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The Portfolio-Culture Classroom:
Revealing Writers Through Reflection

by

Stephen James Pearse

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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Doctoral Dissertation

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Date May 6, 1997

University of Washington
Abstract

The Portfolio-Culture Classroom:
Revealing Writers Through Reflection

by Stephen James Pearse

Chairperson of the Supervisory Committee
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This study uses ethnographic methodology to investigate the role 'portfolio-culture'-based instruction plays regarding high school expository writing students' understandings about writing (processes and products), as well as their beliefs and understandings about themselves as writers. The discovery of meaning for high school writers of the nature and significance of what they learn, do, and understand is the central focus. This qualitative, comparative case study was conducted with the intent of illustrating, interpreting, and discovering--as opposed to testing--hypotheses. Two sections (classes) of a pre-college, single-semester course taught concurrently serve as the sites for the study; embedded within each site are multiple case studies of three student-writers whose understandings of writing and of themselves as writers constitute the study's units of analysis. At each site, cases include a lower, middle-, and high-achieving student-writer.

Data sources include questionnaires, structured and unstructured interviews, and additional reflective documents. Interpreted according to pattern analysis, student-writer reflections were transcribed, coded, and categorized according to four themes: (1) identities as writers, (2) characteristic writing procedures, (3) writer growth and self-assessment, and (4) understandings of the nature of effective writing. Findings include portfolio-culture students' more specific and frequent talk about their approaches to and strategies for writing, their different use of peer feedback, and their greater acknowledgment of the contributions that classroom activities and personal effort--as opposed to innate ability--make to their respective accomplishments. In addition, the lower-achieving portfolio-culture student expressed a considerably higher degree of confidence in herself as a writer than did her more traditionally-instructed peer. Findings suggest that instruction emphasizing 'sustained engagement'--a recursive process of perceiving, producing, and reflecting--significantly contributes to student-writers' identities, attitudes, and understandings. In addition, study results support claims that the portfolio-culture approach to writing instruction contributes positively to students' sense of control and responsibility, as well as to their ability to apply reflections to future practice.

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Dedication

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Chapter 1 An Innovation Worthy of Investigation:

The 'Portfolio-Culture' Writing Classroom

If teachers are to affect a positive change in their students' written products, it is evident that they must change their focus from evaluating and correcting finished papers to helping students expand and elaborate qualitatively the stages of their composing process; they must, in short, help their students become reflective writers (Pianko, 1979, p. 278).

How might teachers most effectively involve their students in the processes as well as the products of writing? By what means and in what sorts of learning environments are students most likely to modify or elaborate upon their beliefs about the nature of "good writing"? How should teachers interact with their students in order to encourage them to make discoveries about themselves as writers? In the late 1970s and early 1980s, such questions had only begun to be raised. To date, these and related questions now permeate the writing assessment--and more recently, the portfolio-centered--instruction and assessment literature (CCCC Committee on Assessment, 1992).

Recent Background

Answers, on the other hand, remain ill-defined and tentative (Metzger & Bryant, 1993; Yancey, 1992). Because empirical investigations of portfolio-based assessment and instruction have only recently begun to be reported, many questions relating to students' work with, understandings of, and feelings about their writing deserve further investigation (Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 1993). Researchers, theorists, program directors, and teachers practicing and investigating portfolio-based instruction and assessment have derived principles and practices from several fields, including the visual arts and music education, literacy and reading assessment, and journalism (Camp, 1990). As a result, the literature is rich in perspectives and possibilities. Yet evidence and discussion of this "portfolio metaphor" in the language arts classroom remains incomplete (Cox, 1993; Graves & Sunstein, 1992; Metzger & Bryant, 1993; Valencia & Calfee, 1991).

In the course of defining, observing, and interpreting the nature and potential of portfolio-based writing instruction, studies have examined the expanding--and changing--

roles of teachers and students (e.g., Elbow & Belanoff, 1986), teacher reflection about student writing progress (Evans & Vavrus, 1990), students' sense of ownership relating to writing process and performance (McCarthy, Meier, & Rinderer, 1985), and assessment as an occasion for learning (Wolf, 1991). According to these and other studies, reflectivity--a concept in need of clear, purposeful definition--is an apparently crucial component of portfolio-based instruction and learning. As Meyer, Schuman, & Angelo adjudged, "evidence of student self-reflections about the included content should be present in the portfolio; otherwise, it is a folder, scrapbook, or showcase, but not a portfolio" (1990, p. 4).

Both the incorporation of the portfolio in writing classes, and teachers' and researchers' thinking about its potential, are changing. Gill (1993) refers to the portfolio and its use in the classroom as having evolved from single-dimensional assessment tool to dynamic, multi-functional approach to teaching and learning. *Portfolio*, it seems, has flowered from static noun to dynamic verb:

The portfolio approach was first designed as a way to evaluate students' work, as an alternative to the separate marking of every final draft, and has since been extended to teacher and program evaluations. But portfolios have also become important teaching tools in many classrooms, being used to honor writing, to motivate revision, to build self-esteem, and to develop student sensitivity about what makes for good writing (p. 45).

As part of the introduction to their comprehensive collection of essays dealing with critical questions of portfolio assessment practice and theory, Black et al. epitomize an even more recent focus of the literature, and emphasize the significance of reflectivity to those investigations and discussions:

It is evident from these essays that practitioners and researchers in portfolio assessment embrace the often messy, usually ambiguous package that portfolios represent. The essays in this volume represent a range of approaches found in serious discussion of composition issues, but they focus most heavily on reflective practice. . . . Portfolios . . . seem to crystallize two rather different constructs of writing ability. One construct presupposes a general competence in writing. . . The other construct is based in the writing classroom and is specific, local, and assumes there is no student writing separable from the context of the

classroom (1994, p. 2).

The present study investigates aspects of that second construct. But what exactly is “reflective practice” in the context of the language arts--and more specifically, the writing instruction--classroom? How does portfolio-based instruction and learning differ from more conventional approaches to teaching writing? What might students’ reflections concerning their work as writers tell us about their experiences and understandings? What constitutes evidence of student awareness of and/or authority over writing processes and written products?

As mentioned above, the portfolio-based writing instruction and assessment literature has just begun to be defined. Many questions require clarification and investigation, especially in the face of ever-increasing applications of and expectations for the portfolio as an assessment tool and, perhaps more significantly, as a teaching/learning milieu, or ‘culture’ (Camp, 1992; Wolf, 1991). The promises are great. Not surprisingly, the high national profile of the portfolio as a mode of assessment and, increasingly, as a central element of instruction has resulted in a broad dissemination of recommendations, models, and curriculum packages. As a result, teachers and researchers need to learn more about the dynamics of what has been defined and described as the portfolio-culture classroom (e.g., Camp, 1992; Camp & Winner, 1993). The present study represents one such investigatory attempt, with an emphasis upon student understandings.

Research Question

The question this study addressed was: **How, if at all, does involvement in a portfolio-culture writing classroom contribute to high school students’ understandings** of: (1) their identities as writers; (2) the different processes involved in writing, and their own use of those processes; (3), their progress (growth) as developing writers, and related self-assessment; and (4) the nature of effective writing?

Definitions of Major Terms

Although a number of the following terms are defined and illustrated within one or more of the succeeding chapters, their significance to this study's design, purpose, and findings--as well as their integral importance to its narrative--requires that they be defined at the onset of this presentation.

Reflection(s)

No concept is more essential nor pervasive within this study than reflection (or reflectivity). In fact, student reflections constituted this study's data from all sources. As used here, a reflective response is a written or oral expression of "meta-commentary" (Anson, 1994): It represents students' rationales or rhetorical claims for, interpretations of, or attitudes toward their written work. Study subjects often reflected about their own and others' writing in the context of viewing themselves as evolving writers. Such responses refer to students' experiences with and understandings of individual written pieces and/or their writing as a whole, both process and product.

Observation(s)

In contrast to reflections, student-writer observations are simple notations: They account for students' identifications, acknowledgments, or descriptions of writing-based events, documents, details, or features, without reference to rationales, claims, interpretations, or attitudes.

Identity, responsibility, control, and authority

Because it is intended as a contribution to the portfolio-based writing instruction literature, this study investigates, describes, and makes several claims regarding several concepts pervading that literature (e.g., Belanoff & Dickson, 1991; Black et al., 1994; Larson, Ryan, & Winterowd, 1989; Lawson et al., 1989). In addition, I have assigned literature-informed operational definitions to these interrelated concepts in hopes of clarifying their respective meanings as represented by student-writer reflections.

Identity. As used in this study, identity refers to student-writers' attitudes about writing, both process and product. Identity-related reflections express attitudes toward, understandings about, or expectations of characteristic writing procedures and writing progress.

Responsibility. In this study, responsibility refers to accountability for fulfilling a task as assigned by others.

Control. Control-based reflections relate to student-writers' gaining or demonstrating power over and responsibility for writing procedures, from first approaching a given assignment or task to sharing a resulting final product with a particular, intended audience.

Authority. Authority involves self-direction (Zemelman & Daniels, 1986), individually and/or in writing groups, in support of student-determined objectives for a given writing-based project, and/or of more generalized goals within or across writing projects. This concept provides the purpose or rationale for the control that is inherent in a writer's consciously and autonomously-determined decisions and actions, based upon understandings and beliefs about writing.

Rationale for the Study

This "portfolio culture" is, according to PROPEL researchers, teachers, and their students, greater than the sum of its parts, for it also ". . . requires a reflectiveness on the part of teachers and students that reaches deep into instruction and curriculum . . ." (Camp & Winner, 1993, p. 74). Stressing the centrality of various assessment activities to this classroom culture, Camp & Winner also emphasize the importance of ongoing interactions among PROPEL student-writers and between PROPEL teachers and individual students, as well as between and among colleagues students' parents and guardians, researchers, and administrators.

From assisting students in the development of criteria and standards for writing assessment, to participating in across--classroom "review sessions" (Camp & Winner, p.

76) and conferring with research and supervisory personnel, PROPEL teachers--and, by extension, their students--do not operate in isolation. Reportedly, the PROPEL "portfolio culture" brings an impressive combination of communication, information, and expertise to bear on the teaching and evaluation of student writing.

A question that the available PROPEL literature implicitly raises might be posed as follows: Can PROPEL's principles and essential practices--especially those relating to the development of a "portfolio culture"--result in similar student learnings and behaviors in other, more typical school and classroom settings? Specifically, might a similar "portfolio culture" take root in the context of a single-semester course designed to provide instruction and practice in essay writing across a variety of modes (i.e., narrative, expository, descriptive, or persuasive)? Furthermore, does the particular nature of PROPEL course content--that is, instruction in imaginative as well as in what is often referred to as college preparatory writing (Applebee, 1981)--contribute to the creation and apparent effects of such a "portfolio culture"? As coordinators and researchers Camp and Winner state in their overview of PROPEL procedures,

... it was clear that if the portfolio was to have a place in English and language arts classrooms beyond the life of the ArtsPROPEL project, it would need to accommodate all varieties of writing in the English and language arts curriculum. A portfolio designed only for imaginative writing would not be likely to survive (1993, p. 71).

Finally, and from the perspective that relates most directly to the current study: I posed two questions: (1) In what specific, identifiable ways does portfolio culture-based instruction and assessment differ in its effects upon student understandings of writing and of themselves as writers from that which might be defined as "good writing instruction"? and (2) What insights might student-writers' reflections provide regarding those understandings? The developers and teachers of Arts PROPEL state that "... reflective and perceptual skills and habits of mind are interwoven with production activities" (Camp

& Winner, p. 47). As for the importance of reflectivity to this process, one PROPEL teacher stated:

I really believe that reflection is the key that allows the teacher to unlock the picture of students' growth. You can see some change in their writing, but to get the total picture, you must have their reflections. And this is what really opens up the dimensions for assessment to a much broader range of skills that may not have been in your lesson plans (p. 58).

Before teachers of middle and high school English commit often-scarce resources of time, materials, and energies--for both teacher and student--to the cause of incorporating something akin to this "portfolio culture" metaphor into their practice, they need to know more. Questions concerning what students actually believe, think, and do in portfolio-based classrooms need to be investigated in such a way that PROPEL's sense of a portfolio culture can be examined for its role in and contributions to the promising results that Camp (1989, 1992), Cooper & Brown (1992), and Wolf (1989, 1991) have described.

More to the point, we do not know enough about the reflective process as it relates to and reportedly reveals beliefs students hold about writing as it is taught and practiced in portfolio-based classrooms. And it is reflection that lies at the heart of this study (see Appendix A, Sample Reflections Across Codes). If it is true that student writing portfolios are "as much an extended reflection as they are a compilation of student work" (Howard, 1992, p. 8), it seems reasonable to expect that students might display such reflective responses within and about their work with writing as a function of the portfolio process. Dewey's sense of the nature and power of reflection seem most relevant to that which this study was designed to discover.

The successive portions of a reflective thought grow out of one another and support one another: they do not come and go in a medley . . . Active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends constitutes reflective thought (1933, p. 4).

The 'portfolio-culture' classroom

In order to investigate how involvement in what is defined as a 'portfolio-culture' classroom affects student-writers' identities, procedures, understandings, and progress, this study contrasted student reflections on these issues across two instructional settings. The 'portfolio-culture classroom' (ArtsPROPEL/harvard Project Zero, 1993; Camp & Winner, 1993) as modified for Site A participants incorporated two semester-long emphases: (1) domain projects and (2) portfolios.

Differing from Site B's project units in terms of their more open-ended nature, domain projects involved students in the selection of focus and content, while *working*, followed by *showcase*, portfolios enabled Site A students to make more choices and engage in their work in more individualistic ways than their Site B peers. In addition, this teaching/learning environment was distinguished from Site B instruction by three principles that drove classroom activities: (1) *student choice (authorship literacy)*, for which students were encouraged and expected to write and critique as practicing professional authors; (2) *sustained engagement*, used in this study to describe a recurring sequences of activities following the recursive pattern of perception, production, and reflection; and (3) *assessment as an episode of learning*, an ongoing process in which Site A students engaged in a variety of self- and teacher-initiated assessment activities designed to inform as well as to measure student learning.

Working and showcase portfolios (Site A). For this study, both types of portfolios could be defined as "... tool[s] for instruction and student self-assessment ..." as well as a focal point for the "... kind of curriculum that would support the making of useful and revealing portfolios" (Camp & Winner, 1993, p. 71). More specifically, *working* portfolios constituted the focal point of instruction and assessment, and ongoing centers for student efforts in the pursuit of individually-selected writer objectives. Always accessible, *working* portfolios were primary texts for Site A students, serving as (a) nurse logs for final evaluated projects, and (b) raw material for showcase portfolio construction at the

close of the semester.

Site B *writing folders*, in contrast, were static, terminal repositories for student work, accessible to students only when graded papers were returned and responses to questions (see interview and questionnaire protocols) calling for references to folder contents were required.

Overview of the Dissertation

In preparing this dissertation, I faced the challenge of accurately representing the salient features of the “portfolio-culture” classroom as they were implemented in one of the study’s two sites. Because of the complex features of comparative case study research, I chose to represent them in some detail. As I outlined the dissertation’s design, I attempted to build in a kind of scaffolding of the principles and practices at both sites from one chapter to the next. I felt that, due to the complex nature of the data, its sources, and its rich textures, I needed to make direct connections from literature review to presentation of methods, and then to study findings.

In addition, again because of the complex relationships among this study’s two sites, six participants, and reflective data, I felt the need to describe and illustrate the two Essay Fundamentals sites in considerable detail. By doing so, I am hopeful that the findings I report and the explanations and implications that I offer for them are clearly and appropriately grounded in the literature and practice of “portfolio-culture” teaching and learning.

CHAPTER 2 THE PORTFOLIO-CULTURE CLASSROOM: AN EVOLVING LITERATURE BASE ON THE VERGE OF SYNTHESIS AND CLARITY

The purpose of this chapter is to review recent literature related to language arts classrooms that incorporate a portfolio-based approach to writing instruction. More specifically, I consider literature that investigates “portfolio-culture” students’ attitudes toward, understandings of, and claims for their writing and for themselves as writers. To illustrate the several major perspectives that contribute to this area of inquiry, I will discuss studies that explore such features of “portfolio culture” as (1) *student choice* (e.g., of topic, design, and detail), (2) *sustained engagement* (investment over time in the portfolio-culture process), and (3) *teacher support* (instruction, collaboration, and assessment).

In the first section, I present the literature’s descriptions of central principles and essential features of portfolio-based writing instruction, with an emphasis upon what has been referred to as the “portfolio-culture” classroom. I then review the recent writing-based literature as it contributes to each of the above-listed themes. Finally, I summarize the degree to which the literature raises and informs the central question that this study poses: *How does involvement in a portfolio-culture classroom contribute to high school students’ understandings of (1) their identities as writers; (2) the different processes involved in writing, and their use of those processes; (3) their progress as developing writers, and related self-assessment; and (4) the nature of effective writing?*

Overview of Portfolio-Based Writing Instruction

As a topic for investigation, portfolio-based writing instruction and assessment is a relatively new area of inquiry (Glazer & Brown, 1993). The literature base is incomplete, only recently reflecting empirical investigations of portfolio assessment (Metzger & Bryant, 1993). Although no studies to date have directly compared traditionally-conducted “good writing instruction” to “portfolio-based” secondary classrooms with respect to student-

writer reflectivity, several recent studies and program reports pose or investigate significant questions and provide important information about portfolio-based teaching and learning. Despite variously defining *reflection*, *assessment*, and *evaluation* as they pertain to writing instruction, studies and other documents published since 1989 (e.g., Bertisch, 1993; Camp, 1992; Cooper & Brown, 1992; Cox, 1993; Fairchild, 1993; Hitchcock, 1992; Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991; and Wolf, 1991, among others) investigate the premise that student reflectivity is integral to the purposes and possibilities of portfolio-based instruction and learning. For example, Rief (1990, in Graves & Sunstein, 1992) describes the apparently reflective nature of the portfolio in “Eighth Grade: Finding the Value in Evaluation”:

Reading, writing, speaking, and listening are the tools students work with to create meaning for their own purposes. I value students who are able to communicate, think, create, and reflect with those tools. Portfolios become the evidence for what we value in our classrooms. The act of putting together a portfolio is a reflective act in itself, as students choose what to put in there and why. That reflection on where they’ve been, where they are now, and how they got there is what real learning is all about (p. 58).

Not surprisingly, a key issue of portfolio-based studies--and, implicitly, of how the portfolio-based classroom differs from that of more traditional designs for “good writing instruction”--is the degree to which students develop identities of themselves as readers and/or writers--and how teachers can make use of such information as they design instruction and assessment. By describing portfolios as “. . . a natural component of teaching and learning, a process that allows students and teachers to document and reflect on learning . . . (Valencia & Calfee, 1991, p. 335), the literacy portfolio literature offers some possible directions for exploring the recursive themes of *choice*, *engagement*, and *support* as they inform and define the “portfolio-culture” classroom.

In her report of the Literacy Portfolios Project (Manchester, New Hampshire, 1991), Hansen pointed out the centrality of such student involvement, with special

emphasis upon self-awareness, to the purpose and design of literacy portfolios. Students spanning the first to twelfth grades chose items for their literacy portfolios, set goals and posed questions regarding the relative significance of their selections, designed the physical features of their portfolios, and shared in-progress and completed portfolios with teachers and other students. In short, students apparently engaged in reflective, self-evaluative considerations that can lead to self-knowledge. As Hansen explained,

Every adult and student in the project has created a Literacy Portfolio. Whether or not we know ourselves better than anyone else does, our portfolios give us the opportunity to get to know ourselves better. Our literacy is who we are (1992, p. 66).

Although not explicitly directed toward students' writing processes and products, Hansen's discussion of the Literacy Portfolios Project challenges teachers to empower students to contribute in important ways to curricular and instructional goals and approaches for attaining them. Accordingly, these literacy portfolios incorporated non-school items, including student writing based upon outside reading and other student-selected materials. Students also determined the significance and relevance of their selections by measuring them against three questions: "Who am I?" "Who am I as a reader-writer?" and "How does this item show my growth?" (p. 67).

This theme of the centrality of student engagement in a nurturing, supportive learning environment is at the core of the portfolio-culture conversation. In their comprehensive overview of portfolio-based instruction and assessment in the reading/writing classroom, for example, Tierney, Carter, & Desai (1991) asserted that classrooms emphasizing student *ownership* (e.g., self-selecting goals, selections, and/or projects relating to personal reading and/or writing growth) also encourage students to respond creatively, reflexively, and knowledgeably to their own writing.

The "Portfolio-Culture" Classroom: Arts PROPEL

The most frequently cited--and most comprehensively described--portfolio-based

program in the United States is Arts PROPEL (Camp, 1992; Camp & Winner, 1993; Wolf, 1991), a collaborative project funded by the Rockefeller Foundation and designed by Project Zero (Harvard Graduate School of Education), the Educational Testing Service (ETS), and the Pittsburgh Public Schools. Involving music, the visual arts, and imaginative writing, PROPEL (a modified acronym for programs designed around student *perception, production, and reflection*) was based upon the belief that the creation of a “portfolio culture” would make student progress and accomplishment possible and documentable. As Wolf (1987/88) stated, “The project [Arts PROPEL] is built on the conviction that it is time to take a fresh look at what the arts teach and how art teachers examine what their students learn” (p. 26).

Arts PROPEL teachers engage their students in one of three domains, including music, visual art, and imaginative writing, the latter emphasizing poetry and drama (Camp, 1992, p. 62). According to Howard (1990) in a resource paper drawn from her teaching experiences in a Pittsburgh PROPEL classroom, such a culture establishes a learning environment that encourages student-writer choices, engages students in explorations of the writing process, and emphasizes reflection as a core value and behavior. For Howard and other PROPEL teachers and researchers, “. . . writing portfolios are as much an extended reflection as they are a compilation of work” (p. 8). Although Howard provides neither explicit examples nor analyses of such “extended” reflections, Camp & Winner (1993) do so in their handbook designed for teachers of *imaginative writing*. An indication of the theoretical and instructional context for those principles is implicit in Wolf’s description of the project’s underlying premises, written during the initial year of Arts PROPEL’s five-year experiment:

First, in the arts, the ability to find interesting problems is probably at least as important as being able to answer someone else’s questions. In music, visual art, or creative writing, individuality and invention are at least as essential as mastering technique or knowledge. Second, learning in the arts

often occurs in very large chunks spread out over a long period of time (Wolf, 1987/1988, p. 26).

Involving their students in the processes and via the perspectives that characterize the work of poets, dramatists, and other imaginative writers, PROPEL middle and high school teachers have instituted instructional programs based upon *perception*, *production*, and *reflection*, as defined in the Arts PROPEL literature (e.g., Camp, 1992; Camp & Winner, 1993). One of those lessons from the arts, according to Pittsburgh Public Schools PROPEL teachers and researchers, is that learning occurs over time: the evolution from collective writing folder (*process folder*) to reflective (*product*, or *showcase*) portfolio mirrors PROPEL's descriptions of those three namesake processes. More specifically, it is the apparently dialogical process [see Figure 2-1] between collecting student writing in folders, involving students in the selection process, and assessing completed portfolios that defines PROPEL's "portfolio culture":

The center portion of the diagram examines the heart of the entire process of teaching and learning about writing--a series of dialogues about writing between students, between teacher and student, and between student and parent which create a "portfolio culture" and encourage all writers to join the community of learners at all points along the writing process. The intention is to replace competition with cooperation (Arts PROPEL to PROPEL: Portfolios in Pittsburgh Classrooms, 1992, n.p.).

This "portfolio culture" is, according to PROPEL researchers, teachers, and their students, greater than the sum of its parts, for it also "... requires a reflectiveness on the part of teachers and students that reaches deep into instruction and curriculum ... " (Camp & Winner, 1993, p. 74). Stressing the centrality of various assessment activities to this classroom culture, Camp & Winner also emphasized the importance of ongoing interactions between PROPEL teachers and their students, their colleagues and peers, parents, and building and district administrators. From assisting students in developing criteria and standards for writing assessment, to participating in cross-classroom "review sessions" (Camp & Winner, 1993, p76) and conferring with supervisory personnel, PROPEL teachers--and, by extension, their students--do not operate in isolation. According to

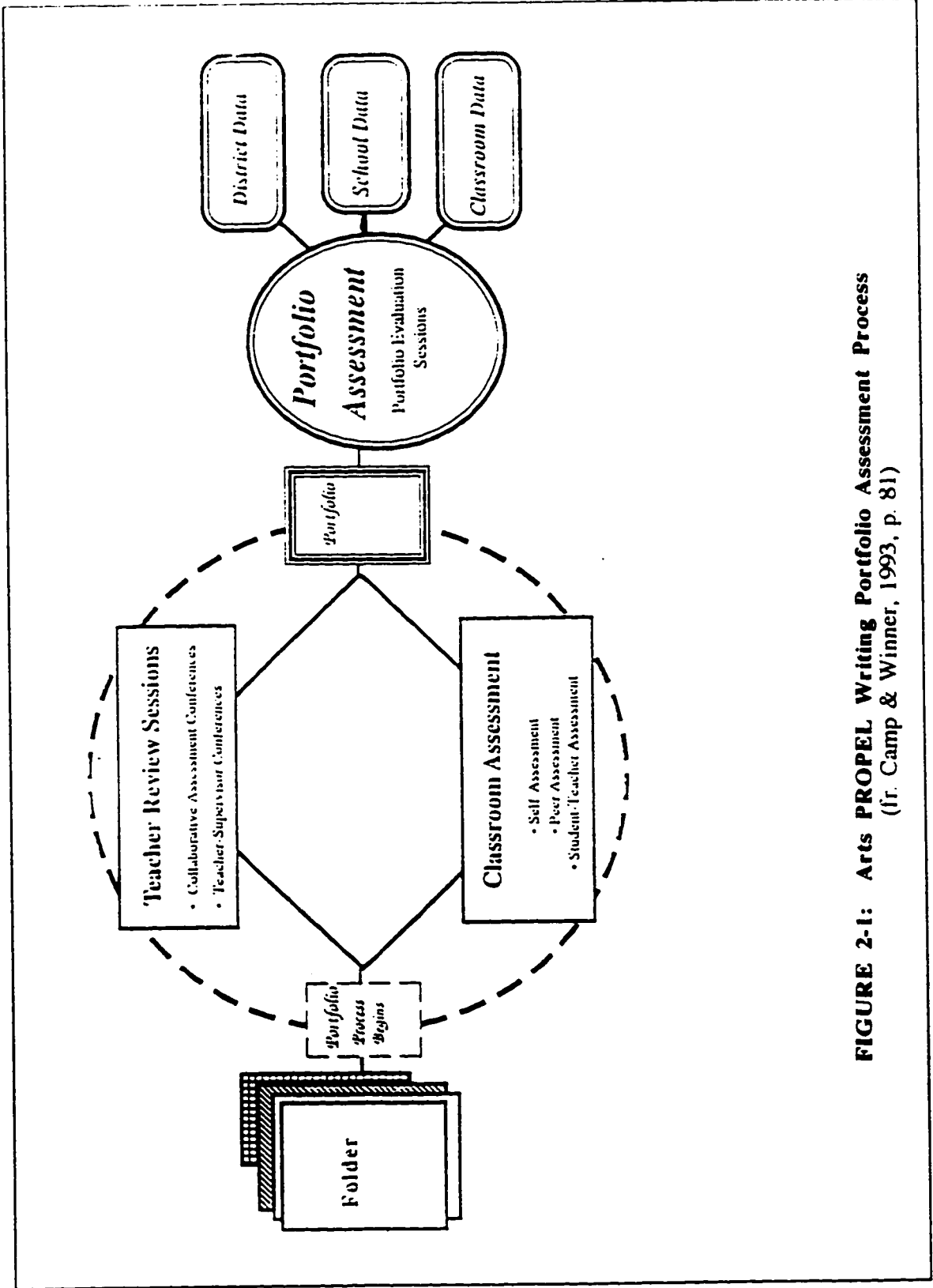


FIGURE 2-1: Arts PROPEL Writing Portfolio Assessment Process
(fr. Camp & Winner, 1993, p. 81)

available description and documentation, the PROPEL “portfolio culture” brings an impressive combination of communication, information, and expertise to bear on student writing instruction and assessment.

Thematic Summary: The “Portfolio Culture”

As described in the literature, “portfolio culture” classrooms feature at least partial student determination of writing criteria and standards, selection of pieces for portfolio inclusion, development of a certain sense of ownership of and responsibility for their writing, and continuous self-assessment with respect to individual written products as well as to overall writing growth [see Figure 2-1]. Accordingly, viewing the act of writing as both process and product is central to the “portfolio culture” classroom (Cooper & Brown, 1992; Glazer & Brown, 1993; Lucas, 1992; Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991; Yancey, 1992).

Exploration and personal *choice*; *sustained engagement* via investment over time in the portfolio-culture process; and *teacher support* with regard to instruction, collaboration, and assessment: These principles figure prominently in the portfolio-culture conversation. In his introductory comments concerning Belanoff and Dickson’s anthology of programs and studies of portfolio-based instruction and assessment in high school and college writing classrooms, Elbow (1991) describes how portfolios mesh with the sort of process-based, student-centered instruction that PROPEL portfolio classrooms exemplify:

Most of all, then, portfolio assessment is attractive to teachers because it *rewards* rather than punishes the essential things we try to place at the heart of our writing courses: exploratory writing, in which the writer questions deeply and gets lost; discussion with peers and with teacher; feedback on drafts from peers and teacher; and extensive, substantive revision . . . portfolio grading helps the learning climate because it reinforces continuing effort and improvement: it encourages students to try to revise and improve poor work rather than feel punished for it or give up. In a writing course, portfolios invite students to invest themselves and try for what is exciting, rather than playing it safe by writing ‘acceptably’ or defensively (p. xv).

From global definitions to detailed descriptions, researchers and practitioners write

about the portfolio--and the portfolio-based classroom--as organic instructional quality, not as static object. The following definition embraces those portfolio-culture themes of evolutionary learning, of student investment, and of reflection as a central element of the evaluative process:

In general, educators have defined a portfolio as a purposeful collection of student work over time. It is a tool for expanding the quantity and quality of information we use to examine learning and growth. As a process, the creation of a portfolio honors the importance of collecting evaluative information formatively as well as summatively . . . It also communicates to students, teachers, and parents that assessment is something we all engage in, a self-evaluation or reflection that helps us set goals and paths to learning (Valencia, 1992, p. 33-34).

Importance of Student Choice to the 'Portfolio-Culture' Classroom

This section examines the descriptive, interpretive, and emerging critical literature regarding the degree to which supporting principles and particular features of *student choice* contribute to language arts portfolio-culture implementations and related student behaviors. Although it is difficult--and somewhat problematic--to 'tease out' discrete references to and analyses of *student choice*, *sustained engagement*, and *teacher support* within a literature base that remains more descriptive of portfolio programs than critical of programmatic elements (Metzger & Bryant, 1993; Yancey, 1992), these three key features of the portfolio-culture classroom are each addressed within a number of post-1990 studies and project reports.

A Middle School Application Featuring Student Choice

In listening to the tapes of Karen interviewing her students, I noticed a similar event in every interview. At the beginning of each, the students' replies to Karen's questions were short and nondescript. They seemed guarded and their answers predictable. But as each interview progressed, the students' voices relaxed, their answers became longer and more detailed, and they began to offer suggestions about how portfolios might be used and writing taught. . . . She [Karen] also told me about her pleasure and surprise at speaking to them in this way. "It was really interesting. Especially about the idea of choices. They like to have choices. All the way, along the way." For her, hearing her students like this changed some of the decision making in her classroom (Luce-Kapler, 1996, p. 48).

As an outgrowth of her description of a case study of writing portfolios created by seventh grade language arts students, Luce-Kapler advocated viewing portfolios not merely as assessment tools or aggregations of student work, but as “. . . the opportunity to track development and survey a body of work, and for students to gain self-assessment skills” (p. 46). Luce-Kapler interviewed a small [unspecified] number of student-writers on three occasions over a three-month instructional period. She observed classroom procedures and interviewed “selected” students in order to gain an understanding of classroom portfolios from the perspective of her own professional writing experiences, which included the purposeful collecting, arranging, and presenting of individual pieces for a given audience (“Each time I created a different portfolio from my pool of writing. Those portfolios formed the basis of what I wanted to say orally about my writing . . .”p. 46.)

Delving into matters of student experiences with and feelings about at home- and in-school writing, interview questions and responses reportedly grew out of these students’ portfolios, each representing written products along with writing process-related documents. Luce-Kapler reported that--from revealing their sense of the nature of good writing when asked to discuss the reasons for choosing their respective ‘Best Pieces’, to commenting about their selections from among writing topics and procedures--these seventh-grade students valued the freedom to make such choices, and felt comfortable in doing so. Despite expressing a variety of opinions about these and other writing-related topics, the students Luce-Kapler chose to interview reportedly appreciated the freedom within carefully constructed limits that their teacher had provided. (“. . . the students came to realize that just as they didn’t want topics to be too prescriptive, neither did they want a teacher to . . . tell them to write whatever they wanted. . . . What they needed from the teacher was a place to begin, a groundwork from which their ideas could flourish” p. 47.)

Because available information concerning this study is limited to relatively general

descriptions, Luce-Kapler's claims relating to the significance of choice to middle school students' apparent growth as writers and attitudes toward writing are problematic. For example, the study's framing of questions regarding student choice may have confounded the highly visible *portfolio-culture* -related features of collecting and selecting individual pieces for product portfolio inclusion with such universal 'good writing instruction' practices as modeling the writing process, providing prewriting and drafting options, and establishing a nurturing, supportive atmosphere. In addition, Luce-Kapler does not speak of these students' reflective experiences beyond the interviews themselves, whether conducted by herself or by the teacher. Also, because she neither provides control group data nor identifies how or on what basis she selected interview subjects, Luce-Kapler's findings may be confounded by other variables. Finally, the study does not refer to the instructor's assessment methods for either individual written work or completed portfolios; as a result, we do not learn how interviewees felt about the apparent significance of their choices upon how they and others assessed final written products and/or resulting portfolios.

Yet despite these and other unaccounted for conditions and variables, Luce-Kapler's observations concerning the significance of choice for students enrolled in portfolio-based composition classes reinforce themes that previous studies explored and indicate directions for further research into the role student choice plays in establishing portfolio-culture classrooms.

Power, Choice, and Authority

As we converse with students about the portfolio, we are setting the criteria for evaluation. As students note contexts and decide on purpose, audience, voice, arrangement and order, they are setting the standards by which we can evaluate their ability to accomplish these goals. We evaluate how well they have developed their text to meet the goals they set for themselves and the essay (Metzger & Bryant, 1993, p. 286).

Judging by its ubiquitous appearance in the literature, student choice, with respect

to a variety of portfolio-related processes and features, is an enormously important element of portfolio assessment in general and of the portfolio-culture classroom in particular. Within this position paper intended as “a beginning resource for teachers who are investigating portfolios. . .” (p. 279), Metzger & Bryant reviewed the portfolio assessment literature since the late 1970s. In so doing, they asserted that *power* --a concept manifesting itself in occurrences and degrees of choice--is an unavoidable and problematic variable for portfolio assessment in general and for the portfolio-based composition classroom in particular. According to the authors, the complex relationship between teacher and student (1) constitutes a central element of the portfolio assessment/portfolio-culture discussion; (2) should be purposefully, methodically constructed in portfolio-culture classrooms; and (3) has not been sufficiently studied. Regardless of the degree of choice students may employ (and enjoy), the instructor retains ultimate authority “. . . and the powerful curriculum that he or she represents” (p. 285).

Referring to such portfolio-based issues as the respective roles of formative and summative evaluation, teacher and student contributions to assessment standards and procedures, the role of collaborative group work and of peer evaluation, and designing and selecting content for portfolios, Metzger & Bryant reviewed selected portfolio assessment studies, descriptions, and prescriptions through the lens of authority and control. Metzger & Bryant acknowledged that more recent descriptions and studies of portfolio assessment explore the efforts that some instructors have made to “. . . empower the student--to break down the traditional hierarchy in order to enable students to become full participants in the educational process . . .” (p. 285). They also reported that the literature (e.g., Bishop, 1990; Newkirk, 1992; Simmons, 1992; Sommers, 1991; Weiser, 1991) also raises power-related issues that program developers and teachers should consider as they integrate portfolio assessment within composition instruction. Metzger & Bryant concluded that, as befits its classification as a form of *authentic assessment* (e.g., Cole, Ryan, & Kick,

1995), portfolio-based instruction and learning in composition classrooms must emulate the notion that “. . . writers choose and decide as they practice their craft, accepting, modifying, and vetoing during the various stages” (p. 287).

From ‘Ownership’ to ‘Empowerment’

References to student choice are often conceptualized in the literature as either contributing to or directly constituting *ownership*, a quality or identity that itself may be said to result in student *empowerment*. In their comprehensive overview of portfolio-based instruction and assessment in the reading/writing classroom, Tierney, Carter, & Desai (1991) asserted that classrooms emphasizing student *ownership* also facilitate students’ tendencies to respond creatively, reflexively, and knowledgably to their own writing. The authors defined *ownership* both physically (“A key is to introduce and use portfolios so that they remain the students’ property . . . p. 70) and instructionally (“Part of the spirit [of encouraging independence] is inviting students to help develop the criteria so that they know exactly what they have to work toward to be successful. . . . to let students have a say in the kinds of work that they’re going to be doing” p. 4).

Based upon research and development of portfolio-based instruction and assessment, K-12, with seven teachers representing several Ohio school districts over a two-year period, this study entailed observations and interviews of teachers and students, focusing on the role that *empowerment* apparently plays in successful portfolio-culture classrooms. Tierney, Carter, & Desai defined this concept as (1) behaviors that grow out of elements of *ownership*, as described above, resulting in (2) a form of independence that manifests itself through informed choice, personal awareness, and “. . . the power of their own and others’ pursuits” (p. 70). The authors stated that their investigations did not compare students and teachers involved in portfolio-based programs with those working in traditional teaching/learning environments. During the third year of the project, the authors created a research design involving such comparisons and incorporating larger samples of

teachers and students across grade levels in a single school district. Data relating to students' reflective responses included (1) self-assessments of perceived strengths and weaknesses, (2) perceptions of changes in reading and writing, and (3) perceptions of others' judgments of their work.

According to the authors, results suggested that most students--at whatever age or level of reading/writing development--began the reflective process at relatively simple levels. Following long-term (semester or year), varied engagement in reflective activities, students are reported to have demonstrated markedly higher levels of awareness, self-assessment, and decision-making regarding their individual sense of what it means to be a writer. Tierney, Carter, & Desai do not present an explicit understanding or model of how student *empowerment*--as a consequence of gaining a sense of *ownership* through choice--is represented or can be identified within those reflections. The authors also do not provide sufficient documentation in support of their claims for and anecdotal descriptions of classrooms incorporating portfolio assessment. In addition, Tierney et al. raise questions regarding how students view themselves as writers--and about how they do or do not come to see themselves as informed choice makers in collaboration with their teachers. Those questions are not, however, sufficiently pursued in this study. Nevertheless, this often-cited comprehensive text based upon the authors' research includes a number of helpful perspectives as well as procedures and strategies for those teachers who would design portfolio-based reading/writing environments for their students.

A Portfolio-Culture Classroom in Support of Choice

Important elements of student choice as defined and enumerated in the portfolio assessment and portfolio-culture/PROPEL literature have also been documented as they are incorporated in a more traditional "college-preparatory writing" course (Applebee, 1991). Bertisch (1993) reported the conversations among and practices of the several public (urban and suburban) high school teachers who participated in a portfolio assessment seminar (as

part of the New York City Writing Project). Bertisch instituted the PROPEL elements of (1) a progression from folder compilation to portfolio selection and organization, and (2) a variation of PROPEL's *classroom assessment* component, featuring self, peer, and student-teacher assessment, but not, apparently, incorporating PROPEL's "Family Review" or "Teacher Review" sessions (Pittsburgh Public Schools, 1992). In addition, her students, as for those of Camp (1992) and other PROPEL teachers, combined expository with imaginative writing projects, largely according to student choice ("One student may be polishing a college essay while another is completing a twelve-page mystery. From the beginning, we think about choice and revision" p. 55).

Bertisch designed alternative ways of documenting and assessing her high school students' levels of self-assessment and understandings of writing process and product, and she reported a summary of program design and related student involvement. Exchanging her more traditional routine of assigning, monitoring, and assessing student papers for a writing workshop environment, Bertisch established a portfolio-based program that evidently invited student choice and reflection. By providing writing prompts, involving students in peer-editing teams, emphasizing student-selected revisions, and requiring periodic letters of progress, Bertisch encouraged her high school seniors to shape their own writing objectives and processes within the context of such traditional whole-class features as assignment types, goals, and deadlines.

According to Bertisch, a key element of the program involved the reflective aspects of learning about one's own choices regarding writing processes and products, or "performances." For example, midway through the year-long, senior-level course, she asked her students to respond to questions from a "Portfolio Reflections" list (Camp, 1989) so that they might consider the nature of their accomplishments as writers ("What do you see as the special strengths of this work?"), and the ways they might revise a given product

(‘If you could go on working on this piece, what would you do?’ --Camp, 1989, cited in Bertisch, 1993, p. 57).

Based upon students’ response sheets (four during the year) and self-evaluation charts, along with responses to questions she posed during individual end-of-year conferences, Bertisch summarized the effects writing portfolios apparently had upon her students’ reflective responses. Bertisch reported that these students frequently expressed their progress in the context of understandings and needs as writers, and that each student-writer’s series of four portfolios revealed “. . . the individuality and progress of the writer,” and that “. . . portfolios have become chronicles of the ways in which students document their growth and take responsibility for analyzing and improving their own writing” (p. 59).

Yet this claim is not thoroughly discussed or documented in terms of apparent evidence of student reflectivity. This particular document provides only brief anecdotal references to student reflection and choice. It does not, in and of itself, meet the reflective criterion that LeMahieu, Eresh, & Wallace (Pittsburgh Public Schools) proposed for PROPEL students--and their teachers:

Thus the portfolios created by the end of the school year are designed to give a complete portrait of the student as learner. Students are asked to become metacognitive [reflective] regarding their own learning: They are asked to use their entire collection of writing as a text from which to learn about themselves as writers and learners (undated, p. 4).

The Role of Sustained Engagement in Portfolio-Culture Classrooms

One of the real drawbacks to single-sample conventional writing assessment is that it has little to do with the way we teach or work as writers. . . . Portfolios, on the other hand, are widely recognized as having intrinsic pedagogical value, since they allow composing over time and delay evaluation until a student is ready to choose and or revise her best work. It follows, then, that using portfolios to assess student writing furnishes an important link between the way we teach and the way we assess (Huot, 1994, p. 329).

Huot’s remarks, expressed in the context of defining and documenting the validity

of portfolio-related data for purposes of large-scale assessment, also alludes to a second central theme in the portfolio-assessment literature: the nature and apparent importance of students' long-term engagement in the portfolio *process*. If a student is to develop a true sense of *ownership* (Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991) of the activities in which she engages and the products she revises, publishes, and assesses in the writing classroom, she will need to be immersed in an instructional environment that might best be defined as *sustained engagement*.

The Arts PROPEL Project

In conjunction with the Schools Reform Program of the Rockefeller Foundation and as a participant /researcher in the five-year Arts PROPEL research project, Wolf (1991) reported upon research that supported her and other PROPEL researchers' efforts to "... find ways of capturing growth over time so that students [could] become informed and thoughtful assessors of their own histories as learners" (p. 36). Defining the writing portfolio as a "prepared accomplishment" (p. 14) created over time and through experimentation, reflection, and revision, Wolf investigated that which she defined as a "... third ... aspect of assessment, which is neither measurement, nor endorsement, but an occasion for learning" [emphasis added]. In so doing, Wolf disparaged traditional testing--especially single-incident, so-called *performance* assessment--for its disregard of opportunities to (1) engage students in self-assessment, (2) teach students strategies for obtaining others' responses to their work, and (3) encourage students to make discerning and appropriate applications of those responses.

