptions of literacy" (p. 88) and do not engage in cultural criticism. Lester Faigley (1992) shows how instructors often elicit from students and reward them for producing personal narratives that display a reflective middle-class perspective, one that "asks for a construction of experience in a particular dramatic form" and that "requires the capacity to identify critical disjunctive moments that trigger self-reflective growth" (p. 121). And Lynn Bloom (1996) argues

that critical thinking is a middle-class value. Likewise, Ryden's (2002) research shows that "trends in process writing pedagogies have lent themselves to the adaptation of a form that celebrates an evolving, reflective, public private self" (p. 87). This reflective stance may come across as critical and insightful, but, paradoxically, promotes middle-class values, which some claim the assignment is supposed to question. Therefore, because these stories "may produce testimony that bolsters the hopes to which many writing teachers cling" (Ryden, 2002, p. 90), instructors, perhaps without knowing, are actually promoting middle-class ideologies and values. Thus, rather than helping marginalized students, as Morris Young (2004) claims, "The literacy narrative can create anxiety rather than nostalgia because it can further marginalize those who have already been marked as Other by privileging one story over another" (p. 37).

Yet a surprisingly large body of scholarship advocates the literacy narrative as a way to resist hegemonic narratives such as the literacy-equals-success master narrative. Many teacher-researchers claim that questioning and critiquing literacy education can complicate and problematize easy notions that literacy leads to social and financial success (Clark & Medina, 2000; Eldred & Mortensen, 1992; Paterson, 2001; Scott, 1997; Soliday, 1994; Young, 2004). Ryden (2002) explains how the process movement in composition led to an interest in writing assignments (like the literacy narrative) that encouraged metacognition and critical thinking. Metacognitive or reflective writing assignments were thought to "heighten students' awareness of themselves as thinkers/writers/readers and their intellectual relationship to text and subject matter" (p. 85). Many teachers now utilize the literacy narrative as a way to get students to examine where their ideologies come from, which thus repositions them.

Rather than promoting middle-class subjectivities as Ryden, Faigley, and others argue, these scholars claim that the literacy narrative assignment challenges middle-class perspectives and ideologies. It can denaturalize literacy experiences, especially those whose experiences may be out of the dominant norm (Brown, 1999; Clark & Medina, 2000; Fleischer, 1997; Fulcher, 1996; Paterson, 2001; Scott, 1997; Soliday, 1994; Young, 2004). It also encourages students to question dominant ideologies of American schooling (Bishop, 2000; Brown, 1999; Clark & Medina, 2000; Eldred, 1991; Eldred & Mortensen, 1992; Pratt, 1991; Scott, 1997; Soliday, 1994; Young, 2004), of American individualism (Scott, 1997), and of the notion that literacy automatically leads to upward mobility (Eldred & Mortensen, 1992). The assignment also offers opportunities for marginalized peoples to transform literacy for their own purposes (Meyers, 1996; Soliday, 1994; Young, 2004), allows for voices that challenge, resist, and revise dominant narratives on literacy, race, and education (Young, 2004), and provides collective experiences that question and complicate dominant (exoticized) narratives about minorities and in turn provide alternatives to those narratives (Clark & Medina, 2000; Young, 2004). This assignment can also allow minority students to confront and deal with the complex ideas of assimilation and resistance (Soliday, 1994; Young, 2004) and thus enhance their self-esteem (Meyers, 1996).

Why is there this tension between those who say that the literacy narrative assignment promotes middle-class subjectivities and those who claim it challenges it? Perhaps it has something to do with other stories common throughout the text, particularly the negative stories of literacy such as the outsider narrative and what Paterson (2001) calls the stigma narrative, which instructors may associate with a critique

of middle-class values. The stigma narrative involves stories where students writing about being marked, labeled, and stigmatized by negative literacy experience, particularly as they progress in school.

Some might say working-class students would use negative literacy stories in ways that challenge the literacy-equals-success narrative and thus liberate them, like how Keith Gilyard, Morris Young, bell hooks, Victor Villanueva, and Maxine Hong Kingston use theirs. In such cases, the negative stories of literacy work to challenge and subvert the literacy-equals-success/upward mobility narrative. First, the stigma narrative, according to Paterson (2001), highlights moments when the student has been marked or misread, his identity “spoiled,” because of a teacher’s comment, a label, an ambivalent educational system, a pedagogical practice, an external assessment, or some other negative moment connected to literacy.

These moments of stigmatization can occur in or out of school and typically result in an “emotional and intellectual rupture in confidence” (p. 151). In literacy narratives by published scholars, the stigma narrative provides a critique of the success narrative. Villanueva’s negative literacy experiences in *Bootstraps*, for instance, function to demonstrate that literacy does not necessarily lead to success. While Villanueva eventually becomes a tenured professor, his story is not one of upward mobility or immediate success once becoming literate. He instead uses the stigma narrative to show how factors such as race, class, and working conditions—even though he was literate—worked to his disadvantage and complicated his “success.” Maxine Hong Kingston (1975) in *The Woman Warrior* similarly critiques the literacy-equals-success/upward mobility narrative by showing how she is an outsider to mainstream literacy practices. In

addition, she demonstrates that though she finds eventual success in writing, she has not moved “upward” or out of her social class.

Teacher-researchers and other scholars who promote the literacy narrative assignment seem to assume that modeling negative stories found in famous literacy narratives will empower marginalized students by providing them with opportunities to critique middle-class subjectivities, such as the literacy-equals-success narrative. But nobody has looked at teacher responses to negative stories of literacy the way that Ryden has looked at success narratives. To what extent do teachers actually reward these negative stories? And if we do find that teachers reward these negative stories of literacy, is it really fair to ask marginalized students to critique these middle-class subjectivities? For whom does such a goal serve? Wiley et al (1998) has suggested that such critiques may be the product of entitlement. Thus, whereas middle-class students may feel that criticizing middle-class society is a natural right, students from lower classes do not feel they have a right to do so; they view it as something to be earned and therefore may feel less entitled to critique such a subjectivity.

Not only may working-class students feel less entitled to critique a middle-class subjectivity, but also they may not know that challenging such a subjectivity is a goal. Working-class students have a lot invested in a belief in education and academic literacy. While these students perhaps felt confused and torn when first exposed to academic, middle-class ideologies that may have contrasted to their own, now they might have a lot invested in performing such a subjectivity (Rodriguez, 1982; Zebroski, 2003). Schooling has taught such students that (middle-class) literacy (and Standard English) is the means through which they can become successful. Why would they want to critique this middle-

class perspective in the same schooling context where the ideals and values were originally taught and promoted? Lynn Bloom (1996) argues that stories that equate literacy with success “embody what American education has historically been dedicated to—not putting the ‘finishing’ veneer on an elite class, but enabling the transformation and mobility of lives across boundaries, from the margins to the mainstreams of success and assimilation on middle-class terms” (p. 668). In a society in which working-class students begin at a disadvantage, this notion that learning literacy will bring success carries a powerful punch. Furthermore, by making it a goal to challenge middle-class values, are we really in fact privileging middle-class ideals and students?

Given these contradictory notions of what the assignment encourages students to do—one that it surreptitiously inculcates and rewards students for performing a middle-class subjectivity (Faigley, 1992; Ryden, 2002; Wiley et al, 1998) and one that it provides an avenue for challenging this subjectivity (Meyers, 1996; Scott, 1997; Soliday, 1994; Young, 2004)—how do real students actually negotiate this assignment? What do teachers really expect from students?

To better understand what types of subjectivities teachers really do value, I have adopted an empirical approach that looks systematically at value-appeals and student demographic data in light of student essays. Specifically, I analyze student self-reported total family income and the highest level of education earned by each parent. Additionally, I will not look at the dominant subjectivity a student adopts in the literacy narrative as a whole as other scholars have done (Eldred & Mortensen, 1992; Fox, 1997). While the success narrative may be the dominant theme throughout the text, students perform multiple identities within a single text (Paterson, 2001; Williams, 2003/2004).

Therefore, I will examine the smaller, mini-subjectivities students perform throughout the single text and how instructors respond to these sub-performances. We know that instructors privilege the success narrative, but do they privilege all the variations on the success narrative similarly? Do these sub-narratives have the same cultural cache? Do they perpetuate middle-class values?

This project seeks to answer the following questions:

- To what extent do marginalized students from non-hegemonic socioeconomic classes or ethnicities challenge the literacy-equals-success story and negative stories of literacy as Young and Soliday claim? To what extent do they perpetuate it (Ryden)? How do their performances of these narratives differ or resemble those of students from more privileged backgrounds?
- Who might be alienated when certain values are privileged?

METHODS

To examine the possible class biases in these narratives, I broke the student texts down into events. An event refers to a specific literacy sequence that has a recognized beginning, middle, and end. I looked at the master narratives students often invoke, as well as certain values promulgated through these narratives. To get interrater reliability for my coding, a second rater coded a subset of the data and had excellent agreement with me on these codes.

The socioeconomic information analyzed in this chapter comes from questions students answered in the demographic data questionnaire and is comprised of two main

sources: total family income and highest level of education earned by each parent.

Students self-reported each of these items.

This chapter also analyzes results from think-aloud protocols conducted with instructors investigating what instructors view as reflection in student literacy narratives. Seven instructors participated in the think-aloud protocols and each read and responded to at least three different student texts. The instruction prompt asked them to underline passages that suggested reflection. The instructors were not told anything about the coding of events. For detailed reporting of the methods used, refer back to Chapter Two.

In addition, I also analyzed the proportional reflection score, which analyzed how often an instructor noted something as reflection. If they underlined *more* than half of an event, the event was deemed “strongly reflective;” *less* than half meant “weakly reflective.” Kathy’s success narrative serves as an example. She writes:

I also did a lot of writing in high school. At Sacred Heart, we had to write papers in pretty much every subject. I actually established a rather nice portfolio at the end of four years. But at the same time I think that I will always wonder that maybe if I would have put in 110% instead of just 90% that I might be a much better writer than I am today. A vast majority of my high school career consisted of a lot of me pretending like I knew what I was doing and really just hoping for the best. Whenever I was given a writing assignment, I always got a bit excited inside, but I usually ended up putting it off until the last minute and getting only a decent grade when I knew deep down I could’ve gotten an exceptional grade.

One instructor viewed this entire passage to be reflection, underlining it all. This is a “strongly reflective” event since more than half of the event is underlined.

On the other hand, some narratives, such as the outsider and child prodigy, were marked as reflection by instructors, but were never marked as “strongly reflective.” Look at a child prodigy narrative also written by Kathy.

As a child growing up, and even now I have always had a huge imagination. I could always think up these incredible stories and characters in my head and I

used to love to put it all on paper. I used to write all the time, I've kept a diary since the 5th grade.

In this example, only one sentence is underlined as reflection. Since the underlined words are less than half of the entire event, this event was deemed “weakly reflective.”

RESULTS

In coding the data, I used the event as my unit of analysis and coded for three different things:

1. Whether the instructor marked the event
2. The proportional reflection score
3. The values promoted in the event

Reflection according to master narrative

The literacy narrative assignment encouraged students to tap into “shared” values with their instructor. Because students are writing these narratives knowing that teachers are their audience, they often seem to write what teachers want to read. In other words, they used ethos and pathos to create a bond between writer and reader. They read the rhetorical situation and tapped into values (they assumed) their teachers held. While this rhetorical strategy is common to most everything students write that teachers are going to evaluate, in the literacy narrative, these values explicitly concern literacy. Students understand their audience enough to know that writing teachers most likely hold certain values about reading and writing, teachers, and specific pedagogies. Thus, in their texts students often talk about the teachers who made a positive impact on their lives, explore their views of literacy, and allude to the romanticized power of education.

As shown below in Table 12, the success and stigma narratives, which were the two most popular narratives in student texts, also carried the most reflection according to instructors.

Table 12: Proportion of Times Master Narrative was Regarded as Reflection

Rank	Master Narrative	% of times marked as reflection	Proportional reflection score
1	Success	80%	1.078
2	Stigma	78%	1.075
3	Hero	70%	0.93
4	Literacy winner	74%	0.91
5	Outsider	90%	0.90
6	Other	63%	0.88
7	Rebel	50%	0.77
8	Child prodigy	48%	0.48

Both narratives were high in terms of the percentage of times it was viewed as reflection and in its proportional reflection score. Success and stigma narratives both carried proportional reflection scores well over 1.0, which means that when instructors were marking places as reflection, they underlined more than half of the event as reflection.

Reflection according to value invoked

As I mentioned in Chapter Three, each event was coded by each value. In other words, I looked at each event to see whether or not the particular value was invoked, which meant that one event could theoretically contain all values. Table 13 shows how often each value-appeal was seen as reflective by instructors.

Table 13: Proportion of Times Value was Regarded as Reflection

Rank	Value	% of times marked as reflection	Proportional reflection score
1	Anti-academic	78%	1.13
2	Literacy as a shared activity	75%	0.93
3	Literacy equals success	69%	0.87

In the future, I will investigate other values students often invoke, such as competition, apathy, extrinsic motivation, and others to see how instructors responded to these instances.

Master narratives used by different socioeconomic classes?

My findings show that students' performances of certain stories differed by family income and parental education. Tables 14 and 15 reveal the significant differences between groups in terms of family income level and educational achievement. In particular, more privileged students were more likely to include negative stories of literacy.

Table 14: % of Events Telling Particular Master Narratives Broken Down by Family Income Level

Story/value invoked	Economically privileged \$80,000 or more	Less economically privileged Less than \$80,000	<i>p</i> value
Positive stories of literacy	61%	67%	
Negative stories of literacy	28%	19%	< .01
Success	32%	29%	
Stigma	22%	16%	< .01
Hero	14%	16%	
Child prodigy	10%	12%	
Literacy Winner	5%	10%	< .025
Other	6%	8%	
Rebel	5%	6%	
Outsider	6%	4%	
Total (without first 2 rows)	100%	100%	

Table 15: % of Events Telling Particular Master Narratives Broken Down by Highest Degree Earned by Parent(s)

Story/value invoked	Educationally privileged Bachelor degree or more	Not educationally privileged Less than a bachelor degree	<i>p</i> value
Positive stories of literacy	63%	66%	
Negative stories of literacy	24%	19%	<.05
Success	31%	29%	
Stigma	20%	15%	<.05
Hero	15%	16%	
Child prodigy	11%	11%	
Literacy Winner	6%	10%	< .025
Other	8%	7%	
Rebel	4%	6%	
Outsider	4%	4%	
Total (without first 2 rows)	100%	100%	

The first two rows in both tables show the overall grouping of master narratives. As both tables show, there are no significant differences in which group was more likely to invoke “positive stories of literacy” (success, hero, child prodigy literacy winner). However, both economically-and educationally-privileged students were more likely to invoke “negative stories of literacy.” It should come as no surprise that no class

difference exists in which groups tended to invoke “positive stories of literacy.” The value-appeals promoted in positive stories seem obvious. Students could easily predict that telling positive stories about literacy would jive with an English instructor’s values. However, the class differences in terms of “negative stories of literacy” might not be as easy to predict.

In addition, the tables also reveal that strong differences between socioeconomic groups existed in two specific master narratives—stigma and literacy winner. More privileged students were more likely to perform the stigma narrative, while less privileged students invoked the literacy winner narrative more often. What’s more is that the master narrative that wealthier students were more likely to perform (stigma) was extremely popular with instructors, while the one that less privileged students invoked (literacy winner) was not.

Stigma narrative

In terms of socioeconomic status, more privileged students incorporated stigma narratives more often than less privileged students. Students from homes where their family’s total income was greater than \$80,000 incorporated the stigma narrative 22% of the time; whereas those from homes where the total income was less than \$80,000, incorporated it 16% of the time, a significant finding, $\chi^2(1) = 5.41, p < .025$. In addition to total family income, students from families where parental education level was less than a bachelor’s degree were somewhat more likely to invoke the stigma narrative than students where one or more parents have a bachelor’s degree or more, $\chi^2(1) = 4.95, p < .05$.

As reported in Chapter Three, instructors viewed stigma narratives reflective over three-fourths % of the time. They carried an extremely high proportional reflection score (1.08), which meant that more than half of the event was underlined as reflection. Instructors view this narrative as reflection. In a society and a media obsessed with the stories of people who have gone through trauma and pain, it is not surprising that the stigma narrative, though a less-intense version of it, is common in student texts. Our own field is very sympathetic to the plights of the less fortunate—those oppressed and disadvantaged by certain systems and institutions. What is surprising about the fact that more privileged students performed this master narrative then is that instead of being sympathetic to the situations and backgrounds of less privileged students, we are privileging the stories of those from wealthier classes.

Literacy winner narrative

Contrary to stigma narratives, which carried a high proportional reflection score and were popular with more privileged socioeconomic students, the literacy winner master narrative was not viewed as reflective and was invoked more often by less privileged students. The literacy winner master narrative revealed significant differences between socioeconomic groups both in terms of total family income and parental educational achievement. Students whose families made less than \$80,000 were somewhat more likely to invoke the literacy winner narrative than those from homes that made more than \$80,000, $\chi^2(1) = 5.13, p < .025$, and students in households where the parental educational level was less than a bachelor's degree were also somewhat more

likely to incorporate this master narrative than those students from homes where one or more parent had earned a bachelor's degree or more, $\chi^2(1) = 5.03, p < .025$.

Perhaps the literacy winner narrative was invoked more often by less privileged students because this master narrative, like the other positive stories of literacy, also taps into the value of success. As described in Chapter One, literacy winners present themselves as successful consumers of literacy, who amass academic currency by garnering extrinsic rewards for their literacy. This master narrative draws from an educational system based on competition, and because working-class students enter the schooling arena where competition rather than collaboration reigns supreme, perhaps they buy into this notion as well and when they write, they thus construct their experiences in terms of success. With teachers as the audience, perhaps they think that teachers will look favorably upon them when they report instances of success in school or in writing.

Because the academic currency students earn is “materialized in the documents and artifacts they create and receive,” perhaps adopting the literacy winner identity “enable[s] many of these students to prosper in the educational setting” (Paterson, 2001, p. 21) when otherwise they would not. Paterson hypothesizes why the literacy winner master narrative is popular:

Students often internalize a widespread belief in their intrinsic deficits (and it is a multi-faceted deficit—lacking experience, intellectual acumen, wisdom, and fluency in the English language). I think students learn the lesson well that who they are is not good enough. They've grown up surrounded by the rhetoric of *A Nation at Risk* which declares “the educational foundations of [this] society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very nation...” (*A Nation at Risk*, 5). They know they must always be refining, reworking and re-fashioning the self to be more culturally productive and acceptable.

They're culturally constructed to posit a self that needs to be filled up. (pp. 124-125)

Because the literacy winner buys into cultural notions that distinctions and rewards bring power (see Bruner, 1986), it is not surprising that literacy winners were more popular with less privileged students.

Literacy winner master narratives were ranked fourth in terms of its proportional reflection score. They were popular with instructors because after students detailed how they won some sort of competition, they would typically sum up by stating the effect winning something had on them. For instance, Jocelyn writes,

After a few seconds, she looked at me and said, "This is really good!" I looked up, smiled and replied, "Thanks! I was just thinking about my mom and decided to write down what I was thinking." After class, she called me to her desk and we talked for a while on the poem I had wrote to my mom. She suggested that I send it in to the Reflective Program, this was yet another contest where all types of work would be reviewed for the best presentation of an art project, writing project, math project, whatever. She asked me to read it in front of the judges as well, because she said I spoke very well. I eventually said yes, and as a result, I won that writing contest. By winning that contest, it made my passion for writing come back. I realized that I still had the freedom to write what I wanted, just in different ways.

Both instructors marked the last two sentences as reflection. Amanda noted the last two sentences as reflection because the student "is reflecting on what's going on with her process." Trisha even comments, "Her reflection is that winning made her passion come back. That's at least her interpretation of events."

Whereas in other narratives, instructors were apt to fill in the blanks for students and make causal connections when they made value-appeals, instructors were less likely to make this move in literacy winner narratives. Actually, only when the student incorporated an explicit analytical move did instructors underline literacy winners as reflective. Kristy, for instance, writes,

I wanted each paper to be unique and my senior year really gave me the opportunity to express that uniqueness through my portfolio. I worked twice as hard to better my writing and make it so that it would stick out in the reader's mind. I felt so proud of myself when I received a proficient on my senior year portfolio and now in college I feel that my writing style is right up to the level that it needs to be.

One instructor Ashlie responds to her explicit reflection:

That's good that she identified that specific thing: She wanted each paper to be unique. That's a very good start. She could have also developed a better view of being a member of the Young Author's Award and the Appalachian Book of Young Poets, but I guess she does say that it helped her regain her confidence and practice writing once more because she does recognize those opportunities as having influenced her, but it's not really there yet.

Values invoked by different social classes

In addition to class differences between which group was more likely to invoke certain master narratives, socioeconomic differences also existed between groups in terms of who was more savvy at appealing to instructor values. As I reported in Chapter Three, instructors were more apt to flesh out the connections for students when certain appeals were invoked, such as anti-academic critiques and literacy as a shared activity.

Tables 16 and 17 demonstrate significant differences in terms of certain value-appeals. As these tables show, there are no significant differences according to income or educational achievement in performances of the literacy-equals-success value-appeal; however, educational and economical class differences exist with the other two value-appeals—anti-academic critiques and literacy as a shared activity.

Table 16: % of Events Making Particular Value-Appeals Broken Down by Family Income Level

Value invoked	Economically privileged \$80,000 or more	Less economically privileged Less than \$80,000	<i>p</i> value
Literacy equals success	65%	71%	
Anti-academic	23%	8%	< .001
Literacy as a shared activity	34%	24%	< .01

Table 17: % of Events Making Particular Value-Appeals Broken Down by Highest Degree Earned by Parent(s)

Value invoked	Educationally privileged Bachelor degree or more	Not educationally privileged Less than a bachelor degree	<i>p</i> value
Literacy equals success	67%	71%	
Anti-academic	17%	8%	< .01
Literacy as a shared activity	31%	25%	< .1

As the tables show, the literacy-equals-success value-appeal, which consists of the four positive master narratives as well as other moments students invoke the belief that literacy leads to success, was the most common value-appeal students performed in their essays and was in fact present in all students' literacy narratives. The fact that this

narrative was utilized so much by all groups of students emphasizes the cultural value of this value. Individualism is so prevalent in our culture and so is the notion that literacy will bring success. Several scholars have noted how students often incorporate this value into their essays. Paterson (2001) claims, “The idea that one can teach oneself in a disciplined way, in the manner of the Puritan work ethic, is strongly at work in so many student narratives” (p. 100). Wendy Ryden (2002) also finds that students commonly adopted the success story format and claims, “That students at such tender ages can manage to adapt their life stories to [the success] paradigm of struggle and rectification attests to the evocative power of the [developmental] pattern” (p. 94).