Wolf's and others' (e.g., Camp, 1990; Gardner, 1990; Resnick & Resnick, 1990) investigations of how and to what effects scholars and artists routinely engage in ongoing assessment constituted the focus for advocating a learning environment and instructional procedure that they defined as a *portfolio culture*. Such a culture incorporates the individual, recursive elements or stages of the writing process (e.g., Flower & Hayes,

1980; Young, Becker, & Pike, 1970). It does so within a student-centered atmosphere in which “. . . there is frequent and public discussion about what makes for good work and a clear sense that good work takes a long time to emerge” (Wolf, 1991, p. 22). In addition, Wolf portrays *portfolio culture* classrooms as involving student access to and development of criteria for and exemplars of samples of work. Along with (1) viewing assessment as “a larger episode of learning,” (2) incorporating the “scaffolding of reflective and critical capacities,” and (3) emphasizing “reflection and response . . .” (p. 19), the establishment of a *portfolio culture* is said to define and inform the *process-portfolio*. This interactive bank of work-in-progress houses “. . . a representative collection of work [that] yields a kind of autobiographical understanding which includes knowledge of past change and the prospect of future development” (p. 20).

Perhaps the instructional idea most essential to Wolf’s sense of the portfolio culture and its contributions to the process-portfolio is that of student engagement. Involving students of various abilities, interests, and motivations in the long-term (semester or year-long) pursuit of serious, honest considerations of how their own reflections about and others’ critiques of their work might contribute to their “portrait of themselves as writers . . .” (p. 23) would seem to present a substantial challenge, despite Wolf’s claims of student “investment” and “discernment.” As part of her description of this process, Wolf refers to the need to explicitly teach students to “become adept at using their own reflections, as well as the response from other readers, to inform their work” (p. 23).

Much of what Wolf and others (e.g., Camp, 1992; Camp & Winner, 1993) advocate in establishing and maintaining a *portfolio culture* requires the knowledge and enthusiasm of instructors trained in ways of establishing, supporting, and assessing the myriad compositional evidence that such a writing classroom environment produces. Also, without changes in (or waivers of) current public school policies for determining and reporting student grades, this vision of the portfolio culture classroom would be difficult to

implement in many school districts. Student (and teacher) sustained engagement in the ongoing, recursive production and assessment of writing (or of the visual arts, or of history, as Wolf refers to these and other disciplines) constitutes a holistic and natural, albeit deliberate and purposeful, blending of instruction and learning, production and assessment (Gardner, 1990).

Finally, Wolf claims that “. . . it is essential to invent a new vision of student assessment as a productive force in American education” (p. 33), yet this report only partially defines and describes how student assessment might contribute to the *portfolio culture* approach to sustained engagement as played out in more typical classroom settings. By virtue of its frequent and often central references in the portfolio-culture discussion, the potential --and actual--contributions of reflection to student-writers’ understandings of their growth and identity as writers and of the nature of effective writing is in need of greater and more explicit attention than Wolf presents in this study.

Sustained Engagement through Criteria Development

My observation is that most college writers have an internal set of criteria that they use to judge their own work. I want to use reflective writing to help them bring their criteria to the surface, then have them work together with other writers to develop criteria for specific assignments--with the idea that the more sophisticated list they internalize will enable them to become more independent writers. Doing this means changing my role in the classroom from one who does the reflecting for them and who provides the criteria for evaluation to one who creates opportunities for them to reflect and to experiment with evaluative criteria (1993, p. 2).

Fairchild reported that her action research in-progress of twelve college expository writing students (over half of whom were business majors) investigated what she referred to as the “interplay” between reflection and assessment. These student-writers evidently worked and learned in an atmosphere that closely aligned with Wolf’s description of the *portfolio culture* : an ongoing discussion of the nature of and criteria for recognizing and producing good writing, in conjunction with the understanding that writing is a complex, recursive, and often time-intensive process (1991). Also in keeping with Wolf’s work,

Fairchild defined “reflective writing” according to Lucas’s reference to *reflective evaluation*, “a kind of formative feedback the *learners give themselves*” (Lucas, 1992, in Yancey, p. 2).

Fairchild described helping her students operate as a “community of writers,” a term she defines as taking advantage of opportunities to reflect upon their own work as well as to evaluate their peers’ writing—through class discussion and according to agreed upon criteria. With the intention of studying the “. . . implications for portfolio assessment for student learning and teacher methodology” (p. 1), Fairchild directed her students’ participation in a drafting-reflecting-sharing-reviewing-revising process not unlike that described by Camp (1992) and Wolf (1991). Each week, students were asked to record “notes” as to their sense of the quality of drafts, doing so on the reverse sides of the papers themselves. They then discussed revising ideas and plans in peer groups, individually selected specific qualities or issues for Fairchild’s feedback, and revised each paper as frequently as they felt necessary until semester’s end, when product portfolios were due.

Fairchild claimed (1) that these college writing students came to her course with “an internal set of criteria” with which they tended to judge their own work, (2) that the reflective writing and responding process as described above “. . . help[ed] them to bring their criteria to the surface” (p. 1), and (3) that the resulting “merging” of reflection contributed to student understandings of their progress as writers. Speaking from the perspective of an instructor whose expectations for her students’ performance were both high and untested, particularly regarding students’ intensive engagement with their own and one another’s work, Fairchild admitted to her frustration with group-developed criteria that seemed “. . . vague, too general, missing important elements” (p. 7).

Yet in accordance with her belief that student-writers must reflect upon, discuss, and ultimately determine the criteria for which they would be evaluated, Fairchild allowed

the process to continue, citing a central theme of portfolio assessment literature in support of her decision: “For now, the wealth of data I have reminds me of what Peter Elbow, Pat Belanoff, Marcia Dickson and Kathleen Yancey all say about portfolio assessment in general--that is, it’s messy” (p. 9).

Fairchild’s report of her college freshmen composition students’ drafting, reflecting, revising, and evaluating experiences in support of portfolio preparation amounts to a promising yet only preliminarily investigated approach to investment over time in the portfolio-culture process. A number of important questions are embedded within her account of this single-semester writing course. For example, how did the claimed “interplay of reflection and evaluation” (p. 1) operate for individual students, within and across particular writing assignments, and in support of their respective development of portfolios? How does Fairchild define such reflection? To what degree and to what effect did students gain “control of the criteria for which their writing [would] be evaluated”? What is the apparent relationship between these students’ understandings of the processes involved in writing, and the individual and group activities that defined their *sustained engagement* in the portfolio process, and in what specific ways did students’ writer-identities evolve during this semester of instruction, and in accordance with their experiences? Other studies pertaining to students’ sustained engagement in the portfolio-process shed additional light upon some of the issues embedded within these questions.

A Portfolio Culture Emerges for Young Writers

The relationship between student-centered learning and assessment is also central to Hitchcock (1992), a single-classroom descriptive study of student reflectivity in the context of a portfolio-based writing/reading (literacy) curriculum. With its contributions to the literature regarding the roles reflectivity and evaluation play in students’ understanding and valuing of the writing process, this study’s design and results offer important implications for further investigation.

In this case study of twenty-one fifth graders, Hitchcock found that many students developed explicit identities of themselves as writers, and gained clearer understandings of writing processes. In addition, Hitchcock reported that students developed a more assertive sense of *ownership* (defined as control over topic selection, elective use of class time for reading, peer conferencing, or independent revising) of their writing procedures and products. Based upon a “collaborative literacy” program including teacher- and student-selected reading, dialogue journals, learning logs, and small-group discussions and peer conferencing sessions, Hitchcock’s students evidently engaged in rich explorations of their own literacy. Significant for its similarities to the work of PROPEL projects, Hitchcock’s study presented students’ literacy portfolios as “. . . biographies of students’ work which represent a wide range and diverse collection of accomplishments and personal reflections” (Wolf, 1989, cited in Hitchcock, 1992, p. 7).

Five “fundamental principles” drawn from the portfolio assessment literature directed Hitchcock’s literacy portfolios, two of which bear directly on student reflectivity. According to Hitchcock, such portfolios should be (1) “Continuous and dynamic: Portfolios . . . look at growth, change, and development over time . . .” [and] (2) “Collaborative: Students should work collaboratively with their teachers in reflecting on, evaluating and selecting pieces for inclusion . . .” (p. 8). Distinguishing among self-assessment, self-evaluation, and self-reflection, Hitchcock defined *self-reflection* for the purposes of this study as “. . . any affective responses made about one’s own writing” as they grew out of students’ familiarity with the writing process and the “attitudes, perceptions, and values children have about writing” (p. 99).

In addition to the interesting comparisons of this study’s theoretical premises and portfolio design with those of both Wolf (1991) and Fairchild (1993), Hitchcock’s methodology is also instructive. Entry slips, “. . . aimed at collecting students’ perceptions of individual writing,” and reflections on their writing as a whole, were taken

at mid- and end-points of the study. For the latter, “. . . students were asked to reflect on their writing as a whole . . . given time to review the contents of their portfolio, . . . [and] asked to respond to the question, ‘What do you like best about your writing?’” (p. 20).

Unlike Fairchild’s college writers, who developed project-based criteria through reflection and discussion as part of their engagement with the portfolio process, Hitchcock’s fifth-grade writers’ experiences over time were more tightly teacher-directed, including the selection of universally applied writing criteria. These students’ reflective responses were directed toward six frequently cited writing criteria (e.g., Spandel & Stiggins, 1990): conventions, ideas, organization, sentencings, voice, and word choice. These criteria were nearly identical to those used in PROPEL classrooms, as reported in Camp & Winner (1993), and by the Oregon Language Arts New Standards Team (Oregon Department of Education, 1994) *portfolio culture* descriptions.

In her discussion of study results, Hitchcock referred to students’ tendencies to speak of individual pieces in more specific terms, and to express their own writing/writer attributes more clearly and precisely at the end of this eight-month portfolio-based program than was the case at the beginning (October) of the study. At Phases II and III, Hitchcock asked students to review the pieces they had selected and to write introductions for their portfolios, focusing on their perceptions of writing improvement or change. After completing these self-reflections, students were then asked to respond to an eighteen-question self-efficacy scale.

Hitchcock found that students’ reflective statements at Phase III (June) indicated less emphasis on such ‘presentation’ aspects of their work as neatness and handwriting, and more explicit references to writing quality (six criteria, or traits) and more specific references to attributes of particular written pieces. The author then coded self-reflective comments regarding students’ perceived strengths and growth as writers into sixteen categories, including the original six criteria and such additional categories as “affective.”

“length,” “collaboration,” and “process.” From Phase II (February) to Phase III four months later, Hitchcock reported that the number of growth-related comments had increased by 80%.

Additionally, Hitchcock pointed out that students’ self-reflections on individual pieces and on overall writing ability were also coded and categorized, then analyzed according to frequency of response. Hitchcock reported that at Phase II and III, “strength of ideas” and “quality of voice” became of interest to the students, and that comments referring to writing *process*, *organization*, and *word choice* also increased. Entry slips, along with writer’s growth statements, reflected a marked increase in the frequency of comments from Phase II to Phase III, and a higher percentage of comments related to *ideas* and to *details* than was the case at Phase I (baseline).

Because Hitchcock’s comprehensive investigation into student reflectivity as it reveals writing accomplishment and growth is descriptive rather than comparative, claims for student-writer growth and change are, in effect, tentative. Still, this carefully documented study suggests promising directions and approaches for further investigation into the role sustained engagement in the portfolio process plays in “portfolio culture” classrooms.

Teacher Support in Portfolio Culture Classrooms: The Importance of Scaffolding

Because “a portfolio pedagogy supports an open classroom and relies upon a genuinely academic environment” (Yancey, 1992, p. 18), I found that a process I once owned now must be owned by my students. The shift I have made in my classroom from shared decision-making to student-owned decision-making has been one of the serendipitous results of a portfolio system, one that I believe results in increased opportunities of teacher education students to reflect on personal and professional growth (Stroble, 1992, p. 1).

Stroble’s description of a portfolio-based teacher education education program emphasized the widely advocated notion that those who would teach should develop at least

some degree of awareness of--and, it may be hoped, empathy for--their students' experiences as they participate in teacher-selected activities. By virtue of representing a state (Kentucky) that mandates portfolio assessment of learning in several academic subjects, including writing, University of Louisville preservice teachers are expected to prepare portfolios, just as must all Kentucky secondary students.

Stroble described how she made the sometimes difficult transition from classroom director and decision-maker to resource person and student supporter. By means of instruction, collaboration, and assessment, Stroble encouraged and guided her students' investment in a *portfolio culture* that was apparently largely of their own invention. Although closely related to the notion of *student choice*, and perhaps nearly inseparable from considerations of *sustained engagement*, *teacher support* is a third essential component of the portfolio-culture classroom.

In her discussion of the kinds of assessments that meet Arts PROPEL standards as "occasions for learning," Wolf (1991) presented a similar picture of the teacher's supporting role for student performance, doing so via an intriguing analogy: The teacher as *scaffold builder and monitor*:

... we [PROPEL developers] were committed to investigating the idea that teachers . . . would develop the kinds of critical judgment that would permit them to see, value and nurture possibilities in the work of students . . . [and] we wanted to design assessments that provided information, not just about final products, but also about students' capacity to take a work from first draft to finished piece. In this way, we were interested in a form of dynamic assessment that would yield information about students' entry level of performance and their performance when they had the scaffolding provided by models, consultation, resources, and their own option to appraise and re-enter a project. Thus, we wanted assessments that provided a view of student achievement that encompassed development . . . as well as a clear reading of where a student's work stood in relation to the standards of excellence in a particular field (p. 19).

Available studies do not provide empirical evidence of the degree to which students engaged in various (and variously described) *portfolio culture* contexts "perform," when compared with non-portfolio culture student performance. Several studies do, however,

suggest ways in which *teacher support* --via instruction, collaboration, and assessment-- apparently contributes to students' investment in and acceptance of such portfolio culture roles as establishing goals, selecting portfolio content, reflecting upon both process and product, and assessing personal growth and accomplishment.

Providing Opportunities and Options

Sharing Hitchcock's interest in students' sense of themselves as writers, Cooper & Brown (1992) also investigated ways of empowering students, yet doing so in secondary writing classes. Based upon a model founded by the California Assessment Program (CAP), Development Team members (including Cooper & Brown), interim (process) portfolios were designed to encourage students to "... reflect on their abilities as writers" (p. 40), as well as to "see where they have come and clarify where [as writers] they want to go" (p. 45). Similar to the PROPEL portfolio design, with its incorporation of a student *writing inventory* (Camp & Winner, 1993), Cooper & Brown asked their students to write an *introduction* for this same reflective purpose:

The introduction comes first in the portfolio but is written after students have assembled the body of their portfolios . . . Students' introductions are fascinating to read since they give insight into how students see themselves as writers (p. 40).

Cooper & Brown claimed that by (1) engaging students in writing to learn activities (Britton, 1982, as cited in Cooper & Brown), (2) asking them to select 'best writing' pieces and to provide rationales for their choices, and (3) encouraging them to share perceptions, processes, and products in small groups, teachers would be able to create linkages between instruction and assessment that would make sense for and seem natural to student-writers. In addition, the authors asserted that when teachers help students to articulate their rationales for product (*showcase*) portfolio inclusion, plus provide students with sufficient time and guidance to reflect upon class activities (e.g., timed writing exercises) and individual choices (e.g., selecting and describing the qualities of individual

written pieces), students become more aware of and more willing to participate in their own decision-making processes as producers of effective writing.

Cooper & Brown offered summaries of three types of evidence for these claims: (1) *comparisons* of two similar written products, assigned early on and later in the school year; (2) *metacognitive writes* (reflective responding) initiated after each major writing project; and (3) *self-analyses* submitted at the close of the first semester and again at the end of the academic year. Cooper's students reviewed two pieces, introduced by similar prompts and dealing with the same editing task (e.g., literary interpretation), writing comparative comments "... speculating on what accounted for them and reflecting on the classroom experiences which had influenced the growth" (p. 41). In another class, Advanced Placement students "... generally noted that the two samples showed they had become practiced at writing a focused essay using technical analysis ...", and English as a Second Language (ESL) students commented upon "... dramatic evidence of their increased fluency in English." Referring to these and other comparative self-evaluations, Cooper & Brown concluded that many students had demonstrated "... concrete proof of their growth as writers."

The second type of evidence of student *self-assessment* (reflection) emanated from individual *metacognitive pieces*. Citing Johnston (in Keynes, 1987, p. 107), "... To learn to control the medium [writing] they must also reflect, conceptualize and experiment' - Cooper & Brown claimed that encouraging students to select their best writing allowed them "... to internalize their own standards" as they evaluate their own work" (p. 43). As a demonstration of such reflection and apparent internalization, Cooper's high school students were asked to write "a metacognitive piece about their process" (p. 44) for each of four major papers. In these metacognitive (reflective) responses, students reportedly identified the collaborative support they received as they took each piece through the writing process.

Finally, Cooper & Brown asserted that students' *self-analyses*, a third type of evidence, also provided support for claims that portfolio-based instruction (1) contributes to student initiative and empowerment, and (2) blurs distinctions across instruction, learning, and assessment. According to the authors, "... students looked over all this evidence [the portfolios], reflected on it, and attempted to synthesize what they had learned about themselves as collaborators and about the collaborative process" (p. 44).

Students may also benefit from and perceive teacher support indirectly, as teachers involve parents in the portfolio culture process. Although she did not provide references to data in support of her contention, Brown claimed that sending portfolios home for parental review and comment "... strengthens an important link among teacher and student and parents" (p. 45).

The evidence Cooper & Brown offer in support of their claims for the positive influence of the kinds of teacher support they describe is more anecdotal and speculative than empirical. In the following report excerpt, for example, the authors imply causation as they refer to a student activity with a concept (authority) that they do not adequately define:

By requiring students to select one piece of writing as their favorite, this category [Best Writing] allows them additional personal choice, thus adding to their authority as writers (p. 43).

Yet in spite of this report's lack of detailed documentation and analytic discussion of various claims, Cooper & Brown provide valuable suggestions regarding ways teachers can support (or *scaffold*, Wolf, 1991) and enhance student participation in portfolio-culture classrooms. "' I am really grateful for those discussions in which the layers of my confusion are slowly peeled away by my peers'" (p. 45): This high school senior's reflection concerning the value to him of one element of the portfolio-culture classroom merits further consideration and exploration.

Classroom Culture Norms, and Portfolio as Product, not Process

Changing the kinds of assignments given to students does not necessarily change

assessment practice. If we persist in assessment practices which protect the teacher-centered focus and support teacher isolation of the present at the expense of establishing professional standards of performance, assessment reform is unlikely (Cox, 1993, p. 8).

In this study of the impact of a supposedly 'portfolio-based' instructional innovation on the normative practices of two Los Angeles area language arts teachers, Cox (1993) interpreted observations, teacher interviews, and student "working" portfolios through the frame of organizational culture literature (e.g., Deal & Kennedy, 1981). One of the teacher-participants was a department chairperson and portfolio assessment presenter, who in turn recommended another member of her department by virtue of that colleague's effective teaching and willingness to incorporate portfolios in her classroom.

Cox approached this study from the perspective of two premises: (1) that "... the culture of high school classroom assessment is complex and characterized by both explicit and implicit norm[s] of behavior which roughly translate into 'rules of the game', and (2) that "... a single classroom innovation in assessment (e.g., working portfolios) tends to shape itself to the rules of the current 'game,' rather than affecting assessment practice" (p. 7). Cox constructed and pursued her research question--how might a portfolio innovation impact classroom assessment practice?-- in the context of teacher control, a concept she associated with "... the high degree of power and autonomy surrounding the practice of assessment" and with the California Education Code (1991), which describes teacher assessment autonomy as being "nearly inviolate" (Cox, p. 6).

The concept of *teacher support* as a feature of *portfolio culture* classrooms assumes that teacher willingness and ability, not only to approach writing instruction and assessment in a deliberately different (from the norm) way, but also to relinquish certain elements of control (e.g., topic choices and approaches, revising strategies, portfolio selections and criteria) to their students in so doing. Instruction, collaboration, assessment: Available accounts in the portfolio assessment literature suggest that these elements of

teacher support call for teacher training (or another sort of preparation) as well as for enthusiastic acceptance. They are apparently essential to the classroom practice of viewing instruction and assessment as a single entity that contributes to establishing a *portfolio culture*. Yancey's recommendations for college teaching-assistant preparation makes this quite clear:

Several accounts of teachers' development of portfolios--for example those of Sandy Murphy and Mary Ann Smith, Catherine D'Aoust, and Roberta Camp--emphasize that even for experienced teachers, time is crucial: time for preparation so that portfolios work within a curriculum and lead to an assessment that students (and teachers) understand; time for monitoring while students are creating the portfolios; time for review of both portfolios and classroom instruction when the portfolios are submitted (Yancey, 1994, p. 212).

In the course of her study, Cox learned that even "effective and reflective" instructors may harbor a dislike for or at least a discomfort with assessment of all sorts, both formative and summative. In addition, her results indicated that adding what amounts to another assignment --in this case, involving students in selecting and revising previously-assessed compositions via "working portfolios"--did not alter either teachers' assessment practices. In other words, pre-existing norms of teacher autonomy and control prevailed:

Quality standards for portfolios were not identified nor was any other standard for assessment expressed. No rubric [scoring guide] was used. Each teacher graded the portfolios individually and privately. Criteria for grading were not shared. Furthermore, quality standards for portfolios were not identified, nor was any other standard for assessment evident. No rubric for assessment was used. The students' observations appear correct. Grades truly do depend on the teacher (p. 7).

Cox's assertion that "if reform efforts centering on assessment fail to deal explicitly with existing assessment norms, no real change is going to occur" (p. 7) certainly would seem to follow from her presentation of study results. Cox reported that neither of these teachers altered her assessment practices, nor her autonomy as an evaluator, especially with respect to inviting meaningful, ongoing student involvement in the assessment process. Yet

according to Cox's description of this particular portfolio innovation, neither teacher was asked to devise or implement an exemplar of the *portfolio culture*, as Wolf (1991) and others (e.g., Camp, 1989, 1992; Camp & Winner, 1993; Yancey, 1992) define this concept and practice. The innovation Cox describes does not emulate such portfolio culture features as (1) ongoing dialogue between teacher and student, student and parent; (2) reflection as a core value and behavior; or (3) student involvement at all major stages of assessment, including developing criteria and standards and participation in peer-directed editing and reviewing sessions. As other reports and studies suggest, *teacher support* is not simply an identifiable feature of the portfolio culture classroom: it is an essential, partially defining component.

Cox referred to this study's limitations with respect to its relatively narrow focus (two classrooms) and its "classroom snapshot" (p. 2) quality, as opposed to the sort of "portrait of portfolios in action" that has yet to be defined and described in the literature. Had Cox studied a true *portfolio culture* classroom, the two-week time frame, including only three school days across observations and interviews for the two classrooms represented here would probably have been inadequate to the task. As Wolf and others consistently emphasize, students' understandings of writing and of themselves as writers are time-intensive, even evolutionary.

And yet, Cox raised or implied several critically important issues that merit additional study. For example, to what degree and in what ways do the "rules of the game" of teacher assessment autonomy and control give way in classrooms that truly adhere to process-portfolio/*portfolio culture* concept and practice? If teachers involve their students in meaningful ways with assessment, do those students then view themselves differently as writers than do students engaged in more traditional classroom settings? When reflection serves as a core activity--and value--in the classroom, what evidence do those reflections

provide concerning student decision-making, progress, and understandings about the nature of effective writing?

Altered Practices, but Marginal Teacher Support

The idea of being accountable to someone [state coordinators for the Vermont Assessment Project] when I didn't know what I'm going to be accountable for is some pressure I didn't have. It would have been nice if I could have a year to prepare and get ready. . . . Then I wouldn't have this pressure of, "What do they want? What will it look like in the end?" (Daniels, 1995, p. 12).

As was true of the two Cox study participants, 'Maura', the subject in Daniels' case study, was an experienced, highly regarded teacher who participated willingly, although with some trepidation, in a large-assessment portfolio innovation. Yet unlike Cox's two teacher-subjects, the teacher highlighted in Daniels' study received ongoing training, along with opportunities to "network" with colleagues who were also implementing portfolios. Would the 'rules of the game,' to use Cox's phrase in reference to the pre-eminence of teacher autonomy and control over instruction and assessment, also hold sway if the innovation were mandated and supported by a powerful outside agency, in this case, the Vermont Department of Education?

Daniels cited neither Cox, 1993, nor any other portfolio assessment study. And yet, her investigation of one elementary school teacher's implementation of the Vermont Assessment Project (VAP) writing portfolio component for her twenty-three fifth-grade students seems designed almost as an intentional reinvestigation of Cox's central question: How does the introduction of portfolio assessment, featuring writing portfolios, impact the norms of classroom assessment practice? Over the course of a full school year, Daniels pursued two interdependent questions: (1) how does one 5th-grade teacher use portfolios in the context of classroom writing instruction and assessment? and (2) to what extent do VAP-mandated portfolios inform or otherwise influence that teacher's instruction and assessment practices?

Working from several premises (“ . . . teachers score portfolios that are sent to the state [Vermont]; teachers must do portfolios with their students; teachers are the decision-makers about how it will be done” p. 3), Daniels traced how one teacher “negotiated” that VAP portfolio mandate. Observations included state-sponsored workshop sessions, as well as four, two-day classroom observations evenly spaced throughout the school year; documents related to these sessions supplemented observation transcripts. Daniels also conducted pre- and post-interviews focusing on such topics as this teacher-participant’s instructional and assessment practices, her use of portfolios, and her views of the VAP project. In order to gain a sense of direct and indirect influences upon Maura’s instruction and assessment practices, she also interviewed the school principal, a fourth grade teacher in Maura’s school, and the VAP area workshop and “network” leader. Data was chronologically arranged, coded, categorized according to central patterns or themes, and triangulated for analysis.

The VAP writing portfolio was physically similar to that of the working portfolio reported in Cox (1993): Both portfolios served as bins for each student’s total writing output, and each model incorporated evidence of both writing process and product. In other respects, however, these portfolio designs represented significant differences. For example, whereas neither portfolio grading standards nor individual scoring guides were provided with the portfolios that formed the basis of Cox’s study, VAP portfolios would be assessed according to five traits, qualities such as “purpose” and “organization” that were congruent with the teacher’s current approach to assessing student work. In addition, the VAP portfolio process recommended that Maura use this same rubric to score individual student products, a step that she described as “putting the cart before the horse” (p. 12). Finally, these fifth-grade students included writing across several disciplines, including science and social studies, in their portfolios; the Cox study’s working portfolios, on the other hand, represented only language arts-related writing.

As for a *portfolio culture*, as it contributes to portfolio process, however, Daniels concluded that this teacher's instructional and assessment practices did not change as a result of the implementation, even in the spring when VAP selected several portfolios to be sent on for state review. Describing herself as “a very organized person . . . [who] really [has] to have an idea all planned out ahead of time before I begin in order to keep it all where it's supposed to be” (p. 12), Maura is reported to have focused upon the end product--the production of VAP portfolios--in relative isolation from how she characteristically went about instructing her students and assessing their work.

For her, the following instructional practice apparently constituted *teacher support* for her students' work. In a typical “writing period,” all students responded to the same teacher-assigned topic, worked independently without peer conferencing, and received positive yet brief feedback from their teacher as she encouraged and monitored them. This pattern of instruction persisted throughout the school year, including Maura's intensive management of her students' drafting and revising processes, to which she appended her perceptions of VAP expectations . Daniels cites the following teacher reflection in support of her conclusion (“She was trying to keep the VAP criteria in mind, and to teach to it all at once”):

It's the rough drafts. I don't want to say that it's boring, but it drags, because in those, I'm trying to teach so much . . . While they're looking at sentence structure, they're looking at their detail sentences. Does it fit with their topic sentences? . . . I have to be careful that when we get to our first, second, third, fourth and fifth drafts that they haven't lost the whole meaning of why we're doing it in the first place (p. 14).

Yet despite a lack of systemic change in approaches to instruction and assessment, Maura's students did engage in one *portfolio culture* feature: They selected ‘best pieces’ from their collections at a number of points during the year. In addition, students reportedly wrote more frequently and produced more writing, perhaps as a consequence of additional revising, as directed by Maura in her quest to satisfy all five VAT scoring guide

writing qualities.

As is the case for the above-discussed studies that feature teacher support as either an explicit or implicit theme, this study suggests a number of questions for further investigation. Daniels reported, for example, that the teacher-participant found the VAP portfolio project to be “very valuable” for both her and her students, claiming that “. . . collecting and selecting from their writing had a positive impact on [them]” (p. 20), yet the study provides no confirming data regarding students’ experiences and responses. Student reflection played no discernable role in Maura’s classroom, nor did such additional portfolio culture attributes as scoring guide design, ongoing conversation, or criteria development. It is clear, however, that despite this teacher’s apparent concern for what she viewed as her students’ needs and best interests, she did not serve as *scaffold-builder* (Wolf, 1991) from task or goal to student experimentation and performance.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed current literature that investigates a portfolio-based or *portfolio culture* approach to writing instruction. Noting this literature’s relative newness, I discussed its dependence upon often imprecisely defined conceptual base, including such terms as *reflection* and *assessment*, *ownership* and *empowerment*, and *perception* and *production*. In so doing, I have attempted to synthesize these and other themes so that they might serve as a basis for the following sections of this review.

I then addressed three interrelated themes that pervade--and inform--this literature: The apparent roles that *student choice*, *sustained engagement*, and *teacher support* play in the creation--or absence--of the “portfolio culture” classroom. Because of how they are defined and played out, these portfolio-culture themes should be considered both separately and collectively. Few studies touch upon any one of these strands to the exclusion of the others. Mirroring the complex nature of their subject, many portfolio assessment studies tend to investigate such complex topics as student self-assessment, teacher and student

roles and relationships, and student understandings of the contributions of writing process to product.

This review of the literature suggests that the theme of *choice*-- especially as it is investigated in terms of student involvement in and responsibility for writing--is intertwined with considerations of the writing process. It is difficult to discuss elements of student choice in the context of portfolio assessment without addressing or at least alluding to choice in the broader sense of the writer's selection of purpose, topic, and approach. Yet because elements of choice apparently play such an important role in the establishment and maintenance of a "portfolio culture" environment in support of what many refer to as the portfolio process, the literature's various definitions and descriptions of choice require additional investigation.

Considerations of the nature and possible effects of student involvement in such a portfolio culture also raises many questions. Investigations of such engagement, generally defined as amounting to students' investment and *empowerment* over time in the portfolio-based classroom, are complex if not problematic: they require considerations of the complementary third theme of *teacher support*. In addition, this literature's attempts to synthesize these and other themes are only partially successful. In effect, some studies address matters of engagement in conjunction with concepts that are either undefined or seem at odds with definitions presented in other studies. For example, Wolf (1991) defines the portfolio as a "prepared accomplishment" and "an occasion for learning," language that implies student engagement as a given and "an occasion for learning," language that implies student engagement as an indigenous quality of portfolios and of portfolio assessment. In contrast, other studies define the portfolio as a relatively static collection of student work, not as an artifact that serves a dynamic portfolio *process*.

From single-classroom implementations to state-wide portfolio assessment programs, portfolio-culture related studies cut across a number of circumstances,

objectives, features, and themes. Correspondingly, the literature has evolved from descriptive overviews of and prescriptions for portfolio implementation to more formal, careful analysis, with a recent emphasis upon case study research. In addition, the literature suggests that student reflectivity plays an apparently significant role in the formation and development of the *portfolio-culture* -driven composition classroom, as well as the potential of such reflectivity to contribute to understandings regarding student-writer growth and performance.

Yet connections between student understandings of writing and of themselves as writers through involvement in the portfolio process remain only partially investigated. No studies to date have conducted investigations from the perspective of how reflectivity--a core feature of the *portfolio-culture* classroom--might contribute to students' understandings of their identities and growth as writers. By conducting a comparative case study of high school composition classrooms, I hoped to contribute another layer of evidence regarding the dynamic workings and possibilities of the *portfolio-culture* approach to writing instruction.

CHAPTER 3 ANALYZING REFLECTIONS IN SEARCH OF WRITERS' UNDERSTANDINGS

Introduction: Procedural Rationale

The research-to-date on student-writer reflectivity either explores broad generalizations and theoretical premises regarding student growth and understanding, or makes a variety of claims for given approaches to implementing portfolio-related writing instruction. In addition, most investigations of student-writer reflectivity do not arise from clearly articulated operational definitions of such terms as *authority*, *control*, *identity*, and *reflectivity*, concepts that pervade the literature. Furthermore, because most investigations of portfolio-based assessment and instruction have only recently been conducted, many questions relating to students' work with, understandings of, and control over their writing deserve further investigation (Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 1993). Researchers, theorists, program directors, and teachers practicing and investigating portfolio-based instruction and assessment have investigated this topic in a number of content areas, including the visual arts and music education, literacy and reading assessment, and journalism (Camp, 1990). As a result, the literature is rich in perspectives and possibilities. Yet evidence of the appropriateness and usefulness of this "portfolio metaphor" in the language arts classroom remains incomplete (Graham, 1993; Graves & Sunstein, 1992; Valencia & Calfee, 1991).

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to understand the effects of key elements of a promising and well-documented approach to portfolio-based assessment, the "portfolio-culture" classroom (Camp & Winner, 1993; Wolf, 1991), on student-writer reflectivity. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the question: How does involvement in a portfolio-culture environment contribute to high school students' understandings of (1) their identities as writers; (2) the different processes involved in writing, and their own use of these processes; (3) their progress (growth) as developing writers, and related self-

assessment; and (4) their understandings of the qualities and features of effective writing?

Description of Design

This study examines high school students' understandings about writing (processes and products) and their beliefs and understandings about themselves as writers. As a qualitative study, it is designed with an eye toward "... insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing" (Merriam, 1988, p. 10). The study strives to be *heuristic*: Its purpose is to "... bring about the discovery of new meaning, extend the reader's experience, or confirm what is known" (Merriam, p. 12). The discovery of meaning --for high school writers, of the nature and significance of what they learn, do, and understand--is central to this study.

Procedure

Qualitative research is an appropriate methodological approach for conducting this work, as its "... paramount objective is to understand the meaning of experience. ... it strives to understand how all the parts work together to form a whole" (Merriam, 1988, p. 16). More particularly, "... the case study's unique strength is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence--documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations" (Yin, 1984, cited in Merriam, 1988, p. 8), as the evidential variety and central question explored in the current study illustrate. Case study research is a *comprehensive* strategy (Yin, 1994, p. 13) whose design addresses the present study's investigation of "a contemporary phenomenon"--in this case, student-writer reflectivity--"within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context [the 'portfolio-culture' classroom] are not clearly evident."

According to Yin (1994), five research design components are essential for case study research: (1) a study's questions, (2) its related propositions, (3) its unit(s) of analysis, (4) the logical links from the data to those propositions, and (5) the criteria for findings interpretation (p. 20). This study's central question's form--'How does

involvement in a portfolio-culture classroom contribute to high school students' understandings . . .?"--best fits this methodological approach. Again according to Yin, "The case study strategy is most likely to be appropriate for 'how' and 'why' questions . . ." (1994, p. 21). This qualitative, comparative case study was conducted with the intent of illustrating, interpreting, and discovering--as opposed to testing--hypotheses. The following propositions contributed to the design and focus of this study: The 'portfolio-culture' approach to writing instruction, if transplanted to a traditional college-preparatory writing course, has the power to influence or even shape high school students' understandings of themselves as writers; as a result of participating in the 'portfolio-culture' classroom, Site A student-writers' understandings and uses of various writing procedures and strategies will be altered, increased, and/or enhanced; 'portfolio-culture' students will experience clearer, more explicit understandings of their progress as writers; and those student-writers' self-reflections will represent clearer understandings of the nature (qualities and features) of effective writing than will the reflections of their 'good writing instruction' counterparts.

A case study design is best defined and understood according to the nature of its final report (Merriam, 1988, p. 27). Whether categorized as descriptive, interpretive, or evaluative (Merriam, 1988), or explanatory, descriptive, illustrative, or exploratory (Yin, 1994), effective qualitative case studies incorporate four "essential properties": (1) *particularistic*, focusing on a given program or phenomenon; (2) *descriptive* of key phenomena, as well as interpretive; (3) *heuristic*, in that they ". . . bring about the discovery of new meaning, extend the reader's experience, or confirm what is known"; and (4) *inductive*, as any tentative hypotheses are subject to reformulation or reconsideration (Merriam, 1988, pp. 11-13). Although elements of this case study are both descriptive and explanatory, its central purpose--and design--is interpretive, because student-writers' understandings, representing both sites, constitute its units of analysis, and because

students' discoveries of meaning with respect to the nature of writing and of themselves as writers may be related to the respective teaching/learning cultures those students experience. As Erickson (1986) states,

The task of interpretive research . . . is to discover the specific ways in which local and nonlocal forms of social organization and culture relate to the activities of specific persons in making choices and conducting social action together. For classroom research this means discovering how the choices and actions of all the members constitute an enacted curriculum--a learning environment" (p. 129).

Study Design:

Six Cases, 'Portfolio-Culture' and 'Good Writing Instruction' Classrooms

Two sections (classes) of a pre-college, single-semester writing course taught concurrently by an experienced Essay Fundamentals instructor served as the sites for this study. Embedded within each site were multiple case studies of three students-writers whose understandings of writing and of themselves as writers served as the study's units of analysis. Because this is a comparative study, I have observed, interpreted, and described selected student-writers' reflective behaviors as they have occurred in two related instructional environments. Site A was distinguished by several elements of 'portfolio-culture' informed instruction and assessment, as described in the literature. (See below for full description.)

I selected one low-, middle- and high-achieving student from each site in order to access a cross-section of students who characteristically take Essay Fundamentals, and in so doing, to provide a basis for across-site as well as within-site analysis. Specifically, I wanted to ascertain to what degree particular features of the 'portfolio-culture' classroom seemed to influence student-writer understandings about writing and about themselves as writers. I was also interested in learning how similarly competent and capable writers--for example, one middle-achieving student enrolled in the standard (good writing instruction) class and the other in the 'portfolio-culture' class--would view their respective identities, progress, and accomplishments as writers, as well as their understandings of the nature of

good writing. By implementing this design, I hoped to be able to discover evidence of influence of instructional design and atmosphere on student-writer experiences and perspectives.

To date, available research on ArtsPropel-related instruction and learning in secondary writing classrooms does not feature such comparative studies, reporting instead upon either new implementations or interventions conducted within a single or two or more similar sites. In addition, much of the research thus far conducted has relied upon student self-reports and/or teacher or researcher claims of varying degrees of student *reflective* behavior, a concept that is closely tied to the 'portfolio-culture' conversation, yet is only vaguely defined. The portfolio-as-assessment literature also discusses such related, contributory concepts as writer *identity*, *authority*, and *control* in rather undefined, sometimes interchangeable terms. As a consequence of conducting this study, including participant selection and operational definitions of these essential concepts, I hoped to increase the possibility of clarifying and illustrating respective 'portfolio-culture' students' behaviors and understandings through documentation, interpretation, and analysis.

Description of Two Sites

Site A included the following 'portfolio-culture' elements: *student choice* , referring mainly to project objectives and approaches and procedures; *sustained engagement* , relating to investment over time in the portfolio-culture process; and *teacher and peer support* , involving interactive, recursive instruction and assessment. In addition to sharing major project requirements with Site B (see document, *Course Description*), Site A instruction also reflected four principles and practices of 'good writing instruction' that characterized Site B and that are frequently mentioned in the literature.

Site similarities.

In keeping with best practice for writing instruction at the secondary level, and with

Site A: 'Portfolio-Culture' Classroom

Site B: 'Good Writing Instruction'

Similarities

- Course goals, learning objectives, and six expository writing projects
- Instructor
- Concurrent (same-day) class sessions
- Best practices of good writing instruction
- Supplemental texts, including Macrorie (1968, 1971) and Elbow (1973, 1981)
- Reading-based activities in preparation of literature-related projects and for provision of writing models
- Student reflections (3 questionnaires) and follow-up interviews (3) concerning Essay Fundamentals experiences
- Vocabulary development, based upon SAT exams and commercially available preparation resources

Differences

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Choice: 'Authorship Literacy' | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited student choice: Essay topics, themes, and organizational designs |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustained Engagement: Students Initiating, engaging in, and assessing written work

acc. to Perception-Production-Reflection cycle (Working Folders to Showcase Portfolios) | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher-directed & determined writing process (Writing Folders) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher and Peer Support: Student-presented understandings & student-driven peer-response groups | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher-directed writing processes |

FIGURE 3-1: Similarities & Differences: Sites A and B

the need to eliminate unnecessary threats to section comparison, both sites incorporated four best practices of good writing instruction:

- 1.) Beginning-of-term and ongoing community-building activities (Gere, 1987; Macrorie, 1968, 1985);
- 2.) An emphasis upon recognized qualities of effective writing, including the provision of appropriate models and assessment (Applebee, 1981; Spandel & Stiggins, 1990);
- 3.) Peer-editing groups (Gere, 1987; Macrorie, 1968; Sommers, 1982);
- 4.) Writing folders, writer journals/logs, course notebooks (Elbow, 1973; Hairston, 1982).

In addition, both sections of Essay Fundamentals instruction incorporated the following components in compliance with course requirements (see document, *Course Description*) and/or in support of this study's methodology:

- Vocabulary development (weekly lists and related activities) based upon SAT exams and commercially available SAT preparation resources;
- Supplemental texts, including Macrorie (1968, 1971) and Elbow (1973, 1981);
- Reading-based activities in preparation of literature-related projects and for provision of writing models;
- Student self-reflections (3 questionnaires) and follow-up interviews (3) concerning their experiences in Essay Fundamentals.

Site A ('Portfolio Culture') Distinctions.

Student choice. In addition to presenting and adhering to the course outline-indicated expectations, involving students in various community-building activities, and establishing a climate of openness and trust for students in both sites, the instructor introduced the concept and practice of *authorship literacy* (Camp, 1989; Camp & Winner, 1993) to Site A students in support of student-writer choice and relative (to Site B experiences) autonomy. The essential elements of *authorship literacy*, as explained in the Arts Propel-related literature and as followed for Site A students, are as follows:

1. Students write frequently and explore a wide variety of genres, including drama, prose, and poetry, in order to become "active and informed authors" (Camp

& Winner, 1993, p. 6) [Appendix 1, *Poetry and Fiction Packets*];

2. Teacher and students engage in "frequent and very open talk about different kinds of writing and different levels of accomplishment . . . [and about] intent and effect . . . and of differences in reaction and taste . . ." (Camp & Winner, p. 7);
3. Teacher and students involve parents as readers/correspondents for student writing.

In support of student-writer choice, Site A participants (a) established specific, writer-objectives for major projects; (b) sought out models and other writer resources, such as Writer's Digest articles, in support of those objectives; (c) chose from among teacher-recommended and student-modeled prewriting, drafting, and revising strategies in anticipation of fulfilling their own and the instructor's objectives for a given project; and (d) directed peer-response groups (PRGs) to review revisions according to those selected objectives.

Sustained Engagement.

Site A used sequential writing-based activities in order to (a) introduce students to the nature and value of self-reflection, (b) ". . . develop students' abilities to judge and their capacity to enhance and reveal the best of their knowledge and understanding" of the writing process, and (c) "model the way in which experienced writers move from one challenge to another, pursuing a line of thought, technique, or theme" (Camp & Winner, 1993, pp. 7-8). In short, this general approach to initiating, engaging, and assessing written work actualizes a critically important principle of the 'portfolio-culture' classroom.