The cultural value of the literacy-equals-success value-appeal as well as its prevalence in all student literacy narratives in this study, demonstrates that students could easily predict that English writing instructors would respond well to such a belief. Though these moments in which students invoked the literacy-equals-success value-appeal are conventional and even boring (according to some instructors), students use this notion that literacy equals success to appeal to particular claims about the value of literacy, which instructors found as reflective. Students know that teachers are their audience and are rhetorically adept at responding to their beliefs about the importance of literacy. Even the fact that the students are composing such an essay testifies to the importance that instructors place on writing about literacy. Wendy Ryden (2002) posits, “[S]tudents as savvy readers of their audience tap into the romance that English teachers value surrounding education and the power of reading and writing to produce what students think will be acceptable stories for a school assignment” (p. 94). As shown in Table 12, instructors responded well to the value that literacy equals success: this value

was marked reflective 69% of the time, and it carried a relatively high proportional reflection score (0.87).

Instructor responses to the literacy-equals-success value-appeal demonstrate how the practice of filling in the connections for the students benefits already-privileged students. In the following example, a student from an economically- and educationally-privileged home writes:

I actually got published again in “The Appalachia’s Book of Young Poets” my eighth grade year for a poem that I had written about friendships. Being published again helped me to regain my confidence and practice writing once more. I think that the writing process that I used and currently use today is a personal mix of the writing process that were shown to me in middle school, along with other tid-bits of information that I learned throughout high school and on into college.

One instructor Ashlie marks the last part as reflection, stating, “This is a good point here. The writing process that she uses is a personal mix of writing processes that were shown to her. It’s a good thing that she realizes that, and she’s able to express it.” Ashlie’s comments demonstrate not only that she appreciates this student’s reflection because the student seems to realize something about herself, but also that she agrees with the student’s expression. Whereas that last phrase could be seen as mere description, or reporting, this instructor does not see it this way and views it as reflection.

However, in a similar example taken from a less privileged student’s essay, another instructor Amanda does not seem to make the connections for the student. Camile, whose total family income is less than \$40,000 and parental level of education is less than a Bachelor’s degree, writes:

By the time I reached middle school I had expanded my leisure writing methodology. I had begun to keep several journals simultaneously. I had a small journal I kept with me at all times to jot down random thoughts that would later turn into finished products. These better-developed pieces were divided into

different types of journals. I had a journal solely for poetry, one for short stories, and one for my private thoughts. I spent a substantial amount of my solitary times occupying myself with my journals. This allowed me to develop some high-quality pieces that I used for my middle school English classes.

The instructor does not underline any part of this student's event, even though there is a causal argument made within it. The instructor merely states, "I think that's more description. It's sort of part of reflection, but kind of expanding on it and describing it." Although less privileged students knew to invoke literacy-equals-success appeals such as the one above (and thus appeal to their instructor-audience), instructors did not always view such appeals as reflection, even when the appeal incorporated a causal argument, which seems to point to some class biases due to inconsistencies in what instructors privilege.

Unlike the apparent appeal of the literacy-equals-success value, two other values that instructors viewed as reflection seemed to have been less obvious as values to some students and even when they were invoked their appeals were not as successful with instructors. As Tables 16 and 17 make clear, anti-academic critiques and the notion of literacy as a shared activity were extremely popular with instructors but were incorporated significantly less often by students from less privileged economic and educational backgrounds.

These two beliefs seem to tap into the progressive values of the type of instructor who assigns literacy narratives, perhaps one who is more recently trained, who is familiar with the literacy narrative genre, or who values personal writing. Furthermore, this value of literacy as a shared activity seems to appeal to instructors who understand that definitions of literacy cannot be decontextualized out of the social and cultural places that

created literacy acts and other situations for literacy (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Bleich, 1988; Brandt, 2001; Scribner, 1984; Street, 1995).

Anti-academic value-appeals

Let's first explore anti-academic value-appeals, which as described in Chapter Three, typically came in the form of critiques of academic writing, school-based literacy practices, and academia as a whole. As Chapter Three also demonstrated, composition instructors responded positively to anti-academic value-appeals and fleshed out the causal connections for students. What is most problematic about instructors privileging this particular value-appeal is that those students from wealthier socioeconomic backgrounds were more likely to employ it. Students from homes where the total family income was *greater than \$80,000* were significantly more likely to incorporate these critiques, $\chi^2 (1) = 11.56, p < .001$. In addition, students from homes where the total family income was *greater than \$40,000* were also significantly more likely to incorporate such anti-academic critiques, $\chi^2 (1) = 9.55, p < .01$.

As Chapter Three showed, Michelle was one instructor who responded really strongly to an anti-academic bias in student narratives and tended to, as Judith Summerfield (1996) puts it, "conflate text with life" (p. 160). When students wrote about the problems they had with academic writing, it was actually quite common for Michelle to complete the thoughts for the students and take the student's statements much further than the text itself actually did. Let's look at Michelle's response to Tim, a student from a home where the total income level exceeds \$80,000 and where both parents have a bachelor's degree or more:

Throughout middle school, my English teacher would tell me what to write. I had to write according to the state portfolio guidelines. Everything I wrote was for my portfolio. If it wasn't written coinciding with portfolio standards, I was forced to rewrite the piece. This truthfully repelled my taste of writing. The writing process always seemed to be too confining for me, as well. Every time I was compelled to use the writing process, I felt restricted by its organization. I felt that my best compositions were written spontaneously, without using a process. I understand why the process is used, but I don't feel that it is the best way for me to write.

Michelle viewed this passage as strongly reflective and her comments about why she noted particular instances as reflection are specifically tied to Tim's choices to critique an academic system such as the portfolio, which seems to indicate her own anti-academic bias. For example, Michelle underlines the entire last sentence as a reflective statement even though she points out that the sentence "is not explained at all" and does not reveal "what this means exactly to this person." Michelle mentions that she would like the student to explain his statement, but justifies her view of it as reflection because the student "seems like he wants to leave that subject alone because he's frustrated." In other words, this student's frustration about this "academic" way of writing justifies him not analyzing or evaluating his statements. Michelle's words even suggest that the sentence is reflective because he is critiquing "academic" standards. So, this privileged student was able to be perceived as reflective because he was saying something that this instructor already viewed as reflection.

Unlike the student from a privileged home whose passage was viewed as reflection, another student whose family makes less than \$80,000 and where both parents have less than a Bachelor's degree, incorporates an anti-academic critique that is not viewed as reflection. Jocelyn writes,

Once I got to high school and got a boyfriend and cool new friends I discovered that it wasn't cool to love to read or write so I pretty much stopped reading and writing. It was that and a mixture of horrible reading curriculum that kept me

from reading a good book in a very long time. I think that I enjoyed maybe one or two books that I read all throughout my middle school and high school career. I now mainly stick to writing the occasional note or email and reading magazines and occasional newspaper articles.

Sarah, the instructor, did not mark any of this passage as reflection. Instead, Sarah questions the inconsistencies in the passage and wants the student to elaborate further:

So what is this reading curriculum? And this paragraph seems to contradict the previous one where she said she loved to read those R. L. Stein books in seventh and eighth grade. Isn't that middle school? So a little contradiction there; that's OK. The student will just have to explain. And I'm not sure if that one sentence (*I think that I enjoyed maybe one or two books that I read all throughout my middle school and high school career.*) is a reflection. Well, it could be, though. No, I don't think it is.

Sarah did not fill in the connections for the student, even though both a causal argument and the anti-academic value-appeal were present. Interestingly enough, this event was also composed by a less privileged student.

In sum, instructors were willing to make connections for educationally- and economically-privileged students—and to give them the benefit of the doubt that they intended to make the connection themselves but just did not. However, it seems that for some reason less privileged students were not as savvy at invoking these same appeals.

Literacy-as-a-shared-activity value-appeals

In the same way instructors responded positively to critiques of academia, instructors also noted reflection in moments when students explore the idea that literacy is a shared activity. Like the anti-academic critique, the literacy as a shared value appeal was also divided along class lines, utilized more often by students from more privileged socioeconomic backgrounds.

If we look closely at this view of literacy as a shared activity, we discover that it seems to challenge the American value of individualism, where people only rely on themselves and their bootstraps to succeed. When the shared activity appeal is invoked, however, we typically see several people engaging together in literacy practices together, which highlights the point that learning literacy is a social occurrence. Here again, instructors noted reflection because of this value-appeal, even though the logic was weak. For instance, Kristy, a student from an economically- and educationally-privileged home writes in her conclusion paragraph,

To me, writing is another language, a language that we all have to know in order to survive in the world....

This student's words point to a joint community of literate beings. The two instructors who read her text both viewed the second sentence as reflection yet regarded it incomplete because the student had not mentioned anything about this point in the paper and does not follow up with any explanation of her comment. Perhaps the instructors noted it as reflection because Kristy taps into a value both of these instructors hold: writing as a communal activity. Listen to one instructor's comments as evidence:

This is the best sentence in terms of reflection and reflective writing that I have encountered so far. I don't know what that means to her because she didn't really express it in the paper; and, "*in order to survive in the world,*" that's where the community idea comes in—having to function in a certain type of world, in a certain community, so you have to learn to write in certain ways.

Even though the student did not give further explanation, both instructors still marked it as reflection, perhaps reflection because the student appealed to their values about literacy in successful ways.

Unlike Kristy's essay where instructors easily accepted the student's statements about writing and viewed them as reflection, in Jocelyn's essay, one instructor had a difficult time with her passage. Jocelyn writes,

Then, one day, when I was a sophomore, I was caught writing at my desk. My English teacher knew I was off topic because we were supposed to have been reading. So, she came over to my desk and politely asked, "May I see what you are writing?" Naturally, I gave her my paper, without any problems and waited for her response. After a few seconds, she looked at me and said, "This is really good!" I looked up, smiled and replied, "Thanks! I was just thinking about my mom and decided to write down what I was thinking." After class, she called me to her desk and we talked for a while on the poem I had wrote to my mom. She suggested that I send it in to the Reflective Program, this was yet another contest where all types of work would be reviewed for the best presentation of an art project, writing project, math project, whatever. She asked me to read it in front of the judges as well, because she said I spoke very well. I eventually said yes, and as a result, I won that writing contest. By winning that contest, it made my passion for writing come back.

Though Trisha marked the last sentence as reflection, she mostly responded to the way this student reflected:

There's a piece missing because she hasn't really told me how [her passion for writing] went away. OK. I'm slowing down because maybe I'm wanting her to reflect differently on this experience because what's going through my mind as I'm reading about this story is how rare it is that teacher's just randomly walk up and say, "This is really good," and how few students get that kind of ad hoc encouragement for being off-topic. So I understand how important it could be to this student, and then as she comes back to recounting winning the contest and the winning making her passion for writing come back, I'm wanting to argue with her and say, "Well, you know, maybe it had more to do with actually somebody personally touching you." So I'm fighting against what I want her to say. Her reflection is that winning made her passion come back. That's at least her interpretation of events. And I'm just going to stick with that as reflection because I'm having a hard time not imposing my idea of what reflection ought to be in this paragraph.

Trisha's response shows that this student's reflection did not work for her and, as a result, was less likely to complete the connections for the student and mark the passage as reflection. Just as with the anti-academic critiques, less privileged students did not

incorporate this appeal to shared literacy as often as those from wealthier socioeconomic classes. When they did, however, they were not as successful at appealing to instructor values.

DISCUSSION

In a study of the relationship of aesthetic taste to social class, Pierre Bourdieu (1984) notes that “nothing more rigorously distinguishes the different classes than the disposition objectively demanded by the legitimate consumption of legitimate works, the aptitude for taking a specifically aesthetic point of view on objects already constituted aesthetically—and therefore put forward for the admiration of those who have learned to recognize the signs of the admirable” (p. 40). It seems as if the instructors want students to appeal to their particular tastes.

In addition, instructor responses to these shared values also point to some class biases in the goals of the assignment. While this sample is small, my data highlight the need for instructors to be more aware of how our goals for the assignment and what we privilege in student texts when we respond may actually serve to marginalize working-class students for whom this assignment is said to be particularly empowering. The finding that instructors flesh out the connections for students when certain value-appeals are invoked problematizes claims that the literacy narrative assignment challenges middle-class perspectives and ideologies and as such is particularly beneficial for marginalized groups of students. These value-appeals tend to reinforce middle-class ideologies and subjectivities, which as I mentioned earlier, is the problem that scholars

like Faigley and Ryden have with personal narrative writing—that it encourages students to adopt solipsistic, middle-class stances that appear to be outside ideology.

Anti-academic

Bourdieu (1984) observes that “tastes are perhaps first and foremost distastes” (p. 53). As these findings show, some composition instructors seem to have a distaste for academic writing. What is problematic, however, is that students from less privileged economic and educational homes were not as savvy appealing to this anti-academic value as their more privileged peers. Perhaps this is because they may not know that challenging such a subjectivity is a goal or is acceptable in such a setting. Wendy Ryden (2002) contends,

It makes sense that inevitably grade-conscious students try to write what they think their evaluator wants them to write, and it might take some doing on the students’ part to come to the counter-intuitive awareness that critiquing establishment practices of literacy is acceptable or desirable. (p. 93)

Ryden’s comments demonstrate that this anti-academic critique seems to go against what students are taught in school and so working-class students may not know that such a critique is even desirable.

Not only may students not know that performing such a subjectivity would be desirable or acceptable in a classroom setting, but they may not want to provide such a critique. Working-class students have a lot invested in a belief in education and academic literacy. While these students perhaps felt confused and torn when first exposed to academic, middle-class ideologies that may have contrasted to their own, now they might

have a lot invested in performing such a subjectivity. For instance, one student from an economically-and educationally-privileged home writes,

The stories that I had to read in class were nothing like [the books I read for fun]. I just enjoyed reading and not having to find the central theme of the first three chapters, or what the character was feeling on page 10....I used to like to read because I wasn't being forced to do it, and I didn't have to read a certain amount of pages every night.

This student's critiques of the reading curriculum and pedagogical methods comes from a privileged stance that claims entitlement and is a viewpoint working-class students might not want to adopt. Perhaps schooling has taught students from lower socioeconomic classes to buy into the values and discourse of the middle class, such as the notion that middle-class literacy is the means through which they can become successful. In a society in which working-class students begin at a disadvantage, this notion that learning academic literacy brings success carries a powerful punch. Why would they want to critique it?

In her review of four texts on personal narrative, Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson (1999) contends that the cultural narratives students draw from when they compose bring them comfort and even empowerment. What we need to be wary of, however, is that these cultural narratives "are thoroughly embodied and naturalized" and therefore "may exclude or even oppress those of other classes and cultures" (p. 103).

It seems as if students from wealthier homes have learned how to appropriate anti-academic discourse. They seem to know that such critiques carry a lot of cultural capital and, therefore, they incorporate these negative assessments into their essays. Furthermore, these students from privileged socioeconomic backgrounds also seem to

reap the benefits of incorporating these appeals because instructors marked this narrative as reflective over three-fourths of the time.

Literacy as a shared activity

Furthermore, if we look more closely at the value of community and social literacy perpetuated through the success narrative and other positive narratives of literacy, we discover that it seems to challenge the notion of the American dream and the cultural value of individualism. How would working-class students know to invoke such a critique or that this critique would be valued by instructors? Whereas middle-class students may feel that criticizing middle-class values and discourse is a natural right, students from lower classes may feel less entitled to provide such a critique or may not know to do so.

Not only may working-class students feel less entitled to critique a middle-class subjectivity, but also they may not know that challenging such a subjectivity is a goal. They were taught to value a middle-class perspective—even though middle-class values may have been at odds with their life situations and experiences. Why would they want to critique them in the same schooling context where the ideals and values were originally taught and promoted? By making it a goal to challenge middle-class values, are we really in fact privileging middle-class ideals and students? These are questions that warrant our attention. In future research, I will continue looking at the values instructors' privilege in certain narratives and how these values relate to social class.

So perhaps the claim that the literacy narrative assignment promotes a broad, social understanding of literacy in which students can come to discover how they are

influenced and shaped by others (e.g., Brown, 1999; Eldred & Mortensen, 1992; Scott, 1997; Webb, 1999) only applies to certain students, specifically those from the higher end of the economic spectrum.

While working-class students may intuitively be aware that many people have influenced their literacy development, in a school system based on assigning grades to individuals rather than groups, they may have been taught to value this middle-class perspective of individualism, even though this middle-class value may have been at odds with their life situations and experiences. Why would they want to critique such a value in the same schooling context where these ideals were originally taught and promoted? Furthermore, how would working-class students know to invoke such a critique or that this critique would be valued by instructors?

In addition to some working-class students not knowing instructors would value an appeal to literacy as a shared activity, maybe they also did not invoke it because this value is at odds with their life situations. Perhaps students from these homes did not have family reading at bedtime, attend storytime at the library, or have access to the Internet to engage in instant messaging, all of which are shared literacy activities. Perhaps the realities of work, a single-parent home, financial issues, or time play a part in working-class students not invoking appeals of literacy as a shared activity. Richard Miller (1996) reminds us, “To have the right kind of personal experience is what matters, for this is what allows one to accrue cultural capital within a given institutional context” (p. 280). If working-class students do not “have the right kind of personal experience,” then how can they be expected to invoke such an appeal?

By making it a goal to challenge middle-class values, are we really in fact privileging middle-class ideals and students? Though the sample is small, the findings presented here nonetheless lend some empirical support to the claims of those who have already been critiquing class bias in personal narrative. These trends also problematize claims that the literacy narrative assignment challenges middle-class perspectives and may not be as beneficial for marginalized groups of students as advocates of personal writing have claimed. In future research, I will continue looking at the values instructors' tend to privilege in certain narratives and how these values relate to social class.

CONCLUSION

We should be encouraged that when instructors respond to and evaluate student texts, they are mostly looking at the rhetorical features and the analysis in the text rather than appeals to shared values or personal tastes. However, we must still be careful because it can become all too easy to respond to the values to which students are appealing (values that they may actually believe or values that they fake or exaggerate to please the teacher). When we respond to such values—values that more privileged students appear to be savvier in touching on—we may place less wealthy students at a disadvantage since they do not seem to know that a critique of academic writing is a value they should hold or promote in their literacy narratives. While we as teachers cannot escape bringing our own opinions and experiences into the reading and evaluation of student texts, we do hope that we are fair and that we critique the texts based on rhetorical features and strategies instead of values to which students appeal, values that some less privileged groups may not know they are supposed to critique.

Less privileged students in particular might benefit from attempts to make our criteria and values clear. Although the literacy narrative is advocated because it fosters multiculturalism and racial diversity (Clark & Medina, 2000; Sandman & Weiser, 1993; Soliday, 1994; Walsh, 1997; Young, 2004) and because it provides opportunities for marginalized peoples to transform literacy to their own purposes (Soliday, 1994; Young, 2004), the findings presented above complicate these assumptions because at least two value-appeals were underutilized by students from lower-income homes. Although the purported goal of assignments such as the literacy narrative is to be inclusive, we risk excluding students who do not share our middle-class academic values.

¹⁷ Perhaps Berlin and Faigley mean that students avoid *explicit* talk about ideology and culture, for as Young (2004) reminds us, all writing is connected to the culture which produced the person and no writing truly can ignore ideology.

¹⁸ Faigley (1992) points out that historically “writing teachers were as much or more interested in *whom* they want their students to be as in *what* they want their students to write” (p. 113, emphasis in original). Thomas Newkirk (1997) observes, “Rationales for literature and composition typically lay out bold moral and civic claims” (p. 70).

CHAPTER FIVE

TEACHING LITERACY NARRATIVES RHETORICALLY: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR INSTRUCTION

The literacy narrative assignment has become a popular genre of personal writing and has found widespread adoption in composition classrooms. The claims by teacher-researchers are mostly positive in what the assignment can offer students, particularly in its ability to foster greater reflection. This dissertation found that teachers see reflection as a primary goal of the assignment. The survey distributed to instructors confirms that instructors consider reflection both a purpose for assigning literacy narratives and a criterion used to evaluate the student texts: out of 13 different possible purposes from which to choose, instructors ranked reflection as the most important purpose of the literacy narrative assignment; and out of 32 possible options, they ranked reflection as the second most important criterion of evaluation (next to “personal engagement”). The results from the think-alouds also suggest that reflection first and foremost means cause/effect and evaluation arguments. Instructors viewed these two logical moves as reflection well over two-thirds of the time (69%).

Contrary to these findings that illustrate instructors have an explicit understanding of reflection, an analysis of instructor-written assignments revealed that their conception of reflection is more tacit. In other words, what instructors ask for in these assignments is

not necessarily what they most want to see. Whereas the think-aloud results demonstrated that instructors value analytical moves as reflection the majority of the time, the assignment overviews, instructions, goals, “Key Features,” and invention prompts highlighted literary strategies, such as narrative tension, vivid description, and metaphoric language. These literary features were only mentioned as reflection by instructors in the think-aloud protocols 20% of the time, which demonstrates that the focus of instructor assignments on description and other narrative elements is perhaps misdirected.

This study also found that instructors privilege certain stories in their responses to student texts, particularly ones that incorporate middle-class ideologies and subjectivities. The two master narratives viewed as the most reflective in the think-alouds were the success and stigma narratives. It is not surprising that instructors would value the success master narrative that equates literacy with success; even the instructor assignments hinted that they wanted students to incorporate developmental success narratives.

What does seem surprising, however, is that instructors value the stigma narrative, one that critiques academic practices that serve to mark and disgrace students and that seemingly goes against the success narrative. On the contrary, the assignments rarely mention that they want students to incorporate a master narrative that details moments in which they were stigmatized by negative literacy experiences. Rather, most of the invention questions included in instructor assignments focus on the positive aspects of literacy.