The most obvious 'portfolio-culture' classroom artifact that student-writers produced was the Showcase Portfolio (Camp, 1989; Camp & Winner, 1993; Glazer & Brown, 1993; Yancey, 1992). Following the beginning of second quarter work, Site A students selected and reflected upon given pieces in support of their self-assessments as

writers. Growing out of a semester's worth of ongoing, recursive self-assessment and teacher, peer, and parent review of drafts and final projects, Showcase Portfolios evolved largely from working writing folders that had been established during the first week of instruction (see Figure 3-2, *The Components of the Portfolio Collection*). Unlike Site B students, whose folders served only as convenient collection loci, Site A student-writers periodically (a) shared folder contents with others in support of course work, (b) revisited previous writing objectives and projects in preparation for subsequent Essay Fundamentals projects, (c) reflected upon goals for and qualities of individual assignments and of the Showcase Portfolio as a whole, and (d) presented completed Showcase Portfolios to peers, parents, and the instructor for their review and/or assessment.

Adopted from Camp & Winner (1993). Arts PROPEL: A Handbook for Imaginative Writing. Boston: Educational Testing Service and Harvard College, p. 73.

The completed portfolio will include three to four pieces selected from the Working Portfolio, five to six pieces of focused reflection, and a table of contents.

The Table of Contents is a record of the pieces in the portfolio and the dates on which they were written and selected.

The Important Piece of Writing is selected by the student using his or her own criteria; the student is asked to answer a series of questions about the piece and the experience of writing it.

SPECIFICALLY, to complete:

A Biography of the Important Piece, which asks the student to illustrate the process he or she used to create that piece of writing. The student answers questions and writes the "story" of the work's development.

The Satisfying Piece of writing and the Unsatisfying Piece are selected by the student, who then describes what makes the piece satisfying and the other not, what has been learned from working on them and what might now be done differently.

The student's Free Pick is a piece selected by the student to round out the portfolio as a picture of him/herself as a writer. The student is asked to explain the reasons for the choice.

The Final Reflection invites the student to look at his or her writing for the semester and to describe whatever changes are seen in the writing and in him/herself as a writer.

FIGURE 3-2: The Components of the Portfolio Collection

For each unit of instruction, the sequence of activities loosely followed the 'portfolio-culture' design/process of perception, production, and reflection [see Figure 3-5, *Instructional Sequence: The 'Portfolio-Culture Classroom'*]. In addition, Site A instruction emphasized collaboration over evaluation, as acted out by the teacher and his students. Specifically, the instructor set parameters for the basic nature (e.g., 'a persuasive essay on a topic of current interest') and time frame (e.g., three weeks from initial perception activities to self-assessment procedures for one of six major written products). Students then completed activities relating to teacher- and student-selected models individually and in teams. An overview of that general sequence follows:

- **PERCEPTION.** Students served as 'co-designers' with the instructor with respect to prewriting, drafting, and revising strategies. In one stage of perception, students 'marked up' sample essays according to teacher-provided, yet negotiable, guidelines (Camp & Winner, 1994, p. 13). For example, as an introduction to project #1, the Personality Profile, students were asked to circle, underline, and otherwise identify important attributes of a professional model essay according to matters of thesis, content and information, and style (see Appendix B).

- **PRODUCTION.** Production-based activities are designed to engage students in drafting, and then revising, activities in support of selected objectives. In an early stage, for example, "students draft the first segment of their own essays, using/drawing upon the techniques they have observed and discussed in the sample essays" (Camp & Winner, p. 15). Concurrently, Site A students also co-designed criteria and standards of effective writing for course products/projects with the instructor, who periodically recorded and distributed class-generated standards and expectations in list form to students, and from which scoring guides (assessment rubrics) were often generated during class discussions. At Site B, students were provided with and instructed in a nationally-recognized (Spandel

fr. Spandel, V., & Stiggins, R.J. (1990). Creating Writings: Linking Assessment and Writing Instruction. New York: Longman.

“Analytical scoring, then, is an attempt to define the main traits or characteristics of writing (e.g., *ideas, organization*) and to specify criteria that describe each of these traits in terms of the relevant strengths and weaknesses that we are likely to see in real samples of student writing” (p. 7).

IDEAS & CONTENT

This paper is clear, focused, and interesting. It holds the reader’s attention. Relevant anecdotes and details enrich the central theme or story line. The writer seems to be writing from experience and shows insight: a good sense of how events unfold, how people respond to life and to each other, and how ideas relate.

ORGANIZATION

The organization enhances and showcases the central idea or theme. The order, structure, or presentation is compelling and moves the reader through the text.

Details seem to fit where they’re placed. An inviting introduction draws the reader in, and a satisfying conclusion leaves the reader with a sense of resolution. Transitions are smooth and weave the separate threads of meaning into one cohesive whole.

VOICE

The writer speaks directly to the reader in a way that is individualistic, expressive, and engaging. Clearly, the writer is involved in the text and is writing to be read.

The paper is honest and written from the heart. It has the ring of conviction. The language is natural yet provocative; it brings the topic to life. The reader feels a strong sense of interaction with the writer and senses the person behind the words. The projected tone and voice clarify and give flavor to the writer’s message.

WORD CHOICE

Words convey the intended message in an interesting, precise, and natural way. The writing is full and rich, yet concise.

Words are specific and accurate; they seem just right. Imagery is strong. Powerful verbs give the writing energy. Vocabulary may be striking, but it’s natural, and never overdone. Expression is fresh and appealing; slang is used sparingly.

SENTENCE FLUENCY

The writing has an easy flow and rhythm when read aloud. Sentences are well built, with consistently strong and varied structure that makes expressive oral reading easy and enjoyable.

CONVENTIONS

The writer demonstrates a good grasp of standard writing conventions (e.g., grammar, capitalization, punctuation, usage, spelling, paragraphing) and uses them effectively to enhance readability. Errors tend to be so few and so minor that the reader can easily skim right over them unless specifically searching for them.

FIGURE 3-3: “Qualities of Effective Writing”

(Teacher-determined and presented criteria and standards, Site B ‘Good Writing Instruction’)

& Stiggins, 1990) set of criteria (Figure 3-3, *Qualities of Good Writing*, pertained to Site B only.)

• REFLECTION. Students engaged in ongoing, recursive self-assessment and quarterly parent review, in addition to peer-group and teacher assessment (the latter being characteristic of both sites). As is the case for production-based activities, reflection can take any number of forms (e.g., self-assessment questionnaires, reflective journal responses) and occur at several stages in the pursuit of a final product. For example, Site A students evaluated early and partial drafts of their work using a set of *guided questions* modeled after those used during an earlier perceptions activity in response to one or more published pieces (Camp & Winner, 1993, p. 15).

Teacher and Peer Support.

Although the instructor performed such roles as managing project completion schedules, establishing peer support groups, providing support materials, and assessing and assigning final scores for work completed at both sites, his purposes and actions on behalf of Site A student-writers were more complex and collaborative than was the case for Site B. And to a somewhat lesser extent, Site A student teams also played more varied roles than did their Site B counterparts. The instructor frequently served as resource person, coach and facilitator at Site A, as opposed to assuming the more traditional roles of direct deliverer of content and monitor of student performance and progress that he assumed for Site B students. For instance, although the instructor was the primary contributor and presenter of writing-related information and models for both sections, Site A students--as individuals and in teams--did so as well. In preparation for drafting the Literary Analysis essay (project #6 of 6), Site A student teams presented their own understandings of how a given literary feature (e.g., *tone*, *imagery*, or *characterization*) might contribute to the overall effect (*atmosphere*) of a short story or novel, then made suggestions to the class regarding ways of approaching this project. In contrast, Site B students reviewed teacher-provided materials individually, not meeting in teams until initial Literary Analysis drafts had been completed.

Additionally, whereas peer response teams of four-five students each reviewed and made suggestions for improving their peers' works-in-progress at both sites, Site B teams were instructor-driven with respect to a given Helping Circle (Macrorie, 1981) session's focus and purpose during any given class session. In contrast, although the instructor established meeting times for both classes, Site A peer review teams' attention was often directed toward such team-selected interests as reviewing writers' selected objectives for a particular writing project; comparing the effectiveness of various prewriting activities; choosing appropriate points of view/voices for a given assignment; or discussing the organizational or stylistic qualities of certain poetic, fictional, or nonfictional models in preparation for revision of their own respective pieces.

Participants

Primary

The six primary participants--three from Site A, the Portfolio-Culture based classroom, and three from Site B, the non-Portfolio Culture classroom--were selected according to the principles of *criterion-based* sampling (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Specifically, *typical-case* selection guided the study's sampling procedures, based upon four attributes: (1) grades earned in high school language arts courses, (2) writing samples, (3) teacher recommendations, and (4) attendance records. The primary participant selection process utilized *criterion-based*, also referred to as *purposive sampling*, through which the researcher creates a "recipe of the attributes essential to one selected unit and proceed[s] to find or locate a unit that matches the recipe" (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 77). According to Goetz & LeCompte, "The researcher develops a profile of attributes possessed by an average case and then seeks an instance of this case" (p. 81). This study's participant selection procedure follows that model.

Specifically, a total of three low-, middle-, and high-achieving students were identified from each site, based upon the above listed attributes and according to general

profiles of three types of entering Essay Fundamentals students: (1) those who have earned high school language arts grades of A- or higher; (2) students who have achieved at moderately successful levels, earning final grades ranging from a B- to a B+; and (3) students who have qualified to take the course but who have performed at a level suggesting minimal competence or preparation (C range). A single representative of each subgroup was then selected, resulting in three primary participants per site. An additional criteria for participant selection at each site was equivalent gender balance across the two sites (two females and one male student). All participants were seniors, with one exception (a middle-achieving female, a junior, Site A).

Upon selecting these participants, I confirmed their willingness to participate in three structured interviews, to complete three questionnaires, and to allow me to photocopy and make use of their course-related written work for analysis. After assuring them of anonymity during data-gathering and use of pseudonyms in any shared or published reports of this work, I asked them and their parents to review, date, and sign Human Subjects Assent forms.

Secondary

Secondary participants for this study included primary participants' respective *peer-editing* and/or *response* groups, consisting of three to five peers, as well the instructor who taught both of these Essay Fundamentals sections (Site A and Site B). During the semester (18 instructional weeks), each student worked and shared ideas and suggestions about writing with several different teams of 3-5 students each. In addition, small-group peer review or editing sessions took place five-six times per quarter at each site. Transcripts of audio- and videotaped peer-group sessions indicate topics and meeting times, but not the identities of individual peer-group members.

Instructor's experience and teaching style.

The instructor ('Mr. Green') was selected for his (1) successful experience in teaching the course, (2) his broad knowledge of students representing a wide range of abilities and interests, (3) his willingness and ability to offer both a 'Portfolio-Culture' and a 'good writing-instruction' section of the course, and (4) his willingness to participate in study-related activities, including observations and interviews that I would conduct.

A secondary English teacher for twenty-eight years, Mr. Green has taught third through twelfth grades, with grades nine to twelve instruction characterizing his most recent professional experience. A knowledgeable, gregarious, and self-confident teacher and coach whose instructional style is orderly and purposeful, yet generally student-centered, Mr. Green considers forming positive relationships with his students in support of their pedagogical development to be at the core of their--and his--success. This instructor has taught both vocational and college-bound writing courses at tenth through twelfth grade levels; year-long comprehensive (literature, composition, speech) entry-level (ninth grade) courses; and elective, upper-division (grades eleven and twelve) classes, including creative writing.

An active member of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the instructor has attended many writing-based workshops at state and national levels and has presented his own approaches to engaging students in the reading and writing process at conferences and conventions. He is well regarded in the community and is the recipient of a parent-teachers' association (National PTA) Golden Acorn award. He holds bachelor of arts degrees in English and psychology, along with a master of arts degree in psychology, has served as English department chair (junior high, grades seven to nine), and coordinated his high school's gifted and talented program for the first several years of its existence. Currently, he coordinates a cross-disciplinary program for ninth grade students and involves Lifetime Writing (non college-bound) students in internships and service learning projects. Mr. Green's attitudes toward and practices of the teaching of writing are a good

fit with the several qualities of good writing instruction called for in both sites of this study.

In response to the question, “What do you believe it means to be a teacher of writing?”

(Interview #1), the instructor responded as follows:

I think being a teacher of writing means that you do write, that you understand the angst that an individual goes through in the process of putting together their [sic] ideas. Thus when I’m developing new papers [assignments] that I’m going to do for Essay Fundamentals, [or for] ninth grade, I always do the paper myself first, to try to find out what some of the pitfalls are. And I share those with the kids. I think that . . . it’s terribly important that there’s a lot of sharing going on . . . you don’t write in a vacuum. . . . (see Appendix C)

Although the components of the ‘portfolio-culture’ classroom as described in the ArtsPropel literature (Camp, 1989; Camp & Winner, 1993) were unfamiliar to him, Mr. Green displayed an interest in acquiring the expertise necessary to implement such a program for his own students. As he mentioned in response to an Interview #2 question (“To what extent or in what specific ways did you change or alter the way you taught the ‘control’ [3rd period] class?”), the instructor found some elements of the ‘portfolio-culture’ classroom, such as continuous self-assessment (reflection) and instructional interaction between teacher and student, to be characteristic of quality instruction:

I think that some of the things that are inherent in a portfolio culture are the things that are inherent with a good teacher. And since I consider myself to be a good teacher of writing, some of the things I find that I was asking my first period [Site A] class to do, I would normally ask any writing class to do, but could NOT ask my 3rd period [Site B], as a result of being part of the culture specific to first period.

Preparation for study participation.

During the spring prior to study implementation, I introduced Mr. Green to the premises of the ArtsPropel literature and to the features of the two Essay Fundamentals sites that he would be asked to instruct. Specifically, I asked him to read articles and texts describing language arts portfolio-based instruction in general (Hansen, 1992) and the ‘Portfolio-Culture’ classroom in particular (Camp, 1989; Camp & Winner, 1993; Howard, 1992). At this same time, I provided Mr. Green with a document I had prepared for his

Site A students to be distributed at the beginning of the semester (“*What is a ‘Portfolio-Culture’ Classroom? What Will It Mean to--and for--You?*”--Appendix D). Intended as an overview of the special qualities of the ‘portfolio-culture’ classroom, this two-page document features definitions and attributes of the central tenets of this approach to writing instruction and learning--*perception, production, and reflection*. In addition, it introduces Site A students to the four special qualities of ArtsPropel that they would experience: student choice and reflection, student/teacher co-discovery (collaboration), writing model variety and diversity, and a recursive relationship between assignments and assessment. Several weeks before the school year began, I discussed these texts and documents with Mr. Green. In so doing, I answered his questions concerning the differences between the two Essay Fundamentals sites that needed to be implemented.

Soon thereafter I prepared and shared with Mr. Green a comparative overview of essential similarities and distinctions across the two sites in the context of the first of six Essay Fundamentals units, the ‘personality profile’, “*Site A and Site B Instruction: The ‘Personality Profile’ Project*” (see Figure 3-4). From key materials and resources and detailed instruction sequence to assessment-based activities, this columnar comparison cites Camp & Winner (1993) with respect to important ‘portfolio-culture’ concepts and procedures (e.g., the *perception-production-reflection* sequence).

I provided Mr. Green with a more detailed, yet generalized supplemental document (Figure 3-5, “*Instructional Sequence: The ‘Portfolio-Culture’ Classroom*”) that paired selected sections of Camp & Winner (1993) with suggested approaches to implementation for any given Essay Fundamentals project or unit. As I reviewed these materials with him, I emphasized their use as flexible guides for student-teacher collaboration, and not as templates to be applied in a rigid, preordained manner. Thereafter, and throughout the term of the study, I made myself available to Mr. Green whenever he felt the need to

Site A ('Portfolio-Culture')

1. Class & small-group readings and discussions of professional & student-written models/excerpts.
2. 'PERCEPTION': Class & small-group 'marking up' of sample essays (see Camp & Winner, 1994, p. 12), according to teacher-provided--yet negotiable--guidelines.
3. Preparation for 'PRODUCTION': In large and small groups, students focus on significant textual features & writing techniques "as if they were themselves authoring the [essay], using a set of questions that parallel the guidelines they used earlier for marking up the [essay]" (p. 14).
4. Instructor provides excerpts taken from student journals, reflective pieces, & published authors' descriptions of their respective prewriting strategies. Students model after and/or adopt such techniques for their own prewriting.
5. 'PRODUCTION #1': Students draft the first segment of their own Personality Profiles, using/drawing upon the techniques they have observed and discussed in the sample essays (see Camp & Winner, p. 15).
6. 'REFLECTION #1': Students assess their partial drafts according to a set of *guided questions* based upon those used to evaluate previously reviewed and 'marked' models. (A first experience in looking back at their own work.)
7. 'PRODUCTION #2': Students now either revise this partial draft or draft the remaining segment(s), using the techniques they have explored in their own and others' writing, and that seem appropriate for their essays' purpose/design/intended audience.
8. 'REFLECTION #2': Students read & respond to one another's drafts, THEN reflect on their own, "making decisions about possible revisions with the help of a set of questions and evaluative criteria" (Camp & Winner, p. 16).
9. 'PRODUCTION #2': Students revise the piece in response to learnings take from REFLECTION #2. They then write an Introduction of their objectives for and questions about the piece to parents, who are asked to respond and return.
10. Students present the project to the teacher (or reader) for evaluation according to both predetermined criteria (rubric) and student-determined objectives.

Site B ('Good Writing Instruction')

Teacher-provided criteria (evaluative rubric) for the Personality Profile.

Teacher-provided samples of successful (highly-ranked) student essays. Lecture/discussion of relevant 'qualities of good writing'.

Traditional pre-writing activities: Students work independently as they imitate pre-writing techniques explained and demonstrated by the instructor, including mapping, clustering, and listing.

Students draft thesis statements as per LAW directions and according to the 'center of gravity' that presents itself in prewriting activities.

Teacher review & approval of student-generated thesis statements; students begin drafting Personality Profile essays, following thesis revision.

Students share drafts in peer groups, according to Helping Circle process as explained by the instructor and/or as modeled by other students (videotaped or live).

Students revise drafts according to peer group and/or teacher suggestions and their own understandings of needed improvements.

Following final editing and rewriting, students submit the project to the teacher (or reader) to be evaluated according to previously established criteria (rubric).

FIGURE 3-4: Site A & Site B Instruction: The 'Personality Profile' Project

review the nature of his work with Site A--and Site B--students. In addition, I periodically visited, observed, audiotaped, and videotaped pertinent sessions and activities at both sites during the semester.

Data Collection

Interview and questionnaire transcripts, along with additional in-common reflective documents, served as data sources for this study, for it is through these sorts of data collection instruments that the researcher might best access what is “inside a person’s head” (Tuchman, 1994, p.216). Yet for the very reason that these self-reporting tools allow participants so much latitude in the nature of and motivation for their responses, it was essential to pose questions in such a way as to avoid three potential sources of response-contamination: (1) eliciting or encouraging a positive ‘take’ from the respondent’s point of view, (2) influencing the respondent to anticipate the researcher’s desired or expected responses, and (3) calling for information that respondents may not know about themselves (Tuchman, p. 216).

Interviews

The three interviews (Appendix E) conducted for this study were designed and timed for their power to reveal “the actor’s explanations” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 65). In keeping with the principles and practices of interpretive investigation, interview data were triangulated with (1) site-based and participant-created documents, such as in-common portfolio or writing folder contents; (2) questionnaire transcripts; and (3) observation notes. Two structured interviews, together with a final interview designed as a follow-up to each participant’s responses to the third and final questionnaire, were conducted, with each successive interview following a corresponding questionnaire’s thematic focus. In keeping with the study’s qualitative, ethnographic design, interviews should document or at least imply understandings that no other data gathering technique

STEP/STAGE #1: "Class and small-group readings and discussions of professional and student-written models/excerpts"

SUGGESTIONS

It would be best to split the time dedicated to this step between teacher-led/whole-class discussions and student-led/small-group sessions. For EF [Essay Fundamentals], students might profitably discuss such issues as structure/organization, writing style, purpose/theme, rhetorical strategies/literary devices, and selection/incorporation of detail.

These discussions probably should focus on sample poems and short stories as well as on essays/editorials and the like. Also, students should be asked to keep some sort of record of these discussions that they can refer to at a later time, perhaps in course journals.

STEP/STAGE #2: "'PERCEPTION': Class and small-group 'marking up' of sample essays (see Camp & Winner, 1994, p. 13), according to teacher-provided--yet negotiable--guidelines."

SUGGESTIONS

- Please note the attached photocopy from Camp & Winner (p. 13), 'Suggestions for Marking Up a Poem: Perception'.
- Based upon this document, consider the following 'revision' designed for EF students:

[followed by the document, 'Suggestions for Marking Up and Essay: Perceptions']

STEP/STAGE #3: "Preparation for 'PRODUCTION': In class & small groups, students focus on significant textual features & writing techniques 'as if they were themselves authoring the [essay], using a set of questions that parallel the guidelines they used earlier for marking up the poem'" (p. 14).

SUGGESTIONS

- Review and consider possible variations of the Camp & Winner document (p. 14), "Questions for Discussion of List Poems: Perception."

THE KEY: "... teachers and students then discuss the poem [essay] from the perspective of readers and writers" (Camp & Winner, p. 14).

- Consider the attached document as a potential 'preparation for production' model for EF students.

FIGURE 3-5: Instructional Sequence: The 'Portfolio-Culture' Classroom

can provide. As Glesne & Peshkin state, "Interviewing puts you on the trail of understandings that you may infer from what you observe, but not as the actors themselves construe" (1992, p. 65).

Interview #1.

Participants were individually interviewed for one-half to one hour in single sessions on three separate occasions. Interview #1 ("Progress as a Writer") was conducted just prior to the close of the first quarter of Essay Fundamentals instruction. This structured interview consisted of seven questions adopted from the Oregon Language Arts Portfolio Project (Hill, 1994) and selected for their relevance to the first questionnaire, conducted following two weeks of course work.

Interview #1 questions were designed to afford a sense of participants' impressions of the sorts of understandings they had been gaining regarding writing, both process and product. For example, participants were asked, "What's the hardest part of the writing process for you now?" and "What can you do more easily now than you could at the beginning of the year, or at some point in the past--as a writer?" These two questions served as follow-ups to Questionnaire #1 ("What is difficult for you as a writer? Why?") and "What would you say are your strengths as a writer? (What do you do well?)". They also invited participants to respond to questions relating to writing ease and difficulty through the lens of time, whether in terms of unexamined evolution, recognized progress, or of stagnancy or maintenance.

In order to arrive at clearer understandings of participants' responses to these questions, I posed follow-up probes. For example, following one participant's response to "What's the hardest part about the writing process for you now?" I asked this secondary question in order to elicit further detail and clarification: "When you say 'change it [a given draft] and go over it again', is that part of the process?" Whether such follow-up probes were posed depended upon the clarity and comprehensiveness of participants' responses.

Interview #2.

Interview #2 (“Effective Writing”) was conducted five weeks after Interview #1 and three weeks following student responses to Questionnaire #2. The interview was designed to ascertain students’ definitions, descriptions, and understandings of effective writing. This structured interview consisted of two separate protocols, with the first set of five questions posed without reference to any particular sample or exemplar, and focused upon students’ overall understandings of effective writing’s nature and features, plus corresponding definitions and descriptions of ineffective writing. For example, the first question, “For you, what does GOOD WRITING do or accomplish?” was intended to focus students’ attention on product as opposed to process, in preparation for the remaining four questions and as a basis for the exemplar-driven protocol to follow. A third question-- “Which of those qualities, features or ‘ingredients’ [of effective writing] are, in your opinion, the most important? Why?”--followed students’ self-descriptions of effective writing’s qualities and preceded a second question concerning the nature of ineffective writing. These initial “Effective Writing” questions served as follow-ups to Questionnaire #2’s more personally directed questions (“What do you like to do MOST in writing?” and “In what ways would you say that you ‘act like a writer’?”) and as a theoretical and reflective framework for the exemplar-based protocol to follow.

Questions related to students’ views of specific writing samples taken from the New Standards Project, 1994 Portfolio Field Trial Booklet, English/Language Arts (Appendix F) were asked. Sample A (“Ode to the Basketball Courts”), produced by a high school sophomore enrolled in a standard English course, is excerpted from Portfolio #03162-07, Set B, and was adjudged to be ‘below standards’ with respect to effective writing-related benchmarks. Sample B (“Why Me?”), produced by a junior English Honors student, is excerpted from Portfolio #03161-03, and was assessed as “meeting or exceeding standards” according to those same criteria.

Following completion of the first set of questions, individual participants were given a short break, then provided with a photocopy of Sample A only. I then read this exemplar aloud to each interviewee as he or she reread the piece silently, in order to ensure that students would have accurately read and heard the entire piece. The first of five questions was designed as a transition from the focus of that opening protocol: “Now that you have described Effective Writing, what qualities or features of effective writing, if any, ‘come through’ or appear in Sample ___?” Successive questions asked respondents to describe and assess the importance of those qualities and features (#2); discuss the sample’s ineffective qualities, if any (#3); rate the sample on a least to most effective scale (#4); and add any other impressions and perceptions concerning the piece’s relative effectiveness that might come to mind (#5). The entire process was then repeated for Sample B. As for Interview #1, I posed follow-up probes in cases where initial responses were unclear, unspecific, or otherwise seemed to invite further discussion.

Interview #3.

The purpose for this final interview (conducted during the closing week of the semester) was threefold: (1) to return to each student’s Questionnaire #3 (“How I Have Changed as a Writer”) responses for clarification and/or elaboration, (2) to invite students to revisit their responses to previous questionnaire- and interview-produced responses, and (3) to focus each student’s reflective attention on the four elements of writer understandings that served as the directives for this study: Writer identity, growth and self-assessment, processes pursued in the creation of product, and the nature of effective writing. This was my final opportunity to gain a sense of how each respondent’s experiences related, from his or her own perspective, to these four themes, issues that I hoped would inform my central question (“How does involvement in a portfolio-culture classroom contribute to high school students’ understandings . . .”). As Glesne & Peshkin (1992) state,

By whatever means obtained, the questions you ask must fit your topic: the answers they elicit must illuminate the phenomenon of inquiry. And the questions you ask must be anchored in the cultural reality of your respondents: the questions must be drawn from the respondents' lives (p. 66).

Conducted immediately following completion of Questionnaire #3, this final interview did not take the form of a single protocol, as was the case for Interviews #1 and #2. Rather, I tailored four central questions, one relating to each of the study's themes, for each respondent, based upon his or her related responses as expressed in previously completed questionnaires and interviews. Although the emphasis and wording of those corresponding questions differed, based upon individual student-writers' experiences, the thematic focus and intent remained consistent, as the following identity-based questions posed for Samuel and Julie, middle-achieving and high-achieving non-portfolio culture students, respectively, exhibit:

[Sam] A third question I have is on your identity as to how you see yourself as a writer. In response to the Final Reflection [Questionnaire #3], question #2 ("How/in what ways do you think your writing has changed?"), you said, "I now know how to write different ways." Could you be a little more specific as to what you meant?

[Julie] In your Final Reflection Letter, you said, "I see improvement in not only my writing from the semester, but also in my attitude toward writing. . . . Before it was considered a necessary evil, part of that dreadful chore, homework. Now I think of writing as a means of self-discovery, such as the National Issue paper, & of exploring the world around us, such as the Persuasive Essay." Aside from the subjects and purposes of the projects themselves, were there any activities or features of the class that contributed to this change in attitude. If so, what were they?

Julie's response follows:

Well, I mentioned two of the papers, but I think just everything we wrote: it really caused you to kind of look inside of yourself to see, 'What do I really think about this?' Or it caused you to look, like we did the Childhood Essay, and it caused you to kind of look back on your childhood, and it helps you to see how, how your perspective [student emphasis] has changed so much.

Following each respondent's initial response to a given central question, I posed one or more follow-up questions that I hoped would contribute to my understandings of his or her experiences with and attitudes toward that writing-based issue. Simultaneously, I provided

respondents with the opportunity (and encouragement) to explain, elaborate, interpret, or make claims--in other words, to reflect, with the ultimate goal of eliciting not good conversation, but good data (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 81). In Julie's case, I wanted to get clarification of her sense of 'perspective' as well as its apparent influences. As a consequence of her response to a follow-up question, Julie provided the insight, albeit in a general way, that the relationships and interactions among Essay Fundamentals participants contributed to that change in 'attitude' toward writing:

(Question) Is it the topics that do that, [Julie]? Is it the topics or the subjects of the papers that contribute to that? The kinds of essays you were asked to write, or something else?

(Response) Well, the topics, the kind of essay, that's a thing, one factor, but I think it's a lot more than that. I think our class itself was just a really good class, with a lot of really good people. And I liked my [writing] group, and I liked the teacher, and I think it made me like writing.

All interviews were tape-recorded, and verbatim transcripts reflect exact wording of questions as well as participants' responses to them. This is in support of this study's emphasis upon discovering meaning through the recursive dialogue between interviewer and respondent. As Merriam (1988) states,

... rigor in a qualitative study derives from the researcher's presence, the nature of the interaction between researcher and participants, the triangulation of data, the interpretation of perceptions, and rich, thick description (p. 120).

Transcripts were prepared according to the following process: Audiotapes were listened to first, in order to ascertain that complete responses to all questions posed were intact; a second time for transcription purposes, with any passages not clearly understood monitored by a second (and in some cases, a third) listener; and a final time as a check for accuracy, once transcripts had been saved to disk and printed. Transcriptions across all three interviews for the six participants were then photocopied to serve as primary documents for coding, analyzing, and interpreting (noting) purposes, with original sets being filed along with attendant computer disks.

Questionnaires

A second and complementary data source for this study was a sequence of three questionnaires (Appendix G), each completed prior to and providing a focus for subsequent interviews. In order of implementation, these questionnaires were designed to introduce respondents to the study's central themes at the onset of the course (Questionnaire #1); to ask them to reconsider and elaborate upon those themes, following an academic quarter of Essay Fundamentals experience (Questionnaire #2); and finally, to provide them with the opportunity to revisit those central themes at semester's end (Questionnaire #3). An interest in "meanings-in-action" (Erickson, 1986) drove this design, for student-writers were presumed to be understanding and responding to in-common experiences in the Site A or Site B "micro-cultures" in similar--and different--ways.

Consisting of five questions each, all three questionnaires incorporated at least one question pertaining to if not directly calling for responses to each of the study's central themes : Writer identity, growth and self-assessment, procedures followed in the creation of product, and the nature of effective writing. Additionally, these three protocols were designed according to the premise that, as a consequence of participating in classroom writing-based activities, respondents' in- common and individual experiences would be accessed via the scope and expression of the questions posed. With respect to writer *identity*, for example, student-writers were asked in September (9-19-94) to respond to question #3 ("What is *difficult* for you as a writer? Why?"), whereas two months later (11-14-94), following the completion of three of six major projects, participants responded to one prompt within Questionnaire #2 that revisited this question directly, yet with an implied invitation to refer to course experiences ("What do you like to do LEAST?"). Correspondingly, Questionnaire #3, completed only days before the final interview was conducted, includes three questions that speak to matters of relative writing difficulty and

preference, but that direct respondents to review an entire semester's experience in the context of overall writer *identity* (e.g., question #5, "How do the changes you see in your writing affect the way you see yourself as a writer?")

Questionnaire #1.

It is presumed that no high school junior or senior enrolled in Essay Fundamentals is a *tabula rasa*, for whom writing is an unfamiliar experience or an alien concept. On the contrary, each class member--and study participant--had successfully completed a minimum of two years of high school language arts, and had performed well enough on various writing tasks to be admitted to this elective course. Regardless of skill levels, experiences, or attitudes, participants were presumed to be familiar if not entirely comfortable with school writing. My first goal, then, was "to make the familiar strange and interesting again" (Erickson, 1986, p. 121) for student-writers as well as for myself. Questionnaire #1 ("Initial View of Self-As-Writer") was intended to establish a pre-immersion baseline of writing-based attitudes, beliefs, and/or apprehensions for each respondent. In fact, as the study's sequence of three questionnaires and subsequent interviews suggests, I modeled the general design of my investigation after the conceptual frame of the 'portfolio-culture' classroom itself: perception, production, and reflection.

Questionnaire #1 prompts were designed to document baseline participant understandings of and attitudes toward the nature of good or effective writing, the roles others might play as students strive to improve their written work, their own strengths and weaknesses as writers, and characteristically enjoyable writing tasks.

Questionnaire #2.

Reconsideration of and elaboration upon previously introduced themes, with an emphasis upon respondents' experiences with writing and their sense of themselves as writers, served as Questionnaire #2's purpose and focus. Administered at course midpoint and prior to and in anticipation of Interview #2 ("Effective Writing"), this

questionnaire was also designed to elicit reflective responses, as its prompts encouraged student-writer claims, interpretations, and attitudes in the context of viewing themselves as evolving writers, in keeping with the study's operational definition of *reflection*, as opposed to *observation* (simple identification, acknowledgement, or description).

From question #1 ("What do you like to do most in writing?") to #3 ("Where do you get your ideas for writing?") and #5 ("In what ways would you say that you 'act like a writer'?"), these prompts were designed to be direct and clear, yet sufficiently broadly stated so as to invite individual interpretation and expression (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Although the questionnaire format precludes participant observers from asking the sort of interactive, 'fortuitous' questions afforded by interviewing (p. 71), set questionnaire protocols provided a uniform, relatively controlled foundation of responses as they contributed to my understandings of the themes central to this study. As a result, I was able to analyze respondents' responses to a given prompt with some degree of confidence that conditions and opportunities for expression were reasonably consistent. This was doubly important, as subsequent interview questions largely grew out of the patterns of similarities and differences I discovered within this data.

As an example, Ann's (Site A) response to question #1--"I like to get other people's opinions on parts of my writing--then either edit or leave it, depending on my findings"--raised an issue that cuts across all six study participants' answers. Consequently, I incorporated student-writers' comparative use of and attitudes toward peer response group reactions and suggestions into the protocol for Interview #3, as the following follow-up question/response sequence represents:

Question: Did you feel encouraged by people in writing groups that , while [Alice's] paper *sounds* a little different than someone else's, or her voice is a little bit different, or the length is different, or what she focused on is a little different, that that was OK?

Response: I think so. Well, in our writing group, we all respected each other a great deal, and we--I think we all felt comfortable asking questions about what they

thought about theirs, and they felt free also to critique, and it wasn't--they weren't afraid to.

Questionnaire #3.

Revisiting central themes at semester's end in anticipation of a final comprehensive interview: This was the essential purpose of Questionnaire #3 ("Final Reflection").

Adopted from Project Zero/Harvard Graduate School of Education (Camp & Winner, 1993), this structured protocol is preceded by a directive to respondents: "Read everything in your folder and portfolio [Site A] (or, your writing folder [Site B] thoughtfully. Then answer these questions carefully and specifically" (Appendix G). These five questions focus respondents' attention upon accumulated and selected evidence of their writing-based experiences as they call upon student-writers' reflective powers. The resulting responses, although not always extensive or specific, are *heuristic*; that is, they contribute to my own and respondents' understandings (Merriam, 1988, p. 12) of such concepts as writer identity and progress, as well as of the nature of effective writing, process and product.

This final questionnaire took student-writers through the entire scope of their Essay Fundamentals experiences, from opening assignments and activities (#1, "What do you notice when you look at your earlier work?") through more recent efforts and accomplishments (#4, "At what points did you discover something new about your writing?"). Responses to these questions also served as beginning points as I constructed Interview #3 protocols for these student-writers. For example, Ann (Site A) responded as follows to question #1 :

I notice that as time progressed, my generalizations become more and more supported. I really started off not knowing how to bring my feelings and opinions to a fine point that is understandable to anyone reading or listening.

The corresponding Final Interview question I wrote attempts to elicit references to specific written products in support of Ann's response:

... Could you talk about how a certain later piece--later in the quarter, in the course--reflects stronger support for generalizations than does a piece that you wrote earlier on in Essay Fundamentals?

Ann's reply provided additional reflection, on her sense of the nature of effective writing as well as her 'take' on the role of two important features of the 'portfolio-culture' process: selecting and pursuing personal objectives for each project, and involving parents as reviewers of student work:

Well, my Persuasive essay. I really, really worked hard on it, and I kept my--the objectives that I wanted to pursue, which was supporting my facts, details. So I wouldn't have any generalizations that would be left hanging. I kept them in the back of my mind the whole time while I was writing it. And I also had my mom reread it and make suggestions, so that I would have all my generalizations or opinions supported by the facts.

Reflective Documents

In-common documents constituted a third source of data for reviewing and assessing the nature and significance of student-writer reflectivity to study questions across and within these two sites (see Appendix H). I have reviewed three types of documents for their potential to inform this study's central questions: writer's journal entries, self-assessments of two student-selected written products (Satisfying and Least Satisfying pieces), and end-of-quarter and semester cumulative-experience reflections. I also did so in hopes of obtaining a deeper and richer description of each student-writer's experiences and reflections, and to triangulate reflective data across these common documents, questionnaires, and interviews in order to ensure internal validity (Merriam, 1988).

Writer's Journal Entries.

As explained in Chapter 4, all Essay Fundamentals students were expected to engage in journal writing at least several times each week, with some class time being dedicated to this activity. Journal entries across these two sections of Essay Fundamentals included responses to teacher-posed questions, book reactions, descriptions of approaches to writing tasks, and assessments of newspaper editorials and other teacher- and/or student-

selected pieces and prompts. With the intention of providing students with ongoing opportunities to (1) imitate and comment upon various writing styles, (2) describe and discuss personal writing experiences, and (3) explore a variety of approaches to writing-based problems and projects, the journal-response component of the course was designed to play an important supporting role in these students' evolution as writers.

At times, journal entries served mainly as opportunities to record observations, such as Greg's remarks concerning his first foray into reading contemporary satire:

Though I am only 37 pages into the book which is usually enough for me to judge what a book will be, I still cannot get into this book [The Third Policeman/author]. It is the first real satire that I have read, so it may take some time for me to get used to, coupled with the fact that I have never explored a foreign author . . .

Other journal entries, especially those assigned to Site A participants, called upon students to arrive at perceptions and understandings of what constitutes good writing, doing so indirectly by responding to the poetry and prose of published (and acclaimed) authors as well as of student writers. Greg's first quarter response to "Sold Out," a poem by Veis Quinlan, reflects his efforts to understand how this poem's theme of aging and loss plays out through evocative detail and vivid imagery:

This poem's meaning is vague, in what the true meaning is. It is obvious that 'the old man' is sad about the loss of his cattle and it seems as though he may be losing his farm. The horses must be sold, the beginning [lines] say, and the cattle already have been. He doesn't speak. He only looks at the empty pasture blankly looking back at him. "Weathered poles and old men/mark what the age of the farm must be./Now it is gone." No words are wasted in this poem. Its meaning is evident. Self-Assessments: "Satisfying" and "Unsatisfying" Pieces.

Completed during the final week of instruction (1/18/95), these two documents posed identical questions at each site, yet did so under quite different circumstances. For Site A students who had been asked to assemble Showcase Portfolios (see Chapter 4) of their work, the concepts of 'Satisfying' and 'Unsatisfying' with respect to their own and others' writing were already familiar. Throughout the semester, these students had been asked to consider and share in teams and with the class their understandings of the qualities

and features of good writing. During the last two weeks of the semester, they were asked to write entry slips identifying and citing rationales for each piece they selected for their Showcase Portfolios. In contrast, Site B students, although encountering definitions and exemplars of effective writing, were not encouraged to discuss and explore the notion of a particular piece's merits from the perspective of personal standards and expectations prior to responding to these documents' questions.

Yet the purposes Mr. Green gave students for completing these two documents were identical at both sites: "To discover what you have learned about writing, to see how far you have come as a writer, and to reflect on your standards for writing" (see Appendix H). Directions were nearly identical as well, with the phrase "writing folder" used exclusively for Site B participants, whereas both "working portfolio" and "showcase portfolio" were incorporated into the directions for Site A writers. All Essay Fundamentals students received credit for responding to all "The Satisfying Piece" and "The Unsatisfying Piece" questions.

Document questions were designed, as was the case for those within the questionnaires, to be heuristic (Merriam, 1988, p. 12). That is, they were worded so as to avoid leading respondents to any particular conclusions, to reflect participants' unadulterated understandings of such concepts as the nature of 'satisfying' work, the writing process, and their own identities as writers. In addition, I arranged these three questions for each document with the expectation that responses to question #2 would contribute to understandings of and responses to question #3.

For example, Julie's response to question #2 ("Why do you characterize this piece as 'satisfying'?") informs her response to question #3 ("What did you learn about yourself as a writer from your work on this piece?"). Even though she does not discuss her writing process for this project in any detailed way, Julie's answer to question #3 takes the form of

a reflection (a claim, interpretation, or attitude toward her written work) in response to the observations she records for question #2:

Question #2: I worked very hard on this essay and did extensive research. I knew the topic very well, and I put a lot of effort into the writing of it. I also changed it a lot, and revised it until I was happy with the results. The topic I chose was also one I felt strongly about, so being able to write about it and share it with others made it satisfying.

Question #3: I learned that having a lot of knowledge on the topic pays off. I did a lot of research, and also knew about it from reading Alice Walker's books. I learned that I could teach myself things, and that was a cool discovery! I also learned that when things are done in a timely fashion, they become much easier. I am usually a procrastinator with homework, but I learned that I do have self discipline, and I actually had this paper done early.

Cumulative reflections: First Quarter Responses and Final Reflective Letter.

As mentioned above, documents for this study were designed in hopes of obtaining a deeper and broader description of each student-writer's experiences and reflections. In addition, I prepared these and other documents with the intent of generating findings that would "... match reality . . . [and] capture what is really there" (Merriam, 1988, p. 166). Finally, these cumulative reflections were designed as a participatory mode of research and in support of triangulating reflective data in order to ensure internal validity (Merriam, 1988).

"First Quarter Writing Experiences" (11/16/94). Designed as a follow-up to Questionnaire #2 ("Your Sense of Yourself as a Writer"), this set of six questions encouraged students to review their accomplishments and perceived progress, at the close of the first quarter of instruction. Whereas Questionnaire #2 elicited students' overall experiences with writing and their sense of themselves as writers, this document asked participants to consider their work from the perspective of apparent growth and change. By asking such questions as "What do you notice about your earlier work?" (#1) and "What do you know now that you did NOT know at the beginning of the quarter?" (#3), I

hoped not only to “corroborate and augment evidence from other sources” in support of developing converging lines of inquiry (Yin, 1994, p. 81), but also to provide mid-course data in anticipation of the final, more open-ended document, the final Reflective Letter.

The Final Reflective Letter was designed as a last opportunity to gather the sort of rich, ‘thick’ description that is associated with data that acquires its meaning across attitudes, norms, and values as well as experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Merriam, 1988). As a follow-up to Questionnaire #3 (“Changes in Your Writing and in Yourself as a Writer”), Essay Fundamentals students were asked to “. . . write a Final Reflection that builds upon your answers . . .” (see Appendix H). Responses, whether by low-, middle-, or high-achieving Site A or Site B participants, tended to reinforce and clarify previous reflections, as well as to reveal students’ current attitudes toward and understandings of writing and of themselves as writers. An excerpt taken from Julie’s Letter typifies the general nature of these responses:

I see the ability in myself to accept criticism now, and to revise papers more easily. Before it was very challenging for me to alter something I had written down. I used to be satisfied with my first attempt, and now I realize that rarely is a paper ever actually done.