This study also examined the conflict between those who claim that personal narrative writing, of which the literacy narrative is a subset, challenges middle-class

ideologies and perspectives (McLaughlin & Tierney, 1993; Sandman & Weiser, 1993; Sharkey, 2004; Spigelman, 2001; Young, 2004) and those who argue that it reinforces such subjectivities (Berlin, 1988; Otte, 1995; Faigley, 1992; Ryden, 2002). I investigated eight cultural master narratives as well as three different value-appeals perpetuated through these master narratives to see whether certain students were more likely to incorporate them and whether or not instructors' responses to these master narratives and value-appeals privilege certain values or certain populations of students.

The most popular master narrative with both students and instructors was the success narrative. This cultural story encourages middle-class perspectives in its promotion of Graff's (1979) concept of the "literacy myth"—that literacy automatically leads to progress. Like the success narrative, the literacy-equals-success value-appeal—mostly found in the four "positive stories of literacy,"—was also popular with both instructors and students. The success narrative did not differ by race, gender, or social class. All groups of students could easily predict that instructors would respond positively to the success master narrative and the literacy-equals-success value-appeal. The concept that literacy leads to success and cultural progress seems evident, especially in an English classroom in which the assignment is to write about literacy and its influence on students today.

On the contrary, other stories and value-appeals to which instructors responded favorably were incorporated significantly less often by students from non-privileged socioeconomic and educational homes. Working-class students were less likely to invoke the stigma narrative, which instructors viewed as the second most reflective master narrative, and were more likely to perform the literacy winner narrative, which was not

viewed as reflective by instructors. These findings suggest that working-class students might not want to incorporate such appeals, might not know that such a story would be valued by instructors, or they do not have the experiences that would help performing such a story in their texts.

In addition to working-class students not invoking these master narratives as much—perhaps because they were less likely to predict what stories their instructor-audience might want them to incorporate or because they did not want to perform the story at all—students from less privileged economic and educational homes were also less likely to appeal to instructors' values. While working-class students were rewarded for invoking literacy-equals-success value-appeals, they were not as successful at invoking two other value-appeals to which instructors responded positively. Anti-academic critiques and moments in which literacy was presented as a shared activity were not found as often in working-class students' papers. Because instructors were more apt to flesh out connections for students when these value-appeals were invoked, working-class students' texts might have been seen as less reflective, and hence, less successful in terms of fulfilling the goals of the assignment.

These results thus lend some empirical support to the claims of those who have already critiqued class bias in personal narrative: the literacy narrative assignment seems to reinforce middle-class perspectives. These trends also problematize claims that the literacy narrative assignment challenges middle-class perspectives and suggests that literacy narratives may not be as beneficial for marginalized groups of students as advocates of personal writing have claimed.

My results also demonstrate that instructors should more clearly articulate their goals for the assignment and how they will assess these goals in student writing. Personal writing, and the literacy narrative assignment in particular, can best be taught by highlighting the rhetorical capabilities of this genre, specifically the analytical moves of cause-effect and evaluation. By emphasizing what instructors really want, we can make writing assignments more equitable and begin to defend against our own social-class biases in the classroom.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INSTRUCTORS

The following recommendations suggest ways that instructors might prevent the problems I have discussed in this dissertation.

Provide explicit instruction on causal arguments and making evaluations.

Instructors overwhelmingly viewed causal connections and evaluative judgments as reflection and when we teach this assignment, we must emphasize such rhetorical elements. Few instructions in literacy narrative assignments explicitly emphasize logical, argumentative moves as reflection; however, as this study shows, incorporating such elements as cause/effect and evaluation seem to be the most important factors with instructors in fulfilling the goal of reflection. In order for students to effectively satisfy the guidelines of the assignment, classroom instruction should focus on teaching students how to create causal arguments and incorporate evaluation of a prior experience into their essays. Teaching students how to perform these rhetorical techniques will prove valuable to students as they continue to compose in various genres in college and beyond.

One way to teach students how to incorporate causal analysis into their essays is to encourage them to develop two different perspectives: a “then” or past perspective, which represents the student’s attitudes at the time and a “now” perspective, which analyzes, evaluates, and interprets those past experiences and attitudes from a present point of view.

Teach students literary and linguistic techniques.

Because instructors value literary and linguistic markers such as metaphors and vivid description, it seems useful to teach students these rhetorical strategies so that they can have a better repertoire of approaches from which to draw when composing and revising their essays. If students can understand and implement such techniques, their writing will be enhanced and strengthened. They will also build confidence in themselves as writers.

When instructing students how to effectively incorporate literacy components, such as vivid words and metaphors, our focus should be on the rhetorical effect on readers. If students can learn how word choice, diction, vivid detail, and narrative conflict impact the reader, they can better know how to read, revise, and proofread with the reader in mind. Learning the rhetorical impact is something students can apply to all writing they create. Moreover, we can teach students

In addition to teaching rhetorical dimensions of pathos, we should also tell students specifically about the journey metaphor. Students who incorporated journey metaphors were successful in fulfilling the goal of reflection because the journey metaphor itself encourages causal connections and evaluative moves. Furthermore, as

students construct their “journey,” they can look at the sum of their experiences and then evaluate them or make the connection to how these experiences affected the student’s overall journey and brought them to where they are today.

Spend enough time discussing goals and expectations for the assignment, as well as how we are going to evaluate it.

This study also highlights how if we are going to assign literacy narratives in our classes we need to be prepared to spend a great deal of time and effort on them. In my reading, I found that teachers often use this assignment as the first one of the semester because they see it as an easy task where students write about personal experiences. However, as these results show, teachers need to be more careful in structuring this assignment so that students understand the goals we have set for this assignment and how we are going to evaluate these goals. If we want more than description from students, we have to show students how to move toward reflection and analysis. We must remember that just because students *write* a literacy narrative does not mean that they will *reflect* in such a text. If our goal is to promote reflection and critical thinking, then we must be prepared to spend enough time teaching students what we mean and how they can achieve these goals in their texts.

In addition to spending enough time going over our goals for literacy narrative assignments, and all writing for that matter, we must also reveal to students how we are going to evaluate these goals in final products. Our goals should be concretely laid out for students so that they can know what we expect and how they can fulfill our goals. That means that not only should we be explicit in our goals for the assignment, but when we

assess the texts, we should take care to ensure that we are assessing what we told them we would be assessing. If we want to see reflection or critical thinking in student literacy narratives, then we should be prepared to teach students how to fulfill this goal, and then to discover ourselves how we are going to assess this goal. In other words, we need to be able to articulate what we want students to do, and then figure out how to teach it.

Discuss and help students become more critically aware of values.

We as instructors must be more aware of how our own subjectivities shape our responses to student texts to ensure that we do not place certain students at a disadvantage. While it might be useful for students to know what we personally value—perhaps a belief in personal writing or shared literacy—we must be careful to respond more to the analytical and argumentative features of the student texts, for when we reward these value-appeals at the expense of the analytical structure, we may place less wealthy students at a disadvantage. If we are truly to foster a democratic classroom, we need to interrogate and reflect on our own subject positions to ensure that we are being as fair as possible in our responses. We should look more at students' use of argument and less at their effective (or ineffective) appeals to shared values and personal tastes.

If we want students to make certain value-appeals in their essays, then we need to discuss and perhaps make such value-appeals specific goals of the assignment. If we view anti-academic appeals as reflection, for instance, and want students to incorporate these critiques, then we need to discuss why students should do this. What does critiquing Accelerated Reader, for example, provide for students? Or, if we want students to adopt a certain definition of literacy, such as literacy as a social process, then we should also

explain this value and why we as English teachers might view literacy as a social activity. Here again, though, we should make this a goal of the assignment, if we so choose—and I am still not sure that we should choose this option. But if we do want students to incorporate certain values, we must make this goal explicit to students and to ourselves so that it does not become something we arbitrarily evaluate in student texts. Moreover, if we want students to avoid patterning their essays in terms of success, then we should also talk about the pros and cons of avoiding such a structure and then give students options as to how they can write a narrative that is not developmental.

In addition, if we see it as a particular goal of literacy narratives for students to examine and reflect upon middle-class values, then perhaps we could discuss certain values explicitly and tell students that we want to see them articulate how events in their lives lead them to embrace or reject these values. This strategy would benefit those students who may not understand these values or whose experiences do not align with the values, particularly those students to which this assignment particularly tries to reach.

Another possibility beyond teaching students how to make the “proper” value-appeals in their essays might be to talk about literacy narratives in the context of culturally situated literacies, to think about how ideals and definitions of literacy are shaped by history, situated by culture and privileged by dominant institutions. Perhaps we should be teaching students that their experiences with literacy are not simply the result of individual choices and events, but exist within systems of class and power. What passes for literacy, for being valued by dominant educational institutions, is seen as correct because it has been normalized by the dominant culture.

Even if we decide to make certain value-appeals goals of the assignment, we still need to be aware of our own values and prejudices and be less influenced by them as we respond to students. It might be hard for working-class students to make anti-academic critiques, even if they are aware that their instructor holds this value. Though we can never truly escape ourselves as we read, instructors like Michelle in this study demonstrate that our biases sometimes become all too important and can be potentially unfair to non-privileged students whom we are particularly trying to reach.

Discuss master narratives explicitly.

After students write a draft of their literacy narrative, it might be useful to give them a list of master narratives so that they are aware of the ways we commonly talk about our literate experiences. Challenge them to write a complete draft that avoids using any of these narratives. Or, we could also have them compose a literacy narrative that only uses one of these master narratives. Then, encourage them to connect all their experiences to this one narrative to show how these experiences have shaped their views on language and literacy today. We could also push our students to explore various times when they both fit and did not fit into these master narratives. Or, students can compose their literacy narrative and look to see which identities they have adopted in their texts. They can then question and probe these identities further to see why they might have chosen to perform certain ones rather than others. We must make our students explicitly aware of the common stories that students are likely to write, so that when these stories are a part of their essays, they are aware of the many different factors informing that narrative construction and can be more critical of the narratives they tell. Teaching master

narratives also allows students to understand the connotations of the narratives they choose—what they are tapping into in using one narrative or another and who else uses that narrative and why. As Robert Brooke (1987) notes, we should come to see writing as “part of a much larger and more basic activity: the development and negation of individual identity in a complex social environment” (p. 5). Looking at master narratives can help us see how students are influenced by culture and in what ways these cultural stories affect their identities. Anne E. Doyle (1999) claims,

The literacy narrative assignment involves introducing students to the notion that they have lenses through which they interpret their own reading, writing, and learning experiences, and that these lenses shape the stories they tell about those experiences. Instructors who use the literacy [narrative] as a writing assignment offer students the opportunity to begin to see the nature of the narrative plots they use about their writing as lenses through which they filter their experiences. (p. 26)

We could also have students analyze stories written by professional writers, such as Rodriguez or Villanueva, so that students can see master narratives at work in stories by published writers. They can then critique the structure and the writerly moves of the author.

Give students various options as to how to avoid moralizing their literacy narratives, or couching them in terms of success.

In addition to challenging our students to investigate ways that their narratives do and do not align with cultural assumptions of literacy, students must also be aware that not every story they tell about literacy has to come with a moral significance. Students are inherently aware of the expectation that personal experiences be rendered as moral lessons and that stories have a significance. While this may be fine theoretically, in terms

of the story itself, we often get a story that is uncritical of the many different forces that influence it, and so their literacy narratives get simplified into one meaning. When we ask students to produce this type of literacy narrative—one with a moral significance—the narrative inherently becomes a “literacy myth,” one that seems counterproductive to the goals and aims we have set up for the literacy narrative assignment. Instead, we should have students reflect on the complexity of their experiences and show them other ways to compose a text. For instance, we could encourage students to answer the “so what” question by couching it in a different manner, one that works for the purposes of the particular stories being told. One way to avoid students moralizing their literacy stories is for them to focus on incorporating cause/effect statements. Not only does this study show that teachers find the cause-effect technique to be particularly reflective (and thus have positive reactions to it), but also cause-effect is a strategy that is relatively easy to teach and learn. Instructors can also use cause-effect to explicitly demonstrate how this move represents reflection.

Have students situate themselves in a historical context.

Also, it might be useful to challenge our students to investigate the many ecological factors of both their local and cultural contexts. When students begin to understand how their narratives are situated in specific times and places, then they can begin to see the larger, cultural influences on their ways of thinking. One way to do this might be for students to interview family members and teachers to get their opinions on the student and his or her literacy experiences. Students could also create a timeline of

historical events that they could connect to certain literacy experiences to see how their experiences were or were not affected by larger, cultural occurrences.

Encourage students to explore multiple literacies in their text, not just print-based literacy experiences.

As instructors, we must also be more open to exploring different literacies in our classrooms. As this study indicates, the majority of stories came from school experiences. As we live in an increasingly diverse and changing society, we must encourage students to explore nontraditional forms of literacy in these texts. Guiding students to reflect on multiple forms of reading can lead students to reflect not only on themselves, but also on the messages that bombard them and that they must interpret daily.

Expand the literacy narrative assignment to include multimodal forms.

Some instructors include multimodal literacy narrative assignments. In Anokye's (1994) classes, students deliver their literacy narratives orally to the class to help stimulate diversity. Paterson (2001) asks students to translate their written literacy narratives into visual representations. Her dissertation includes several "plates" that students created to tell their literacy stories. In addition, Young (2004) also gives his students the options of writing a fact, fiction, or mixed-genre account. Encouraging students to translate their written texts into some other form may open up ways for students to read and understand their own literacy histories. In addition, it might show students other ways that they can reflect that they may not have thought about previously.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This investigation responded to the call for additional research into what instructors really want students to produce in their literacy narratives when reflection is cited as a goal. This study demonstrates that instructors most wanted to see students making analytical moves rather than just giving a rendering of experience. If the think-aloud prompt had been something other than reflection, I might have gotten different results about what teachers' value in literacy narrative assignments.

Future research should continue looking at the values instructors tend to privilege in certain narratives and how these values relate to social class. Such value-appeals that might be investigated include competition, apathy, and reliance on extrinsic rewards as motivations. Future research should also delve into possible contradictions made by instructors in their privileging of certain value appeals. For instance, do the same instructors reward students for a celebration of literacy and a critique of literacy? Future studies could also analyze student attitudes about and experiences with multimodal literacies including video games, art, technology, and music and the ways students write about these literacies in their literacy narratives.

While this project included students from a wide range of socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, it did not include as many racial and ethnic minorities. A future study could collect additional literacy narratives by minority students to examine potential racial biases in this assignment. Additional texts by racial minorities would also allow the researcher to make widespread claims about whether this assignment tends to benefit or marginalize such students.

In addition to collecting more literacy narratives, another project should investigate narratives that do not fit into the master narrative framework, those marked “other.” It is possible that these are places where students are resisting dominant notions. It would even be interesting to look at the think-aloud protocol responses to some of these “other” narratives. Do students sometimes make interesting moves in these events? Do teachers like them? Do teachers not understand these moves and fail to react (or react negatively)?

In coming to my conclusions about what instructors value in literacy narrative assignments, my study solely analyzed the assignment sheet distributed to students at the beginning of the unit (except in the case of the textbooks I analyzed in Chapter Three in which I evaluated the entire chapter). This type of analysis does not account for the classroom dynamic that accompanies such instructions. Therefore, a future study could examine the instructions and guidelines that come after the assignment sheet is distributed to students, material that are just as important in determining what instructors want students to produce as the assignment sheet itself. Such a study could research what goes on in the classroom through class discussion, peer review, and revision, as well as conferences and written communication between instructor and students. Interviews could also be conducted with students and instructor to glean more information about what is valued in certain genres of writing. Such a study could assess what guidelines and instructions were imparted at different points during the unit.

Moreover, another study could look at instructor responses to student texts to see what features or value-appeals instructors are privileging in their actual responses. Not only could a future study look at instructor responses to the first drafts submitted to the

teacher, but it could also look at the final drafts submitted to teachers to see what students changed in their revision process and what features instructors are privileging after students make these revisions. This study could analyze instructor feedback on the texts themselves to see what additional goals instructors might have for this assignment that might be hidden in the assignment criteria.

Judy Sharkey (2000) claims, “While writing autobiography has become a more popular activity in teacher education, the issue of *responding* to those texts has been left relatively unexplored, yet the responding is a crucial issue as it lays bare which kinds of stories get validated or disregarded” (p. 2). That being said, another study might also have students from working class and privileged backgrounds do think-alouds using the same prompt that I used with instructors. This might get at differences between student and instructor perceptions of the same assignment. It might also allow for non-dominant narratives common to and valued by the working-class to surface.

Finally, this particular study on what instructors value in the literacy narrative—a form of personal writing—could also be repeated with other genres of writing, such as technical proposals, technical reports, or argumentative research papers. In such a study, a survey could be distributed to learn more about the goals and purposes of the assignment, and then these goals could be used as the prompt for the think-alouds.

CONCLUSION

While in theory the literacy narrative genre offers much potential, as teachers of writing, we must be careful when assigning students to construct these texts. We must reflect on our goals and purposes for assigning students to write literacy narratives

because the assignment itself does not guarantee movement towards critical reflection. Many possibilities exist for future analyses of these literacy narratives. Right now, I have only scratched the surface. Once we understand that we must encourage students to critically investigate their assumptions about reading, writing, and education, this assignment will become even more useful for our students.

It is not sufficient for instructors simply to assign literacy narratives and state reflection as a goal without giving criteria as to how they are going to evaluate student texts and the reflection presented in them. As this dissertation has shown, not revealing these purposes may penalize working-class students, whom many claim this assignment can liberate and empower. As teachers, we must try to make our classrooms as democratic as possible so that all students can be given the opportunity to succeed.

If we continue to teach the literacy narrative assignment, we should highlight the rhetorical features that this particular assignment encourages—the logical, analytical structure of cause-effect and evaluation; the pathos created when students include vivid and metaphoric language; and the ethos that students draw on when making value-appeals. The literacy narrative assignment can provide students with a wonderful opportunity to learn these highly complex rhetorical moves.

We must make our students explicitly aware of the common stories that students are likely to write, so that when these stories are a part of their essays, they are aware of the many different factors informing that narrative construction. We must also challenge our students to investigate the many ecological factors of both their local and cultural contexts. When students begin to understand how their narratives are situated in specific

times and places, then they can begin to see the larger, cultural influences on their way of thinking.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Letter to Composition Instructors

Dear Composition instructor:

Fall 2004

Please take 15 minutes to complete the attached questionnaire regarding your expectations and goals for using the literacy narrative in your first-year courses. The primary purpose of this questionnaire is to assess the goals and purposes instructors have for using the literacy narrative assignment and the criteria used to evaluate it. The data from this survey will be used for Kara Alexander's dissertation. If you do not assign the literacy narrative in your courses, please do not complete the survey.

Thank you very much for your time and assistance. Please return the completed questionnaire to Joanna Wolfe's mailbox located in the English department.

Human Subjects Study #516.03: Composition Instructor's Goals and Evaluation Criteria for Literacy Narratives

Dear Composition Instructor:

You are invited to answer the attached questionnaire about your goals and expectations for student writing in the literacy narrative assignment. There are no risks or penalties for your participation in this research study. The information collected may not benefit you directly, but may be helpful to others. The information you provide will be used to assess the various expectations instructors in our profession hold for the literacy narrative assignment. Your completed questionnaire will be stored at the University of Louisville in the English Department, room 319F. The questionnaire will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Approximately 50 instructors are expected to participate.

Individuals from the Department of English and the Human Studies Committees may inspect these records. In all other respects, the data will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Please remember that your participation in this study is voluntary. By completing and mailing the attached questionnaire in the enclosed envelope, you are voluntarily agreeing to participate. You are free to decline to answer any particular question that may make you feel uncomfortable.

You acknowledge that all your present questions have been answered in language you can understand and all future questions will be treated in the same manner. If you have any

questions about the study, please contact Joanna Wolfe at (502) 852-0510 or Kara Alexander at (502) 744-6288. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may call the Human Studies Committee office (502) 852-2188. You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject, in confidence, with a member of the committees. These are independent committees composed of members of the University community, staff of the institutions, and lay members of the community not connected with these institutions. The Committee has reviewed this study.

Appendix B

Abridged Instructor Survey

Part I: Demographic Information

Rank: _____ Professorial Faculty
_____ Full-time Instructor or Lecturer
_____ Part-time Instructor or Lecturer
_____ Graduate Student Teaching Assistant
_____ Other: (please describe) _____

Gender: _____ Female _____ Male

Number of years you have taught **composition** courses at the university level. _____

Definition of the literacy narrative assignment: *The literacy narrative assignment typically asks students to explore their past experiences with reading, writing, and schooling and to consider how those experiences have shaped their current ideas about literacy and schooling.*

As a teacher, do you use (or have you used) a literacy narrative assignment in composition courses? _____ Yes _____ No

If you answered “no” to the above question, you do not need to complete the survey. Please return the survey to Joanna Wolfe’s box in 315.

If you answered “yes,” in which composition courses do you use (or have you used) the literacy narrative? Mark an “X” by all that apply.

_____ 101	_____ 101/102 ESL	_____ 309
_____ 102	_____ 303	_____ 310
_____ 105	_____ 306	Other: (please describe) _____

What do you hope to achieve by assigning the literacy narrative in your courses? _____

The following questions ask about the purposes, goals, and evaluation criteria for literacy narratives in first-year composition courses. If your purposes, goals and criteria vary substantially from course to course, please envision the most generic of the courses you teach when answering these questions.

Part II: Criteria for evaluating literacy narratives in first-year writing courses.

Listed below are criteria that composition instructors might use to evaluate literacy narratives. Please circle the answer that best corresponds to how much importance you place on each criteria when evaluating and grading literacy narratives in first-year writing courses.