Data Analysis

An appropriate metaphor for this kind of pattern discovery and testing is to think of the entire data set (fieldnotes, interviews, site documents, videotapes) as a large cardboard box, filled with pieces of paper on which appear items of data. The key linkage is an analytic construct that ties strings to these various items of data (Erickson, 1986, p. 148).

Erickson’s description of and rationale for *pattern analysis* as a way of locating and articulating the greatest possible number of connections (“linkage”) to the data, thereby enabling within-case generalization, fits this study’s data gathering and analysis procedures. More specifically, the study incorporates several data types, including relevant course documents, interview and questionnaire transcripts, and writing folder and portfolio

documents, in keeping with the need to triangulate both data sources and collection methods (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Miles & Huberman, 1984).

In support of internal validity, I have coded and analyzed all interview, survey (questionnaire), and relevant document-based data according to (a) the four study subquestions relating to writer identity, procedures, progress, and understandings of effective writing; and to (b) six subsets of student-writer-reflectivity. In order to achieve a level of construct validity that could support and clarify the theory or theories that grow out of that data, I looked for converging lines of inquiry and sought outside confirmation of them (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

Coding of the data.

The central question of this study is as follows: "How does involvement in a portfolio-culture classroom contribute to high school students' understandings of their (A) identities as writers; (B) the different processes involved in writing, and their use of them; (C) their progress (growth) as developing writers, and related self-assessment; and (d) the nature of effective writing?" In order to categorize and discuss this study's data--consisting of six students' reflective responses to many questions and prompts across three data types--my initial task was to define the nature and function of student "reflections" and then code those reflections according to the writing-related topics they stated or suggested.

As would be expected, not all responses to questions concerning students' experiences as writers went beyond observations, a term used in the study to refer to simple acknowledgments, identifications, and descriptions of writing-related events, documents, or features. Yet because this study is rooted in the soil of apparent understandings of writer identity and experience, only reflections--those responses that dig beneath surface recognitions--could provide insight into student thinking about writing. As a consequence, I defined the reflective response as follows: A reflection is a written or oral expression of 'meta-commentary' (Anson, 1994): It represents students' rationales or

rhetorical claims for, interpretations of, or attitudes toward their work with writing, in the context of viewing themselves as evolving writers.

After reviewing Site A and Site B students' reflections across writing-related prompts and questions, I found that these participants referred to a total of six major elements of writing. With the exception of "Deep Structures" and "Surface Features," two qualities of good writing as described in the literature (Spandel & Stiggins, 1990), designations for these elements are generic labels (e.g., writing process, self-efficacy). Figure 3-6 provides definitions of and designations for each.

In order to code these reflections consistently and accurately, I (1) established a comparative chart of observations as opposed to reflections for each of these six codes, and (2) set up a test for interrater reliability regarding designations and exemplars of the codes. In pursuit of the former, I recorded student responses that constituted observations (acknowledgments, identifications or descriptions) in each category, and then countered them with reflections (rationales, claims, interpretations, or attitudes) in response to similar topics. As I coded the data, I identified each student response as to its essential purpose or effect. The following observation/reflection pairing typifies the resulting protocol--and directed my decisions for selecting responses to be coded:

Code: "Surface Features" (SF)

Sample Reflection: (claims for, interpretations of, or attitudes toward their work)

" . . . because of the missing parts of the sentences and it's hard to understand it, if you don't go back and reread over. I mean, you should get what it's supposed to mean out of it in the first run through it. And that's why things can't be missing, and why paragraphs can't be miss--like turned around, and stuff . . ."

Sample Observation: (identifications, acknowledgments, or descriptions . . .)

"He [a writer] does have the proper punctuation and the spelling and everything else--"

Interrater reliability.

Writing Process ('WPC')

refer to students' experiences with and/or understandings of the steps and stages that students (1) initiate or encounter, or (2) consider as they review . . . Process-based reflections might be said to reveal . . . individual differences in how students go about their written work.

Written Products ('WPD')

refer to one or more individual pieces of writing or to a collection of documents produced over time. Product reflections indicate student-writers' questions or concerns about--or perceptions and evaluations of such finished written products--and evidence of the understandings that students have about writing.

Deep Structures ('DS')

emphasize features of writing that involve or contribute to students' holistic interpretations of and/or judgments about their work . . . Deep structure-based reflections discuss (1) a piece's rhetorical purpose and content; (2) its organizational design and related techniques; or (3) its apparent voice, tone, and intended audience.

Surface Features ('SF')

refer to features of writing that are visually apparent and that do not generally involve holistic interpretation or judgment. These features can include sentence structure, word choice, conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), and appearance/visual form.

Self-Efficacy ('SE')

represents (1) perceived ability on any given task, and (2) perceived growth over time. These reflections might refer to process or product, deep structures or surface features, but the emphasis is always on the writer's perceptions of growth, achievement, and/or ability.

Commitment to Goals ('ComG')

These reflections account for student-writers' goals and their commitments to them. Expressions of commitment (dedication, determination) to reaching a certain level of expertise with a given technique, strategy, or mode of writing characterize these reflections.

FIGURE 3-6: Key Features: Six REFLECTIVITY Codes

In an effort to obtain an objective assessment of how accurately I had coded subjects' reflections, I asked a University of Washington faculty member (College of Education) and holder of a doctoral degree in education to code selected data. I provided her with (1) the study's central question and attendant topics, (2) its operational definition of reflectivity, (3) designations for the six codes and their definitions, and (4) a total of 49 reflections across two documents (Interview #1 and Questionnaire #2) and two subjects each from sites A and B. Prior to delivering this material to the outside reviewer, I coded each reflection, recorded and dated the results, and secured this data until receiving the reviewer's own results. A comparison of these two accountings of student-writers' reflections resulted in an interrater agreement of 82% (81.63). This worked out to nine coding discrepancies from among a total of forty-nine incidents. The one problematic category for the reviewer was Deep Structures, as she "... saw it in many of the responses that were primarily another category." As I continued to categorize these reflections, followed by interpreting that data, I kept the reviewer's concern in mind.

Analyzing each case.

This process involved several steps, from (1) transcribing and coding the data, to (2) categorizing coded reflections according to the topics they addressed, (3) aligning categorized reflections with the study's central question and its four attendant writing-based themes, and (4) writing thematically-driven narratives based upon relevant reflections for each subject. Table 3-1 illustrates step #3, the alignment of categorized reflections with the central question's four themes.

In order to consider each study participant's reflections in the same way, I then created a template that matched a given response with (1) its reflective code (e.g., SE, Self-Efficacy), (2) a separate code depicting its topic (e.g., EW/ACC 'apparent accomplishments of effective writing'), (3) its source (e.g., Questionnaire #2), and (4) the

TABLE 3-1. Aligning Central Question Themes with Student Reflection Topics

Themes	Student Reflection Topics
A. Writer Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-characterizations as writers • Descriptions of and attitudes toward writing processes • Expressions of writing strengths and weaknesses • Statements of goals and expectations
B. Writing Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expressions of control over process, procedures • Understandings and attitudes toward writing processes
C. Writer Progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expressions of writer progress/growth across assignments, products, and goals • Assessments of the effects of procedures and classroom activities upon product quality • Attributions of progress/growth: Self, instructor, peers, and others
D. Effective Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assertions of important features and qualities of effective writing • Apparent accomplishments of effective writing • Qualities or features that reflect ineffective writing

relevant prompt or question. In this way, I hoped to be able to recognize themes, experiences, and attitudes unique to each individual, yet do so in a form that would allow for meaningful cross-case and cross-site comparison. I also established an automatic process of data triangulation by doing so. Table 3-2 reflects the “Effective Writing” template as it pertains to Samuel, the middle-achieving Site B student-writer.

At this point, I reviewed the resulting data, then wrote three focused narratives for each student-writer, a separate narrative for each of three themes that cut across all six participants’ reflections: effective writing, authority, and identity. These narratives featured inferences I had drawn, based upon the reflective data. For example, after reviewing the nature of Samuel’s many reflections regarding his beliefs and understandings as a writer, an identity-related theme, I opened Samuel’s identity narrative with the following assertion:

By the end of the term, Sam recognizes certain improvements in his written work, and yet he does not characterize himself as a writer. For Sam, being a writer means being a confident self-starter, a person who may welcome others’ responses,

TABLE 3-2. Samuel: Site B/Effective Writing

EW/IF: "Important features or qualities of effective writing"		
Reflective Code	Reflection	Source
DS	"But this poem ['Bayswater, Marilyn Hacker:Poetry Packet B], I believe, is a well written work of art. It makes you ask questions and hooks you. It lets you know whats [sic] going on as you progress and doesn't show you everything until the end. It pulls you through the poem. <u>[Sept. Packet Response]</u>	Journal
WPD	"... Second, I was able to compile everything that was supposed to be in the paper into an easy to read kind of story. Third, I got an 'A'." [ques. #2, " <u>Why do you characterize this piece as 'satisfying'?</u> "]	Satisfying Picce

including praise, but who needs neither motivation to write nor feedback in response to the writing.

Within each narrative, I cited, noted the origins of, and identified as to reflective code all of the reflections that pertained to its central theme. In so doing, I created comparative data bases, organizers, and narrative outlines in order to conduct within-site and across-site analyses. Finally, drawing from these three subtexts, I wrote a comprehensive narrative of each student-writer's themes and emphases. I then placed it and all other documents relating to that student aside in order to focus upon the next student-writer's reflections.

Within-site analysis.

After analyzing each student-writer's reflections across topics and subthemes within each of the two sites, I reviewed all attendant documents, including data charts and narratives, across in-common topics and themes. From that data, I created cross-summary overviews for each of the three central themes: understandings of good or effective writing, writer identity, and writer authority (including the concepts of awareness, ownership, and

control). Figure 3-7 represents an excerpt from one of these within-site cross-summary documents:

TOPIC/THEME #1: Definitions, qualities, & features of writing, and the nature/degree of students' own writing, according to them.

SUBJECT

REFLECTIVE RESPONSES (summarized)

- Rose
 - Claims EW involves (1) clear & consistent development of theme, (2) vivid, descriptive scenes that engage readers, (3) element of 'creativity' (word choice) & 'emotion' (tone), and (4) mechanical competence.
 - Good writing = descriptive, 'creative', focused
 - Rarely refers to own work's Deep-Structure-related features
- Ann
 - EW engages readers by (1) expressing selves clearly & precisely, (2) introducing & maintaining a recognizable & suitable tone, and--most frequently mentioned--(3) supporting generalizations w/specific details & other concrete evidence.
 - EW makes readers think even as it calls for emotional response
 - correlates vivid imagery and approp. & consistent tone
 - expresses the importance of relating to reader/audience
 - Combines such DS features as purpose, organization/design, & voice w/ references to various SF elements, including word choice, sentence structure/patterns, and conventions
- Greg
 - EW is easy to understand; the reader-to-writer connection is central to Greg's claims for, interpretations of, & attitudes toward written products
 - meets reader's need to visualize, communicates author's purpose, presents believable, compelling voice--and message
 - Consistently refers to importance of diction, organization, purpose, & supporting information/detail, all in support of clarity
 - Associates syntax, usage, & mechanics with clarity & support

FIGURE 3-7: Effective Writing: A Site A Cross-Summary

With this summarized accounting of the similarities and differences across each site's subjects and their respective reflections, I was able to write a narrative summary of participants' rationales, claims, interpretations, and attitudes about writing and as writers. Within-site analysis across low-, middle-, and high-achieving participants took the form of four separate narratives, each returning to one of the study's four subquestions. Those four documents were, in order, as follows: A., student identities as writers; B., the processes involved in writing, and students' use of those processes; C., student progress (growth) as developing writers, and related self-assessment; and D., the nature (qualities and features) of effective writing. This became the final step before reviewing these and all contributing data and documents for both sites in preparation for conducting across-site analysis.

Across-site analysis.

When I had completed within-site analysis and write-ups of each respective site, I then repeated much of the process for across-site analysis. Prior to beginning this work, however, I discovered that a few themes that dominated one or more Site B participants' reflections within a given topic (e.g., effective writing) were not a salient feature of Site A participants' responses, and vice versa. And yet, the majority of the issues raised and themes discussed were, in fact, in-common. Again through constructing charts and narratives across themes and topics, but this time searching for both correspondence and dissonance across sites, I conducted comparisons between similar-achieving participants as well as between each set of participants as a group.

Following the writing of comprehensive summaries (see Chapter 5, Findings), I examined similarities and differences across these two sites for evidence of broad themes (claims). Looking across the study's four subquestions (writer identity, writing process, writing progress, and the nature of effective writing), their attendant topics and themes, and individual student-writer reflections, I arrived at five claims that I felt merited further

investigation and articulation. These claims relating to (1) control and responsibility, (2) writing approaches and strategies, (3) confidence and optimism, (4) use of peer feedback, and (5) activities and effort versus ability are discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER 4 Site Similarities & Differences

In this chapter I recount the significant similarities and differences between the two sites that contribute to student experience and reflection. Similarities include common course content and instructional methods; the instructor, classroom, and available resources; and related in-common activities, procedures, and materials. The remainder of the chapter summarizes the two defining components of the Arts PROPEL approach-- domain projects and portfolios--that differentiated Site A from Site B instruction and that reflect the three central PROPEL principles: *student choice* ('authorship literacy'), *sustained engagement*, and *assessment as an episode of learning*. This final chapter segment provides instructional documents and classroom observations in support and clarification of important distinctions between the two sites.

Introduction

Two concurrent sections of Essay Fundamentals, a college-preparatory, single-semester writing course offered to juniors and seniors at _____ High School, served as the sites for this study. Embedded within each site were case studies of three student-writers whose understandings of writing and of themselves as writers formed the study's units of analysis. I wanted to ascertain to what degree particular features of the 'portfolio-culture' classroom with respect to assessment as an episode of learning (Wolf, 1991) and as modeled upon Arts PROPEL classrooms (Camp & Winner, 1993) seemed to influence student-writer understandings about writing and about themselves as writers. Therefore, I designed and established two sites for this study that shared certain elements of 'good writing instruction', yet diverged significantly with respect to instruction--and to a much less degree regarding content--according to the principles and practices of the 'portfolio-culture' classroom (Arts PROPEL/Harvard Project Zero, 1993; Camp & Winner, 1993; Howard, 1990). By implementing this design, I hoped to be able to discover whatever influence this alternative instructional approach contributed to student-writer perspectives

and understandings. An experienced Essay Fundamentals English teacher [‘Mr. Green’] served as the instructor for both sections. (See Chapter 3--Methods--for a full description).

Common features: Essay Fundamentals, Sites A & B

Course Description

Essay Fundamentals is described in the ____ High School Registration Guide as an advanced (i.e., college-preparatory) course focusing on the development of expository writing skills in support of student experience and comfort with the kind and quality of writing they would be expected to produce as college freshmen. Having earned semester grades of “C” or better in a year-long, comprehensive (language and literature, speech and writing) course as sophomores, these juniors and seniors worked singly and in peer-editing teams as they completed descriptive, narrative, analytical, and persuasive writing projects, along with language-related content and skills including vocabulary, usage, and sentence structure. Common site activities featured process-based instruction and practice (Applebee, 1981; Elbow, 1973, 1981; Macrorie, 1974, 1985), peer-editing group sessions in support of improving writing and responding skills (Gere, 1987; Sommers, 1992), and ongoing independent work involving writing folders, journals, and course notebooks (Elbow, 1973; Hairston, 1982), along with supplemental language, research, and presentation-related activities. As is the case for all Essay Fundamentals students, participants at both sites completed within- and outside-of-class assignments, selected topics and read appropriate texts or completed other research in preparation for completing major projects, and shared their work-in-progress and finished products with the instructor and with their peers.

Meeting three times per week for the same number of instructional minutes (Monday and Wednesday, 100 minutes; Friday, 52 minutes), sites A and B consisted of 28-30 students each at this large (1575+ student) suburban high school. At both sites,

students completed three essay projects, along with one in-class essay during each of two ten-week quarters, for a total of six major and two minor products. In addition, Essay Fundamentals students studied lists of SAT-derived words and their attendant synonyms, antonyms, and related words each week; they were required to incorporate them with recently studied language-related skills (e.g., different sentence structures, analogies, applied logic, transitional devices). Designed as a stepping stone to subsequent study as well as a focus for presenting relevant procedures and providing student practice or review of necessary skills, each project is referred to in the course description (see Figure 4-1) as a *unit*, described with respect to central goal(s), relevant concepts and skills, supplemental readings and exercises, and product requirements. Unit III, the Definition Essay, typifies these descriptions.

Classroom Configuration and Available Facilities

Located in a soon-to-be-remodeled but reasonably well maintained building wing that also houses journalism, ninth grade English, and ESL classes, Mr. Green's classroom is large (40 by 30 feet) and well-lit, easily accommodating sixteen two-person tables arranged in eight peer-group islands, and is festooned with student work--both writing and art. A large whiteboard, the teacher's desk, and a low bookcase are arranged along the north wall, adjacent to the east-facing upper windows, below which more shelves and a large project table are arranged. A narrow space in the northwest corner of the room is used to display team- and class-generated lists, plans, and other artifacts temporarily. Bulletin boards featuring student papers, project descriptions, and several commercial and student-created posters referring to authors and literary works dominate the south (rear) wall of the room, while a waist-high counter supports open and labeled writing folder and portfolio file boxes, sets of several supplemental texts available for student check-out, and open file boxes of writing-related periodicals line the west wall. Cubicles and open shelves

III. DEFINITION ESSAY

- A. Goals.
- To build upon leanings: essay structure and technique
 - To adapt the essay form to the requirements of effective definition
 - To focus on fluency and flexibility of research and use of evidence
 - To continue growth in sentence variety, personal voice, and language development

B. Concepts, Skills, Terminology.

1. Logic & Argument (Fallacy, Validity, Truth, Syllogism, Premise, Deduction, Induction, Propaganda, Definition Techniques)
2. Sentence Variety (loose & periodic; short & long; sentence openings)

C. Assignments.

- Write a Definition Essay of 5+ paragraphs employing definition techniques, sentence variety, and appropriate logical rhetorical devices.
- Read Chapter 9, The Lively Art of Writing (L. V. Payne)
- Complete related assignments, including journal entries team critiques, and teacher-provided exercises

The remaining six major essay projects, with attendant key concepts and skills, are presented as follows (see Appendix #f for additional details):

#1, The Personality Profile (non-biographical)

- Focus: Basic essay form, thesis statements, supporting arguments
- Techniques: Transitional devices, concrete language, sentence variety

#2, The Persuasive Essay

- Focus: Rhetorical strategies, comparison/contrast, research, types of evidence
- Techniques: Defining for clarity, rules of parallel structure, citations, transitions

#4, The Analysis Essay

- Focus: Defining a problem, assessing evidence, conducting a discussion
- Techniques: Evaluation, projection/prediction, synthesis

#5, The Literary Analysis/Review

- Focus: Selecting literary criteria for analysis, developing an argument
- Techniques: Accessing literary and critical sources, reinforcing persuasive skills

#6, The Personal Profile

- Focus: Applying thinking and writing skills to a more personal topic
- Techniques: Refining skills and strategies, as needed

FIGURE 4-1. Course Description Excerpt (see Appendix I)

secured at eye level above this counter house dictionaries and thesauruses, along with single copies of literary texts and several anthologies of fiction, poetry, and nonfiction.

Various facilities and resources beyond the classroom walls also serve these student-writers' needs. A computer lab housing thirty stand-alone Macintosh (PowerPC) computers loaded with Microsoft Word, Aldus PageMaker, and PowerPoint software, along with several printers and a scanner, is located two classrooms to the north and is available to Mr. Green's classes upon request. Individual students and peer groups can also meet in the conference/storage room adjacent to the classroom; this is also where I conducted most student interviews for the study. Connected by computer network to county, community college, and university library systems, the school library also features computer work stations, a staffed career center, and conference rooms, thereby accommodating Essay Fundamentals students' needs to conduct research and, occasionally, to review their written work individually and in teams. Finally, a classroom serving as study hall was available during both instructional periods (Site A, period one; Site B, period three) for those students who had missed draft-sharing deadlines and were, as a consequence, ineligible to participate in peer review sessions.

•Best Practice': Good Writing Instruction

Both sites employed several components of good writing instruction in support of the three essential goals addressed by Essay Fundamentals: (1) To provide students with the necessary researching, planning, drafting, and revising skills to produce effective expository text; (2) to build upon student knowledge, selection, and application of language-related skills and concepts in support of effective text; and (3) to contribute to these students' abilities to produce expository text designed for a variety of purposes and audiences. Five key components of what the literature (Britton et al., 1971; Graves, 1981; Perl, 1979; Sommers, 1980; Vygotsky, 1978) describes as being indicative of good writing instruction framed student experiences at both sites: (1) building a supportive

atmosphere, to establish the classroom as a community of writers; (2) presenting the composing process as an inventive and recursive cognitive activity, as applied to meaningful tasks and as intended for identifiable audiences; (3) utilizing peer review and instructor conferencing in support of writer growth and performance; (4) personalizing instruction through writing journals and writing folders; and (5) providing appropriate models and assessments.

Classroom atmosphere.

Establishing a positive, accepting atmosphere is essential for encouraging writer comfort, experimentation, and growth (Calkins, 1980; Gere, 1987; Graves, 1981; Macrorie, 1974). For both sections of Essay Fundamentals, the instructor incorporated whole-class and peer group community-building activities during the first weeks of instruction in order to create a supportive environment for producing and sharing written work. These activities included (1) drafting and posting *trust norms* (agreed-upon values and expectations) regarding instructor and student behaviors, (2) engaging in various 'ice-breaking' exercises in the interest of mutual awareness and empathy, and (3) presenting writing-related mini-lessons designed to build student familiarity and comfort with upcoming assignments and expectations. In addition, the instructor periodically reinforced these key norms of positive classroom interaction by involving students in similar, follow-up activities when they formed new peer review teams, began new projects, and had completed the first quarter of instruction. At both sites, students were taught to respond in responsible, respectful, and helpful ways to one another's work (Gere, 1987; Macrorie, 1974) as well as to make use of those responses in the spirit of learning through revision.

The composing process.

The notion of the composing process as an aggregate of inventive and recursive cognitive strategies or tactics (Bertoff, 1978; Cooper & Odell, 1978; Emig, 1971; Glaser, 1983; Graves, 1983; Hayes & Flower, 1980; Moffett, 1968; Young et al., 1970) informed

instruction at both sites, and served as a foundation for the implementation of key 'portfolio-culture' elements at Site A. Essay Fundamentals students approached each of the six writing projects procedurally, beginning with topic exploration through such 'prewriting' activities as reading, researching, and discussing, and/or with such writing-based heuristic (Young et al., 1970) and graphically organizational (e.g., Rico, 1983) activities as clustering, mapping, Venn diagramming, brainstorming, analogizing, and listing.

Next, student-writers reviewed student and professional writing models as they drafted thesis statements and either followed teacher-provided outlines and designs (Site B) or created their own approaches for structuring discussion, description, or argumentation for a given essay with teacher guidance (Site A). After completing initial drafts of a response to a given essay topic or question, students then shared those drafts in peer review teams, in keeping with the 'helping circle' process (Macrorie, 1974, 1985). In most cases, students then conferenced either formally (scheduled, with pre-determined focus and purpose) or informally (via instructor or student initiative) with the instructor before and/or between revisions. Finally, students edited, proofread, and rewrote their essays, either independently or with peer group assistance.

Peer and instructor review and support.

As suggested above, incorporating peer review and instructor conferencing in support of writers' efforts is another essential instructional element of student-writer engagement and development (Calkins, 1983; Freeman, 1981; Gere, 1987; Macrorie, 1976; Sommers, 1982). All Essay Fundamentals students were taught the mechanics of presenting their own writing and responding to others' work in the interests of product improvement and writer growth. Specifically, Mr. Green distributed copies of a variation upon Macrorie's *helping circle* process and modeled either this or a slightly modified routine with one or more peer groups, or he explained the process and took procedural

questions concerning it from the class, depending upon the given project and student need. Sommers' perspective on the teacher's obligations to student-writers accurately articulates the purpose as well as the spirit in which student-to-student conferences were modeled (and generally conducted) and the instructor's written comments were expressed:

. . . we [teachers] know that we comment on our students' writing for the same reasons professional editors comment on the work of professional writers or for the same reasons we ask our colleagues to read and respond to our own writing. As writers we need and want thoughtful commentary to show us when we have communicated our ideas and when not, raising questions from a reader's point of view that may not have occurred to us as writers. We want to know if our writing has communicated our intended meaning and, if not, what questions or discrepancies our reader sees that we, as writers, are blind to (Sommers, 1982, p. 148).

For each of the six units or projects, peer groups met on at least one occasion, with such session's purpose(s) being wholly instructor-determined at Site B, and alternately or collaboratively designed by individual peer groups and their instructor at Site A ('portfolio-culture' classroom). In addition to peer review, student-writers also consulted the instructor formally (assigned conferencing times) and informally (student-initiated, as needed).

Writing folders, journals, & notebooks.

Research indicates that writing is a complex process (Emig, 1971; Zelman, 1977), and that providing students with many opportunities to write, especially 'freely,' contributes to increasing fluency, sophistication, and confidence (Elbow, 1973; Fulwiler, 1980; Hairston, 1982; Macrorie, 1985). Personalizing instruction through writing was, therefore, an ongoing feature of this course. At both sites, Mr. Green provided students with from fifteen to twenty minutes at least twice per week to initiate and/or complete

various journal entries in support of writing fluency as well as of project development. Although Site A students were given greater latitude than were their Site B peers with respect to journal topics and writing forms and styles, all students were required to complete a given number of entries during each nine-week quarter. Occasionally serving as stimuli for teacher-writer conferences (and eligible for Showcase Portfolio selection on the part of Site A students) and shared during peer group sessions, journal responses were otherwise considered opportunities to experiment, to practice, and to review. Journals received course credit (10%), and Mr. Green reviewed journals three times during the semester. Scores earned were intended to encourage; his commentary was characteristically sparse, nearly always focusing upon student insights and observations, relative degree of entry completion, evidence of improvement of techniques previously attempted, and indications of new initiatives, such as experimentation with voice or form.

Both sites also incorporated cumulative, writer-accessible writing folders, although Mr. Green presented subtle yet significant distinctions between the nature and use of these classroom sets (see full description below). Housed atop opposite ends of a classroom counter, these standard file folders were identified by student and class period and stored in hanging files labeled according to peer writing group numbers. In order to prevent accidental misfiling, Site A folders were manila in color; Site B students' folders were bright yellow. In both classes, students were expected to place all completed and/or assessed projects and other writing-based documents produced for Essay Fundamentals in these folders. In addition, all students were required to maintain standard 3-ring notebooks for the class, including dividers for organizing vocabulary, literature, language, and writing process-related teacher- and/or student-provided materials, along with project-related procedures, models, and assessment information.

Models and assessments.

The provision of appropriate models and assessments, although implemented differently at these two sites, was an important component at both Essay Fundamentals sites, as the literature suggests they should be (Applebee, 1981; Cooper & Odell, 1977). As an integral part of instruction, assessment methods and rubrics (scoring guides) were presented to students prior to their initial work on a given writing project in both sites (Spandel & Stiggins, 1990). The two sites differed according to for what purposes, how, and by whom rubrics were developed (see below for a full description of this difference). Although proposed and instituted in significantly different ways at these two sites, scoring guides were incorporated for all six major units, although not for the two in-class essays. Again differing in terms of the models themselves and of how and for what intended effects they were presented, exemplars of particular forms, devices, and completed products were important elements of each unit across these two sites.

Supplemental Texts and Materials

Models--including sample student essays --are, of course, a type of text. Incorporated in various ways within the scope of each of the six Essay Fundamentals units, writing samples served as exemplars of, for example, the definition essay, the character sketch (Personality Profile), and the literary analysis paper. (Site A students also made use of what might be described as *counter-models*--see below for a complete description.) Students at both sites were asked to consider the nature and value of such exemplar components as introductory strategies, organizational designs, and sentence variety during the course of their work on a given project, depending upon that unit's particular goals and related skills (see Course Description, Appendix I). In addition, models were used as resources for some peer-group and whole-class discussions relating to student work-in-progress.

Mr. Green routinely presented professional and student models as part of his introduction to a given unit. For example, in preparation for initial student work on the

persuasive essay, he provided peer groups with photocopies of recent newspaper editorials and letters to the editor, along with Time and Newsweek magazine columns of topical interest (e.g., year-around school, compulsory national service, high school and collegiate sports) to his students. In addition, he selected exceptional essays written by former Essay Fundamentals students, removing all author identifications and teacher comments prior to photocopying and distributing them to individuals and peer groups. As noted, important distinctions existed between sites A and B regarding the implementation of these and other models, as described below.

The central texts for Essay Fundamentals include Payne's The Lively Art of Writing (1969) and Macrorie's Writing To Be Read (1973) and Telling Writing (1985). Because it features prescriptive chapters that deal with writing issues and characteristics in isolation (e.g., 'The Full and Final Thesis', 'The Passive Voice', 'Parallel Structure'), The Lively Art of Writing (LAW) chapter segments were incorporated within certain units on an as-needed basis; LAW served as a skills-oriented resource rather than as a writing text. For example, one of the Definition Essay unit's several goals, 'To continue growth in sentence variety, personal voice, and language development' (see Figure 1) is worded in such a way that all students, regardless of awareness or competence, might benefit from reviewing some or all of LAW, Chapter 9, 'The Sound of Sentences'. And as is the case for most features of the course, how and under what circumstances a given student accesses this and other Essay Fundamentals resources and assignments (see Appendix I) depends to a greater (Site A) or lesser (Site B) extent upon that student's needs and interests.

Essay Fundamentals is driven by skill-based goals and objectives, not by textbooks. Macrorie's two influential texts, Writing to Be Read (1973) and Telling Writing (1985) encourage student-writers to write for particular purposes and readers, and to pursue clarity of communication from the perspective of reader interests and needs. In a word, all students are expected to shun "English" (Macrorie, 1976), the sort of unvoiced,

impersonal, nonemotive prose that typifies the best dictionary entries and the least effective personal essays. Rather than follow a single outline or other structural formula, Site A students were expected to view projects as problems to be solved with personal interests and objectives in mind, even though certain teacher-imposed constraints were in effect. A lesser degree of flexibility was afforded Site B students, as the description of Site A routines below indicates.

Correspondingly, students were asked to consider models, pursue lines of thought, and draft solutions to problems posed by essay assignments; prescribed exercises were limited to occasional (and brief) in-class, peer group practice and discussion in support of such concepts and devices as transitions, parallelisms, and source citations. Precisely because segments of Macrorie's texts were not formally assigned (see Appendix I), the instructor presented selected chapters and exercises of Writing To Be Read and Telling Writing to all students as (1) models for free writing, as used in journals and as part of the writing process for projects, (2) examples of communicating for different purposes and audiences, and (3) exemplars of form and style in support of peer writing group discussions.

Site Distinctions: Site A, The 'Portfolio-Culture' Classroom
Site B, The 'Good Writing Instruction' Classroom

Overview of Arts PROPEL Theory and Practice: Integrating Teaching and Assessment

I suggest that there is at least one additional option [in addition to 'curriculum']--a classroom culture choice that is honest, challenging, and friendly to both text and students. That is, let's truly commit to authentic assessment in which students are real players . . . Let's move the rich discussion of standards and criteria that merge the tasks with the assessment of those tasks to the core of classroom culture. Let's make this discussion the daily unifying core concept that places the classroom year

in context for our students. In PROPEL we call this Perception, Production, and Reflection, and it is how I plan to teach next year (Howard, 1990, p. 3).

Howard's remarks represent more than an enthusiastic overview of innovative instruction. They also presage two key Arts PROPEL concepts-in-practice in support of "... weaving together curriculum and assessment" (Harvard College/Project Zero, 1993): (1) establishing a systemic, recursive approach to involving students in meaningful ways with their own learning, as represented by the domain project; and (2) doing so in concert with assessing their individual growth as artists, musicians, or writers via the portfolio. Figure 4-2 presents an overview of those themes and practices, as advocated and/or practiced by Camp & Winner, 1993; Harvard/Project Zero, 1993; Howard, 1990; and Wolf, 1989, 1991:

A collaborative five-year (1987-1992) effort involving the Harvard University Graduate School of Education (Project Zero), the Educational Testing Service, and the Pittsburgh Public Schools, Arts PROPEL was founded in an effort "... to explore alternative methods of assessing student achievement in music, the visual arts, and imaginative writing" (Howard, 1990, p. 1). As defined and described by Arts PROPEL researchers and practitioners, domain projects and portfolios (or "process-folios") grow out of the notion that teachers and students should be *co-discoverers* (Howard, p. 2) of effective strategies and models in support of collaborative creating and understanding.

The remainder of this chapter presents a comparative overview of Site A and Site B design and practice from the perspectives of ideal--and actual--applications of the Arts PROPEL instructional model. In the interest of clarity, I have divided this discussion between considerations of Arts PROPEL's two central, defining components--domain projects and portfolios (see Figure 4-7), even though these PROPEL elements frequently overlap in both theory and practice. In addition, Site A applications of and variations upon these two PROPEL instructional practices, in contrast to their relative absence for Site B

Two Systemic Components of Classroom Practice

Domain Projects

- Open-ended, stressing understanding over imitation experience
- Student-centered, using student work as starting points
- Accessible, accommodating varying skill levels
- Process-directed, consisting of interrelated activities

Portfolios

- Record personal growth over time and
- Model the recursive writing process
- Serve as a resource of ideas for future work
- Support reflection and critical judgment

Three Central Tenets, Embedded within Domain Projects and Portfolios:

1. 'Authorship Literacy': Writing and critiquing as authors. Students:

- view themselves as writers, not as students of writing
- write frequently, and explore a variety of genres
- act as thoughtful judges of quality in writing
- develop reflection as a habit of mind
- participate in assessment activities

2. 'Sustained Engagement': Approaching art forms along three 'crisscrossing pathways'. Students:

- engage in sustained encounters with a particular genre of writing (e.g., poetry, journalism, playwriting)
- encounter their own and others' work according to a recursive cycle or process:

PERCEPTION: Students study works of art by peers and published authors to understand choices and make connections between their own and others' work

PRODUCTION: Students are encouraged to master skills, take risks, and learn the principles of the discipline [e.g., 'good/effective writing']

REFLECTION: Students assess work according to personal goals and standards of excellence as they study the entire creative process, not just the end product

3. 'Assessment as an Episode of Learning': Fostering as well as revealing learning. Students:

- engage peers, the instructor, and parents as they develop habits of self-assessment
- consider various writing models as starting points for discussions of artistic values and for self-assessment
- move from writing folders to teacher review sessions, classroom assessment, and portfolio assessment

FIGURE 4-2 An Overview of Arts PROPEL Theory and Practice: Integrating Teaching and Assessment in 'Imaginative Writing'

(derived fr. Camp & Winner, 1993; Harvard Project Zero, 1993)

students, are described according to the tenets that define Arts PROPEL practices: (1)

student choice, (2) sustained engagement, and (3) assessment as episode of learning.

References to relevant documents and classroom activities are offered as evidence of these comparative assertions.

Domain Projects: The Arts PROPEL Model

FIVE KEY IDEAS ABOUT DOMAIN PROJECTS

1. Domain projects are composed of a series of interrelated activities that emphasize process, require revision and reflection, and are accessible to students with various levels of technical skills.
2. Domain projects are open-ended projects with multiple solutions. They invite students to discover and invent their own solutions, and to explore others' solutions.
3. Domain projects stress production as the central activity: reflective and perceptual activities grow out of, and feed back into, the creative process.
4. Domain project work is assessed not only for the finished product, but also for the learning, growth, and increased understanding that has occurred.
5. Domain projects pose problems that stimulate students to increase their role in defining their own problems to pursue (Camp & Winner, 1993, p. 11).

As applied in Arts PROPEL middle and high school Imaginative Writing classrooms, then revised and taught district-wide in the Pittsburgh Public Schools (as the Syllabus Examination Program--SEP--Camp & Winner, 1993, p. 37), domain projects integrated reading and writing activities, reportedly doing so through a fusion of instruction and assessment (p. 11). They were designed, therefore, to build one upon the other with respect to skills learned, concepts understood, and applications made. For example, Camp & Winner (1993) describe a pair of complementary domain projects dedicated to increasing students' abilities to produce poetic expression. Whereas the first of two PROPEL projects ("Writing a List Poem") focuses on listing and cataloging as ways of structuring and infusing rhythms and patterns within a poem, the second ("Exploring Mystery in Poems") asks students to perceive the general nature and specific values of poetic expression, and then to produce their own imaginative descriptions.

Defined as "integrated, cumulative activities spanning several class periods" (p.

12), these and other Imaginative Writing domain projects (1) incorporate ‘marking up’ writing models, along with other analytical activities; (2) emphasize the writing process, from prewriting to drafting and revising; and (3) involve students in what are characterized as the three “crisscrossing pathways” of perception, production, and reflection, wherein perceptual, productive, and reflective activities “. . . grow out of, and feed back into, the creative process” (p. 11). Whatever their particular intended outcomes, Arts PROPEL domain projects were designed to incorporate several interrelated, recursive activities built around the second of three PROPEL principles: *sustained engagement*. Arts PROPEL theory holds that when students participate in focused encounters within and across writing genres, and approach their own and others’ work according to the cyclical, recursive nature of perception, production, and reflection, they are engaging in and benefitting from the “crisscrossing pathways” that define this principle:

Traditionally, arts education has focused separately on either production (studio arts, musical performance, creative writing) or historical and critical studies. In contrast, Arts PROPEL explores the creative process, in which the artist must mine both his or her own experience and the heritage of the art form in fashioning new work (Harvard University Project Zero, 1993, np).

Weaving instruction with assessment, together with analytical investigation and creative production, the first instructional sequence (“Writing a List Poem”) typifies PROPEL domain project design, whether focused upon writing, drama, or the visual arts. Co-designed by teachers and researchers, “Writing a List Poem” takes students through a series of activities in support of a single goal: To introduce students to prewriting, drafting, and revising activities for the purpose of constructing effective poems of their own. According to PROPEL proponents, students immerse themselves in a sequence of recursive activities that direct them from perceiving to producing to reflecting and again to

producing (*sustained engagement*). As a consequence of engaging in these activities, students are said to behave as writers (*authorship literacy*), not simply view themselves as students of writing. PROPEL classrooms are reportedly designed and developed according to the expectation that students take on the identity of expert to at least some degree, teachers participate in the production of writing (or acting or painting), and class discussions and process-based activities reinforce the notion of assessment as an episode of learning. One PROPEL teacher, Arla Muha, reports upon her sense of the presence and significance of such a learning environment for her eleventh grade writers as they worked through the “Writing a List Poem” domain project:

When I was finished [drafting a poem along with her students], I asked the students to read their lines so that we could comment on them. One student said, “Why don’t you read yours, Miss Muha.” So I read. One line was “Let the rain drip from your nose.”

“That’s not very good, Miss Muha,” my newborn poet exclaimed.

I laughed and replied, “You’re right, it isn’t very good.” And then we not only discussed why my line didn’t measure up, but discovered that no matter how much we write or how much of an expert we are, writing is tough work, takes time, and more often than not requires going “back to the drawing board.”

This student was not attempting to make Miss Muha look bad. He was becoming an expert. He knew an effective line of poetry when he saw one and mine didn’t cut it. *Victory #1* (Muha, 1989, p. 4).

In preparation for student engagement in purposeful self-assessment, a panel of practicing poets and teachers convened by PROPEL researchers identified qualities contributing to poetry’s effectiveness, including “. . . variety and concreteness of detail, conciseness, sense of direction, use of rhyme or rhythm, and humor” (Harvard Project Zero, 1993, np). PROPEL instructors then incorporated these and other criteria in their

teaching, explained the nature and importance of each, and then asked students to consider those criteria during each stage of the domain project. Consisting of excerpts from several figures published by Camp & Winner (1993, pp.13-16), Figure 4-3 represents an overview of “Writing a List Poem” for high school students:

Domain Projects: Site A Essay Fundamentals student experiences

As explained above, Arts PROPEL Imaginative Writing students select topics that interest them, brainstorm and list relevant details, produce one or more poems from that or similar lists, and then revise their poems according to their own understandings and classroom discussions of the qualities of effective poetry. This principle of integrated instruction and assessment, as addressed by a series of domain projects, portfolio activities, and related requirements, was established and maintained for Site A students across five of the six Essay Fundamentals projects, insofar as it was possible to do so. As Site A students discovered, following these or similar steps--selecting topics, brainstorming examples and illustrations, and researching relevant evidence in support of a thesis for the personal essay--can be time-consuming and cumbersome. Whereas the *sustained engagement* process as described in the Arts PROPEL literature featured relatively brief poems, dramatic scenes, and other imaginative writing texts and models, thereby allowing a fairly varied series of discovery- and compositional-based activities over a relatively short period of time, Site A Essay Fundamentals students dealt with often lengthy nonfiction pieces whose respective incorporation of literary devices and rhetorical strategies required considerable time to discover, understand, and emulate.

As a result, not all Site A students, as indicated by their reflections, apparently made the sorts of compositional connections across those activities that PROPEL describes as calling for either perception, production, or reflection, resulting in students’ abilities “. . . to discover and invent their own solutions, and explore others’ solutions” (Camp & Winner, 1993, p. 11). In addition, Mr. Green, instructor for both Essay Fundamentals

Suggestions for Marking Up a Poem: Perception [fr. Fig. 2.1, p. 13]

1.
 - Circle words (nouns) that name concrete or specific things.
 - Circle any action verbs..
 - Put a box around nouns for things that are abstract
 - Write in the margin the feeling conveyed by the things named in various parts of the poem
 - Explain how the things in the poem convey the feeling or feelings identified.
2.
 - Underline patterns of words at the beginning of one line that are used again at the beginning of another line or lines [Plus two additional marking-up steps referring to similarities and differences between line beginnings and word patterns, and resulting connections and effects.]
3.
 - Put a bracket around groups of lines that seem to go together.
 - Explain why the lines seem to go together . . .
 - Use a wavy line to circle any part of the poem where you find something unexpected or surprising or out-of-the-ordinary from the rest of the poem or . . . that confuses you.

Questions for Discussion of List Poems: Perception [fr. Fig. 2.2, p. 14]

1.
 - What specific details could you add to the poem? • Which are most appropriate for the poem?
 - Where would you put them in the poem? • How would they affect the poem?
2.
 - What words would you use at the beginning of a line if you wanted to add a new line to the poem? [Plus three questions relating to alternative beginnings and their possible effects]
3.
 - How would you begin the line or lines in which you add your new details? Why? [Plus three questions relating to adding new lines, and the affects of so doing]
 - *Optional:* Where do you think you might find or create a sense of discovery, or of something unexpected or out-of-the-ordinary in the poem?

Questions for Reflecting on Inserting Lines [fr. Fig. 2.3, p. 15]

1.
 - What specific details did you add to the poem?
 - Why did they seem to you to belong in the poem?
2.
 - What words did you use to begin your new lines?
 - Did you use the line beginnings established in the poem?
3.
 - Why did you put your lines into the poem where you did? [Plus three related questions]
4.
 - Do you find any interesting or surprising combinations of details in what you added?
 - What makes these combinations interesting or surprising?
5.
 - How do the lines you inserted affect the poem? [plus three questions regarding writer's likes, possible changes, and reasons for them]

Questions for Reflecting on Your Own Poem [fr. Fig. 2.4, p. 16]

1.
 - What specific details did you use in the poem? [Plus two follow-up questions]
2.
 - Did you use similar patterns of words . . . in your poem? If so, which lines? [Plus three questions relating to similar patterns, variations in patterns, and affects of those variations]
3.
 - Are there any groups of lines that seem to belong together in your poem? [Plus a follow-up]
 - Are there any lines that would be better moved to somewhere else in the poem?
4.
 - Are there any parts of the poem that seem surprising or interesting as you come to them . . . ?
5.
 - What do you like about the poem?
 - Is there anything you would now like to change? Why or why not?