- Evidence that student is personally engaged in the text:
Extremely Important Very important Important Marginally Important Not Important
- An original and interesting thesis:
Extremely Important Very important Important Marginally Important Not Important
- Evidence that student has changed in some way in the writing:
Extremely Important Very important Important Marginally Important Not Important

4. Clear overall organization around a central thesis:	Extremely Important	Very important	Important	Marginally Important	Not Important
5. Evidence that the voice in the narrative seems authentic:	Extremely Important	Very important	Important	Marginally Important	Not Important
6. Awareness of sociopolitical issues:	Extremely Important	Very important	Important	Marginally Important	Not Important
7. Evidence of reflection in text:	Extremely Important	Very important	Important	Marginally Important	Not Important
8. Movement from description of events to analysis of events:	Extremely Important	Very important	Important	Marginally Important	Not Important
9. Grammatical correctness:	Extremely Important	Very important	Important	Marginally Important	Not Important
10. Ability to persuade a reader:	Extremely Important	Very important	Important	Marginally Important	Not Important
11. Paragraph-level organization:	Extremely Important	Very important	Important	Marginally Important	Not Important
12. Student has distanced him/herself from past events, experiences, and behavior:	Extremely Important	Very important	Important	Marginally Important	Not Important
13. Ability to separate past events from current beliefs and assumptions:	Extremely Important	Very important	Important	Marginally Important	Not Important
14. Evidence of awareness to multicultural issues:	Extremely Important	Very important	Important	Marginally Important	Not Important
15. Clear sentence structure and syntax:	Extremely Important	Very important	Important	Marginally Important	Not Important
16. Ability to explore ideas that are personally meaningful to the student:	Extremely Important	Very important	Important	Marginally Important	Not Important
17. Stories that challenge dominant notions of literacy acquisition:	Extremely Important	Very important	Important	Marginally Important	Not Important
18. Provides critiques of schooling and educational experiences:	Extremely Important	Very important	Important	Marginally Important	Not Important
19. Evidence of resistance:	Extremely Important	Very important	Important	Marginally Important	Not Important
20. Evidence of critical thinking:	Extremely Important	Very important	Important	Marginally Important	Not Important
21. Evidence the student has a broad understanding of literacy:	Extremely Important	Very important	Important	Marginally Important	Not Important
22. Evidence that student is critically aware that literacy is a social process:	Extremely Important	Very important	Important	Marginally Important	Not Important
23. Evidence that student sees him/herself as a writer:	Extremely Important	Very important	Important	Marginally Important	Not Important
24. Ability for students to complicate their own notions of “self” and identity:	Extremely Important	Very important	Important	Marginally Important	Not Important
25. Evidence of student empowerment:	Extremely Important	Very important	Important	Marginally Important	Not Important
26. Provides critiques of dominant, sanctioned notions of literacy:	Extremely Important	Very important	Important	Marginally Important	Not Important
27. Provides a well-told description of events:	Extremely Important	Very important	Important	Marginally Important	Not Important
28. Explains why events were significant:	Extremely Important	Very important	Important	Marginally Important	Not Important
29. Evidence student has denaturalized the process of acquiring literacy:	Extremely Important	Very important	Important	Marginally Important	Not Important

- | | | | | | |
|--|---------------------|----------------|-----------|----------------------|---------------|
| | Extremely Important | Very important | Important | Marginally Important | Not Important |
| 31. Evidence student's consciousness has been transformed: | Extremely Important | Very important | Important | Marginally Important | Not Important |
| 32. Evidence of personal growth: | Extremely Important | Very important | Important | Marginally Important | Not Important |

Part III: Purposes for using the literacy narrative in first-year composition courses. To what extent do you see each of the following as a purpose of using the literacy narrative in your composition classes? Please circle the answer that best applies:

- | | | | | |
|--|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| 33. The purpose is for students to explore their own ideas. | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 34. The purpose is for students to demonstrate their knowledge. | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 35. The purpose is for students to convince someone of something. | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 36. The purpose is for students to demonstrate reflection. | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 37. The purpose is for students to demonstrate the significance of something. | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 38. The purpose is for students to prove a point about something. | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 39. The purpose is for students to display critical thinking. | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 40. The purpose is for students to be informative. | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 41. The purpose is for students to investigate literacy experiences that have not been investigated. | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 42. The purpose is for students to illustrate some "turn" or change in their beliefs | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 43. The purpose is for students to instruct someone about something. | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 44. The purpose is to for students to develop skills in description. | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

Part IV: Open-ended questions

1. What is your definition of reflection?
2. Do you assign exemplary, published literacy narratives in your classroom, such as those written by Kingston, Douglass, Villanueva, or Rodriguez? _____ Yes _____ No
3. If yes to #2, which specific texts do you use?
4. How do you use these texts?

In the spring of 2005, Kara Alexander will invite eight people to participate in a think-aloud protocol and interview. Compensation will be provided. If you are willing to participate, please write your name and email address in the space provided below.

Name: _____

Email Address: _____

Please return the completed questionnaire to Joanna Wolfe's mailbox. THANK YOU!!

Appendix C

Abridged Questionnaire

Your answers are confidential and will not be shared with your instructor.

Demographic Information

Gender

Ethnicity

What is your year in school? Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior Graduate student

Age: under 21 21-25 26-30 31-40 41-50 over 50

Is your native language English? YES NO

If no, what is your native language?

Academic Major

College GPA (if applicable):

Your place of birth

City and state where you attended high school

The school that best describes my secondary school experience is:

Public Private Home Other (please specify):

Socioeconomic Information

The following questions are an attempt to assess socioeconomic status. I will use the information you provide to compare and contrast different literacy experiences. This information is solely for the purpose of my dissertation, is completely confidential, and will not be shared with anyone else. You may leave these answers blank if you do not wish to answer them.

What is the highest level of education of your mother/guardian?

Less than high school High school GED Some College Technical school degree
Associate's degree Bachelor's degree Master's degree PhD Professional degree

What is the highest level of education of your father/guardian?

Less than high school High school GED Some College Technical school degree
Associate's degree Bachelor's degree Master's degree PhD Professional degree

What is the zip code of your family's home residence?

My family's total income is between:

\$0-\$20,000	\$20,001-\$40,000	\$40,001-\$60,000	\$60,001-\$80,000
\$80,001-\$100,000	\$100,001-\$120,000	\$120,001-\$150,000	\$150,001 or higher

Appendix D

Instructions for Instructor Think-Aloud Protocol

“What counts as reflection?”

Purpose: Through these think-aloud protocols, we are trying to understand what teachers recognize as reflection in student essays.

Instructions: Read the following student texts aloud and underline passages that suggest reflection. As you underline moments that suggest reflection, mark the smallest unit possible of the reflective moment. This unit can be a word, a phrase, a sentence, or an entire paragraph. The more specific you are in what you underline, the better we can gauge what instructors view as reflection.

When you underline something, please verbalize that you are doing so and why this particular unit strikes you as reflection.

Read the text as if it is one of your student essays, as you would typically read it. Read any way that you prefer—straight through, going back and forth, etc. You may take notes if you would like.

Remember to read the entire text aloud and try to verbalize every thought that you have. This will enable us to better understand how you recognize reflection in student essays.

If you get quiet, or forget to verbalize your thoughts, I will prompt you; otherwise, I will not say anything. I will be taking observation notes; don’t let this distract you.

Appendix E

Transcription Conventions

... Standard ellipses indicate material deleted within a single speaker's turn.

Italics Italics represent student text.

— Underline marks indicate moments that instructors marked as reflective.

Appendix F

Figure 2: Anne's Literacy Narrative Assignment

Literacy Narrative Anne Smith ENGL 101

Assignment Overview:

For this class, you will compose a 4-5 page Literacy Narrative that explores some aspect of your literacy. You will write about your important experiences with reading, writing, and/or speaking, considering the degree to which written communication has shaped your assumptions, your attitudes, and your life. In other words, tell the story of your literacy. You should trace your literacy journey over your lifetime (from early experiences to now), rather than just writing about *one* memorable literacy event.

Goals:

The primary purposes of this assignment are to:

4. examine and reflect on your own personal reading and writing practices;
5. examine the familial, educational, cultural, and historical values that have shaped these practices;
6. and initiate a semester-long (maybe even life-long) *metalinguistic* awareness about your own literacies, a conscious awareness of your language and literacy practices.

The definition of *literacy* we are using for this class includes *the practices of reading* alphabetic texts (e.g., magazines, books, web sites) and visual texts (e.g., television shows, computer games, photographs), and *the practices of composing* written texts (e.g., poems, essays), visual texts (e.g., photographs, advertisements), and hybrid texts (e.g., multimedia, computer games, etc.). Literacy also includes the social, cultural, familial, and personal values that are associated with such texts. *Thanks to Cindy Selfe for this definition.*

Getting Started:

For this assignment, you will need to prepare by culling your memories. Try to go back as far as you can to the first time you actually remember writing something—anything. Think about how and when and where and with whom you learned to read, and how you learned to use language effectively (to get something you wanted, to make someone laugh or cry, to change someone's mind). Think about the kinds of reading and writing you have done at various stages of your life: what did you read and write before you started school? When you were 7 or 8? When you were a teenager? In college? Think about the places where you have written, and the times, and how you felt.

You might use questions like the following to prompt your memories:

- What was reading and writing like in elementary school? In middle school? In

- high school? In college? What did you write when you weren't in school?
- For what purposes did you write and to what kinds of audiences?
 - Where did you write? Were you alone? With other people? How did people react to your writing?
 - What did you write? Why did you write?
 - Did you enjoy writing when you were younger? Middle school? College? Why/Why not?
 - How do you write? Pen and paper? Computer? Has the way you write changed over the years?
 - What were the significant events or circumstances in your life as a writer that stand out in your memory now? Why?
 - What teachers particularly influenced your writing development—either positively or negatively?
 - What philosophies do you think motivated the teachers you have found most (or least) effective?

Content:

Focus on several events over a period of time, explaining how these taken together have shaped your current attitudes towards reading, writing, speaking, and other forms of literacy. *Feel free to explore both positive and negative experiences.* You do not have to write this narrative in chronological order. Write your essay in a way that works for your purposes.

Here are some tips for succeeding on this assignment:

- Respond to the Literacy Narrative questions as completely and fully as possible in order to help narrow down your ideas into a coherent narrative.
- Tell as many stories as possible.
- You don't have to pick *all* the literacy events/happenings in your life. Be selective. Select key moments/events that seem particularly important to your own personal literacy history.
- Interview your family members and friends in order to add authenticity to the story of your evolving literacy.

Specific Details:

Audience: The audience for your literacy narrative is me and the other people in this class.

Format: This essay must be between 4 and 5 pages, computer-generated, double-spaced, 12-point font.

Peer Review date: Monday, February 2. Bring 2 copies of your draft.

Due Date: Wednesday, February 4.

Let me know if you have any questions.

Appendix G

Figure 2: Elaine's Literacy Narrative Assignment

Elaine Johnson
ENGL 101
Fall 2003

Literacy Autobiography—Project 1

- Explore your memories and experiences with language learning, reading, and writing
- Reflect on how you feel about the writer you are today

You cannot truly progress as a writer if you do not understand WHY you read and write the way you do.

Things to consider when constructing your essay:

- What are your earliest memories of language learning?
- How did you identify with language when you were young?
- Have you used writing as an agent for change?
- Did you learn language out of force or desire?
- Who has had a lot of influence in your life in terms of language learning?
- Have you ever used writing to accomplish anything? If so, how and under what circumstances did you learn to do this?

Requirements:

- 3-5 pages, typed, double-spaced, 12-point font
- Peer Review draft due September 3
- Final Draft due September 8

CURRICULUM VITAE

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University of Louisville
Department of English
Bingham Humanities 315
Louisville, KY 40292

Education

Ph.D., Rhetoric and Composition, University of Louisville, Louisville, KY

Graduation date May 12, 2006

Dissertation: “Implicit Response: Instructors Values and Social Class in the Literacy Narrative Assignment”

Committee: Joanna Wolfe (Chair), Bronwyn Williams, Debra Journet, Susan Ryan, Ann Larson

Other Research Interests: Literacy Studies, Professional Writing, Multimodal Composing, Computer-Assisted Writing Instruction, Rhetorical Criticism, Teaching Pedagogies, Contemporary American Women’s Literature

M.A., English, Abilene Christian University, Abilene, TX

August 2002, 4.0 GPA

Primary Focus: Rhetoric and Composition

B.S., Interdisciplinary Studies in English and History, Abilene Christian University, Abilene, TX

May 1999, 3.88 GPA, *Summa Cum Laude*

Minors: English Education and History Education (Secondary)

Endorsement: English as a Second Language (Secondary)

State of Texas Lifetime Teaching Certificate: English, History, & English as a Second Language

Publications

(2006). More about reading, responding, and revising: The three r’s of peer review and revision. In C. L. Selfe (Ed.), *Multimodal composition for the 21st century: A resource book for teachers*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Wolfe, J., & Alexander, K. (2005). The computer expert in a mixed-gendered collaborative writing group. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 19(2), 135-170.