FIGURE 4-3: The List Poem
Close-up of a Domain Project in Imaginative Writing
 (fr. Camp & Winner, 1993—pp. 13-16, Figures 2.1 - 2.4)

sections, found it difficult at times to replicate the claim that “. . . Arts PROPEL explores the creative process, in which the artist must mine both his or her own experience and the heritage of the art form in fashioning new work” (Harvard University Project Zero, 1993, np, as cited above). Although Green provided class time for and encouraged his Site A students, both individually and in peer editing teams, to “. . . increase their role in defining their own problems to pursue” through establishing objectives, reviewing student and professional models, and engaging in discussions regarding the nature of good writing, student understandings and applications of “. . . the heritage of the art form”—in this case, the personal essay—gave way much of the time to more elemental considerations pertaining to constructing effective essays for various purposes and representing several traditional organizational designs. That said, although Site A’s incorporation of key principles and practices pertaining to *student choice*, *sustained engagement*, and *assessment as episode of learning* (see Figure 3-1) for students did not constitute a replication of Arts PROPEL “imaginative writing” domain projects and portfolios as described by Camp & Winner (1993), it did consistently incorporate and emphasize key elements of them.

Figure 4-4, an overview of the ‘portfolio-culture’ Essay Fundamentals classroom, represents the first page of an introductory document that Mr. Green presented and explained to Site A student-writers on the first day of instruction. Its emphasis upon teacher-student collaboration and investigation introduced these Essay Fundamentals students to a way of learning and doing that contrasted in fundamental ways with Site B students’ experiences:

The instructor’s task in support of Site A students’ learning was to reshape the instruction of each of the six Essay Fundamentals units of study (see Appendix F) to comply with the major principles and components of domain projects. PROPEL researchers and practitioners encourage instructors of various courses to “. . . modify the domain projects developed by Arts PROPEL to suit their needs, or use them as models for

What is a 'Portfolio Culture' Classroom? What Will It mean to--and for--You?

In this class, as in all Essay Fund. classes, you will be expected to practice the process of writing and to produce quality work. But this class will be different, because we will take a unique approach to learning about producing and evaluating writing, known as the '**portfolio-culture**' classroom. Founded and practiced in the Pittsburgh Public Schools as a project known as Arts PROPEL, a 'portfolio culture' classroom is at least as much the environment we create together as it is the writing you will produce during the semester. As one Arts PROPEL student said,

It is a friendly environment of discussion and compatible argument, a place of freedom of the mind. . . . A place to explore what the written word is and what it can be. A place to express the feelings deep within ourselves.

At the heart of Arts PROPEL are three stages of thinking about and 'doing writing': **Perception, Production, & Reflection**. More about these unifying concepts later. First, here are the special qualities of the 'Portfolio Culture classroom' that you are about to join:

- Students & the teacher are co-discoverers.

--All of us will identify and explore strategies that contribute to 'good writing'.

- Assignments will be meaningful, because students will make decisions, even as they follow teacher guidelines.

- Many student and professional models will contribute to student-writers' choices, strategies, and products.

- Connections between assignments and assessment are essential!

--We will consider the qualities of effective writing, based upon helpful models, your writing experiences, and group & class discussions.

In short, a 'Portfolio Culture' classroom is honest, challenging, and 'user-friendly'. It demands a great deal from all of us, but the results should be extraordinary. It will be up to all of us to make it so.

(See reverse side for an overview of PERCEPTION, PRODUCTION, & REFLECTION.)

Figure 4-4: The Portfolio-Culture Classroom

creating projects of their own" (Harvard College/Project Zero, 1993, np). Within the constraints of the six-unit Essay Fundamentals course design, the instructor and his students modified approaches to and construction of project-based writing units according to three PROPEL-based qualities, each originating from and contributing to a central theme:

flexibility in the service of student acceptance of and investment in what Mr. Green referred to as the ‘portfolio-culture Essay Fun class’ in his conversations with me.

More specifically, these units approximated domain project design by virtue of being (1) relatively (in comparison to Site B units) *open-ended*, allowing for a variety of expository solutions to problems posed; (2) *student-centered*, using “. . . students’ own work as the starting point for critical stud[y] . . .”; and (3) *accessible*, empowering students to take a number of risks as writers, regardless of individual skill level. (In contrast, corresponding Site B projects were substantially more teacher-directed, providing fewer options for student choice and approach, from topic selection to methods of and purposes for drafting and revising.) Five of the six Site A Essay Fundamentals expository writing units were developed, therefore, with Harvard Project Zero’s central pedagogical purpose in mind:

Domain projects explore principles and practices central to the disciplines of visual arts, music, and imaginative writing. These products are designed to stir the imagination and inspire students to become active learners who are deeply involved in their work (Harvard Project Zero, 1993, np).

Units modeled after PROPEL ‘domain projects’, together with a three-stage portfolio process and related activities, distinguished Site A student-writers’ experiences from Site B students’ work. At Site A, both design and practice honored the central tenet of the PROPEL Imaginative Writing program: Integrating teaching and assessment via student-centered episodes of learning (Wolf, 1991). This teaching/learning approach to Essay Fundamentals goals and course work was intended to encourage student authorship and, ultimately, a sense of ownership through immersion in a recursive, albeit comparatively slowly developing, pattern of perception, production, and reflection-related activities (Camp & Winner, 1993). ‘Unit I: Basic Essay Form & Purpose’ (see Figure 3-4) summarizes the key instructional distinctions between Site A (the ‘portfolio-culture’

classroom) and Site B ('good writing' instruction) as they relate to student projects and portfolios. It is also described below as part of a discussion of the nature and importance of *sustained engagement* as Site A Essay Fundamentals students encountered it.

Although they were of necessity compressed and somewhat altered versions of PROPEL domain projects, five traditional (as presented to Site B students) course units were revised and implemented according to the underlying and premise and basic design of imaginative writing projects as described by Camp & Winner: “. . . developing in-depth, long-term domain projects in which students could become authors, engaging directly with the demands and techniques of a specific kind of writing, and learning to make reflection and assessment part of their writing process” (1993, p. 11). (See references and explanations regarding those differences and their apparent significance elsewhere in this chapter and in Chapter 6, Discussion.) The sixth unit, the literary analysis essay, was assigned just before student-writers began to select, revise, and write final reflections about pieces to be included in their Showcase Portfolios; the semester calendar in general and limited class time in particular prevented Site A students from engaging in the time-intensive perception-production-reflection process for this final Essay Fundamentals project.

Contrasting approaches: The persuasive essay

This second of six Essay Fundamentals units typifies the important distinctions between Site A and Site B teacher direction and student experience. Whether comprising a three-week unit (Site B) or a domain project of slightly longer duration (Site A), the persuasive essay segment was designed to increase student skills and understandings across several common course goals. Published in the Course Description (see Appendix), these goals included providing all students with opportunities to explore and practice (1) applying various persuasive (rhetorical) approaches to a given topic or issue, (2) researching and citing source material, (3) defining concepts and clarifying assertions, (4)

selecting and incorporating various forms of evidence, and (5) organizing and developing a persuasive argument.

Domain project vs. traditional unit: The persuasive essay

Key Site A distinctions, modeled after major elements of Arts PROPEL domain projects, emerge from teacher unit plans and goals, instructional materials, and classroom observation transcripts. For example, although available instructional time allocated for the persuasive essay was limited to approximately three weeks at both sites, only Site A students participated in a series of activities, including analyzing newspaper editorials and other models of appeals and approaches (*perception*), sketched out ‘quick drafts’ of what would evolve into full-fledged essays (*production*), and reconsidering those quick drafts by way sharing Exit Slips (Gere, 1985) in peer editing groups (*reflection*). In addition, Site A students (1) used their own and others’ work as starting points, (2) conducted assessment-as-learning activities alone and with their peers, and (3) wrote and revised objectives for their work, based upon their own as well as the instructor’s expectations. A site comparison of the first two class sessions dedicated to persuasive writing reflects most of these distinctions:

Site A	Session #1 (10/24/94)	Site B
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Reflection</u>: ‘Reflective Write #1’ (Opinion piece due; reassessment of personal objectives) • Teacher-initiated discussion of overall strengths and weaknesses of Opinion pieces; Introduction of the second major unit: The Persuasive Essay. • Writing-team: Share & discuss objectives previously established for the Opinion piece. • Teacher-initiated discussion: Class review of “The ongoing, class-generated list of qualities of good, effective writing. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Not conducted</u> • As per Site A • <u>Not conducted</u> • Teacher-initiated review: Qualities of Good Writing”
	Session #2 (10/26/94)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher-initiated overview of unit requirements and distribution of article, re the nature of persuasive discourse. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As per Site A

- Perception 1: In teams, share student-provided teacher-newspaper editorials acc. to (a) emphasis upon three central appeals and (b) overall effectiveness.

Record learnings in course journals.

- Brainstorm topics for own persuasive essays; Preliminary thesis (position + limits) due 10/28.

- Whole-class discussion, provided editorials and related commentary: The effective persuasive piece.

- As per Site A

As these overviews begin to suggest, Site A ('portfolio-classroom') students followed a recursive series of perception, production, and reflection activities quite similar to the Arts PROPEL pattern described above (see Figure 3-4) for domain project #1, the Personality Profile. From their written reflections concerning the degree to which they believed they had met their personal objectives for the Opinion Paper, to their responses to 'Guided Questions for Reflection' regarding completed persuasive essays, Site A student-writers probably engaged in as close a facsimile of PROPEL domain projects as could have been conducted within the context and constraints of the Essay Fundamentals course. Although held accountable for meeting the same five goals as were their Site B counterparts, 'portfolio-culture' students experienced greater autonomy (and, at times, higher levels of concern, since they were charged with the responsibility for making more substantive compositional choices) as they designed, produced and reflected upon their writing-related experiences.

Mr. Green led both sections of students through a traditional 'good writing instruction' sequence, moving from reading student and professional models to brainstorming ideas and discovering relationships among them, and from conducting research to writing and sharing preliminary drafts in peer editing groups. Yet only Site A students were asked to view their work and related objectives through the lenses of inventors who, while revelling in their discoveries and creations, also acknowledge the challenge of defining and solving problems that intrigue or trouble them. For example, after selecting specific objectives for their persuasive essays, Site A student-writers conducted 'mark-ups' (see Figure 4-5 below) of model essays in order to consider these

pieces' strengths and weaknesses (*perception*). Next, Site A students were asked (see overview of Session #7, 11/7/94) to review their previously completed and evaluated opinion papers in light of their most recent understandings regarding the art of persuasion (*reflection*). Following this, Site A student-writers were asked to respond to a series of questions ("Guided Questions for Reflection: The First Draft of your Persuasive Essay"--*perception*). Prodding students to consider the degree to which they have addressed project requirements and their own objectives, these Guided Questions then led Portfolio Culture students to determine specific needs for revision they recognized, and to select the method(s) by which they might revise their work (*production*). As was the case across five of the six projects, Site A students began their work with persuasion by reflecting upon their most recent compositional understandings and accomplishments.

Mr. Green distributed "Reflective Response #1" (first Persuasion Project reflection) forms to Site A student-writers on October 26 (1994); it was on this date that a contracted outside reader had evaluated and returned students' 'opinion papers' in response to certain newspaper editorials. Site B students were asked to read and consider the reader's comments, then place these graded papers in their writing folders. Site A students, however, were first asked to review their goals for the piece, and to do so in the form of a reflective response. (As the document implies, the reader responded to several teacher-determined criteria as well as to one or more individual student objectives for that piece) :

Please take a few moments to write about how you feel about what you have accomplished as a writer in this paper. Your Reflective Write is for YOU: It may be a description of any or all of the following, or you may add your own 'issues for reflection':

- What did you do well in this paper?
- How well did you meet your goals? The assignment's requirements?
- What might you do differently next time?
- What questions about your paper would you like answers for?
- What sorts of goals might you set for next time?

When you have finished, please staple this Reflective Response #1 to your paper and place it in your working portfolio."

Even those responses that emphasized surface features often portrayed writers who had taken responsibility for--yet were somewhat ill at ease with--the idea that no finished product is without some possibilities for improvement, and that the act of writing often incorporates making decisions, whether of a substantive or of a more surface nature. Greg, ultimately the most accomplished among the three Site A subjects chosen for this study, provides an example of this sentiment with his response:

I organized the essay well and addressed the question simply. I followed my personal goals for the paper and received commendation for it. Next time (following the advice of the reader) I plan to cut off my sentence fragments. I had too many in the paper. I want to also give more specific examples of what I am explaining. One question I would like to ask, though, is how I can solve my problems with sentence fragments. And why do they recur so often? Am I doing something terribly wrong? I'm going to make the destruction of sentence fragments one of my goals for next time.

Appendix J, *The Persuasive Essay: Instructional Sequences, Sites A & B*, delineates additional important commonalities and distinctions between these two Essay Fundamentals sites for the persuasive essay domain project (Site A) or instructional unit (Site B). Representative with respect to typical student and teacher role, use of instructional time, and selected resources, each session demonstrates that, although all Essay Fundamentals students received quality writing instruction, Site A student-writers benefitted from and contributed to a learning environment marked by an “. . . alignment between the indicators of . . . assessment and the goals of instruction” (Valencia, 1992, p. 35).

In support of this month-long domain project or unit, both sites incorporated teacher-provided sample persuasive essays, including contemporary pieces published in

local and national newspapers and magazines, along with high-quality student models. Yet whereas Mr. Green presented two chapters--Chapter 7, "Connections between Paragraphs", and Chapter 10, "Parallel Structure"--from The Lively Art of Writing as important skill-based information for all Essay Fundamentals students to review and practice, Site A students experienced a much greater instructional emphasis upon their individual needs and interests, as influenced by their personal writing objectives, their perceptions of previously completed work, and their understandings and assessments of supplemental persuasive models. In addition and in support of this individualization, Site A students selected articles regarding idea generation, organization, voice, and style from an indexed classroom collection of Writer's Digest issues, among other writing-related periodicals and texts.

Session #7 of the persuasive essay instructional sequence epitomizes the most significant contrasts between these two Essay Fundamentals sites. Whereas Site A activities represented an alignment of assessment and instruction, arguably the most essential feature of PROPEL domain projects, Site B activities amounted to a teacher-directed instructional sequence that, while incorporating process in the creation of product, did not "... invite students to discover and invent their own solutions, and [to] explore others' solutions," nor did they "pose problems that stimulate students to increase their role in defining their own problems to pursue" (Camp & Winner, 1993, p. 11). An overview of these distinctions follows.

Site A	Session #7 (11/7/94)	Site B
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Perception3</u>: "A Mark-up Guide" (see form) Students (a) read & discuss strengths/weaknesses of self-selected sample essays, (b) respond individually to questions, re Thesis, Content, and Style, then (c) share findings. • Meet individually with the instructor and in teams, focusing on the first segment of their own persuasive essays. • <u>Reflection 2</u>: "Reflective Response: The Opinion 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Not conducted</u> (teacher-led lecture-discussion, re the nature of persuasion) • As per Site A • <u>Not conducted</u>

Paper.” Review evaluation of Opinion Paper in light of new knowledge and understandings, re the art of persuasion. Respond to questions re writer’s objectives for Opinion Paper. Review/revise objectives for the Persuasive Essay. (student drafting time)

Representing the early stages of persuasive essay work, Session #7 represents Site student- writers engaged in a microcosm of that recursive domain project process, stressing understanding over imitation, and requiring invention as well as exploration. As the summary indicates, Site A students began session #7 by conducting a ‘mark-up’ of a teacher-provided sample essay. As per Arts PROPEL design, student teams were asked to read, discuss the apparent merits and weaknesses of, and ‘mark up’ this essay in order to discover certain facts and features concerning the work’s focus, content, and style. In addition, teams were asked to share those discoveries with the whole class. A representative excerpt from this document appears below (Figure 4-5). The following excerpts derived from one writing group’s discussion as they ‘marked up’ an essay depicting genetic engineering as a force for social good as well as an important scientific break- through deserving of Americans’ financial support. The discussion begins, and group members review the nature and value of logical, emotional, and ethical appeals as they work to code and mark various other features of this piece. Although one person (Greg) dominates this first segment, this three-member team is beginning to consider such rhetorical elements as speaker, tone, focus, and organizational strategies and their evident success:

Greg: This is the thesis paragraph, OK? [proceeds to read the opening paragraph of the assigned essay.] Um, probably that the main focus, thesis, is the benefits of genetic engineering, so it’s a host of problems [GB paraphrases from the text.] She’ll [the author] outline a bunch of problems, most likely, and ethical dilemmas. Those are the focus points that are probably going to be talked about during the whole thing.

Ann: A host of problems--

Greg: New technologies, possess the technologies, to solve the mysteries of human life.

Rose: Can I see this for a second?

1. THESIS: Topic, Opinion, & Tone

- Underline words and phrases that indicate the essay's focus/thesis/purpose.
(Note that such 'identifiers' may be located throughout the piece.)
- Find & circle any 'emotion' words or phrases that indicate TONE--the author's apparent attitude toward her subject.

2. CONTENT: Development & Details

- Review the essay's structure: Describe its organizational design (for example, least-to-most-important, comparison/contrast, general-to-specific, etc.)
- Highlight the essay's specific details/concrete examples in each paragraph or section.
- Place a star (*) by EMOTIONAL appeals, a check by LOGICAL, and a number sign (#) by ETHICAL appeals that you find in the paper.
- Bracket [] the essay's introductory and concluding passages.

FIGURE 4-5: A 'Mark-Up' Guide

Greg: Yeah, go for it. [R. spends a moment reviewing the notes and the essay.]

Greg: Um, basically emotional things, such as 'if we allow ourselves' to do things, 'lose the multitude of benefits' out to about here [points to text]--just in this thesis, thesis paragraph, her emotions of things are kind of like--her whole attitude toward the subject is that she wants it--she thinks that genetic engineering is a great thing, and we can't allow ourselves to fall into this 'quagmire of doubt', as she puts it. And she says that we'll lose all of the benefits that we could have gotten from genetic engineering if we don't follow it, so her whole thing is that genetic engineering is good, and that it's for the betterment of human kind. That's her attitude toward the subject . . . So that is--she's outlining everything for us, so we can say, 'first paragraph, she's outlining exactly what she's gonna say, what this whole project is, the basis of her paper. [returns to reading of the text] So, she's starting to get into her comparison and contrast, what's bad about it. what's bad about this whole thing.

Ann: In what paragraphs?

Greg: That's paragraph #2 [reads segment to A and the others]. So she went into all the drawbacks of it, she said one of the drawbacks was that it cost too much. Well, yeah, it would cost a lot. And another thing she said is that it's really really hard to decode all those genes. Next paragraph, she says exactly how much it will cost.

A bit later in the conversation, Greg began to raise questions of clarity and quality; he and his peers may be considering the implications for their own work as they express their

perceptions of this model's apparent strengths and weaknesses. Interesting, although Greg dominates this small-group discussion, another member of the group (Rose) presents a number of their findings to the class when the instructor calls for each group to share their discoveries with the class:

- Ann: [To G.] What'd you say, 'the value of'?
- Greg: Yeah, 'the value of justice and personal privacy.' It's the main ethical question. [Returns to reading, referring to this concept] So they're kinda reducing ethical aspects of this to a study--they're trying to make the ethical questions logical. . . .
- Rose: What are the key ethical implications?
- Greg: What? I don't know about ethical implications--it doesn't seem to make any sense to me. It's more like this person is trying to get other people to think this way, cause things like cloning and DNA and stuff is really ethical--that's a huge ethical question for most people. It's like saying, they're moving toward that, but it's almost like they're doing it in a scientific manner; they're trying to, like, explain everything scientifically--
- Rose: Yeah.

The whole-class discussion forty-five minutes later is teacher-orchestrated, but student-driven. As each group representative gave his or her 'read' on a paper that others had seen but not 'marked up', Site A students appeared to be engaging in the sort of reflective give-and-take that contributes to *authorship literacy*, one of three concepts (along with *sustained engagement* and *assessment as an episode of learning*, Camp & Winner, 1993) that define the Arts PROPEL approach to teaching and learning in general and the domain project in particular:

- Student 2: It WAS a research paper!
- Student 1: Rather than a persuasive paper, because a persuasive essay is supposed to be, how you feel, and there's no emotion there, so--
- Student 2: I was just going to say that about three pages into it we quit reading it, cause we were really bored, so it didn't hold our attention well.
- GREEN: Let's go with the medical paper. That was Lindsay's group.
- Student 3: We found that this essay was pretty much stories. It had like a lot of emotional point of view. It's--the first page is basically a story. It's quoted. And we found that the essay was very much like a newspaper article. It just said these stories, like these persons found this and did this. She doesn't really touch upon her point of view very much--it's just kind of like this general thing.
- GREEN: So you thought of it more as just someone making a report?
- Student 4: Yes.
- GREEN: Anything else?

Student 4: Strongest appeal was emotional.

GREEN: Were there enough facts?

Student 2: There was lots of specifics and general things, but nothing that really affected the reader--it's kind of bland, you know.

GREEN: What kind of facts would affect the reader?

Student 2: Like, things more specific to people that would just kind of interest them.

[next group]

Student 5: Structure. It started with an emotional appeal, like disgust. And then it went, like, six pages with just facts, and then it went back to emotion at the end. And, the language was very medical and we didn't understand all the words 'cause it got a little too technical.

Later that same day, Site B students, who had also previously read a teacher-provided article pertaining to persuasive strategies and appeals, participated in a whole-class, teacher-led discussion. Unlike Site A student-writers' small-group 'mark-up' sessions, during which the students developed their own questions of one another as a result of considering another writer's work, these students were taken through the instructor's predetermined script: Definitions and descriptions of persuasive expression, along with the three types of persuasive appeals, followed by an oral reading of a single persuasive essay model. Beginning with a hypothetical scenario, Mr. Green first led the class through a series of questions intended as checks for student understanding:

Green: In your journal, write 'Persuasive Paper.' Today's date, November 7.
[He repeats this direction; students go to their seats.]

Green: OK, to start off with, what I want to do is I want for you to contemplate helping me. I'm a foreign exchange student who has just come to your country, and I'm in Essay Fund with all of these A students, and I'm clueless. And you get to give me just three pieces of advice on what I must do for a persuasive paper. You can tell me only three things. What three pieces would you give me that would probably ensure that I could do the best job possible on a persuasive paper? What are three things that I must know. Megan?

Megan: That any facts that you have to support it with facts, and also with examples.

Green: Examples of a specific place?

Megan: Like, if you have an idea, and you support it with facts and examples.

Green: OK, I've got facts and examples. Steven?

Steven: You have to include logic--to prove your point.

Green: Is that ethical? What's logical?

Steven: That's the part that organizes the facts.

Green: The ethical? I didn't get that point. Is she [M] going to help with the ethical?

Megan: Oh, no. He can do it.

Green: I've heard four things so far: First, facts, and then I heard logical, then I heard logical in support of facts. Helen?

Helen: Um, I think you need to also say opposition. That you have to mention the other side.

Green: What assumption does that make?

Helen: That there is an opinion--

Green: That there is an opposition. Are there issues that lend themselves to persuasive papers, that do not have opposition?

Conclusion: Domain projects as implemented for Site A student-writers

Clearly, Arts PROPEL domain projects designed for imaginative writing instruction could not be directly imposed upon the goals and content of the Essay Fundamentals expository writing course. Unlike the Pittsburgh Public School students who were enrolled in Arts PROPEL classes, Site A student-writers did not experience a specialized approach to composition: they encountered, practiced, and reflected upon the art and craft of writing from neither the poet's, the playwright's, nor the journalist's especial perspective. Instead, these students worked their way through a more traditional upper-level composition course, one designed to prepare them for the sort of writing that they would most be likely expected to produce in college classrooms across most subject areas. And yet Site A student-writers did experience domain project-based instruction, as defined by Arts PROPEL researchers and practitioners:

Domain projects are composed of a series of interrelated activities that emphasize process, require revision and reflection, and are accessible to students with various levels of technical skills (Camp & Winner, 1993, p. 11).

More specifically, Site A essay writing units met the essential design of PROPEL domain projects as measured against available descriptions and reports. More specifically, Essay Fundamentals domain projects conformed to the central tenets of the *five key ideas*

about domain projects (see above). As is the case for their PROPEL exemplars, Essay Fundamentals domain projects as implemented for Site A student-writers represented:

1. . . . interrelated activities that emphasize process, require revision and reflection, are accessible to students with various levels of technical skills;
2. . . . open-ended projects with multiple solutions . . . [that] invite students to discover and invent their own solutions, and to explore others' solutions;
3. . . . production as the central activity; reflective and perceptual activities grow out of, and feed back into, the creative process;
4. . . . assess[ment] not only for the finished product, but also for the learning, growth, and increased understanding that has occurred;
5. . . . problems that stimulate students to increase their role in defining their own problems to pursue (Camp & Winner, 1993, p. 11).

Portfolios: Site A Distinctions

Domain projects reside at the heart of the 'portfolio culture'; without them, portfolios can be counted upon to serve no greater purpose than to preserve and perhaps organize student work. Domain projects and working (or process) portfolios are, then, two sides of the same instructional coin. Davidson's description of the *process portfolio* is well worth considering:

To turn the portfolio into a learning tool, it is necessary to link it to the process of learning. The process portfolio does just that. . . . The Arts PROPEL portfolio . . . is a good example of the process portfolio (1993, p. 46).

The clearest available description of the PROPEL portfolio, both process and product, is described in Camp & Winner (1993). Accordingly, what follows is an overview of how portfolios were implemented for Site A students, coupled with the degree to which those procedures did--and did not--mirror the PROPEL model for *imaginative writing* .

As contextual clarification, a two-point preface seems called for. First, how and by whom programs were initiated seems to have contributed significantly to the design of this 'portfolio-culture' -based approach to student learning. The PROPEL literature describes *imaginative writing* domain projects introduced to Pittsburgh Public School students as having been "... sketched out by PROPEL researchers drawing on what they had observed or knew to be successful in language arts classrooms. The projects then entered a cycle of development in which each member of the team contributed different kinds of expertise" (Camp & Winner, 1993, p. 8). Classroom teachers and school district administrators then discussed these initial ideas and project plans, piloted them in district classrooms, and returned to the entire group in order to modify and refine, as needed. This "cycle of development . . . [which] resulted in an important fusion between teaching, learning, and assessment" (p. 9) was impossible to replicate at Site A. Instead, Mr. Green, the instructor for both Essay Fundamentals sites, studied available materials and engaged in several formal discussions and many ad hoc conversations with me about the nature and possible procedures of an Arts PROPEL-informed 'portfolio culture,' concentrating on considerations of how the essence of such a culture could be implemented at Site A.

Second, the respective curricular ranges of Arts PROPEL classrooms on one hand, and both Essay Fundamentals sections on the other, differed in at least one significant respect. PROPEL-designed imaginative writing projects were presented in the context of comprehensive language arts classrooms: students engaged in literature study in concert with writing production. As a result, one PROPEL goal, "the opportunity to write as poets and playwrights" (p. 6), although adapted for Site A students as the opportunity to write as skilled and accomplished essayists, could be only partially replicated in the context of this writing-only course. Mr. Green did so in two ways. First, he incorporated special supplemental materials, such as teacher-assembled packets of poetry and prose selections, across the five Essay Fundamentals domain projects and in support of student literacy in

language and composition. Second, he engaged students in conversations with him and one another about their incorporation of models, suggestions, and lessons as selected from an in-house collection of Writer's Digest articles. These two distinctions served as important building blocks for the establishment of a 'portfolio-culture' at Site A.

. . . portfolios offer a unique opportunity to empower students by encouraging self-reflection and self-evaluation. Through the process of studying, reviewing, and discussing their work over time, students become better able to evaluate critically their work and assume more responsibility for their own learning. With guidance and time, they begin to understand the criteria that denote high-quality work and are able to set personal goals for achievement (Valencia, 1992, p. 37).

The glue that binds Arts PROPEL principles and practices in support of this integration of teaching and assessment is the portfolio (Camp & Winner, 1993; Wolf, 1991). Consequently, the three central principles guiding Site A students' work--*student choice, sustained engagement, and assessment as an episode of learning*--were intended to come together from one unit to the next, across teacher-selected goals and student-elected writer's objectives, and via Working (process) and Showcase portfolios. Of the two Essay Fundamentals sections, Site A is the 'Portfolio-Culture' classroom, for, as Valencia (1992) states, such collections of student work are most likely to contribute to student growth when teachers, students, and others view them as dynamic procedural tools rather than as static and terminal repositories of assignments, scoring guides, and student papers.

According to Valencia and others, considerations of (1) who selects items for inclusion and for what purposes, and (2) who has access to them and for what purposes are at least as important as is the question of what is to be placed in the portfolio. This is also true for Arts PROPEL researchers and practitioners. Issues of authenticity, assessment, and empowerment are, therefore, endemic to portfolio-based instruction and

learning; as such, they were a central concern for Mr. Green as he implemented a PROPEL-inspired program for Site A students. The following description of those portfolios and their implementation in Arts PROPEL classrooms echoes these themes and epitomizes Site A student-writers' experiences:

The Arts PROPEL portfolio is based on a view of teaching and learning in which students' classroom experiences are designed to help them develop the resources they need to assume increased responsibility for their learning. The teacher sets up, monitors, and facilitates activities in which students can develop the necessary tools and abilities. She first models for students the processes involved, then encourages the students themselves to engage in the processes, then responds to their evolving work, suggesting alternative strategies where appropriate. Writing is seen as a complex performance drawing on a wide repertoire of skills and knowledge; the aim of instruction and assessment alike is to help students increase the range of their skills and knowledge and to become more expert in applying them (Camp & Winner, 1993. p. 74).

The remainder of this section describes Site A alignment with each of several PROPEL principles and practices as they combined to establish the above-described portfolio culture. Although Site A student-writers did not encounter each specific PROPEL instructional piece, they did experience elements and degrees of 'portfolio culture' design that, both individually and collectively, differentiated these two Essay Fundamentals sites. In brief, Site A students engaged in an ongoing process of *portfolioing*, while their Site B counterparts merely saved and organized, periodically placing finished products and other assignments in their writing folders throughout the semester.

Design of the Arts PROPEL writing portfolio.

In this early period, teachers work with students to establish a climate of trust and to help students develop a view of themselves as writers creating a body of work. In addition, teachers introduce students to the practice of reflection and to possible ways of talking about their own and others' writing (Camp & Winner, 1993, pp. 71-72).

At both Essay Fundamentals sites, students engaged in such community-building activities as interviewing one another; writing, illustrating, and posting brief self-portraits on bulletin boards; and establishing and presenting special small-group identifiers (e.g., family crest,

motto, symbols, and the like). Only Site A students, however, selected, read, shared, and discussed various writing samples in small and large groups in support of (1) developing a sense of the nature of and options for effective writing, and (2) discovering ways of talking about their own and others' writing. Camp & Winner indicate that students are prepared to incorporate portfolios as "a formal part of their learning" when they exhibit the following behaviors:

- express ownership of their work
- seek out responses to their work
- refer to writing previously completed
- want to look back at earlier drafts of their writing (p. 72).

By the third week of the course, students at both sites had begun to place class-generated work in their writing folders. Site A students' early experiences with *process folders*, by virtue of what went into the folders and what they did with those contents, were unique. For example, Site B students had placed only completed and teacher-assessed Personality Profile essays in their respective folders, whereas Site A students included all notes, plans, and drafts; relevant journal responses; perception-related documents, such as mark-up guides; and production-based documents, including photocopied Writer's Digest articles.

At about this same time (four weeks into the course), Site A students began to write brief (one-half page) reflections concerning their domain project drafts. According to Camp & Winner,

When the students become comfortable with oral reflection and the idea of the writing folder, when they show signs that they are thinking as writers, they begin writing reflections. Upon completing a final draft for a particular piece of writing, students respond to three questions:

- *What do you like best about this piece?*
- *What are you least satisfied with?*
- *Why?* (p. 72).

Figure 4-6 represents such a reflection. The clause in bold text is a reference to one of this student's stated objectives (**bold**) for the piece:

Essay Fun!	Name <u>Jan Dennis</u>	per. # <u>1</u>
<p>My personality profile was a fairly good paper. I think it was well developed and organized clearly to support my thesis. I would like to use more descriptive language next time, and probably proof more thorough [sic]. I had enough details to support my ideas, but I could have been more original with my presentation of them.</p>		
<p>FIGURE 4-6: Reflections, The Personality Profile</p>		

In keeping with PROPEL design, Site A students placed complete domain project packets, including all of the above mentioned documents and teacher evaluations, into what they would soon refer to as their *working*, or *process*, folders.

It was also at this time (early October) when students' use of those folders also began to differ across the two sites. Whereas Site B students placed completed papers in their folders, then left them on the classroom counter until Mr. Green had returned his evaluations of their next writing project, Site A student-writers began to access their work when needed in preparation for further reflection and when revising or establishing new objectives for the following project. In a departure from PROPEL design, however, Site A students did not begin to establish second folders--*showcase portfolios*--at this time. Because students at both sites were to complete a total of six projects (plus two in-class essays) during the semester, Mr. Green decided to delay Site A students' selection for what he defined as the Showcase Portfolio until late November, five weeks prior to the end of the semester. Because students engaged in a recursive series of perception-production-reflection activities for each domain project and reviewed completed projects as they reconsidered specific objectives for the next project, Mr. Green felt it unnecessary to initiate formal transfer from process folder to portfolio until all but one of the domain projects had been completed.

Portfolio contents required of Site A Essay Fundamentals student-writers were modeled after those to be included by PROPEL students enrolled in year-long *imaginative writing* classes, as a comparison of Site A (see Figure 4-7 below) and PROPEL components (see Figure 3-2) lists demonstrates. Differences relate, of course, to the content, genre, and style of finished products; the range and number of products to be included; the exclusion of the Teacher-Student Negotiated Free Pick (unnecessary, due to the more restrictive nature of Essay Fundamentals course content and fewer number of projects) and the Writing Inventory (largely replaced by Site A students' responses to Interview #3 protocols); and the number of "pieces of in-depth reflection":

Assessing the portfolio

One major, pedagogically significant distinction between simply maintaining writing folders (Site B) and establishing working (*process*) folders and creating *showcase portfolios* goes beyond student access to and reflection about ongoing writing, both process and product. How, by whom, and for what reasons completed portfolios are evaluated--and serve as important assessments of student growth and accomplishment--is at the center of the portfolio culture experience. Again, because of the nature of PROPEL resources and expertise, Mr. Green was unable to replicate the assessment strand as implemented in Pittsburgh schools' *imaginative writing* classrooms. Yet in all essential respects, Site A student-writers did engage in similar experiences and routines:

The approach to assessment represented in the Arts PROPEL writing portfolios involves students, the classroom teacher, parents, teachers from other classrooms, and administrators. The portfolio contains evidence of student work that is examined by all of these parties, each of who indicates what they see and value in the writing. Through this process, the portfolio becomes the basis for a dialogue (Camp & Winner, 1993, p. 75).

Essay Fundamentals 1
November 30, 1994

Name _____

Putting It All Together: Your Showcase Portfolio

... a student-centered, reflective portrait of your writing experiences, answering such questions as ...

- What changes have taken place in your understandings about writing and about what it means to be a writer?
- What evidence of writing process and product, does your work represent?
- In what ways does all of your work 'add up' to a record of your interests, your thinking, your effort, your versatility, and your accomplishments as a writer?

You will be creating your Showcase Portfolio by taking an inventory of your work in Essay Fund., selecting pieces from your writing folder and describing some of them in a detailed way, and writing a Final Reflection.

More specifically, your completed Showcase Portfolio will include:

- A **Table of Contents** that is a record of the pieces in the portfolio and the dates on which they were written and selected;
- A '**Satisfying**' and an '**Unsatisfying**' piece of writing. You will explain why you chose each, what you learned from writing them, and what you might now do differently;
- A **Biography of an Important Piece** of writing, in which you describe the process you used to create that piece of writing. (You will answer questions about and write the 'story' of the work's development);
- A **Free Pick**: A piece you have selected that 'rounds out' your portfolio and provides a picture of yourself as a writer;
- A **Final Reflection**: You will look at your writing for the semester and describe the changes you see in the writing--and in yourself as a writer.

FIGURE 4-7: Showcase Portfolio Design

Because Site A represented the only PROPEL-based writing class offered in the Shoreline School District during the 1994-1995 school year, and because the necessary funding was not available to acquire the services of other classroom teachers, Mr. Green was unable to involve other school professionals in the portfolio review process. He did,

however, engage Site A students' parents in the process (see below). In addition, Mr. Green conducted several brief conferences throughout the semester with Site A students, both individually and as they worked in small groups, as per PROPEL guidelines (" . . . in nurturing a portfolio culture in the classroom, teachers often engage students in individual conferences, either informally by moving among students while they are writing or more formally in scheduled, sustained conferences" (p. 75). Furthermore, Mr. Green followed PROPEL suggestions for providing his students with minimal, yet significant, student reflection- and objective-based comments, including a reference to " . . . one thing the student has done well and one aspect of writing that needs improvement" (p. 72).

Whereas Site B students submitted projects to their instructor for evaluation without engaging in any reflective activities, Site A students not only attached reflections to each piece, but also reviewed those reflections from the perspective of thematic threads to be considered as they prepared to weave them into the fabric of their own Showcase Portfolios. As they did so, Site A students reviewed the objectives they and Mr. Green established across five domain projects, then drafted end-of-term reflective letters that served as epitomes of their portfolios. In support of this work, Mr. Green provided Site A student-writers with significant class time (two 100-minute sessions, plus thirty or more minutes during earlier and later class periods) to discuss their progress as writers with their peers (through peer editing and response groups). During those times, Site B students worked on completing a more extensive, research-intensive version of the final Essay Fundamentals project, the literary analysis essay.

Helping students and their peer review teams develop criteria and standards for evaluating writing is an important feature of the Arts PROPEL classroom approach to assessment. While their Site B counterparts attended throughout the term to a teacher-provided document detailing six qualities of good writing (Spandel & Stiggins, 1990), Mr. Green helped Site A students " . . . to develop a list of the qualities of good writing. The

list is posted in the classroom, so that students will have it before them during subsequent occasions for writing and reflecting. Each time the class has another discussion of comments, the teacher adds to or changes the list” (Camp & Winner, 1993, p. 75). Figure 4-8 represents the final version of that list for Site A students:

As mentioned above, Site A students’ parents played an important role in this portfolio culture classroom. As per PROPEL guidelines, these student-writers took their

descriptive language	utilizes similes and metaphors
appeals to the senses	paints a vivid picture
stimulates emotional response	element of surprise
catches attention	vivid description
seems real--even though it's not	crisp
touches the reader	easy to read
detail	clear, direct, and simple
gets reader's attention	direct and to the point
entertaining	no wasted words
talks to a specific audience	effectively gets a point across
gets an emotion across	people can relate to it
words all flow together	attention getters
informative--keeps you reading	in-depth character
development	tells a compelling story
uses imagery	realism
flows smoothly	creatively worded
if horror, gruesome and violent	unpredictable, suspenseful
imaginative	careful and thoughtful
figurative language	narrative voice when appropriate
lots of dialogue	related to real life
appropriate word choice	clear theme or meaning
one-of-a-kind personalities	clear and concise
reader involved	original
universal appeal	
original idea--not something you'd read in a newspaper article	
words to make you think that you are there	
indirect closing--leaves the readers hanging and wondering	
smooth lead-in; introduction catches reader's attention	
clear description of people's appearance	
images of what will happen next	
captures the reader's emotion	
each author puts own feelings into it	

FIGURE 4-8: Class-Generated Qualities of Good Writing

process folders (first quarter) and showcase portfolios (second quarter) home for parental review. In addition, as suggested by Camp & Winner (1993), students informed their

parents concerning the nature of their work, obtained their responses, and then “. . . reflected upon the experience of having their parents look at their work . . .” (p. 76).

Figure 4-9 (see Appendix) represents an excerpt from the response that one Site A student-writer received from her mother:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which piece of writing in the folder tells you most about your son or daughter's writing? <p style="padding-left: 40px;">I think the Opinion paper about abortion tells me the most about Amy's writing. She's writing about a serious subject and her thoughts are written clearly and thoroughly in her response.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does it tell you? <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Her writing tells me that Amy's ability to make her own decisions and support those decisions have matured . . . that she knows her morals, what she believes in and knows how to get that message across through her writing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you see as the strengths in his or her writing? <p style="padding-left: 40px;">I think it's wonderful how she considers both sides of the case, yet keeps her stand. She makes her points by using examples that diverse audiences could relate to. She also starts off with her controversial statement, right off the bat.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">FIGURE 4-9: Parent Folder Review and Reflection</p>

The several questions posed in this letter to parents closely paralleled Kathy Howard's letter design, as reported by Camp & Winner (p. 77). Later during the semester, Site A parents were asked to review their students' portfolios in preparation for final reflection interviews with Mr. Green, scheduled during the third week in January, 1995. Prior to Winter Vacation (December, 1994), Mr. Green provided Site A students with a Showcase Portfolio Packet (see Appendix K) that explained the requirements for the finished portfolio, included forms for peer and parent assessment, and presented assessment categories and criteria, modeled after Camp & Winner, p. 83). After reviewing his Site A students' Showcase Portfolios, including personal writer's objectives and the final

reflective letter, Mr. Green conducted those interviews in accordance with course goals and student-selected objectives, as Figure 4-10 indicates:

Essay Fundamentals / Student Writer _____	Showcase Portfolio			
1 Inadequate	2 Low Acceptable	3 High Acceptable	4 Outstanding	
The contents of this student's Showcase Portfolio demonstrate:				
<p>_____ • Accomplishment in writing (overall score) (Student initials indicate 1-2 criteria to be doubled in value.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • selecting and meeting specific writer's objectives _____ • formulating an appropriate thesis _____ • establishing and maintaining purpose, such as to describe or to persuade _____ • writing to and for an identifiable audience _____ • developing and organizing effective supporting arguments _____ • using specific detail in support of ideas and arguments _____ • composing effective and varied sentences _____ • following basic rules of usage, mechanics, and spelling _____ • selecting and incorporating vivid, appropriate language _____ 				
<p>_____ • Use of processes & resources for writing (overall score) (Student initials indicate 1-2 criteria to be doubled in value.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • awareness of strategies and processes in writing _____ • use of processes: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing _____ • researching, selecting, citing, and documenting source materials _____ • using a variety of resources in the composition of an essay _____ (one's own, the school's, the community's) • ability to describe what one recognizes and knows about writing _____ • ability to see and build upon strengths & opportunities in one's own writing _____ • constructing, negotiating, and sharing meanings in small-group and whole-class discussions _____ • reading, reviewing, and evaluating essays using specific criteria _____ • making use of Writing Groups & activities to improve one's own writing _____ 				
<p>_____ • Development as a writer (overall score) (Student initials indicate 1-2 criteria to be doubled in value.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • progress from early to late pieces: growth & development _____ • increased understanding of features & options important to effective writing _____ • writing for different purposes and audiences _____ • sense of self as a writer, including goals, purposes, and achievements _____ • evolution (growth & change) of personal criteria and standards for writing _____ • development of a personal writing style _____ 				
<p>This student's <u>strengths</u> as a writer include:</p>				
<p>This student's developmental needs as a writer include:</p>				
<p>FIGURE 4-10: Portfolio Evaluation</p>				

Chapter Conclusion

Portfolios involve a partnership between students, parents, and teachers. It is a partnership centered on empowering students to assess themselves. . . . Portfolio assessment positions students to learn about themselves at the same time as it places teachers in the position of being an assessment coach. Maintaining portfolios over the course of the year allows the teacher to learn about each student and therefore to become the critical link that supports and nurtures growth (Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991, p. 105).