- (2004). Literacy practices and literacy events of a 21st century American child. *Computers and Composition Online: An International Journal*, 2(1). <http://www.bgsu.edu/cconline/theory.htm>
- (2003). Preparing teachers to incorporate technology into the classroom. Published on the University of Louisville's Department of English website, under "Computer-Assisted Instruction." http://www.louisville.edu/a-s/english/clt/Teacher_Resources/beginning.html

National Conferences

Presentations:

- "New Regions of Composing: Exploring Multimodality in the Writing Classroom." College English Association Conference, San Antonio, TX, Spring 2006.
- "Heroes, Rebels, and Victims: Stories Students tell in Literacy Narratives and Teachers' Reactions to Them." CCCC, Chicago, IL, Spring 2006.
- "Owning Discourse: Celie's Development and Empowerment in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*." Twentieth Century Literature Conference, Louisville, KY, Spring 2006.
- "Composing Images, Creating Texts: A Conversation about Incorporating Multimodality into the Composition Classroom." CCCC, San Francisco, CA, Spring 2005.
- "A Rhetorical Wrangling with Literacy: Grappling with Dominant Notions of Literacy in Sapphire's *Push*." 20th Century Literature Conference, Louisville, KY, 2005.
- "The Significance of the Stories Students Tell: A Perspective Based on Empirical Research." National Council of Teachers of English, Indianapolis, IN, Fall 2004.
- "Incorporating Multimodal Projects into the Classroom: Sharing Audio and Video Projects." (With Cynthia Selfe & Literacy, Technology, and Education class). Watson Conference on Rhetoric and Composition, Louisville, KY, Fall 2004.
- "A Woman's Place in a Mixed-Gendered Technical Writing Team." CCCC, San Antonio, TX, Spring 2004.
- "A Will to Survive: Identity, Economics, and Gender in Willa Cather's *My Antonia*." Twentieth Century Literature Conference, Louisville, KY, Spring 2004.
- "'Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death': Patrick Henry's Use of Ethical and Spiritual Metaphors in His Political Speech." Rhetoric Society of America Conference, Austin, TX, Spring 2004.

Chair Positions:

- "Wither Composition in the Corporate University?: Charting the Move from a Human Science to a Management Science" Chair, Thomas R. Watson Conference on Rhetoric and Composition, Louisville, KY, Fall 2004.
- "Authors Reading Poetry and Fiction." Chair, Twentieth Century Literature Conference, Louisville, KY, Spring 2003.
- "Keeping the Faith: Spiritualism and Religion in Identity Construction." Chair, Thomas R. Watson Conference on Rhetoric and Composition, Louisville, KY, Fall 2002.

Local Conferences

- "Preparing for College Writing: Papers, Papers, and More Papers!" Presented at the NIA College Preparation Conference for Diversity, University of Louisville, Louisville, KY, October 2004.

“Collaborative Learning in the Classroom.” Presented with Sonya Borton & Beth Powell at composition orientation. University of Louisville, Louisville, KY, August 2004.
“Literacy for the 21st Century: A Glimpse of the Future through Multimodal Texts.” Presented at Delphi Center with Dr. Cynthia Selfe and other students in Literacy, Technology, and Education course, University of Louisville, KY, April 2004.
“Incorporating Team Projects into Your Writing Class.” Presented with Dr. Joanna Wolfe at orientation for all composition instructors, University of Louisville, Louisville, KY, August 2003.

Academic Honors and Awards

Barbara Plattus Award for Excellence in Graduate Student Teaching, University of Louisville, 2003-2004.
Metroversity Writing Competition in Graduate Research, First Place, “Standing Against One’s Self: Detection and Voyeurism in *Lady Audley’s Secret*,” 2004.
Metroversity Writing Competition in Graduate Research, Honorable Mention, “A Will to Survive: Immigrant Women in *My Antonia*,” 2004.
Red and Black Faculty Mentor, University of Louisville, 2002-2003 (selected by a student scholar-athlete as the teacher who had the greatest influence on his success in the classroom)
Dean’s Honor Roll, ten semesters, 1994-1999
Alpha Chi, National Honor Society, Membership based on top ten percent of class, 1995-1999
President, Kappa Delta Pi, International Honor Society in Education, Planned and facilitated meetings and fundraisers; traveled to St. Louis for training and international conference, 1997
Pi Lambda Theta, International Honor Society and Professional Association in Education, 1997-1999
Leadership Award, Abilene Christian University Office of Admissions, 2000
Who’s Who Among American Colleges and Universities, Abilene Christian University, 1998, 1999
Valedictorian of Northland Christian School, Houston, Texas, 1994

Teaching Experience

Instructor, Central Texas College, Gatesville, TX

Composition 1 (ENGL 1301), Spring 2006

Instructor, Abilene Christian University, Department of English, Abilene, TX
Business and Professional Writing (ENGL 326), Summer 2005, online course

Graduate Teaching Assistant, University of Louisville, Department of English, Louisville, KY

Scientific and Technical Writing (ENGL 303), Fall 2004

Women in Literature (ENGL 373 / WGST 325), Summer 2004

Computer-Assisted Introduction to College Writing (ENGL 102 CAI), Spring 2004

Advanced Composition for First-Year Writers (ENGL 105), Fall 2003

Introduction to College Writing (ENGL 101), 2 sections, Fall 2002

Graduate Teaching Assistant, Abilene Christian University, Department of English,
Abilene, TX
Composition and Rhetoric (ENGL 111), 1 section, Spring 2002

Writing Center Consultant, Abilene Christian University, University Writing Center,
Abilene, TX, 2001-2002

Provided students in a range of disciplines with one-on-one support, guidance, and feedback on various types of writing projects; developed, organized, and led workshops about the University Writing Center and the services offered.

Graduate Assistant, Abilene Christian University, Department of English, Abilene, TX, Fall 2001

Assisted department chair in teaching a First-Year Composition course; responded to three drafts of all four assigned student essays; taught class 50% of time; prepared lesson plans and activities for class

Student Teaching, Abilene, Texas, Spring 1999

Franklin Middle School – English as a Second Language (6-8 grades)

Abilene High School – English (12th grade) and AP History (11th grade)

Professional and Administrative Experience

Assistant Director, Composition

University of Louisville, Louisville, KY (June 2004-Dec. 2004)

Supervised a staff of more than 80 instructors; scheduled instructors for courses; led lessons for the teaching practicum; implemented orientation and professional development workshops for teachers; assisted students in gaining transfer credit and filing student grievances; and assessed incoming student portfolios for placement into first-year composition courses.

Assistant Director, Writing Centers Research Project (WCRP)

University of Louisville, Louisville, KY (August 2003-May 2004)

Gathered, organized, and archived writing center documents; transcribed oral history interviews from leading writing center scholars; conducted oral history interviews with Professor Lisa Ede (Oregon State University) and Professor Lester Faigley (The University of Texas at Austin).

Co-Director, 2004 Thomas R. Watson Conference on Rhetoric and Composition

University of Louisville, Louisville, KY (December 2002-December 2004)

Worked with two other assistant directors to organize and plan conference from initial stages to its end: created “Call for Papers”; communicated with featured speakers; organized and coordinated presentations; created program; helped shape website.

Graduate Research Assistant to Dr. Joanna Wolfe, “Enhancing Women’s Experiences with Teamwork in Technical Writing and Computing Environments”

University of Louisville, Louisville, KY (January 2003-August 2003)

Audio-and video-taped collaborative writing groups in technical writing classes; conducted and transcribed interviews; coded and analyzed data.

Employment History

Admissions Counselor, Office of Admissions, Abilene Christian University

Abilene, TX (April 1999-Aug 2001)

Counseled high school seniors and their parents through the college admissions and financial aid process by phoning and writing to students regularly, visiting with families, conducting outreach activities, leading campus tours, and designing and presenting PowerPoint presentations to large groups of visitors; traveled extensively throughout Texas and Georgia; developed writing, leadership, and people skills.

Other Service

Comprehensive Exam Committee, Graduate Student Representative, 2003-2004, participated in analyzing and revising the current comprehensive exam structure; led discussions with graduate students about exams and served as liaison between faculty and graduate students.

Spring Speaker Committee, Director, 2003-2004, organized “Spring Speaker” festivities; raised over \$3500 from other departments and organizations to bring Dr. Helen Fox to campus to discuss the role of peace activism in our communities.

English Graduate Organization (EGO) treasurer, April 2003-May 2004

EGO member, August 2002-present

Twentieth Century Literature Conference committee member, 2003, 2004. Participated in organizing and bringing food for graduate students at conference.

Thomas R. Watson Conference planning committee member, 2002.

Graduate Coursework

Rhetoric and Composition

Applied Research Methods in Rhetoric/Composition (J. Wolfe, University of Louisville)

Composing Identities (B. Williams, University of Louisville)

Composition Theory and Practice (B. Huot, University of Louisville)

Intersections of Technologies and Composition Studies (P. Takayoshi, University of Louisville)

History of Rhetoric I (M. Rosner, University of Louisville)

Literacy, Technology, and Education (C. Selfe, University of Louisville)

Narrative Knowledge (D. Journet, University of Louisville)

Research Methods in the Composing Process (D. Journet, University of Louisville)

Rhetoric of Slavery (C. Mattingly, University of Louisville)

Teaching Composition (B. Huot, University of Louisville)

Composition Theory and Teaching Practices (N. Shankle, Abilene Christian University)

Business and Professional Writing (N. Shankle, Abilene Christian University)

Literacy Studies (B. C. Bennett, Abilene Christian University)

Medieval Rhetoric and Pedagogy (W. Rankin, Abilene Christian University)

Rhetorical Criticism (D. Williams, Abilene Christian University)

Teaching Practicum (W. Rankin, Abilene Christian University)

Literary Criticism

Film Theory (T. Byers, University of Louisville)

Victorian and Postmodern Narrative (B. Boehm, University of Louisville)
17th-Century British Literature (B. Walton, Abilene Christian University)
American Literature after 1860 (S. Weathers, Abilene Christian University)
Fiction by 20th Century American Women (G. Barton, Abilene Christian University)
Literary Theory and Interpretations (W. Rankin, Abilene Christian University)

Creative Writing

Creative Fiction (A. Haley, Abilene Christian University)
Creative Nonfiction (A. Haley, Abilene Christian University)
Poetry Workshop (A. Haley, Abilene Christian University)

Professional Affiliations

Conference on College Composition and Communication, 2001-present
Modern Language Association (MLA), 2004-present
National Council of Teachers of English, 1997-1999; 2000-present
Rhetoric Society of America, 2003-present

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