As explained above, Essay Fundamentals is a single-semester course. The weaving of Arts PROPEL's two central "concepts-in-practice" (Howard, 1990, p.3)--domain projects and the portfolio--was compressed into a relatively brief period of time, and took place across five of six required compositional units. As a result, class time was precious, frequently given over to such critically important activities as teacher-student conferences, peer group discussions, and individual investigations of models in support of project requirements and personal writing objectives. Accordingly, Site A students were asked to either complete or initiate a fair number of perception-, production-, and reflection-related activities outside of class time. As a consequence, Mr. Green found his complex, interrelated roles as "assessment coach" and "critical link that supports and nurtures growth" at Site A to be well worth the effort, but an effort indeed, a comprehensive Site A role that required consistent, conscious distinctions from that required of him for Site B Essay Fundamentals students.

Yet despite these and other special constraints and necessary adaptations of the Arts PROPEL imaginative writing *portfolio culture* model, Site A students clearly experienced a distinct learning environment that contrasted in important, recognizable ways from the 'traditional writing instruction' Site B classroom. Encouraged to see and assess themselves as actual writers, and not merely as students of writing, regardless of their actual levels of

achievement, Site A subjects' reflections suggest that, to a greater or lesser degree, these student-writers have engaged in a recursive, reinforcing process that contributed to writer awareness and growth. A number of Ann's reflections, for example, suggest that this middle-achieving *portfolio culture* student has engaged in meaningful ways with her own learning, and that in so doing she has assessed not only the nature of her growth as a writer, but also the importance of that growth to her. In the following end-of-course (final interview) reflection s in response to two questions--'What do you notice about your earlier work?' and 'For you, what does good writing do or accomplish?'--Ann speaks from the perspective of one who knows a good deal about herself as a writer--as well as from the perspective of an involved, if undecided, contemplative reader (and credible judge) of writing quality:

I notice that as time progressed, my generalizations become more and more supported. I really started off not knowing how to bring my feelings and opinions to a fine point that is understandable to anyone reading or listening. I really worked very hard on it [Persuasive Essay], and I kept my--the objectives that I wanted to pursue, which was supporting my facts, details. So I wouldn't have any generalizations that would be left hanging . . . all of my generalizations or opinions supported by the facts.

And,

. . . it [good writing] makes me think rather than just sit there and listen to it. It's turning wheels in my head, thrills me one way or the other, probably I feel something else, though. I either get angry about it, or upset, or happy, or reflective, I don't know.

CHAPTER 5 Portfolio-Culture Students' Reflective Distinctions

Introduction

In this chapter I cite and interpret evidence of student-writer reflections as they relate to four significant findings within and across reflections expressed by students enrolled in the two sites described in chapter 4. The purpose of this chapter is to present such evidence of apparent similarities and differences among student-writers' perceptions and assertions in the context of such themes as identity, authority, and control.

I reached five conclusions after examining questionnaires, interview transcripts, and related documents across the four ancillary topics embedded within this study's central question: How does involvement in a Portfolio-Culture classroom contribute to high school students' understandings of (1) their identities as writers; (2) the different processes involved in writing, and their own use of these processes; (3) their progress (growth) as developing writers, and related self-assessment; and (4) the nature (qualities and features) of effective writing?

I was able to do so after I had analyzed Site A (Portfolio-Culture) and (Site B (traditional good writing instruction) student subjects' observations and reflections as they appeared within the above-mentioned data sources. Titles and dates of cited interview, questionnaire, and related course document excerpts are listed in Figure 5-1:

Document Title	Implementation	Date
Interviews		
#1 "progress As a Writer"		10/31/94
#2 "The Nature of Effective Writing"		12/4/94
#3 "Final Reflections: How I have Changed as a Writer"		1/25/95
Questionnaires		
#1 "Initial View of Self-as-Writer:		9/19/94
#2 "Your Sense of Yourself as a Writer"		11/14/94
#3 "Final Reflections"		1/22/95
Documents		
Journal Entries	various dates	(9/9-1/95)
"First Quarter Respose Sheet"		11/16/94
"Satisfying" & "Unsatisfying Piece" Reflections		1/25/95
"Final Reflective Letter"		1/25/95

FIGURE 5-1: Portfolio Culture Study Documents

In addition, I reviewed this data according to the study's operational definitions of these terms as described in chapter 1.

Identification of Subjects

The six student-writers who served as subjects for this study are identified within chapter 3 (methods). For purposes of convenience and brevity, I refer to study subjects as either high-, middle-, or low-achieving students according to selection methods described in chapter 3. In addition, I identify them as either Site A (Portfolio Culture) or Site B (Good Writing Instruction) classroom participants. Names ascribed are pseudonyms. The following overview represents these subjects' identities and their classroom placements:

Student-writers	Site A	Site B
High-achieving	Greg	Julie
Middle-achieving	Ann	Samuel
Low-achieving	Rose	Paula

Claim One: Control and Responsibility

- In traditional as well as Portfolio Culture Essay Fundamentals classes, higher-achieving student-writers express a greater sense of control over and responsibility for their work than do their less-accomplished peers.

I considered these students' reflections in support of this first claim according to the following operational definitions:

- Responsibility:* accountability for fulfilling a task as assigned by others
- Control:* gaining or demonstrating power over and responsibility for writing procedures, from first approaching a given assignment or task to sharing a resulting final product with a particular, intended audience
- Authority:* involves self-direction (Zemelman & Daniels, 1986), individually and/or in writing groups, in support of student-determined objectives for a given writing-based project, and/or more generalized goals within or across writing projects

In doing so, I have reviewed student observations and reflections pertaining to writer control and responsibility (1) across-site, between high-achieving subjects; and (2) within-site, among low-, middle-, and high-achieving writers.

As is described in chapters 3 and 4, Site A, the Portfolio Culture classroom, differed in several instructionally significant ways from Site B, a more traditional 'good writing instruction' environment. Although these classroom settings involved the same number and type of required projects, used many in-common texts, and incorporated process-to-product approaches to writing instruction, the Portfolio Culture (Site A) experience is, by definition and practice, more conducive to and encouraging of student control and authority (Camp, 1992; Camp & Winner, 1993).

From greater student choice ('Authorship Literacy') to sustained engagement as exemplified by participating in perception, production, and reflection activities, Site A students were expected to take more explicit responsibility for their own learning. From choosing prewriting and drafting approaches and establishing learning objectives for a given project, to selecting pieces for their Showcase Portfolios, Site A student-writers experienced greater latitude and accepted more responsibility for learning than did their Site B peers. Although not directly promoted as such by Arts PROPEL developers and practitioners (e.g., Camp, 1992; Camp & Winner, 1993; Wolf, 1991), the portfolio-culture classroom is a place where students of varied abilities and accomplishments might reasonably be expected to exhibit and acknowledge a higher degree of autonomy than would their more traditionally-instructed peers.

It would seem to follow, then, that students representing like abilities and accomplishments across these sites would express differing degrees of control over and responsibility for their work. This was the case to a large extent for low- and middle-achieving student-writers enrolled in Site A, as opposed to those engaged in Site B activities. In contrast, however, high-achieving students at both sites expressed a similarly

strong sense of control over and responsibility for their learning. An undercurrent of independence, and of autonomy, characterizes many of these students' reflections. Low- and middle-achieving students at both sites rarely state or imply such a sense of control over or ultimate responsibility for their work in Essay Fundamentals.

Both of these high-achieving students-- Greg (Site A) and Julie (Site B)--present themselves through their reflections as competent, confident writers for whom assigned tasks in Essay Fundamentals are challenging but not intimidating, and for whom teacher directions were open to interpretation, not rigidly prescribed. In that spirit, these successful students view teacher expectations and assigned projects from the perspective of opportunities to learn about and practice the skills of writing in a supportive atmosphere. In fact, Julie sees her more traditionally-run writing class as a nurturing environment that, although teacher -directed, invites a degree of student choice and decision making:

I think there was a LOT of autonomy, because, you know, comments were made, especially by the [writing] group, and really you didn't , if you didn't ask Mr. _____, you know, go up during the free period [25-minute student/teacher break] and give him your paper and say, 'What do you think about this?' And you really, you didn't have to have his opinion of it before you turned it in. . . . But I think that really when it came down to it, the corrections were your own decisions, and so they [peers and instructor] would give suggestions or advice, but I think--I know I had . . . pretty much full control over how my paper ended up being shaped.
[Interview #3, 1/25/95]

Greg (Site A) also characterizes his experiences in Essay Fundamentals as being largely personally determined, frequently coupling this autonomous perspective with a writing-related skill or quality ("Now [final third of the course] I don't care as much if my thoughts are different from others. Point of view is very important to a successful writing piece"--Questionnaire #3, 1/22/95). A student-writer who speaks frequently of the importance of confidence in his quest to improve upon his writing skills and experiences, Greg views the Portfolio Culture classroom as an environment in which the teacher, his peers, and other real and imagined audiences have contributed to--but not determined or

passed judgments upon--his beliefs about and understandings of himself as a writer.

Early on in the course, when asked to describe his strengths as a writer, Greg referred to those influences--by doing so, he also implied his appreciation for a learning environment that encourages experimentation, practice, and revision:

Teachers, friends, and parents are helpful to me when they read what I have written. And to me it is a success when they say they understand. Friends and parents can't really teach me what to write or how to do it, but their encouragement is what drives me to continue writing. To have praise from a reader is fantastic and can't be measured in significance. (Questionnaire #1, 9/19/94)

Greg views all three constituents--teachers, friends, and parents--as readers. Not once in the course of responding to questionnaires and interview questions does Greg refer to his teacher as an arbiter of standards or as a determiner of relative essay quality or success. Rather, Greg subsumes his teacher's and others' responses to his work according to his own sense of progress and accomplishment. Toward the close of the semester, Greg reiterated this theme of personal determination. By this time, establishing specific objectives for himself as a Portfolio Culture writer ("paper flows correctly, and doesn't jump around"; "paper is an opinion, and that opinion is clear") had become routine.

Within his Final Reflection Letter (1/25/95), Greg stated,

. . . I am a bit closer to becoming the writer that I want to become. I can now be put into a variety of different writing situations and know that I can do a good and thorough job. . . when I came into the class, I could only write in a certain way. I can write in several different ways [now] . . .

In contrast, when asked to comment upon her earlier work, Rose, Greg's low-achieving Site A peer, implies that she is considerably less confident in her work and in her capacity for taking responsibility for it:

My earlier work was very technical and complicated, they consisted of very little creativity. It was obvious that I was nervous and wasn't clear on how to write an effective paper. (Questionnaire #3, 1/22/95)

Similarly, when asked to respond to a question that calls for self-evaluation, Ann, the middle-achieving Site A student-writer, characteristically refers to her dissatisfaction

with or apprehensions of grades earned, as opposed to Greg's expressions of personal expectations and goals. Ann's response to the question, 'What are some aspects of your writing that you would like to continue to improve?' is typical:

I have a lot of trouble listing specific examples. I do big generalizations which tend to, I think, hurt my grade more than help it. Just because I don't know if I forget or if I have trouble remembering to--I don't know, I just never list specific examples. (Interview #1, 10/31/94)

Even when she does exceptionally well with a given project after having engaged in a multi-step writing process, Ann implies that such success grows out of a desire to earn teacher approval as represented by grades. In this particular case (in response to the question, 'Why did you describe this essay as a Satisfying Piece?'), Ann acknowledges her efforts, yet she uses the language of teacher expectation ('guidelines', 'requirements') rather than of personal goals and expectations. It is a positive, yet far from autonomous, reflection of accomplishment:

The reason I characterized this piece as 'satisfying' is because I know I worked very hard on it, creating many different drafts and making changes in order to receive a high grade. In comparison to earlier pieces it was of great improvement. I feel that I met all of the requirements and guidelines my teacher and I set up. I worked hard and received an A. (The Satisfying Piece, 1/25/95)

Just as Greg refers more frequently to goals for his writing and for himself as a writer than do either of his less accomplished Site A peers, Julie, his Site B counterpart, also reflects upon her work from an apparent perspective of personal control and authority. As indicated above, Site B student-writers were not encouraged to set their own objectives for their Essay Fundamentals projects; as a consequence, Julie rarely speaks explicitly of particular writer expectations or goals. Yet unlike her low- and middle-achieving non-Portfolio Culture peers, she characteristically responds to her work from the perspective of ongoing improvement across features of writing that matter to her. For example, when asked, 'What do you notice about your earlier work?' (Questionnaire #2, 11/14/94), Julie speaks of writing qualities that crop up several times across interviews and documents, and

she does so from the perspective of work-in-progress:

I think I've become more clear in the point of my paper, and have become better at organization, flow, vocabulary, and supporting claims with examples.

In contrast, when asked if he felt that his writing had changed since the beginning of the term, Samuel, a middle-achieving student-writer, expressed the most tenuous of acknowledgments ("It has changed a little. I pay more attention to openings and thesis statements. I notice format."), tempered by the overarching implication that the teacher's notion of effective as opposed to ineffective writing--and how to avoid the latter--prevails:

I'd probably follow the same structure, but . . . I did basically what he [Mr. Green] told me, the way I wanted to do, but I didn't do it, I don't think, good enough. (Interview #3, 1/22/95)

As discussed above (Chapter 4), Site B students were offered considerably less latitude and opportunity regarding how they might approach, reconsider, and assess their own and others' work. As is the case for both Paula (low-achieving) and Samuel (middle-achieving), Julie's response to the question, 'What are some aspects of your writing that you would like to improve?' (Interview #2, 12/4/94) indicates that, although her instructor's advice and direction may not directly drive her efforts to enhance the quality of her writing, she is certainly influenced by it:

I think one thing Mr. _____ likes to have our papers be shorter than longer. I know sometimes I tend to be long-winded, not ramble, but explain it, and I think one thing I need to work on is getting my point across in a more condensed fashion and being more concise and say that's something I need to work on, to be able to say something and say it shortly.

And yet, the tenor of Julie's reflections differs in a subtle but significant way.

When her peers discuss their work in Essay Fundamentals, their reflections are almost always grounded in specific projects. That is, both Samuel and Paula tend to view each project in isolation as a finite product, rather than within the context of a step or stage in their respective development as writers. What most distinguishes Julie's reflections from those of her peers is her tendency to see her evolving capabilities with and attitudes toward

writing-as-process as being at least equally important as are considerations of the apparent quality of those products. Julie's reflections compare favorably with Greg's on this subject.

For Julie, success in Essay Fundamentals needs to be measured against her evolving feelings about writing and about being a writer, in addition to considerations of individual project quality, as this Final Reflection Letter (1/25/95) excerpt suggests:

I see improvement in not only my writing from the semester, but also in my attitude toward writing. Before it was considered a necessary evil, part of that dreadful chore called homework . . . I used to be satisfied with my first attempt, and now I realize that rarely is a paper ever actually done.

Earlier on in the course, Julie expressed doubts about her identity as a writer, and yet she did so in the context of not having met the rarefied qualities and accomplishments of what she defined as the quintessential writer--an idealized and playful picture, to be sure: "I imagine a writer to be poet-like and always carry around a pen and paper--maybe even a quill!" For Julie, writer growth is dependent upon seeing herself as an independent, motivated, and creative writer ("poet-like") who takes a long-term, cumulative view of control of and authority over her work (" . . . rarely is a paper ever actually done").

In contrast, although Samuel also acknowledges that Essay Fundamentals experiences have contributed to his perceptions of competence, he does so from the perspective of a student who takes direction, and not as a writer in some degree of control over his own progress ("I don't see myself as a writer. At the moment, I see myself as someone who can write when needed. But does not do so freely"--Questionnaire #3, 1/22/95). In short, he is a responsible writer, but he is not in control. In answer to this same question, Paula characterizes herself in a similarly pessimistic and uncertain vein:

I'm not sure what 'act like a writer' means. I don't think I 'act' like one. Whatever it is, I'm not a very good writer.

Earlier in the semester, at the close of the first quarter of instruction, Sam offered this comment in response to a question concerning his then-current approach to writing

assignments: "I used to be able to write an essay in about an hour--now it takes a week. It's funny how progression can take you backwards." (First Quarter Response Sheet, 11/16/94). Despite his refusal to identify himself as a writer, a concept he never defines, Samuel implies here and elsewhere that his process-related activities in Essay Fundamentals have contributed to his increasing sense of growth and potential writing success, even though that growth has not been autonomous, as this reflection suggests:

Well, bascially, I've grown with the class; I've learned how I should write, because before this class, you were never really taught how to write.
(Interview #3, 1/25/95)

In summary, both high-achieving students view themselves as writers who, while far from having perfected the art and craft of writing, are essentially in control of the work they do. Notwithstanding their acknowledgment of others' assistance and influence, both Julie and Greg convey a sense of being in charge. Middle- and low-achieving students at both sites, on the other hand, although representing themselves as being willing to learn, do not see themselves as being in control of that learning.

Claim Two: Writing Approaches and Strategies

- Portfolio Culture student-writers talk more specifically and frequently about their approaches to and strategies for writing than do students who are instructed in a more traditional way.

When you've finished your first draft of the case-history, put it aside for a day. Then read it aloud to see whether any leading idea or feeling emerges. If you find one stirring a little, consider cutting out those parts that don't touch this idea or feeling, and adding more details that strengthen it (Macrorie, 1985, p. 63).

All Essay Fundamentals students were introduced to several process-oriented supplemental texts and related activities, as described in chapter 4. In addition, however, Site A student-writers (1) experienced less restrictive and more frequent opportunities to discuss in-progress and completed projects with the instructor and their peers, and (2) usually responded more frequently in writing upon their work, including assessing and selecting certain pieces as they made the transition from Working to Showcase portfolios.

Perhaps as a consequence, these portfolio-culture students talked more as a group--and often more extensively--about their work than did their more traditionally instructed peers.

It does not necessarily follow, however, that Site A writers would, as a direct result of opportunities and purposes to do so, speak in more specific terms about their approaches to and strategies for writing than would Site B participants. In fact, at least one Site A student-writer's individual reflections are often less detailed than are those expressed by her Site B counterpart. Yet despite this lack of consistent correlation between learning sites and reflectivity regarding the concepts and procedures of writing, with the exception of high-achieving student-writers, Site A student-writers' reflections concerning approaches to and strategies for writing are generally more frequent as well as more focused, detailed, or precisely expressed than are those expressed by Site B students.

Between low-achieving student-writers, neither Rose (Site A) nor Paula (Site B) suggests that process is an important feature of her Essay Fundamentals experiences. And yet, Rose's reflections imply a greater understanding of and engagement with the writing process. With the exception of valuing others' assistance and suggestions in response to her preliminary drafts, Paula rarely refers directly to writing as a process that she values and can describe. Rather, she makes a few general references to moving from "having ideas" for fulfilling a given assignment to getting those ideas on paper. And from that point, she worries in a seemingly vague way about "losing her thought," rather than reflecting upon the nature and value of taking deliberate steps or using particular strategies to improve the quality of a given draft.

For Paula, writing seems to be more of an action, result, or quality than a process. For example, when asked to describe 'other stages of the process that were easier now than at the beginning of the semester' [Interview #1, 10/31/94], Paula refers not to prewriting activities or revision techniques but to word choice:

Getting more, a higher vocabulary . . . I've used what I have learned to put in there

because that makes it [a given essay] more impressive--higher quality rather than little-kid writing, you know.

To some degree, Rose's reflections concerning the process of writing are similarly general and simplistic, yet unlike Paula, she specifies how she goes about producing a piece of writing as she acknowledges the importance of reader ("audience") role. In so doing, Rose's tone is matter-of-fact, yet apparently confident that her process 'works':

I act like a writer in very simple ways. 1. Sit down and think about something. 2. Add feeling to my topic. 3. Write my feelings down. 4. Present it to an audience, be it 1 person or many people. [Questionnaire #2, 11/14/94]

Rose also neglects to refer to process-related stages or steps, such as drafting, revising, or editing, but unlike Paula, she alludes to process and its value to her by the end of the course ("My writing has changed in many ways. I have taken my time to organize my thoughts and get them down on paper . . ."--Questionnaire #3, 1/22/95).

In previously appearing reflections, Rose indicates an understanding and valuing of writing-as-process, as her response to the question, 'What do you think is important to know about you as a writer?' [Questionnaire #2, 11/14/94) suggests:

That I enjoy writing when a topic is given to me because that step is already taken care of. If I have to think of a topic then that just adds another step to the process.

In contrast, although she speaks of the importance of peer-group suggestions, using her imagination, and serving readers' needs and interests, Paula rarely refers to specific approaches to writing tasks, with the exception of some general comments about moving from having ideas for a piece to writing them down on paper. In describing her strengths as a writer (Questionnaire #1, 9/19/94), Paula states, ". . . I can think of something so fast I can't write it out in time (not good), but when I can get in on paper before I loose [sic] the thought, I'm proud of it!" Paula seems to view writing as a single action, albeit a challenging and often exasperating one.

On other questionnaires and during interviews, Paula makes similarly general references as to her approaches to Essay Fundamentals work., For instance, her sense of

how she would revise a graded and returned reaction piece to a Seattle Times editorial consists largely of rereading source material, to the exclusion of such procedural strategies as notetaking, outlining, and clustering, all of which had been introduced by her instructor. About her *Least Satisfying Piece*, for example, Paula states, "First I'd reread the article 10 more times and see if I understood it. I would put more support in it [her reaction piece] so it was more true" (Unsatisfying Piece, 1/25/95). In comparison, although Rose's response to this same question also fails to reveal any specific attributions for or judgments about how she approached the project, unlike Paula, she incorporates the concept and process of revision within her response:

If I was given a chance to revise my piece, I would start by changing my topic. I strongly believe that if the writer is not interested in his/her writing, the paper will lead to be place[d] in a Unsatisfied folder. By changing the topic I could creat[e] a new piece from scratch that would flow together to meet my goals.

Finally, in her response to the question, 'What's the hardest part about the writing process for you now?' (Interview #1, 10/31/95), Paula's semester-long struggle with moving from initial idea to final product find their theme within this broadly stated reflection:

I have so much in my head sometimes I can't get it down on paper, I'm trying--like [not to] lose it, and say OK wait, 'What is it that I'm supposed to be writing now?', and I'll have to think back and try it, get it on the paper--get into the right words . . . Cause like you have, like, all in your head and then you're writing it out, it comes out differently. You have to change it and go over it again.

In this and other reflections, Paula expresses the sense that, for her, no intermediary steps or stages exist between an initial idea ("so much in my head") and a finished product ("writing it out"). In contrast, by the closing weeks of the course, Rose was referring to her approaches to process, even though she was not always directly prompted to do so. For example, when asked if she ever 'saved' a paper on her own, Rose had this to say about her National Issue paper:

. . . I was going to do teenage pregnancy, but then I had a paper written out and I read it to my writing group, and they said that the topic was too vague, and there

was too much--my story was too long, and not interesting, and they couldn't really figure out what was--what the plot was, you know. I changed my subject, and then I came back to my writing group (Interview #3, 1/25/95).

Although not expressing as much frustration as Paula, his lower-achieving Site B peer, Samuel's reflections also imply that the process-to-product connection is not as clearly identified it might be. Ann, Samuel's middle-achieving Site A counterpart, values others' contributions while saying relatively little about her usual writing procedures, yet she frequently expresses the sense that, given the opportunity, she would apply a procedural activity (revision) to it: ("Well, because I got an F on a paper I decided that it was a 'bad' paper, but now I know I could revise, or I know how to maybe make it stronger"--First Quarter Reflections).

Samuel's process-related reflections are, when compared to his high- and low-achieving Site B peers, few and brief. In addition, whereas Paula expresses her frustrations with writing procedures, Samuel seems to imply that his shortcomings as a writer are largely the result of not following instructor and peer suggestions, although his reflections also suggest that such followership may not be in his best long-term interests. Samuel expresses a certain uneasiness with this dilemma, but he seems unable to resolve it. With his first interview response, Samuel presaged the dependent, almost passive approach he took to the writing process throughout the semester:

If a teacher gives me a format to follow or something they [sic] want me to do with the writing, I can do that. But that may be a weakness, too.

For Samuel, process amounts to a handed down "format," whereas Ann refers to process as a matter of making selections from among possible approaches to revising drafts (" . . . I like to get other people's opinions on parts of my writing--then either edit or leave it, depending on my findings"--Questionnaire #2 11/14/94). An Interview #3 (1/25/94) reflection also typifies Samuel's ambivalent feelings about a process about which he feels neither comfort nor control:

I'd probably follow the same structure . . . but I did basically what Mr. [Green] told me, the way I wanted to do, but I didn't. I don't think, good enough. In this class, you write a paper, and everybody--you have a group--everybody in your group tells you about it, so you get three different points of view, instead of one.

These and other reflections indicate that neither Samuel nor Ann is especially forthcoming about characteristic writing procedures or their apparent importance and value. It is also true, however, that while Samuel's process-related reflections often refer to the centrality of others' contributions to his work and do not suggest the possibility of approaching the writing task differently in order to improve product quality, Ann expresses greater flexibility and initiative, even though in this instance, it is too late to do so:

If I had the opportunity to revise this piece I would have supported my generalizations with facts. I would go further into detail of explaining my true thoughts of love and the reasons we are afraid to 'love talk' . . . if I were given more time I could have thought about my response through, to have a more thorough response (The Satisfying Piece, 1/25/95).

Ann does not share any details or examples concerning her typical writing procedures here, yet her characteristically brief comments do suggest that she views writing as occurring in steps and stages, however undefined they might be. For example, Ann's response to the question, 'What do you like to do least as a writer?', is generic at best, even though she and her teammates had discussed and experimented with a variety of prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing activities:

The part I like least is starting; it really helps to turn it in, in installments and have some sort of outline. (Questionnaire #2)

When asked a similar question ten weeks later, Ann's response trod similar ground, equally lightly, although she does incorporate references to a key element of the writing process, revision:

Oh, in revising. Well, I have everything on a computer, pretty much, unless it's an in-class essay. So, sit down--and they [peer editing group members] usually wrote on my paper what they thought, so then I would look at it and maybe insert stuff, or take stuff out, compared to what they thought was best.

Clearly, Ann engages in the writing process, including planning, drafting,

reviewing, and revising, although she apparently does not pursue all of these stages for all or even most of these Essay Fundamentals projects. The frequency and specificity to which she refers to approaches to writing tasks exceeds that of her middle-achieving Site B counterpart's reflections. As is the case for Samuel, Ann's process-related reflections are characteristically brief, yet they do refer to particular procedures either by name (e.g., 'Outline', 'revising') or by general function (e.g., 'insert stuff'). Ann's selections of writer's objectives for her work often drive her discussions of her writing strategies. Unlike Rose, her low-achieving Site A colleague, for whom setting objectives was more ritualized than purposeful, Ann often designed her approaches according to her goals for a given piece, as this reflection concerning her persuasive essay suggests:

I really, ah, worked really hard on it, and I kept my--the objectives that I wanted to pursue, which was supporting my facts, details. So I wouldn't have any generalizations that would be left hanging. I kept them in the back of my mind the whole time while I was writing it. And I also had my mom reread it and make suggestions, so that I would have all my generalizations or opinions supported by the facts. (Interview #3, 1/25/95)

In spite of this middle-achieving Site A student's specificity concerning her practices, both high-achieving students raise the matter of writing approaches and strategies more frequently than any of the study's low- and middle-achieving writers. Both Greg and Julie often express themselves in terms of particular writing strategies and occasionally link those procedures to product quality. Among her Site B peers, Julie comes closest to articulating the nature and value--to her--of procedural events and activities (" . . . I think just having examples shown to us from ones that were successful papers . . . was really helpful in seeing effective writing and knowing how to go about a paper, kind of"--Interview #3, 1/25/95). Julie expresses the attitude that such exemplars and other teacher-directed, process-based activities contribute to the quality of her final products. In so doing, she also alludes to the apparently positive impact that this teacher-led classroom environment has had upon her as she identifies approaches to writing that she learned and

followed :

We've gone over the format a little more and how to make your thesis, to state your opinion and then to set the boundaries, you know, of what you're going to talk about, and so I've learned more about that--just making a thesis and sticking to it more, I think that's become more easy. (Interview #1, 10/31/94)

Greg, her Site A counterpart, responds to this same question ('What is the easiest part of the writing process for you now?') less explicitly, but from a somewhat more autonomous perspective. He, too, indicates a procedure, an approach to the writing task that works for him ("easiest to do"):

The easiest part is probably after I have all the information, just writing it down. The draft's the easiest thing for me to do. It just kinda flows out, after you have all of the information. It's probably the easiest--and then after you have a decent rough draft, the final is a lot easier--rough draft is probably the easiest to do.

Although a significant number (30%) of Julie's reflections regarding beliefs and understandings about herself as a writer refer to her experiences with characteristic writing procedures, some, but not all, of those responses discuss her experiences with particular processes. When asked early on (Questionnaire #1, 9/9/94) what she found to be difficult about completing any given writing task, Julie responded more explicitly than did either of her Site B peers, yet still without elaboration:

What is most difficult for me is getting started on paper. I can never seem to finalize a topic, or chose [sic] that perfect opening sentence. Once I get into it, I'm usually OK in writing the rest; it comes more easily . . .

In some degree of contrast, Greg sees writing as involving discrete, often sequential procedures, although he, like Julie, does not discuss those procedures in any detailed or even consistent way. Instead, Greg speaks in general terms about steps he takes to complete a given task. He frequently does so via observation and report, although a few reflective responses representing claims, rationales, interpretations, or attitudes also surface. Furthermore, in contrast to his more detailed remarks concerning beliefs and understandings of himself as a writer, Greg often says comparatively less than does Julie concerning his characteristic writing procedures.

For example, when asked about aspects of their writing that they intended to improve (Questionnaire #1, 10/31/94), neither student referred to any particular class project. Yet while Greg focused upon a particular feature of the writing process, Julie referred to her approaches in a more comprehensive way. Greg's more specifically targeted reflection follows:

I want to be able to get words that I can--instead of having to describe them in five words that I use over and over and over again, just be able to put one word down and just describe what the scene is or what the person's feeling and--to make it not so monotonous and so--I like to think of it as kind of 'childlike'--a lot of the time, because you can't think of a word that would describe the situation better, you just use simple words . . . because usually in writing, and before you get a very good vocabulary, you probably have . . . a group of 15 words that you use over and over again, continuously in your writing. I just want to improve that and get away from that.

It is interesting to contrast this reflective focus upon expression (word choice) with Julie's more expansive response, a representation of her apparent internalization of writing strategies:

I think I need to work on--what's it called when you're after your first draft and revising,--sometimes I'll just type it up and then take it in and get comments, but sometimes I don't always act on them. And so, I need to be more willing to kind of butcher my paper up a bit, cause sometimes I'll just do SpellCheck and then I'll say I'm done, and so I need to be more willing to, you know, get rid of things and move things and change it around, and sometimes once I write it I keep it cemented that way, and I think I need to be more open-minded to changing it more.

These high-achieving students' responses to the question, 'Why did you characterize this piece as *unsatisfying*?' (Unsatisfying Piece, 1/25/95), reinforce these relatively minor yet interesting distinctions between their respective approaches. Note that Julie's forthright appraisal of her work is expressed from the perspective that process ('focus,' 'time') relates to product quality:

I was not happy with this piece because I didn't feel that I had a focus as I was writing it. It seems to jump around a bit and it doesn't flow as much as I'd like it to. Also, I didn't give specific or personal examples for most of the claims I made, so there were a lot of unsupported arguments. Probably the reason it's unsatisfying is partly due to the time limit in the classroom for completion of the paper.

Greg's response, on the other hand, presents a student-writer who lays blame more directly at his own feet, and for whom the overall process is more self-determined:

As opposed to all my other papers, the Opinion Paper was not revised, rough-drafted, or even looked at after I initially wrote it. Research was not done satisfactorily, and was not followed up to get a very clear outlook on the subject, laziness set into me and I figured that the rough draft . . . would be all right to turn in as my final copy. I subsequently received a low grade and have since declared the piece as my lone failure in the entire class. . . . I did not do a sufficient amount of work on it to deserve full credit. Luckily the person who graded [it] did not have as much distaste for it as I did. ('The Unsatisfying Piece, 1/25/95)

Yet despite differences in tone, these two reflections are essentially one, for they both depict students who possess a clear sense of themselves as writers. Both Greg and Julie recognize, make use of, and acknowledge the importance of their respective approaches to writing tasks. Finally, although Ann and Greg, the stronger Site A students, occasionally do so, none of these traditionally instructed Essay Fundamentals students discuss specific procedures or strategies as they might contribute to particular qualities or features of finished products.

Conclusion

After reviewing these and other reflections for evidence of references to student-writers' respective approaches to writing tasks and strategies for completing them, I learned at least as much about differences as about similarities. Between the two middle-achieving students, for example, Ann is much more deliberate and specific with respect to her approaches to writing than is Samuel. Furthermore, Paula, the latter's Site B low-achieving peer, reflects more frequently about her work--albeit without referencing process--than does this higher-achieving student. Writing is, after all, a relatively individualistic pursuit, curriculum, instruction, and classroom atmosphere notwithstanding. Yet despite these seeming contradictions, all three portfolio-culture writers spoke fairly regularly about their approaches to and strategies for completing writing tasks, whereas among Site B writers, only Julie, the high-achieving writer, did so with any clarity or

frequency.

Claim Three: Confidence and Optimism

- Although differences among expressions of confidence and optimism across higher- and middle-achieving student-writers are not significant, lower-achieving portfolio-culture student expressed a higher degree of confidence in and optimism for themselves as writers than do their more traditionally-instructed peers.

Overview

The Arts PROPEL portfolio is based on a view of teaching and learning in which students' classroom experiences are designed to help them develop the resources they need to assume increased responsibility for their learning. . . . Writing is seen as a complex performance drawing on a wide repertoire of skills and knowledge; the aim of instruction and assessment alike is to help students increase the range of their skills and knowledge and to become more expert in applying them. Eventually this approach leads students to become capable of self-assessment. (Camp & Winner, 1993, p. 74)

This excerpt, taken from the document that formed the basis for Site A instruction and learning, comes closer than any other to inferring that students' acknowledgments of competence, expectations for success, and confidence in doing so are program goals embedded within the Arts PROPEL *imaginative writing* program design. As described in chapter 4, Greg, Ann, and Rose all benefited from certain practices and opportunities that Site B student-writers did not encounter. Even so, all of these Essay Fundamentals students experienced a supportive and purposeful atmosphere in which to engage in writing-related tasks. True to form, individual student predilections, abilities, and performances influenced these six students' reflections on this subject, which in turn serve as supporting evidence for the above claim.

Following a pattern that cuts across all of my findings, the high-achieving student-writers at each site are more alike than different, in this case expressing confidence and optimism more frequently and explicitly during the semester of Essay Fundamentals instruction than did their less-accomplished peers. Such was also largely true, however, for this study's middle-achieving participants, a phenomenon that does not repeat itself this directly across other findings. These two student-writers (Ann, Site A; Samuel, Site B)

present nearly identical portraits, in this instance as writers who occasionally recognize significant improvements in their work, yet who, unlike their higher-achieving peers, do so less frequently, explicitly, and confidently.

The two low-achieving student-writers' reflections on this subject, on the other hand, represent radically contrasting impressions with respect to their views of their writing and their sense of themselves as writers. Whereas Rose (Site A), like Ann, sees herself as an ever-improving writer with the potential for continuing to do so, Paula decries what she interprets as a lack of progress in *Essay Fundamentals* and expresses a pessimistic sense of her writing potential.

Across- and Within-Site Evidence

When viewed across many documents spanning twenty weeks, all six participants indicate at least some doubt about either the quality of their work or their ability to perform at higher levels—or both. Yet such expressions were rare for Greg and Julie, high-achieving student-writers. When she was asked at the beginning of the course to discuss what she found to be difficult about tackling writing assignments, Julie represented herself as struggling at times but cautiously confident that she had been and would continue to be up to the task:

What is most difficult for me is getting started on paper. I can never seem to finalize a topic, or chose [sic] that perfect opening sentence. Once I get into it, I'm usually OK in writing the rest; it comes more easily . . . (Questionnaire #1, 9/19/94).

For his part in response to this question, in which he refers to meeting the challenges involved with approaching a new writing task, Greg also admitted to having encountered some difficulties and to being less than satisfied with his performance:

To continue with a thought-up plot and develop it . . . I have drive at first when I think of a story and then it slowly fizzles. Partly because of lack of patience on my part. And partly because I run out of ideas and think the work is not very good. I am my own worst critic. . . .

Somewhat later (Interview #1, 10/31/94), Julie also expressed an apparent lack of confidence in her writing skills, offering only surface features of writing in her favor. In response to the question, 'What would you say are your strengths as a writer?', Julie seems to question even those small competencies:

To be truthful, I don't do anything well. I'm OK at some things though. I can usually find interesting and uncommon words to describe something, and I have lovely spelling and punctuation (usually).

For his part, Greg inferred apparent competence regarding such deep structure attributes as ideas and content to reach his audience, yet he also admitted to being uncertain about his abilities, in conjunction with his lack of experience with self-assessment:

Well, other people have told me, and I'm not sure--it's hard for me to self-evaluate when I write a lot of the time . . . People have told me that I do a very good job of letting people see what I'm writing. I explain things really well--characters are shown to people like they're there, and it's very, very easy to understand, and it creates a picture in people's minds.

Yet despite these and other distinctions, both high-achieving students are optimistic about their continued growth and potential as writers. Greg refers to goals for himself as well as to his perceived accomplishments in general yet positive terms. When asked, 'What do you think is important to know about you as a writer?' (Questionnaire #2, 11/14/94), he responded as follows:

It is important to know what you are good at as a writer. Then you will have confidence in something to keep you going. As a writer people really have no limitations.

Eager to invest time and effort into experimenting with a variety of "styles," a term he associates with purpose and genre as well as with language, Greg views himself as an unpolished yet "mature" writer who continues to improve:

. . . I am a bit closer to becoming the writer that I want to become. I can now be put into a variety of different writing situations and know that I can do a good and thorough job (Final Reflective Letter, 1/25/95).

Around this same time, Greg expressed confidence in his ability to alter his "style," offering evidence in support of his belief that his written work had improved over time:

And now I think I can be put in, I can be asked to write a paper in a persuasive mode, or I can be asked to write in the voice of a 5-year-old. And I think I can do that now, instead of being so narrow . . . minded, and so tunnel-visioned in my writing that I can only write in a certain way . . . Now I can write in five-six different styles. I mean, very elementary knowledge in those styles, but they're different styles nonetheless (Interview #3, 1/22/95).

Julie's reflections also indicate an increasing confidence in her ability to produce quality work; optimism that she will continue to do so comes through this First Quarter Response:

My greater knowledge of essay writing has caused changes in papers, such as a well defined thesis with limits, the three kinds of appeals, etc. This knowledge has turned and will continue to turn my essays into more mature pieces. (11/16/94)

Somewhat later, Julie summarized those positive feelings about her work and her potential, doing so on two separate occasions. In her response to a follow-up question regarding the changes she recognized in her work, Julie did so briefly yet without reservation:

I see myself as a more capable and self-confident writer, and I am no longer nervous to write a paper or to ask for people's input about it. (Interview #3).

Similarly, as part of her Final Reflective Letter (1/25/95), Julie reiterated this theme, contrasting her previous reticence to share her work and revise it accordingly with her current self-assurance and confidence:

I see my writing as being clearer, more focused, and having more support through examples and personal stories . . . I see the ability . . . to accept criticism now, and to revise papers more easily. Before it was very challenging for me to alter something I had written down . . .

Unlike Greg and Julie, whose optimistic reflections regarding writing ability and potential are relatively specific, extensive, and frequent, Ann and Samuel (middle-achieving writers) speak sparingly and generally about their writing performance and potential. Yet like her high-achieving peers, Ann is satisfied with her efforts, implying that she has made important progress:

I accomplished all my goals--I really surprised myself. I worked hard and it shows (Satisfying Piece, 1/25/95).

When she does express herself on this issue, her sense of improvement is also clear, even though she does not refer to particular writer's objectives or projects. In addition, unlike Greg's and Julie's more expressive responses, Ann's few reflections on the subject only rarely incorporate a confident and optimistic tone, perhaps because she dwells on her earlier writing's drawbacks rather than address the nature and significance of her perceived improvements. The following reflection--one of only two 'progress'-related responses--illustrates this difference:

I noticed that as time progressed, my generalizations become more and more supported. I really started off not knowing how to bring my feelings and opinions to a fine point that is understandable to anyone reading or listening (Interview #3, 1/25/95).

Samuel also reflects only rarely regarding confidence in his abilities and hopefulness for future writing opportunities and tasks; in contrast, Greg and Julie favorably compare later to earlier Essay Fundamentals projects or express general confidence in their ability and potential more than twice as frequently. Still, unlike Paula, his low-achieving Site B peer, Samuel expresses positive, confident, and optimistic views of his actual and potential written work, even though he admits opportunities for improvement (e.g., "I think I need to work on my detail--I usually am not praised for specific examples, because I use vague examples--I need to work on that"--Interview #1, 10/31/94).

Samuel's sense of improvement--and reserved confidence--is linked to his self-expectations as well as to his increased understandings about writing. For example, Samuel stated at mid-course (Questionnaire #2, 11/14/94) that "... it feels good to write a paper and have it interpreted as you meant it to be," followed by a reference focusing upon his sense of improvement over time ("I now know how to write different ways . . . I can pull a reader in and keep the essay informative and following the thesis").

These and other reflections belie Samuel's one-time contention that he is not a

writer (“I do not see myself as a writer. At the moment I see myself as someone who can write when needed. But does not do so freely”--Final Reflection Letter, 1/25/95). Within this same document, Samuel asserts a positive, faintly optimistic view of his work (“With every essay I get stronger, save one, and I learn more and more about the writing process”). Claiming at the close of the course in the most general terms that his most recent writing is “completely different” because it “has more meaning in it,” Samuel, like Ann, represents himself as a successful writer. Despite not directly addressing his hopes for future work, Samuel’s reflection certainly implies an optimistic view:

I have really changed as a writer since I started Essay Fundamentals. My writing looks completely different and has more meaning within it. . . I learned that the thesis is your opinion and that it should outline the entire paper. I also learned how to express my views accurately through my writing and practiced how to from paragraph [to paragraph] (Final Reflection Letter).

In contrast to Ann and Samuel’s similarly confident, although infrequent, expressions of themselves as capable and improved writers, Rose and Paula could scarcely be in greater opposition. Unlike Paula, Rose expresses a confident view of her abilities and accomplishments. Furthermore, she does so on several occasions, from early in the semester (“I think I do well in drawing the reader in with description and being able to set a scene for them . . .”--Interview #1) until the completion and scoring of her showcase portfolio:

While I was writing my in-class essay, I thought I did really well. I gave a clear thesis, and I got to the point. (Final Reflective Letter, 1/25/95)

Paula’s reflections, on the other hand, suggest a student-writer who is neither pleased with her work to-date nor confident in her ability to succeed at any future time. The several assertions she offers in response to prompts that call upon her to make comparisons of earlier to later work and predictions how her work might continue to evolve range from pessimistic to fatalistic.

When asked at the end of the course (Interview #3) to describe how she felt her

writing had changed, Paula's response was more self-deprecating than informative:

It's worsened: I try hard to make it good and I end up concentrating on the words rather than the feelings in the writing.

Paula's frustration and pessimism is apparently tied to her dependence upon others for direction (" . . . if somebody said, 'Well, write a Literary Analysis, write this or write that', then I could . . . understand what I'm supposed to be writing . . ."--Interview #3). Consequently, her lack of confidence seems to be aggravated by how others do--and do not-- value her work:

. . . And, I don't know, just maybe because I don't think I'm that good of a writer. I turn it [a given essay] in, and I don't like it, and I get back--well, obviously nobody else does, too, so I still don't like it, you know. (Interview #3).

In contrast and in response to a similar question (Interview #3), Rose's reflection takes the form of a hopeful, confident claims:

I feel that I have matured greatly as a writer. Never before [Essay Fundamentals] have I been able to sit down and write. Now I can. I feel my goals have been met in a way that I am satisfied.

Even though earlier pieces did not live up to her expectations (her first efforts were "boring" and "too technical"), Rose views herself as a writer who has become more competent--and confident--during the course of the semester, as this excerpt from her Final Reflective Letter (1/25/95) suggests:

Although my favorite piece, 'Childhood Experience' [sic] was the very first assigned, I now am able to look back and see changes that could have and most likely would have changed my paper to make it more interesting.

In her corresponding reflection, Paula summarizes her frustration with her work in Essay Fundamentals, a view that suggests her writing (and perhaps herself as a writer) is more terminal than evolving:

Looking back on my writing from the beginning of the year, until now, I find there have only been a few changes. None of them good. I've increased the level of my vocabulary, but I left out the 'feeling' in my writing by doing that.

Conclusion

As mentioned above, these six student-writers express some degree of doubt regarding the quality of their work in Essay Fundamentals. Greg is concerned about “bringing feelings out,” while Julie worries at times about whether she has expressed herself clearly. Similarly, Rose struggles to “get it [ideas] on paper,” and Samuel asserts that revising his writing so that it “flow[s] from paragraph to paragraph” is sometimes a concern. Finally, although topic and tone differ so greatly between their respective reflections, both Rose and Paula discuss perceived weaknesses within their essays.

Yet my analysis of these students’ predictive and evaluative reflections suggests that other important--and classifiable--distinctions are also in evidence. Despite some minor differences of focus and emphasis, both high-achieving students see themselves as competent, capable writers who will likely continue to improve. And, although less ardently and frequently expressing their views, both Ann (Site A) and Samuel (Site B), middle-achieving writers by virtue of entrance records as well as exit grades, see themselves in a similarly confident light. The dramatic distinction drawn here is between the pessimistic expressions of Paula, the Site B low-achieving student, and the much more optimistic, self-affirming reflections of Rose, her Site A counterpart.

Claim 4: Use of Peer Feedback

- Portfolio-culture students, especially the stronger writers, report using peer feedback differently and call for it for different reasons than do their more traditionally-instructed peers.

Overview

As a member of the [helping] circle, you’re a party to a contract. Others will help you. You must speak up and help them. If only a few members respond and the others remain silent, there is no circle. If one person dominates, soon others will not listen to him, no matter how wise his comments. The group can become literally a circle of energy. . . . Over the weeks and months that helping spirit builds. It can give you the confidence to do what you’ve never done before, if you’ll take part in the circle. When everyone is responding to others’ writing, then the writing and responding will improve (Macrorie, 1985, p. 86).

In keeping with viewing and practicing writing as process, all Essay Fundamentals

students were provided with models of and expected to participate in the 'helping circle' process as defined and described by Macrorie (1984, 1985) and others. Although the number and duration of helping circle sessions held fairly constant across Site A and B teams (see chapter 4 for a more thorough accounting), Site A helping circle sessions (1) were often driven by student objectives, (2) frequently focused upon outside exemplars in support of student work, and (3) sometimes involved discussions of teacher-assigned topics (e.g., the nature of effective writing, ways of introducing a thesis, reasons for incorporating sentence variety), usually a whole-class activity for Site B students.

It is one thing, of course, to record the nature and amount of talk that students and their peers do or do not engage in, and quite another to ascertain the degree to which peers' suggestions and other contributions influence student attitudes and accomplishments. As indicated throughout, this study focuses upon student reflection as a telling data source across all five claims. Students' claims for, interpretations of, and attitudes toward their peers' contributions to in-progress and completed written work touch upon such issues as the nature of effective writing, writer identity and authority, and apparent writer progress. To a greater or lesser degree, and for differing reasons, all six of these student-writers value peer feedback. Although important differences of attribution present themselves within-site, across low-, middle-, and high-achieving student-writers' reflections, even more significant distinctions between students of like ability occur across these two sites.

For portfolio-culture (Site A) student-writers, the confidence they express about their writing and about themselves as writers (see claim 3) frequently translates into an interest in acquiring peer feedback in support of their independently-determined objectives for a given piece. That interest is strong for the high-achieving writer, and less pronounced for middle- and low-achieving writers. As a general rule, Site A student-writers tend to take a more autonomous, yet no less positive, view of peer feedback, in contrast to their Site B peers; furthermore, they express less apprehension about and dependence upon that

feedback. Going beyond mere appreciation, the strongest writer (Greg) views peer response groups as interested and informed audiences with whom he looks forward to sharing his work. For him, such groups have become writer/learner communities.

Although middle- and high-achieving Site B student-writers also express confidence in their abilities (see claim 3), they often use peer feedback as a kind of litmus test of their writing competence. Yet the most telling distinction between these two sites relates to the low-achieving writers' respective views and uses of peer feedback. Whereas Rose (Site A) values and seeks out peer feedback as an important service in support of her efforts, Paula expresses such a high level of dependence upon her peers' (and instructor's) responses that such feedback amounts to being essential to her understandings as well as any possible success.

Across- and Within-Site Evidence

Greg (Site A high-achieving writer) takes an independent, but not isolated, view of his work, acknowledging the value of others' responses to his approaches and procedures, but viewing such commentary as contributing to his confidence, competence, and commitment as a writer ("I have confidence in what I write. I am not completely fearful of what people will say. Because what people say helps me in some way to improve . . ."-- Questionnaire #2, 11/14/94). Interestingly, Greg makes no reference to his instructor's role, if any--with regard to his choices and applications of process in the pursuit of quality products.

Early on in the course, when asked to describe his strengths as a writer, Greg placed outside influences in a positive light, but according to a subordinate role:

Teachers, friends, and parents are helpful to me when they read what I have written. And to me it is a success when they say they understand. Friends and parents can't really teach me what to write or how to do it, but their encouragement is what drives me to continue writing. To have praise from a reader is fantastic and can't be measured in significance. (Questionnaire #1, 9/19/94)

Greg aspires to be read, understood, and appreciated as one who writes clearly and compellingly. In addition, he believes that to do so requires personal commitment to write a piece that pleases him as well as his potential readers, including writing group members. When asked to ‘ . . . tell me about some revising choices you made on a particular project in Essay Fundamentals . . . ’ (Interview #3, 1/25/95), Greg opened with a simple but telling observation:

. . . And upon writing the first draft, I really was very opinionated . . . because I naturally have a strong opinion about it, and the people in my writing group pointed that out to me, that it was very strongly opinionated, and it didn’t have a lot of statistics to back up what I was saying. And so I used what they said, and I put more statistics into it . . .

Greg appreciates others’ good intentions and frequently makes use of peer-group suggestions, yet he maintains a relatively autonomous approach to his work, as several reflections indicate, including this one, also deriving from Interview #3:

. . . Usually, I have 3 or 4 people read what I write in group discussions, because if I always listen to just one person, you don’t get a second opinion . . . and if you just immediately change something because somebody else wants you to, then you’re writing it just for them, and you don’t get an overview. So I take all the comments that everybody gives me, and I look at what they say.

This portfolio-culture writer characteristically develops major writing products according to a planned sequence, one that is credible to him because it is based at least as much upon his experiences as a responder to others’ writing as it is upon others’ reactions to his own work. In addition, Greg is a party to his own and others’ increasing sophistication as helping circle participants. As an example, a follow-up question on the subject of Greg’s usual approach to writing assignments yields a response that incorporates a claim for—and a positive attitude toward—the contributions that student-writers can make to one another’s work:

. . . before, when I read somebody’s writing that I really didn’t like, I would just say that I didn’t like it, instead of trying--I mean, I would try to say things to improve, but it would be more of, if I’d been given the choice, I probably would have said, ‘Rewrite the whole thing’ . . . Now, I can read somebody’s writing . . . and I can say that the overall thing is good . . . it’s just parts in the middle that you

need to either expand or, you know, bring them in more--and there's just certain things that need to be improved, and I can see that now. And when I write my own stuff now, I don't--I try not to reflect on just hating it; I'm trying to reflect on whether hating certain parts and revising them. (Questionnaire #3, 1/22/95)

For Greg, the two most valuable writing stages or processes are not only interconnected but nearly interchangeable: (1) re-seeing his work from one draft to the next, and (2) taking advantage of others'--especially his peers'--perceptions of and reactions to it. Helping circles offer helpful support as they provide a preliminary audience for his work, yet they do not determine his writer's choices:

The writing groups have helped me substantially. It gives me a chance to share my writing with a subjective audience of my peers (who usually are harder than teachers). I can reflect on what they say to make it more understandable for my audience. I now know what to write so they would enjoy it if I chose to follow all their thoughts. [J] Having people around to praise me also gives me confidence that my writing has a followable track to it. And its [sic] not a mindless collection of babble scrawled on a paper by an adolescent buffoon. (Questionnaire #3, 1/22/95)

Unlike Greg, teacher responses matter a good deal to Julie (Site B), especially as the course begins:

Another thing that is very important to me is the way that the teacher critiques my paper. Something that I write becomes very personal and dear to me, and if lots of negative comments are made, and no positive ones, then that makes it hard for me to want to continue working on the paper. (Questionnaire #1, 9/19/94)

As is true for Greg, however, peer responses do have value for Julie, even though she views her peers and their responses from a different perspective. Julie does not establish objectives for her work, nor does she take Greg's autonomous, elective approach to others' responses to it. Julie's reflections concerning peer feedback imply that how she goes about her work and makes use of others' views of it contributes significantly to her sense of the quality of her writing, even when she hesitates to act upon some of her peers' suggestions:

. . . I need to let it [criticism] be more helpful to me 'cause I don't always act on the comments, and I even agree with them most of the time, but then I'm scared of changing my paper or something. I don't know why, but . . . (Interview #1, 10/31/94)

Yet whereas helping circles are convenient and largely sympathetic audiences for Greg, they take the form of a gauge or test of performance for Julie. To Julie, peer feedback is problematic: she acknowledges its importance, but she is apparently uncomfortable with it:

I sometimes have trouble with criticism, especially applying [it] to my paper, even if I agree with it . . . (Questionnaire #2, 11/14/94).

This reflection typifies the few others she offers concerning peer feedback. Unlike Greg, Julie never refers to her peers as audience; on the contrary, peer feedback serves as a gauge by which she might judge writing quality. Julie expresses this point of view when she is asked, following eight weeks of instruction, about the importance of sharing her work with others:

I would say it's very helpful, to get others' input, cause I know sometimes when I write a paper, I'm just like, 'Oh, it's perfect! It's done', it becomes my little baby and I don't want to change a thing, and then, when other people say, 'Look at this, maybe,' or 'that part, I'm not sure' . . . That helps me to view the paper differently and realize what needs to be changed.

Although she does not refer to helping circles in Greg's context of a sympathetic and supportive audience for his writing, Ann (Site A) does view her peers as important, positive contributors. When asked at the end of the semester to assess how ' . . . class activities have influenced your writing', Ann referred, albeit only briefly, to those whose suggestions had been most valuable:

Well, confrences [sic] with Mr. [Green] have helped; I know what I have to do to get an A or B paper, which is one of my goals. Also, writing circles help. I like knowing what other students think [about her work]. (Interview #3, 1/25/95).

Such sketchy evidence of 'social assessment', a key component of the portfolio culture classroom experience, apparently did not carry over, either to overt considerations of her own standards for or expectations of effective writing, or to descriptions and claims for whatever contributions her peers made to her work. Yet much of the confidence Ann expresses regarding her ability to revise a given piece effectively and purposefully seems to

grow, according to the few reflections she offers regarding peer feedback, out of apparently positive, useful experiences in helping circle sessions.

Even so, when asked about the degree to which writing groups had reinforced her efforts, Ann expressed appreciation for at least some of her peers' interest and support. Whereas Rose, her low-achieving Site A peer, welcomes but is not especially influenced by peer feedback, Ann seems comforted by the interest--and advice--of like-minded, nonthreatening individuals and groups. In some degree of contrast, however, Ann also appears to misunderstand or overlook the crucial role that constructive criticism can provide:

. . . the people that I am close with and that I know won't, like, shoot down my ideas or put me down for what I am thinking . . . we all respect each others' ideas very much, because we're close friends . . . so we really respect each other, I guess. And I feel that we share most of the same values. I think, if they're opposed to what I think, they don't express it. (Interview #1, 10/31/94)

Despite such apparent ambivalence, Ann's reflections indicate that writing group sharing and discussion contribute to the efficacy of her process as well as to the quality of resulting products. In addition, the following reflection, indicating that Ann and her peers modified and internalized the helping circle process taught early on, suggests that for her, peer feedback had become more than a single-session opportunity to share. Following formal helping circle sessions, these student-writers met on their own volition, either outside of during class hours, in order to continue discussions of their work-in-progress:

In that way, we could read it and then ask questions [of] them later--I think we'd write down stuff that we were confused about, or just remember stuff that we were confused about, and then talk to them later. That way, it was a lot more personal; it wasn't like I was reading, and they were shooting stuff at me, and I was trying to be defensive about it. It worked a lot better [than how the instructor had originally modeled peer editing and helping circle procedures]. (Interview #3, 1/25/95)

Clearly, Ann expresses some concern as to how others will receive her work, yet she does so in the context of working out a solution to this problem and empathizing with her peers

even while recognizing her own trepidations, as her response to another question posed during Interview #3 suggests:

I really enjoyed writing groups and sharing pieces of writing. I learned that everyone is pretty much the same, we all want to know what the other person thinks, but are afraid to hear the answer.

Finally, and in keeping with her own and her Site A peers' use of peer feedback as a way to support her own writing initiatives, Ann acknowledges early on in the course that sharing drafts in helping circles and taking advantage of peers' responses results in perceived, if not always actual, improvements in and ideas for approaching assignments:

Yeah, early drafts help me so much more because I have time to change it, whereas if I've already turned something in, and it's already been graded, I don't have that chance to go back and correct something and--sure, maybe it gives me ideas for future papers, but I'd much rather someone critique me on early drafts. (Interview #1, 10/31/94).

In addition to suggesting less control over all aspects of the writing process, including how to make use of peer feedback, Samuel's reflections concerning the value of such contributions are, when compared with those of Paula and Julie, his Site A peers, few, brief, and ambivalent. With his first interview response, Samuel presaged the dependent, almost passive approach he took throughout the semester to the writing process in general and to peer feedback in particular:

if a teacher gives me a format to follow or something they [sic] want me to do with the writing, I can do that. But that may be a weakness, too. . . . [and] . . . 'cause it's very helpful for me to do a rough draft, have my peers read it, and give me feedback on what I'm supposed to do.

Samuel does value those contributions, even though an implication of dependence is also quite clear. This middle-achieving Site B student does view his writing according to a continuum of improvement ("With every essay I get stronger, save one, and I learn more & more about the writing process"--Interview #3, 1/25/95). And early on in the course, Samuel expresses a receptive attitude toward the role others might play in his pursuit of improved written work:

My teachers, friends, and parents can help me with my writing skills by being honest about what they think of my writing and helping me, with suggestions, change it. (Questionnaire #1, 9/19/94).

As the course continues, however, Samuel's judgments about the relative success of those pieces are rooted in others' responses to them, as this Interview #1 reflection begins to signal: "I think I need to work on my detail--I usually am not praised for specific examples, because I use vague examples--I need to work on that." Unlike those expressed by Ann, his Site A counterpart, these reflections suggest that Samuel seems to be limited to assigning credit to or responsibility for perceived product improvements not to any particular writing process, but to his ability to follow teacher--and, to a lesser extent, peer--provided directions.

In summary, the role that peer feedback has played in support of the limited progress and accomplishments Samuel acknowledges is, at bottom, marginal. Never referring solely to helping circles or to peer response in any detail, Samuel appears to use such feedback as a check for or against his perceptions of progress, much as is the case for Julie, despite her more frequent and positive expressions concerning her peers' contributions.

As suggested above, possibly the most significant distinctions regarding the use of peer feedback across these two sites focuses upon the respective reflections of this study's low-achieving student-writers, Rose (Site A) and Paula (Site B). In contrast to Greg's more extensive discussions, Rose's reflections are few and far between concerning her feelings about and uses of peer feedback. Yet unlike Paula's seemingly desperate calls for peer response, Rose takes a more independent and objective approach to--and sometimes expresses mixed feelings about how she might use--her peers' contributions.

Rose possesses a strong sense of what she likes and what she believes to be effective, sometimes deciding not to apply suggestions that seem inappropriate or unclear to her. When asked if there were times when she listened to others but did not feel compelled

to revise pieces accordingly, Rose responded as follows, indicating control over procedures and authority for doing so:

Yeah, I can't remember what paper it was, but I got feedback from my old writing group, and they were like, 'Well, maybe you should change a paragraph', or something, but I felt that that was my strongest paragraph, that gave my thesis. And so I kept it the same; I didn't change it. (Interview #3, 1/25/95)

And yet on other occasions, Rose does indicate that her peers' responses to and suggestions concerning her work are welcome and helpful. Although some measure of this apparent discrepancy may be due to the fact that many interview and questionnaire prompts presume a degree of positive influence (e.g., 'In what specific ways can other people-- teachers, friends, parents--be helpful to you as you work to improve your writing skills?'), Rose expresses her appreciation of informed, supportive peer feedback, but always from the perspective that it is she who will determine how--and whether--to apply it:

Criticism I believe is the best way to improve writing skills. Not so much advise me on what to write, but to give small ideas to help improve the writing piece. (Questionnaire #1, 9/19/94).

On another occasion, Rose heeded her peers' advice concerning her topic choice for a given project. In this case, peer feedback led Rose to exchange her initial 'big idea' for another. She records (or remembers) salient advice, decides how to respond to it, and then returns to her helping circle with an alternative response to the problem (approaching the National Issue essay) facing all of them:

. . . I was going to do teenage pregnancy, but then I had a paper written out and I read it to my writing group, and they said that the topic was too vague, and there was too much--my story was too long, and not interesting, and they couldn't really figure out what was--what the plot was, you know. I changed my subject, and then I came back to my writing group. (Interview #3, 1/25/95)

In this case, Rose applied peer feedback in a way that suggests she certainly valued other students' perceptions of her work: selecting a new focus after having drafted a response to the project prompt would presumably require confidence in her peers' perceptions and judgments.

Yet Rose also expresses frustration with writing group sessions that she sees as being sporadically helpful at best, or disengaged at worst. Rose reports dissatisfaction with her first Essay Fundamentals group. In doing so, however, she does not leave the impression that she is dependent upon these or any other respondents. What follows is more matter-of-fact report than plea for help, as was characteristically true for Paula, her Site B counterpart:

Because in the beginning I had a group that wasn't really interested in my--you could tell by my earlier work because my papers weren't very--they didn't give criticism very well; they just would say, 'yeah, that's good.' But then I moved writing groups and people that, like, wrote better feedback about it. (Questionnaire #1, 9/19/94).

While it is true that Rose sometimes contextualizes her accomplishments and doubts about her abilities in terms of how others might respond to her work, the overall tone and substance of these reflections suggest an independent approach--control--to her work ("I enjoy being able to write and express exactly how I feel, because being a writer no one is going to question your thoughts or ideas"--Questionnaire #2, 11/14/94).

Among these six students, Paula presents herself as being the least confident about her chances for success as a writer and the most dependent upon others--including helping circle members. It is not surprising that she speaks infrequently of helping circle sessions, and that when she does, it is not in the context of weighing the relative merits of her peer's suggestions, as Rose appears to do. Instead, Paula is apparently unable to articulate specific features of her writing that she believes are either effective or ineffective, relying instead upon others'--especially her teacher's--assessments of her work.

Paula most definitely values peer feedback (" . . . but I'm like, 'Please, write all over my paper, I want you to . . .'"--Interview #1, 10/31/94). And yet she does not do so in the spirit of soliciting peers' reactions and perceptions as a check against her own sense of the nature and quality of her work. Rather, she looks to peer feedback either for confirmation that she is on the correct path, or for recommendations as to what to do, and

where to start (“I want the help, I want to do it right”). When asked a question regarding the relationship between her procedures and her written products, Paula reveals just how dependent she is--and has been--upon others’ judgments and expectations:

. . . it [a given assignment] needs to, like, have people helping you, going through . . . with you on it, ‘cause otherwise, it doesn’t develop, I don’t think. (Interview #3, 1/25/95)

Conclusion

Throughout the semester, Paula expresses her need for peer feedback, but this is a need that goes beyond Rose’s grateful acceptance of her peers’ advice, or Julie’s appreciation of compliments as well as suggestions for improvement. As mentioned above, Site A student-writers take a more independent, authoritative approach to peer feedback, yet value it no less. Even Rose, the low-achieving Site A student, expresses a certain degree of selectivity as she weights her peers’ suggestions against her goals for and feelings about her work, while Paula, her counterpart, reflects frustration when peers are not helpful, and dependence by virtue of never contrasting her views about her work with those of other students.

Finally, it may be at least equally significant that Greg, the high-achieving Site A writer, is the only student in this group who views himself as part of a community of writers, helping circles that serve as supportive readers/audience members as well as reviewers of and contributors to one another’s work.

Claim #5: Activities and Effort versus Ability

- Unlike their more traditionally-instructed peers, Portfolio Culture student-writers view classroom activities and personal effort as contributing more to their accomplishments than apparent ability.

Overview

The Arts PROPEL portfolio is based on a view of teaching and learning in which students’ classroom experiences are designed to help them develop the resources they need to assume increased responsibility for their learning. The teacher sets up, monitors, and facilitates activities in which students can develop the necessary tools and abilities. She first models for students the processes involved, then

encourages the students themselves to engage in the processes . . . Writing is seen as a complex performance drawing on a wide repertoire of skills and knowledge; the aim of instruction and assessment alike is to help students increase the range of their skills and knowledge and to become more expert in applying them (Camp & Winner, 1993, p. 74).

As explained in chapter four of this study, the instructor for these two sections of Essay Fundamentals incorporated the critical core of Arts PROPEL instructional and assessment design for Site A students. From developing personal writing objectives and proposing elements of effective writing in small groups, to analyzing professional and student-created models in support of skills to be acquired and practiced, Site A student-writers experienced important elements of a 'portfolio-culture' environment. Site B students, on the other hand, did not experience the perception-, production-, and reflection-based activities in which Portfolio Culture (Site A) student-writers engaged.

Such scaffolding (Wolf, 1989, 1991) activities as 'marking up' professional authors' work (Camp & Winner, 1993), exploring drafting and revising options, and creating performance (showcase) portfolios were unique to Site A students (see chapter four). As a consequence, Rose, Ann, and Greg enjoyed more--and more autonomous--opportunities to explore, test, assess, and present evidence of their growth as writers than did Paula, Samuel, and Julie, their Site B Essay Fundamentals peers. It is interesting to note, however, that they did not, for a variety of reasons, take equal advantage of those opportunities.

Yet it cannot be assumed that Site A writers would, as a consequence of their Portfolio Culture experiences, necessarily attribute course accomplishments to (1) ability, (2) personal effort, or (3) classroom activities other than as would their Site B peers. Site similarities (see chapter four) suggest that all Essay Fundamentals students might be expected to emphasize these three components in differing degrees as they attributed and discussed their perceived (and actual) writing-related accomplishments.

As it happens, however, some clear distinctions do present themselves across these two sites, just as differences in the nature and intensity of those attributions appear within Sites A and B and across similarly-achieving student-writers' reflections.

Within- and Across-Site Evidence

Low-achieving writers. Site A, Rose; Site B, Paula. Although Rose expresses a certain dependence upon teacher directions and expectations, she is also able to look beyond the "low grades" she has earned, focusing instead upon gaining some degree of confidence as a result of "pushing herself" to produce good work. Similarly, in spite of having participated in many Portfolio Culture-specific activities, including establishing personal objectives and participating in helping circle discussions, Rose's reflections suggest that she did not engage in those processes in any detailed way. Yet it is, apparently, a combination of personal effort and involvement in those activities, not inherent ability, to which Rose attributes her accomplishments in Essay Fundamentals.

True also for Paula, her Site B counterpart, Rose does not discuss her uses of or reactions to such activities, even though class activities and personal effort seem to carry equal weight as she acknowledges and suggests the reasons for her accomplishments:

Class discussion(s) have probably helped me the most. The writing groups gave good feedback which helped me in revisions (Questionnaire #3, 1/22/95).

At another point in the course, and looking at writing from the perspective of her feelings about a finished product and its probable effects upon others, Rose seems to derive a sense of control, of responsibility via working within classroom constraints and teacher expectations, and yet doing so quite independently. Within her terse explanation as to why she chose her persuasive essay for her portfolio as an 'Unsatisfying' piece, for example, Rose makes that independence--and the sense that effort means a great deal--clear.

. . . when I turned it in, I was unsatisfied. Because I know that I should have spent more time on that researching, and getting more. (1/25/95)

By the end of the course, Rose feels as though she has “matured” as a writer; correspondingly, she expresses the same broadly positive, confident view in closing course documents (e.g., Final Reflective Letter) that characterized her earliest reflections. For instance, when asked why she saw her National Issue essay as being her Most Satisfying piece, Rose responded as follows:

... For myself, I learned that if I push myself to produce good work that I will feel satisfied with a low grade, therefore giving myself the confidence that I need to write another good paper in the future. (Reflective Letter, 1/25/95)

It should be mentioned, however, that with only six reflective responses across all study documents pertaining to her accomplishments as a writer, tracing improvements and attributing their causes is not a primary issue for Rose, just as it is not for Paula. Even so, Rose’s mid-semester assessment of her progress demonstrates the consistently positive approach she takes to her work while reinforcing her overall theme that class activities and personal effort are the keys to her success, however limited it may be:

My writing has changed in many ways. I have started to add more emotion to my pieces and I notice I feel better about my writing when I do that. (First Quarter Reflections, 11/16/94).

In contrast to Rose’s experience, writing is, for Paula, a daunting task, at the onset as well as at the close of the semester. Although she values what she describes as “. . . a HUGE imagination, so I can make up things easily to write about,” Paula is a hesitant, seemingly confused and frustrated writer whose hopeful perceptions of her abilities and accomplishments are rare as well as contextually narrow, as the following reflection suggests:

I’m not sure what ‘act like a writer’ means. I don’t think I ‘act’ like one. Whatever it is, I’m not a very good writer. (Questionnaire #2, 11/14/94)

For Paula, ability--or more to the point, her perception of the lack of it--is the greatest determiner of success in Essay Fundamentals. Paula does express confidence in her ability to express her opinions in writing early on in the course (“. . . my opinions are very set

and so that I can write on them very well I think, cause I know exactly why I think it . . .”-
-Interview #1, 10/31/94). And yet when asked how the changes she saw in her writing affected how she saw herself as a writer (Interview #3, 1/25/95), Paula skipped over any “changes” she might have recognized or revised in her work, responding instead with a rather dogmatic self-characterization: “It makes me feel like I am an awful writer.”

Paula’s reflections regarding the relationship she sees between her procedures and her written products suggest not only her reliance upon others but also her sense that ability or the lack thereof lay at the heart of prospects for improvement. For example, when asked to respond to the question, “If I were to say to you, ‘OK, go back to the first assignment you did, as though you never saw it before,’ would you approach a writing problem any differently--how you start, how you develop a piece?” (Interview #1), Paula revealed just how dependent she was upon others’ judgements and expertise:

. . . it [a given writing project] needs to, like, have people helping you, going through . . . with you on it, ‘cause otherwise it doesn’t develop, I don’t think.

Similarly, in response to questions posed at the close of the course, Paula’s comments reflect her apparent inability to recognize either improvements in her work or any sense of how class activities contribute to her writing. Even her efforts, although apparently considerable, have not been of much help. When asked (Interview #3) how she thought her writing had changed, Paula’s response was typically brief and direct:

It’s worsened; I try hard to make it good and I end up concentrating on the words rather than the feelings in the writing.

Paula’s Final Reflection Letter (1/25/95) reflection reveals her sense that she has regressed rather than progressed; neither effort nor classroom activities have apparently been of much use to her:

Looking back on my writing from the beginning of the year, until now, I find there have only been a few changes. None of them good. I’ve increased the level of my vocabulary, but I left out the ‘feeling’ in my writing by doing that.

Middle-achieving writers: Ann, Site A; Samuel, Site B.

As mentioned above, much of the confidence Ann expresses regarding her ability to draft and revise a given piece effectively and purposefully seems to be reinforced, although not driven, by her apparently positive, useful experiences in helping circle sessions. And, as might be expected of a student called upon to establish and work toward specific objectives, Ann discusses her perceived strengths and weaknesses as a writer in the context of goal-setting for a given piece:

Well, my Persuasive essay, I really worked hard on it, and I kept my objectives that I wanted to pursue, which was supporting my facts, details. So I wouldn't have any generalizations that would be left hanging. I kept them in the back of my mind the whole time while I was writing it. And I also had my mom reread it and make suggestions, so that I would have all my generalizations or opinions supported by the facts . . . (Interview #3, 1/25/95).

Like Samuel, though, Ann also looks to her teacher for advice and support (" . . . when I write, and get my paper [back] or whatever, Mr. [Green] lists some suggestions about how I can improve it, or how in later pieces I could keep those objectives in the back of my head"--Interview #3). As this reflection suggests, teacher involvement in support of student motivation and direction is more pronounced than it is for either of Ann's Site A (portfolio culture) peers. In addition, although she values her peers' contributions, it is her instructor's apparent influence upon her chances for success, along with her own efforts, that appear to be paramount, as the following reflection demonstrates:

. . . Mr. [Green]'s the one grading me, so I kinda what to get his [opinion] but with our writing groups, I just read to them, and then they would make suggestions, or not all the time. I mean, I wouldn't use their suggestions all the time, because we're different people, and they think a little differently than I do . . . (Interview #3).

Interestingly, as the middle-achieving member of this group, Ann reflects least frequently and specifically about the process-to-product connection. On the other hand, she claims a stronger, more positive connection between acting upon her objectives in pursuit of increased product quality and her actual accomplishments than does Rose,

whereas Greg says less about the apparent impact of those objectives and significantly more about the contributions others' input as well as his own efforts have made upon product quality. About her Satisfying Piece, Ann had this to say:

I knew I'd eventually get the knack of supporting my generalizations with facts. I proved to myself that I could do it. If I kept the guidelines in the back of my head, I remembered to follow them and I produced a higher quality paper. (Satisfying Piece, 1/22/95)

To reiterate, for Ann, what she accomplishes derives largely from her own efforts, in conjunction with and her instructor's advice and support. Her response to the question, 'Why did you characterize this as a Satisfying Piece?' (Satisfying Piece, 1/22/95) makes both of these assertions quite clear:

The reason I characterized this piece as 'satisfying' is because I know I worked very hard on it, creating many different drafts and making any changes in order to receive a high grade. In comparison to earlier pieces, it was of great improvement. I feel that I met all the requirements and guidelines my teacher and I set up. I worked hard and received an A.

Never does Ann refer to her ability to write--or to her capacity to learn about writing--as a rationale for the presence or absence of performance. For her, progress is a blend of her own efforts and others' support as she in pursues her objectives

As is true for Paula, Samuel also says little about the particular approaches he takes as he works to meet project deadlines. Unlike this lower-achieving Site B student, however, Samuel acknowledges Essay Fundamentals experiences that have contributed to his perceptions of competence, even though he formally rejects the notion that he is, as a consequence, a writer. Samuel does recognize growth and achievement ("I have really changed as a writer since I started EF. My writing looks completely different and has more meaning within it"). However, unlike Ann, Samuel's judgments about the relative success of his work are rooted in others' responses to it ("I think I need to to work on my detail--I usually am not praised for specific examples, because I use vague examples--I need to work on that."--Interview #1, 10/31/94). Samuel apparently depends a good deal upon

others for whatever sense of accomplishment and competence he might experience and recognize (“ . . . for me, it helps to know that I wrote something good. I need to have feedback”--Interview #3, 1/25/95). Reflections also suggest that Samuel seems to be limited to assigning credit for perceived product improvements not to any particular writing process, nor even to personal effort, but to his ability to follow teacher--and, to a lesser extent, peer-provided-- directions and suggestions.

When asked at semester's end to summarize how he viewed the relative quality of earlier versus later Essay Fundamentals products, and as to whether he would approach those assignments differently in any way as a consequence, Samuel responded as follows:

I'd probably follow the same structure . . . but I did basically what [Mr. Green] told me, the way I wanted to do, but I didn't, I think, good enough. (Final Reflection Letter, 1/25/95).

This is in keeping with other reflections that suggest Samuel's sense of limited control over writing procedures, as well as his frustration with his apparent inability to explore alternative approaches to assignments, as this response (Interview #3, 1/25/95) indicates:

. . . they say they want you to write this paper. And so, then they [teachers] give you a format to follow by. And so you follow it, and basically you put nothing in it yourself.

Unlike Julie, who appreciates others' suggestions, seeing them as one of many factors contributing to her progress, Samuel seems to harbor ambivalent feelings about such contributions. On the one hand, he values his teacher's suggestions for approaching a given project, to the point of expressing frustration with his inability to take advantage of all of the instructor's recommendations (“But sometimes I just miss it all . . . sometimes there's to [sic] much to think about and so I miss something”--Interview #1, 10/31/94). On the other hand, however, Samuel appears to recognize that dependence upon others for his own sense of ability and accomplishment can be counterproductive:

. . . if a teacher gives me a format to follow or something they [sic] want me to do with the writing, I can do that. But that may be a weakness, too. (Questionnaire #1)

High-achieving writers: Greg, Site A; Julie, Site B. Greg's Essay Fundamentals

experiences were apparently rich and diverse, resulting in an increasing sense of competence and accomplishment; correspondingly, his reflections add up to a fairly even mix of attributions for his perceived success. From among native ability, classroom activities, and personal effort, it is the latter--with class activities serving as a supporting player--that apparently contributes most significantly to fulfilling and affirming Greg's sense of his capacity for writing well.

Eager to invest time and effort into experimenting with a variety of "styles," a term that he associates with purpose and genre as well as with some surface features of writing, Greg views himself as a "mature" yet unpolished writer by the end of the term. Although Greg frequently refers to the benefits he has accrued in Essay Fundamentals (" . . . when I first came into the class, I could only write in a certain way. I can write in several different ways [now]"--Interview #3, 1/25/95), he rarely speaks of specific exercises, activities, or steps that may have contributed to his comfort level and increasing sense of competence. Instead, his reflections imply that some combination of classroom activities and personal effort has contributed to his accomplishments and growth:

When I walked into the class, I'd always . . . considered myself as something of a decent writer because all the English classes I'd ever had, they [teachers] always said that 'you're above average in your writing ability', but I'd always written in my. just the way I wanted to. I mean, when you're in 8th grade or 9th grade, 10th grade, sometimes you write--I'd spent mostly writing just stories; I hadn't really written essays before. And then, . . . I really had no idea how to approach a large research paper such as the Persuasion essay, or write about an abstract word such as 'success', or analyze someone else's writing . . . (Interview #3, 1/22/95).

Greg acknowledges the value of certain class activities, including gathering and considering others' responses to his writing. When asked at mid-course to describe how his writing had changed (Questionnaire #3, 1/25/95), Greg contrasted his pre-Essay Fundamentals experiences and practices with the more reader-sensitive written products that he believed typified his most recent work:

... When I used to write ... we'd just kind of say things, and we'd automatically believe that everybody'd understand what we were saying. We'd write kind of from our minds, like writing for ourselves. And we'd understand what we were writing, but no one else would. And a lot of the qualities that we've been taught in this class is to let other people understand what you're writing, to define things better so this person can understand as well [as] someone more intelligent, or someone less intelligent ... (Interview #2, 12/4/94).

Similarly, as part of his Final Reflection Letter (1/25/95), Greg makes it clear that he equates change in written products with continual, recognizable improvements, and that many "resources" have contributed to those perceived results:

From my first piece (Childhood Experience) to my last piece (Literary Analysis), you can see that my use of other resources, other opinions, time, and the help of my teachers now fully influence the work that I do. Instead of just writing from my personal experiences.

Despite acknowledging the contributions that class activities have made, Greg views his own efforts in pursuit of producing quality work as enhancing to at least an equal degree to his writing competence. Inherent ability counts for something, but for Greg, sustained effort makes all the difference, as the following Satisfying Piece reflection (1/25/95) indicates:

Of all the papers that I wrote during the course of the semester in this class I have seen my own style come through more evidently in this piece [Literary Analysis]. I spent the most time completing it, and was the most satisfied when I had finished the paper. The feeling of really doing hard work showed through. I spent months reading two books by an author I had no idea of, and then relayed that information ... into an analysis. Not a book report, but an analysis. I had to use my intelligence and the opinions of ... critics to create the image of the style of the author. All the work put in, turned into an easily understandable synopsis [that] showed that I can now do research and intelligently respond to a difficult question.

Julie, Site B. As does Greg, Julie reflects upon the strengths and weaknesses she perceives in her writing from the perspective of an evolving, maturing writer whose decisions are, for better or worse, her own. In addition, although Julie's reflections concerning the extent to which specific class activities may have contributed to her accomplishments are similarly few and brief, she also attributes her accomplishments not to ability but to effort, coupled with the support of a variety of classroom resources and

activities. The following response, taken from Interview #2 (12/4/94), constitutes one such attribution:

Responding to editorials . . . has helped me to state my opinion concisely and strongly. Also, some of the readings, such as 'DoubleSpeak' [see Appendix ___] and the one about balancing logic, ethics, and emotion have helped me to know what not to do and how to be balanced.

At a later date, when asked if and how class activities contributed to her understandings about writing during the semester (Interview #3, 1/25/95), Julie acknowledged the value of her instructor's provision of appropriate models, although she did not elaborate as to how reviewing exemplars shaped her own approaches to the composing process:

Well, he [Mr. Green] would read to us a lot, papers from other classes before, you know, the ones that he thought were really top-notch. And so, I think in just having examples shown to us from ones that were successful papers, I think that was really helpful in seeing effective writing and knowing how to go about a paper, kind of.

Again corresponding with the general tone of Greg's accomplishment-based reflections, Julie acknowledges that she has much to learn. Yet she asserts that if the quality of her work is to improve, it will occur due much through her own efforts. The following excerpt from Interview #1 (10/31/94), although briefly and broadly stated, suggests this point of view:

. . . I need to be more willing to, you know, get rid of things and move things and change it around, and sometimes once I write I keep it cemented that way, and I think I need to be more open-minded to changing it more . . .

In some contrast to both of her Site B peers, but much as is the case for Greg, Julie sees her teacher's and her fellow student-writers' suggestions for and responses to her work as constituting--not the ultimate reason for her evident growth and progress--but certainly an important contribution. Julie's response to the question, 'Now that you have completed this course, how would you describe what you have learned about improving your written work?', exemplifies this point of view:

I think I've learned a lot this year about how to revise a paper, because before I would just kind of type it up, check it for spelling, and then I was done, and I

didn't really have much of a, you know, a process of going through and editing it. But I think this year I've become a lot better at that, and accepting people's comments about change in the paper. (Interview #3, 1/22/95)

As for expressions or explanations of how specific procedures contributed to the quality of individual written products, Julie's responses were similarly positive, yet nonelaborative. She either speaks in general terms about those effects ("My greater knowledge of essay writing has caused changes in papers, such as a well defined thesis with limits . . ."--First Quarter Experiences, 11/16/94), or refers in passing to particular papers in support of general observations about her procedures ("I see improvement in not only my writing from the semester, but also my ATTITUDE toward writing . . . Now, I think of writing as a means of self-discovery, such as the National Issue paper, and by exploring the world around us, such as the Persuasive essay"--Final Reflective Letter, 1/25/95).

At semester's end, Julie recognizes important improvements in her work ("I see my writing as being clearer, more focused, and having more support through examples and personal stories . . .). In addition, she has gained a degree of comfort with her approaches to writing tasks ("I see the ability to accept criticism now, and to revise papers more easily. Before it was very challenging to me to alter something I had written down"--Final Reflection, 1/25/95). Yet in each case, she does so in general terms, without reference to either particular products or specific approaches to her work, as this brief assertion represents:

I see myself as a more capable and self-confident writer, and I am no longer nervous to write a paper or ask for people's input about it. (Questionnaire #3, 1/22/95).

Conclusion

Subtle yet important distinctions present themselves across these sites and individual subjects with respect to attributions of accomplishments. Both high-achieving student-writers celebrate a symbiotic mix of personal effort and classroom resources and activities as having contributed to their respective accomplishments, although Greg has a

good deal more to say about this than does Julie, his Site B counterpart.

Between the study's middle-achieving students, only Ann perceives her own efforts as being the primary determiner of fulfilling the objectives she established for herself during the semester, although teacher involvement in support of those efforts count for something, too. In some degree of contrast, although recognizing his growth and achievement, Samuel attributes whatever success he has experienced largely to being able to follow teacher and peer direction.

Finally, Rose joins her Site A peers with her relatively independent expressions of attribution to personal effort, in conjunction with involvement in class activities. As is the case for Paula, her low-achieving peer, however, Rose does not discuss her uses of or reactions to those activities. For Paula, in contrast, success has been elusive; to her, it is ability, not effort or classroom experiences, that determines how well a person does or does not do in Essay Fundamentals.

CHAPTER 6

The 'Portfolio-Culture' Classroom: Possibilities for Student-Writers

In short, researchers conduct qualitative studies not merely for their own sake, but rather in the reasonable hope of bringing something grander than the case to the attention of others. Researchers hope for a description and analysis of its complexity that identify concepts not previously seen or fully appreciated (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 148).

Introduction

Collecting, coding, and interpreting student-writers' reflections in light of the tales they tell is a difficult--and perhaps even risky--business. From describing and documenting key 'portfolio-culture' principles and attributes as they occur in a given setting, to operationally defining concepts that are variously defined and described in the literature (Black et al., 1994; Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 1993), this study raises issues and questions even as it presents potentially significant findings.

As Glesne and Peshkin state, a central purpose of qualitative research is to bring some sort of order to what begins as "fat data" (p. 131). By presenting this comparative case study's findings as a series of interrelated snapshots of student-writer understandings, I intend for its several claims to be viewed as *concrete universals* (Erickson, 1986, p. 130). As Erickson and other proponents of qualitative research explain, only specific incidents of any given phenomena or behavior actually exist in nature--and in classrooms. Universal understandings reveal themselves through comparative analysis, but not without detailed understandings of each case, and not without viewing those cases as individual and independent entities. More specifically,

Each instance of a classroom is seen as its own unique system, which nonetheless displays universal properties of teaching. These properties are manifested in the concrete, however, and not in the abstract. Such concrete universals must be studied each in its own right. This does not necessarily mean studying classrooms one by one. But it does presume that the discovery of fully specified models of the organization of teaching and learning in a given classroom must precede the testing of generalization of those models to other classrooms. The paradox is that to achieve valid discovery of universals one must stay very close to concrete cases (Erickson, 1986, p. 130).

In this cross-site case study of student-writers' understandings of writing and of themselves as writers, I analyzed student reflections for their potential to reveal apparent influences of 'portfolio-culture' elements upon those perceptions and understandings. In the process of doing so, I was struck by the potential of the writing portfolio process (both working and showcase) to function not only as a teaching tool but also as a focal point for management, deliberation, and reflection for students (Fairchild, 1993; Gill, 1993; Valencia & Calfee, 1991; Wolf, 1991). As I mention above (Chapter 1), the portfolio-based writing instruction literature pertaining to matters of reflection and assessment remains relatively new. Only since the early-to-mid 1990s have claims for and about portfolio-based instruction moved from program description and advocacy to investigation and analysis (Camp, 1992; Cox, 1993; Huot, 1994).

This study posed the following question: **How, if at all, does involvement in a portfolio-culture writing classroom contribute to high school students' understandings of** (1) their identities as writers; (2) the different processes involved in writing, and their own use of those processes; (3) their progress (growth) as developing writers, and related self-assessment; and (4) the nature of effective writing? Although this study's reflective evidence provides little insight with regard to students' comparative understandings of what effective writing is (or is not), the data suggest important differences between portfolio-culture students and their more traditionally-instructed peers in several apparently interrelated ways that touch upon matters of identity, process, and progress.

In contrast to their "good writing instruction" peers, portfolio-culture student-writers' reflections generally represent a higher degree of awareness, independence, and confidence. They talk more specifically and frequently about their writing, and view personal effort and classroom activities as having more influence upon the quality of their work than inherent ability. In this chapter I will discuss (1) the theoretical and practical

implications of the study's findings in light of its central question; (2) the limitations of the study, including cautions regarding its design and possible replication; (3) recommendations for future research, and (4) implications for practice.

Five Claims: Patterns and Implications

As I framed this study's design according to its central question, I considered how I might obtain student-writer reflective data relating to the several portfolio-classroom features that had been examined and reported in the literature. Control and choice, responsibility and ownership--these and related concepts have recently been investigated in the contexts of the writing portfolio and portfolio-culture classroom (Daniels, 1995; Fairchild, 1993; Luce-Kapler, 1996; Metzger & Bryant, 1993; Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991). Such studies and literature reviews explored the apparently complex relationship between student choice (e.g., approaches to and topics for various writing tasks and assignments) and ultimate teacher authority (decision-making) in classrooms featuring portfolio-based instruction and/or assessment.

Portfolio-culture contributions to student-writer responsibility and control

My discovery that high-achieving student-writers representing traditional as well as portfolio-culture writing classrooms expressed a relatively greater sense of control over and responsibility for their approaches to and production of writing than did their middle- and low-achieving peers suggests some interesting possibilities. Tierney et al. raise but do not directly investigate questions regarding how student-writers enrolled in seventh-grade portfolio-based classes do or do not see themselves as informed decision makers. Somewhat similarly, Bertisch (1993) reported that her high school senior writing students developed greater responsibility for improving and assessing their writing, and that classroom portfolios served as "chronicles" of the ways they did so (Bertisch, p. 59). Yet neither these nor other studies or reviews report distinctions across ability levels or between portfolio and non-portfolio writing instruction classrooms.

Feeling in control of their own progress and growth, and taking responsibility for the decisions they make, both high-achieving students reflected upon their Essay Fundamentals experiences from the perspective of significant autonomy over and overall satisfaction with their performance. High-achieving writers often say more about their writing and express greater confidence in their approaches to writing tasks than do their less confident and/or capable peers (Gere & Abbott, 1985). In addition, they tend to move from rather general expressions of purpose to more specific considerations of goal-setting (e.g., Flower & Hayes, 1981). It is not surprising, then, that both high-achieving students in this study frequently took on unofficial leadership roles during peer editing group sessions and classroom discussions. Furthermore, some reflections relating to choice and responsibility indicate higher degrees of comfort and/or confidence than was the case for lower-achieving students. Such comfort and confidence almost certainly contributed to the de facto leadership these students displayed in whole-class and peer editing group sessions.

Despite these similarities, however, it would be imprudent to conclude that elements and experiences unique to the portfolio-culture classroom do not contribute to higher-achieving students' control over and responsibility for their work. It may well be that such features as goal-setting, portfolio selection, and engagement in recursive "sustained engagement" (perception, production, and reflection) activities cultivate a more focused, purposeful, or inviting path to responsibility and control. Overall reflections on these issues were roughly equal between these students. Yet the fact that the higher-achieving portfolio-culture student alluded earlier on in the course to such matters than did his traditional-instruction counterpart suggests that one or more portfolio-culture elements may have stimulated those responses, by virtue of emphasizing student investment and autonomy. Consequently, such references to responsibility and control may contribute to a more encouraging, student-centered atmosphere for all portfolio-culture participants, as this study's findings suggest.

“Sustained Engagement”: Central to the portfolio-culture classroom

Taken together and separately, this study’s several findings suggest that the recursive, cyclical approach to writing instruction known as “sustained engagement” is the most productive, hence definitive, element of the portfolio-culture classroom. For students of all levels of accomplishment, but especially for lower-achieving students, the three “crisscrossing pathways” (Camp & Winner, 1993) that constitute sustained engagement amount to ongoing opportunities to invest in writing, both process and product, in a largely self-directed way. A complex approach that involves frequency and specificity of talk in conjunction with and support of perceiving, producing, and reflecting, *sustained engagement* is an overarching process that Camp & Winner (1993) define as follows:

The ability to tackle the complex craft of writing thoughtfully grows out of students’ capacity to judge and refine their efforts before, during, and after they have written. Students’ ability to confront the challenges of writing--to understand their work as it changes over time, to build on their strengths, to look carefully at their work and form new insights and ideas about themselves as writers. (p. 7)

The fact that portfolio-culture students talked more specifically about their approaches to and strategies for writing than did their more traditionally-instructed peers indicates that such judging, refining, challenging, and understanding occurred at least partially via reflective talk, and perhaps to some degree as a function of that talk’s greater frequency. In addition, participating in this recursive process throughout the semester correlated with portfolio-culture students’ apparently more independent approach to applying--or considering but choosing not to apply--peers’ suggestions. As mentioned above, the low-achieving portfolio-culture student expressed significantly more confident and optimistic reflections regarding herself as a writer than did her traditionally-instructed peer. Many of those reflections referred to or apparently grew out of procedural activities unique to sustained engagement.

In essence, “sustained engagement” might best be thought of as a form of

scaffolding, as the latter concept is defined and described (Langer & Applebee, 1986; Wolf, 1991). In keeping with the pedagogical notion that, by working with “experts,” whether they be adults or peers, individual students can begin to internalize complex procedures (Vygotsky, 1962) and gain a greater sense of autonomy and confidence, portfolio-culture participants apparently experience and benefit from the effects of this scaffolding model. Furthermore, because the lower-achieving portfolio-culture student’s reflections on the themes of confidence and optimism contrast so vividly with those expressed by her similarly-achieving counterpart, it would be valuable to learn more about how and to what apparent degree sustained engagement-related activities correlate with expressions of confidence.

With its encouragement of risk-taking over followership, and its celebration of process as product’s equal in importance for writing--and writer--development, sustained engagement should be the subject of further study in anticipation of and preparation for informed classroom practice. Future studies might cross-reference student-writers’ reflections--that is, their rationales, claims for, interpretations of, and attitudes toward their written work--with their respective approaches to writing tasks and uses of peer feedback within the sustained engagement model. It would be valuable, for example, for writing teachers to know the degree to which portfolio-culture student-writers’ characteristic procedures correlate with peer group talk. Investigating the relationships between frequency and specificity of responses to both process-based and product-related topics of discussion as students participate in the *sustained engagement* process might be a fitting place to begin.

Lower-achieving student-writers: Experiencing greater benefits

For teachers and researchers alike, low achievement and an apparent lack of confidence in one’s ability to perform at acceptable, or ‘passing’, levels figure prominently as issues of concern. Additionally, these themes may also represent a correlative

relationship in the writing instruction (e.g., Langer & Applebee, 1984; Britton et al., 1975) and portfolio assessment (e.g., Belanoff & Dickson, 1991; Camp, 1989, 1991; Elbow & Belanoff, 1986) literature. Any approach to writing instruction that might contribute in some demonstrable way to low-achieving students' motivations to perform--and confidence in their ability to do so--deserves investigation.

High- and middle-achieving students' reflections across these two sites do not differ in any obvious, meaningful way with respect to expressions of confidence, as defined by writing process theory (e.g., "... a wholly personal quality resulting from students' discovery that they do have something to say to readers," Perdue, 1987, p. 3). Yet this finding may simply reflect the roughly equal success, especially as measured by relatively high grades earned, that these middle- and high-achieving students experienced at their respective learning sites. Students' relative confidence in their ability to complete a given writing task appears to be related to locus of control; in addition, portfolio-based instruction can affect students' perceptions of ability (Cole, Ryan, & Kick, 1995; Miller & RiCharde, 1991).

As if in anticipation of this latter finding, Perdue (1987) asserted that portfolio-based instruction--along with peer group revision, journal writing, and editing following essay turn-in for teacher evaluation--might build both confidence and social (group) authority. The fact that students at both sites engaged in all but one of these instructional features (revision of teacher-evaluated essays), however, makes it difficult to isolate portfolio-culture elements as having contributed in a direct, unidimensional way to high- and middle-achieving students' confidence and optimism.

In contrast, however, the differences between this study's two low-achieving student-writers' reflections regarding levels of confidence are striking. Despite earning similar final grades in Essay Fundamentals, the traditionally-instructed student's pessimistic view that she is unable to write clearly and interestingly contrasts with her

portfolio-culture counterpart's honest yet hopeful portrayal of herself as an ever-improving, ultimately capable, writer. Although the data do not point to any single, specific cause of these students' respective confidence or optimism, these student-writers' reflections present such a stark contrast on this point that, if evidence to the contrary were not readily available, one might conclude that these students had been subject to a wholly different set of experiences--and teacher/student expectations.

This study's findings suggest that lower- and middle-achieving students benefit more than do their higher-achieving peers from portfolio-culture classroom activities and the encouraging, nurturing environment to which those activities apparently contribute. This implication is reinforced by the fact that less-accomplished students enrolled in the portfolio-culture section of Essay Fundamentals expressed a much higher degree of confidence in and optimism for themselves as writers than did their more traditionally-instructed peers. The portfolio-culture approach to writing instruction should be studied for its potential to involve such students in considerations of their potential to assume writing-related responsibilities, as well as to display greater control over writing-related activities and procedures.

More specifically, it would be interesting to investigate student-to-student interactions across achievement levels with respect to control and responsibility, as well as to confidence and optimism. Do higher-achieving students enrolled in portfolio-culture classes contribute in identifiable ways to their lower-achieving peers' confidence? To their respective expressions of autonomy as writers? If so, do such elements as reported use of peer feedback and the relative importance of class activities and effort versus assumed ability also figure into those expressions? These and related questions deserve further, and more explicit investigation.

Finally, portfolio-culture activities (e.g., making selections for showcase portfolios), as they apparently grow out of elements of *authorship literacy* and *sustained*

engagement , correlate with lower-achieving students' greater confidence and optimism as writers. Future research might focus upon teasing out the particular writing-related activities and experiences, materials, and expectations that evidently contribute to such distinctly different student reflections.

Authorship literacy: Integral to--yet entwined with--sustained engagement

Investigating the relationship between student-writers' identities and behaviors as writers (*authorship literacy*) and their respective engagement in the process of perceiving, producing, and reflecting about writing (*sustained engagement*) might also provide valuable information regarding the apparent workings and effects of portfolio-culture based instruction. Yet attempting to do so is problematic, for the teaching and learning links between these two components of the portfolio-culture classroom are often subtle and complex, and perhaps always interactive.

Among the three central elements of the portfolio-culture classroom, *authorship literacy* , as defined in the literature and incorporated within this study, appears to contribute to the attitudes endemic to and/or resulting from *sustained engagement*-related activities. Lower- and middle-achieving portfolio-culture students' reflections regarding their identities and practices as writers, when compared to those of their more traditionally-instructed peers, exude confidence and optimism. It, too, is a correlation well worth investigating.

For example, as I discuss above (Chapter 2), *authorship literacy*, or choice, as it is defined in the context of student involvement in and options for writing, clearly relates to considerations of the writing process. Yet the concept of *sustained engagement* (Camp, 1992; Camp & Winner, 1993; Fairchild, 1993; Wolf, 1991) also seems to inform many of these portfolio-culture student-writers' process-based reflections. It may be that these two central qualities are, in fact, so procedurally intertwined that they must be documented and

studied for their individual and cumulative contributions to student-writers' attitudes and claims, both process and product.

Examining student-writers' uses of peer feedback would seem to be a productive avenue for investigating authorship literacy's importance to the portfolio-culture classroom experience. Peer response (e.g., helping circles, peer editing groups) comments take a number of forms and purposes, but they are often teacher-driven, whether directly solicited or more subtly influenced (Freedman, 1987; Gere & Abbott, 1987). Also, regardless of the degree to which teachers do or do not direct writing group talk, peer criticism can amount to little more than an exercise in the service of course or assignment requirements.

Yet when viewed from the apparent significance of *social talk* (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986), peer responses reportedly “. . . intensify students' social interactions around the topic of written language and potentially can help them increase their skills as writers” (Freedman, 1987). It might be productive, therefore, to investigate how such talk influences or confirms whatever connections students make between their goals for and decisions regarding writing tasks (authorship literacy) and their approaches to and procedures regarding those tasks (sustained engagement). Put another way, this study's findings suggest that one or more features unique to portfolio-culture students' experiences may help to explain why such different uses of and attitudes toward group feedback occurred across these two sites. Peer groups were similarly established, configured, and engaged as part of the writing and learning process for both groups of writers (see chapter four, site similarities and differences).

These reflections suggest, however, that portfolio-culture helping circle norms of operation and topics of discussion were influenced by (1) individual writers' establishment of and emphasis upon goals, (2) a greater latitude of approach to assignments and the problems they posed, and/or (3) more open and frequent talk (Camp & Winner, 1993) about the nature of their own and others' writing. Erickson (1986) speaks of peer response

groups as representing individual microcultures, unique sets or communities; these two Essay Fundamentals sites certainly seemed to qualify as such.

Portfolios: More procedural than essential

The *working -to- showcase* portfolio sequence as described in the portfolio-culture literature and incorporated in this study is a complementary feature of the *sustained engagement* approach to writing instruction, but it does not appear to be an essential component of it. Even before these portfolio-culture students began to select pieces for their showcase portfolios, for example, they were immersed in individual and small-group considerations of what they had mastered, had yet to learn, and wished to emulate. Reflections indicate that, from establishing specific objectives for a given project, to analyzing various writing models in the context of small-group and whole-class discussions of the nature of ‘good’ (or quality) writing, these students’ immersion in *sustained engagement* activities constituted or contributed to their most significant portfolio-culture experiences.

The portfolio-culture literature represents portfolios as the center of gravity around which all elements of student engagement and performance revolve, or from which such behaviors and learnings emerge. The following expression of that position is fairly typical:

The maintenance and assessment of portfolios supports distinct benefits for the students as well [as for teachers]. Portfolios contain the implicit message that the process of making art is serious, worth doing, and worth being attended. Students increasingly manifest control of their own learning, for they see themselves as the decision-maker in the arts process. . . . Additional benefits include increased student experimentation and risk-taking. Since evaluation is not based solely on the success of a final product, students are more willing to explore different avenues, a characteristic that is explicitly valued in the PROPEL model. (Gitomer, 1989, p. 7).

All of these assertions may, in fact, be true; this study’s findings certainly do not contradict them. And yet, student-writer reflections suggest that the recursive instructional approach of perceiving, producing, and reflecting (sustained engagement) is the impetus for everything that involved portfolios. For portfolio-culture students, ‘maintaining’ portfolios

was hardly an issue; those folders served as logical, convenient containers for works-in-progress, as well as for records and course evidence to review.

According to many portfolio-based program designers, observers, and researchers, student investment in and responsibility for learning is endemic to the portfolio-culture classroom in particular and to portfolio assessment in general (e.g., Belanoff & Dickson, 1991; Camp, 1989, 1992; Cooper & Brown, 1992; Gardner, 1990; Tierney et al., 1991; Wolf, 1991). This assertion raises a number of questions, including how and to what degree portfolio-culture components--including the portfolios themselves--contribute to such effects, for whom, and under what conditions.

Limitations

Subjects

As described above (Chapters 1 and 3), I collected, coded, and analyzed six student-writers' reflections in order to learn about their characteristic procedures, identities, growth, and understandings about writing and about themselves as writers. By selecting a single representative low-, middle-, and high-achieving student-writer from each of two congruent yet quite different learning environments, I hoped to learn how, if at all, the special features of the portfolio-culture classroom contributed to such students' reflections on these issues. By doing so, I chose to gather a great deal of reflective information about each subject, viewing him or her as a single case study.

My emphasis was upon acquiring and reviewing a substantial and varied body of evidence for each case (Yin, 1994) in order to study the phenomenon of reflectivity as it pertained to student-writer understandings about and attitudes toward their respective Essay Fundamentals experiences. In short, I was interested in illustrating, interpreting, and discovering hypotheses, not testing them (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1994).

And yet, securing a single subject as a representative for a given level of student achievement does present certain risks. As a qualitative investigation of such subjective,

personalized issues as identity, apparent progress, and growth, this study was undoubtedly informed to at least some extent by each subject's biases and beliefs, behaviors and thoughts, expectations and values. Regardless of how purposefully and carefully I attempted to design and conduct interviews, construct questionnaires, acquire additional reflective documents, and code resulting data, I was, of course, unable to tease out site-based experiences and influences originating beyond the classroom. Including additional low-, middle-, and high-achieving subjects' reflections at each site would have allowed me to arrive at a greater degree of certainty that such reflections did, indeed, represent a low-achiever's attitudes, rationales, and interpretations of his or her Essay Fundamentals experiences, as opposed to responses expressed by a single individual whose pre-Essay Fundamentals language arts achievement was significantly lower than that of his peers.

That said, I believe that my procedures for subject selection were valid, as measured by essential agreement between cumulative language arts grades prior to course enrollment and final semester grades earned in Essay Fundamentals. Mr. Green's official records indicate a median final grade of B (3.0 on a 4.0 scale) for Site B (traditional instruction); nine of twenty-nine students earned grades within the A range, while only four earned C's, and a single student received a D. Accordingly, Julie (high-achieving) entered the class with a perfect 4.0 GPA and earned an A in this course, Samuel (middle-achieving) entered with a B- average and earned a B+, and Paula entered with a C- average and earned a B- in Essay Fundamentals.

The results for Site A, the portfolio-culture classroom, were similar, although overall course grades were surprisingly lower for these students. The median grade was a B-, with no students earning A's, six earning C's, and four students receiving D's from among twenty-nine students. Greg (high-achieving) entered with a A- language arts average and earned a B+, Ann (middle-achieving) entered with a B- and earned a B for the

course, and Rose entered with a C- and earned a B- in this portfolio-culture section of Essay Fundamentals. My additional selection criteria--including attendance records, teacher recommendations, and reasonable gender representation--seemed to contribute to a balanced group of subjects for this study.

The most interesting among these statistics is, of course, the lower overall grades for the portfolio-culture class. According to Mr. Green, this group of students seemed less capable overall than were those enrolled in the traditional-instruction Essay Fundamentals course. In addition, he also attributed the portfolio-culture section's early starting time (7:10 A.M.) as having a deleterious effect upon student performance. A number of students arrived late to class, while others did not seem to be fully awake until a bit later in the class period. Thirdly, Mr. Green felt that the portfolio-culture process may have slowed some students down with respect to preparing final versions of each of the six projects. In a few cases, students failed to complete the sixth project as a result of concentration upon constructing their showcase portfolios.

As observer and researcher, I also noted the differences brought about by the time of day these two sections of Essay Fundamentals met. Clearly, the portfolio-classroom group struggled with that early-start time. Mr. Green's additional explanations also seem plausible, especially those concerning student failure to complete all six required projects due to time invested in satisfying showcase portfolio requirements. Yet I also believe that Mr. Green's more overt, direct instruction of Site B (traditional writing classroom) students made the respective writing tasks seem simpler, hence more manageable with respect to time, for those students. Whereas portfolio-culture student-writers were clearly more personally engaged in the process than were their peers, they also were expected to make more decisions, to be more inventive, and to attend to what amounted to more tasks (e.g., sustained engagement).

Replication of the portfolio-culture classroom

As I explain and describe above (Chapter 4), the single-semester Essay Fundamentals course that drove both of this study's sites could not serve as a direct exemplar of the Arts PROPEL model as described in the literature (e.g., Camp, 1992; Camp & Winner, 1993; Gitomer, 1989) and as portrayed in Figure 4-2, "An Overview of Arts PROPEL Theory and Practice." In the visual arts PROPEL classroom, for example, a portfolio culture "... creates an atmosphere ... in which students view themselves as novice artists working on long-term projects similar to those that all artists grapple with" ("Developing a 'Portfolio Culture' in the Artroom Under Various Classroom Conditions," 1989, p. 1). And in the case of the imaginative writing PROPEL program that served as the model for this study's portfolio-culture classroom (Site A), domain projects were designed as "... in-depth, long-term ... projects in which students could become authors, engaging directly with the demands and techniques of a specific kind of writing, and learning to make reflection and assessment part of their writing process" (Camp & Winner, 1993, p. 11). For this study, 'long-term' referred more to Site A students' semester-long activities of goal-setting, process and product reflection, and preparation for fashioning their Showcase Portfolios than to 'in-depth' time spent upon individual projects.

Compromises had to be made as I adjusted the six-product Essay Fundamentals expository writing course design to conform to Arts PROPEL's three central tenets and two systemic components of practice (see Figure 4-2) for Site A students. For example, authorship literacy (student choice), the first of those tenets, not only calls upon students to "write frequently" but also provides opportunities for them to "explore a variety of genres." The first mandate certainly occurred for students at both sites, but the second was pursued mainly through independent reading and teacher-provided models for Site A participants across the required six units of study (essay projects).

As I mention above (Chapter 4), the instructor modeled and encouraged such cross-

genre exploration. Even so, Site A Essay Fundamentals students dealt most often with relatively lengthy nonfiction pieces whose various literary elements, although present, posed difficulties for discovery, understanding, and emulation in their own writing. The Arts PROPEL literature, on the other hand, presents trans-genre discoveries and applications as natural, ongoing features of the imaginative writing program (Camp, 1992; Camp & Winner, 1993; Gitomer, 1989). Although Site A students encountered poetry and short fiction at points along the way (see Chapter 4, site distinctions), they did not do so throughout the semester. Presumably, dealing with a variety of poems, short stories, and brief plays allows for greater flexibility and opportunity in the portfolio-culture classroom for student-writers.

A second limitation of replicating portfolio-culture components and atmosphere in this Essay Fundamentals setting relates to the prime mover of the program: the instructor at both sites. To his credit, Mr. Green exemplified the qualities that characterize educators who would implement an innovation within an existing program: Open-minded and flexible, purposeful and organized, curious and reflective. Still, because he was charged with the responsibility of orchestrating two quite different iterations of Essay Fundamentals during the same school day, Mr. Green was accountable for managing four distinct course preparations, one more than was acceptable according to professional association (NCTE--The National Council of Teachers of English) recommendations and District contract. As a result, he was unable to give his full attention to the many roles, including resource person (procurer of various models and other materials), that portfolio-culture teachers and other personnel are called upon to perform. Yet Mr. Green did indeed consistently attend to the central distinctions of portfolio-culture instruction and learning for Site A student-writers. From providing portfolio-culture students with greater responsibility for determining their approaches to tasks, to replacing his typically more direct approach to instruction with that

of adviser and resource person, Mr. Green accommodated the unique characteristics and needs of both Essay Fundamentals sections.

Another possible limitation involves my own and the instructor's role in the process of implementing the Arts PROPEL model for Site A students. During the semester under study, I met with Mr. Green whenever he felt the need to do so. My role at those times was to serve as a resource person for this instructor, as well as to emulate, at least partially, Arts PROPEL's incorporation of researchers, practitioners, and artists with an eye toward enhancing students' opportunities and experiences. In so doing, I attempted to avoid 'second-guessing' Mr. Green's instruction, although this was sometimes difficult to do on those occasions when I entered Site A in my role as researcher. In addition, because I had served as some of these students' teacher during previous years and was otherwise recognized as a Shorewood teacher by others, portraying myself as 'interested guest' on some occasions and disinterested researcher at other times was sometimes problematic.

I took steps to avoid "creatin[ing] social behavior in others that would not have ordinarily occurred" (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 232), and, correspondingly, to self-check for possible bias. Those steps included constructing informal scripts for myself prior to meeting with Mr. Green or entering either site for any purpose other than gathering data, writing memos and reflections following each site entrance and each substantive meeting with Mr. Green, and 'checking in' with a respected and disinterested colleague periodically. In addition, although I was unable to conduct interviews off site, I did so in non-classroom settings on the school site. Even so, however, a certain degree of "confounding" (Miles & Huberman, 1984) undoubtedly occurred.

Additionally, my methodological decision to observe only a single semester each (one sequence) of traditional and portfolio-culture sections of Essay Fundamentals may have limited my ability to design prompts that might have effectively drawn more explicit and frequent responses to the study's several questions. In hindsight, it would have been

helpful to have piloted this study at another site, thereby providing the opportunity to gain comfort with the observation and interview process, as well as to pinpoint my purpose and performance on site (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

Data coding and analysis

Reflectivity serves as this study's fulcrum; all collected, coded, and interpreted data depends first upon how I first defined and incorporated this concept into my investigation of student-writers' understandings. According to Merriam (1988), "[t]he case study seeks holistic description and explanation. As Yin (1984) observes, case study is a design particularly suited to situations where it is impossible to separate the phenomenon's variables from their context" (p. 10). I designed this study of classroom events with the purpose of conducting an investigation that aspires to meet Erickson's description of effective interpretive research:

In method, my work is an attempt to be empirical without being positivist; to be rigorous and systematic in investigating the slippery phenomena of everyday interaction and its connections through the medium of subjective meaning, with the wider social world" (1986, p. 120).

Rigor certainly includes--if not begins--with the defining of terms as well as of purposes. The portfolio-assessment literature's incorporation of reflection as concept or practice is ubiquitous, yet far from unanimous with respect to apparent meaning and application. It was for this reason that I chose to define this vital concept operationally, yet with an eye toward what the literature had to say about it. I then distinguished between student-writers' observations (simple notations accounting for identifications, descriptions, or acknowledgments) from their reflections (written expressions of "meta-commentary" (Anson, 1994) representing rationales, claims, interpretations, or attitudes). Some may feel that such a distinction precludes data that may be of some interest in support (or disagreement with) the claims I make within this study.

Another potential concern relates to the six reflective codes I devised as I began to

review transcripts of documents, interviews, and questionnaires in the context of the study's four subquestions (identity, procedures, progress, and understandings of effective writing). Although interrater reliability agreement was relatively high (82%), I do not provide a second review of the apparent accuracy of these six codes across sample student reflections. In addition, the outside rater saw at least one of those codes ("deep structures"-DS) as amounting to a kind of meta-category that could be said to define a number of reflections that would otherwise be designated as referring to, for example, "written products" (WPD).

The very complexity of such coding, then categorizing many pages of data (student reflections) according to the topics they addressed (see Table 3-1), followed by aligning the resulting matrix with the study's central question and its four subthemes, required me to make analytic decisions that may have limited or even slanted subsequent interpretations of the data. As Merriam (1988) states, qualitative research deals with multiple realities. Careful, useful analysis of data requires a certain and purposeful degree of objectivity, even while we see the world as "... but a function of personal interaction and perception. It is a highly subjective phenomenon in need of interpreting rather than measuring" (p. 17).

Additional Implications for Research

Links to reflection

Throughout this chapter, I have expressed the view that several issues pertaining to student writing in the portfolio-culture context are in need of additional investigation. For example, the apparent differences across these students' respective degrees of control over and responsibility for their writing, both process and product, deserve further review, as do students' uses of classroom resources and activities, including peer feedback, in the pursuit of producing effective written text. Within the literature, many claims have been made for portfolio-based instruction and learning. Perhaps the most significant among them asserts that the portfolio--both entity and process--is linked to reflection. In an

indirect way, this study provides some confirmation of this, yet it also raises questions regarding this central theme, as Smith & Murphy (1992) articulate it:

Portfolios invite reflection. They also invite teachers to know as much as possible about teaching students to reflect. Reflections help teachers understand what their students have learned, what views they have about effective writing, and how they assess themselves as writers. Reflections also help students recognize what they do well and what needs doing next. In other words, successes can become more than happy accidents; problems can become goals or challenges that students set for themselves (p. 16).

Embedded within this assertion are several subordinate motifs that call for more consideration, practice, and study. For example, do features of the portfolio-culture classroom enhance teachers' abilities and opportunities to "understand what their students have learned"? If so, what are those features (e.g., elements of student choice, sustained engagement), how might they be further refined and enhanced for student benefit, and what student and teacher behaviors appear to lead to those understandings? Furthermore, how might those teacher understandings be translated into greater student confidence, responsibility, and control?

Links to effective writing

As stated in Chapter 1, the central purpose of this study was to investigate how, if at all, a portfolio-culture classroom design contributes to high school students' understandings about themselves as writers and about writing, both process and product. This study's findings confirm that the teaching, learning, and practicing of writing is a complex, highly individualized, and often personal, business. Each of these six student-writers--whether enrolled in the traditionally-taught or the portfolio-culture Essay Fundamentals classroom--reflected upon questions posed and prompts provided in individualistic and often unique ways.

Whereas Site A students representing three distinct levels of achievement responded differently to elements and expectations of the portfolio culture, all three subjects' reflections indicate a certain degree of confidence in and responsibility for producing

effective writing, whether currently or in the future. This finding suggests the need to investigate the relationship between expressions of confidence and the production of higher quality written products within such portfolio-culture classrooms. Two questions immediately surface: Do lower-achieving students who express increasing levels in their confidence to produce effective text actually do so? Which, if any, features of portfolio-culture classrooms appear to mediate between such expressions of confidence and optimism and actual performance?

Perhaps as a function of the wording of questionnaire and interview prompts, or the design of other reflectivity-based documents, these six subjects rarely discuss their sense of the nature of effective writing beyond responding to the directive prompts included within Interview #2 (12/4/94), "The Nature of Effective Writing." Although this effective writing theme was not a focus for the study, students' beliefs and understandings concerning it are well worth exploring. This study does not attempt to correlate the relative quality of these students' work with their claims as writers. It would be instructive, therefore, to review the actual work produced by the student-writers represented within this study, and to do so in the context of claims, rationales, and other reflections. To what degree do students who claim to have benefitted from a particular procedure or instance of peer support produce drafts and final projects that, in effect, illustrate those claims?

Implications for Practice

Of interest and importance to teachers

The central findings of this study suggest that those who view the portfolio as both process and product (e.g., Anson, 1994; Camp, 1990; Camp & Winner, 1993; Fairchild, 1993; Lucas, 1992; Tierney et al., 1991; Valencia & Calfee, 1991; Yancey, 1992) have much to tell teachers of literacy in general and of writing in particular. Teachers of college-bound writing classes, for example, would do well to consider the value to their students of incorporating a stronger partnership with them in the pursuit of student-writer

responsibility, authority, and confidence. This study's findings also indicate that the portfolio-culture classroom encourages reflection, and that this third strand of the Arts Propel model truly is recursively related to both perception and production. As Gardner (1987/1988) explains,

reflection means to be able to step back from both your production and your perceptions, and say, 'What am I doing? Why am I doing it? What am I learning? What am I trying to achieve? Am being successful? How can I revise my performance in a desirable way?' (p. 32).

The value of reflection

Providing time for student reflection--whole-class as well as individually--appears to influence student attitudes toward writing and themselves as writers. Portfolio-culture students' reflections gathered for this study point toward two manifestations of that influence: (1) a greater recognition of and appreciation for class activities and their own personal efforts in the service of writing accomplishments, as opposed to native ability; and (2) a more independent, yet consistently respectful, approach to and application of peer feedback to written products.

Caveats are in order here, however. Dedicating more classroom time to reflective (and perceptive--see sustained engagement) activities limits time available for direct instruction, and may even require teachers to pare certain components from the writing curriculum. At the time this study was completed, national and state movements emphasizing the importance of holding all students to high standards of achievement had begun to dominate the public education conversation. Moving from a norm- to a criterion-referenced approach to teaching and learning certainly forces teachers and administrators alike to concentrate upon finding ways to bring all students "up to standard." Teachers who embrace the portfolio-culture approach to writing instruction will need to be able to translate such educational jargon as "sustained engagement," "domain projects," and even "reflection" into terms that students and their parents not only understand but also come to

value as tools to be used in the pursuit of achievement.

Mr. Green's end-of-semester response concerning the value of the 'portfolio culture' to his students acknowledges sustained engagement's dominant role and influence:

I think the one [activity or component] that impressed ME the most because it seemed to have the most value to the kids--and first I kind of questioned how they would take to it, but in fact I thought it to be one of the things that they really responded quite honestly to, and in depth, was the reflective pieces where they would take a piece of their writing and honestly reflect on everything that went into that piece of writing--their sense of ownership, their sense of what makes that piece of writing effective or not effective.

Course design

Teachers intrigued by this approach to teaching writing might also consider designing units of instruction around themes that invite student goal-setting, especially in the context of peer sharing and reviewing sessions. In addition, because outside-the-classroom resources are often limited, two or more teachers working in a given building or district may want to find ways of collaborating that approximate Arts Propel's incorporation of a variety of resources, readers, and sharers of student writing--and of writing-based experiences. Action research would also seem to offer assistance and direction to those teachers who would like to assess the new approaches and strategies they would be introducing as they implement elements of the portfolio-culture approach to teaching writing for their students.

Costs and needs

Yet special resources and the funds that are so often needed to secure them are evidently not essential to portfolio-culture students' success. As explained above, the "sustained engagement" component of the portfolio-culture classroom appears to have had the greatest influence upon the student-writers engaged in this study. Aside from obtaining additional resources (e.g., student and professional writing models, information and examples relating to several genres of writing, and the like), and engaging parents and

other community members in the process, this model of teaching and learning is not an unduly expensive one.

The portfolios themselves

Study results also suggest that, although they are an obviously important component of the portfolio-culture concept, the actual working-to-showcase folder/portfolio process is less important than are “sustained engagement” activities and the “domain projects” that grow out of them. Equipping all students with such folders, and providing space for accessing and storing them, can be a problem. Yet teachers and their colleagues--both English teachers and teachers of other subjects--should be able to devise ways of sharing costs, materials, and responsibilities for incorporating portfolio-based instruction in their schools.

Of interest and importance to administrators

‘All children can learn’ has been replaced by ‘All children MUST learn’ in the standards and assessment conversation literature, especially as it appears in such widely circulated and cited publications as Phi Delta Kappan, Educational Horizons, and Educational Leadership. As mentioned above, the teaching and learning to standards movement is well established in many school districts and states across the nation; it is the subject of many an administrative conference, round-table, and retreat.

Although the ‘portfolio-culture’ approach to teaching writing does not promise dramatic (or immediate) improvement in cognitive skills and performance, it most definitely does seem to influence students’ affective growth about such matters in a positive way. Much is being said about the importance of students of all ability levels taking responsibility for their own learning. With its emphases upon student choice, self- and peer-assessment, and purposeful engagement over time with skill acquisition and product, the portfolio-culture classroom provides opportunities and inducements for lower-achieving

students to engage more positively and purposefully with their own learning--and performance.

Yet if district- and building-level administrators wish to incorporate 'portfolio-cultures' in their schools, they must do far more than mandate implementation, then advertise that such an innovation thrives for students. Just as was the case for Mr. Green, teachers need access to many resources--including time to discuss and plan with one another--in order to implement and sustain such a classroom-altering model for teaching and learning. Helping teachers to secure district, building, and community resources will be essential to such a program's success. The good news is that such resources need not be costly; the essential features of ArtsPropel--with an emphasis upon the "sustained engagement" approach to teaching and learning--can replace existing classroom cultures without devouring limited budgets.

Conclusion

From conducting this study, I have learned that how teachers present challenges to their students, engage their energies in those challenges, and involve students in considerations of the results matters a great deal. Although the study offers no direct insight into actual student performance, it was not designed to do so. A certain perhaps indefinable quality of the writer's work and purpose presents itself across these six student-writers' reflections: the importance of providing many opportunities for students to produce text, perceive the results, and reflect upon the ramifications for future learning and accomplishment. The portfolio-culture classroom is a multi-dimensional puzzle; its components are many, and many-faceted, and each part seems essential to the meaning of the whole. As a way of providing support and guidance, and founded upon the notion that the craft of writing (and the teaching of it) is not a linear but a recursive one, understanding the workings of such a culture is an essential first step to implementing one. Merely

requiring students to maintain collections of their work in manila folders does not such a culture make. Yancey's observations on this score reveal the heart of the matter:

Writing portfolios within the classroom are thus paradoxical. On the one hand, they are quite simple: a mere pedagogical tool with assessment capability. On the other hand, writing portfolios promise to change significantly what goes on in writing classrooms--because of the messages they send, the authority they assign, the ways they motivate students, and the insights they challenge students to perceive and articulate (1992, p. 105).

The Portfolio-Culture Classroom:
Revealing Writers through Reflection

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Appendix A: Sample Reflections Across Codes

Operational Definition / Reflection:

A reflective response is a written or oral expression of 'meta-commentary' (Anson, 1994): It represents students' rationales or rhetorical claims for, interpretations of, or attitudes toward their work with writing, in the context of viewing themselves as evolving writers.

WPC (written products) reflections refer to one or more individual pieces of writing or to a collection of documents produced over time. Product reflections indicate student-writers' questions or concerns about or perceptions and evaluations of such written products, and may provide evidence of the understandings that students have about writing.

Sample reflection:

"I really enjoyed doing the Childhood Experience paper, because there was a definite tone that needed to come across, and sometimes I don't know what exactly the tone should be in some papers, so that helped a lot just to kinda think about what a little kid would say in this part, or how they would think, 'cause they're so much more honest."

--Ann, Journal Entry

WPC (writing process) reflections refer to students' experiences with and/or understandings of the steps or stages that students (1) initiate or encounter, (2) consider as they review. Process-based reflections might be said to reveal individual differences in how students go about their writing work.

Sample reflection:

"Usually, I have 3 or 4 people read what I write in group discussions, because if I always listen to just one person, you don't get a second opinion on a lot of things; and if you just immediately change something because somebody else wants you to, then you're writing it just for them, and you don't get an overview. So I take all the comments that everybody gives me, and I look at what they say. If they say there's a paragraph that they need to take out, I look at the paragraph and see what I think is wrong with it; I ask them what they thought was wrong about it. I revise it by--you know, if I don't like it, if I go back and I don't like it, I can do something as drastic as completely cut it out . . ."

--Greg, Interview #3

DS (Deep Structures) emphasize features of writing that involve or contribute to students' holistic interpretations of and/or judgments about their work. Deep structure-based reflections discuss (1) a piece's rhetorical purpose and content, (2) its organizational design and related techniques, or (3) its apparent voice, tone, and intended audience.

Sample reflection:

". . . and I think that if I start out with kind of a story of where I'm coming from, then I can build that scene--like, where I'm at, what I'm doing, what the weather's like--you know, so they can get that picture in their mind, and then start--it can just flow from there."

--Rose, Interview #2

Appendix B

A 'Mark-Up' Guide: The Personality Profile

DIRECTIONS: In your writing group, read, then discuss the strengths of your assigned (or sample) essay. Then, complete the following steps with the paper and be prepared to share your findings.

1. THESIS: Topic, 'Angle', & Tone

- **Underline** words and phrases that indicate the essay's focus/thesis/purpose. (Note that such identifiers' may be located throughout the piece.)
- Find & **circle** any 'emotion' words and phrases that suggest the author's TONE: her apparent attitude toward her subject—in this case, the person being profiled.
- **Highlight** this essay's apparent thesis. **Circle** any and all words that involve either opinion or emotion.
- Reread the essay for its approach ('angle'). Does the writer refer to her subject as though he or she were close friends? From the perspective of two people who enjoy similar sports or hobbies? Whatever it is, describe that 'angle': Does the author stick with it throughout? Does this 'angle' work for you? Why or why not?

2. CONTENT: Development & Details

- Take another look at that thesis statement: STAR (*) any sentences that do not seem to support it.
- Find the paper's 'strongest' developmental section or paragraph. Then: (a) find and **underline** the apparent Topic Sentence, (b) **highlight** all concrete details that support it, and (c) place a **check mark** (/) by the 3-4 'strongest' supporting details.
- For a different developing paragraph, CODE the types of details that you find within it. Which, if any, category of details (evidence) dominates? Comment briefly upon your findings.

Codes:

- A = anecdote (story) involving the person
- F = fact concerning something about the person
- Q = this person's or another's actual words
- C = information provided in the form of a comparison to someone/something else (comparison or contrast)

- **Bracket** [] the essay's introductory and concluding paragraphs. Then, comment briefly but clearly, accurately: How do these paragraphs differ? How are they similar?

3. STYLE: Diction, Literary Devices, & Sentencing

- What sort of language (slang, highly personal expressions, technical phrases/jargon, imagery) does the writer use in this essay. Put **boxes** around and label one example of each.
- Put a **wavy line** under any literary devices (such as analogies, metaphors, similes, symbols; alliteration, personification) that you find within the essay.
- Place an **X** and label at the beginning of one example of each type of sentence (simple, compound, complex). How would you describe the writer's 'sentence style'? How/ in what way(s) does it contribute to the overall effect of the essay?

Appendix C: Instructor Interview Protocols

Interview #1: Teacher background & Views/Expectations of Student Writers (8/19/94)

1. Please tell me about your background in and preparation for teaching English in general, and senior high writing in particular.

- Please tell me about your professional preparation:
 - Undergraduate and graduate course work? Inservices & workshops?
 - Most and least valuable experiences, learnings?
- Tell me about the courses you have taught that have contributed to your experience and expertise as a teacher of writing.

2. What do you believe it means to be a teacher of writing?

- What would you expect a teacher of writing to know? In what bodies or areas of information would s/he be knowledgeable?
- Please describe how you believe a teacher can most effectively lead or enable his or her students to become better writers.
- In your experience, what aspects of writing are most challenging to many (or most) student writers?

3. What sort of writing course is Essay Fundamentals (EF)?

- How would you describe your GOALS for students taking EF?
- What sorts of ASSIGNMENTS or PROJECTS make up EF's course content?
- What writing-related SKILLS does the course emphasize?
- What other kinds of STUDENT ACTIVITIES are characteristic of EF?

4. How would you describe students who take Essay Fundamentals?

- For what reasons do students characteristically take this course?
- In your experience, what sorts of attitudes toward writing do students who are likely to be successful EF students bring to the classroom?
- What sorts of writing-based skills and experiences do incoming EF students typically bring to the course? What courses taken prior to EF characteristically contribute to EF student readiness?
- How would you describe your role in student learning as a teacher of EF?

Instructor Interview #2: End-of-Course (and Study) Reflections

3/16/95

• PERCEIVED DIFFERENCES (between the two sections of Essay Fundamentals)

1. Have your ideas about teaching writing changed as a result of your experiences with Essay Fundamentals (EF) this past semester? If so, in what particular ways?
2. What differences did you recognize between the first (Site A) and third (Site B) period sections of EF?
3. Were these two classes different to begin with? If so, in what ways?
4. What is your sense of how the portfolio and related activities affected the learning that occurred in the first-period (portfolio-culture/PC) class?
5. To what extent/in what specific ways did you change/alter the ways you taught the 'control' (third-period) class?
6. How would you describe the role you played, as instructor, in these classes? Was your role different for the PC as opposed to the 'control' class?

• AUTHORITY

7. How would you define trying to help students to develop a sense of authority as writers?
8. How important is that in your teaching of writing? Has that degree/level of importance changed for you as a writing teacher, now that you have completed instruction for EF, sections 1 & 3?
9. Did you notice any differences between section 1 & 3 students as to their respective development of this authority? If so, how would you describe those distinctions?

• IDENTITY

10. How would you define trying to help students to develop a sense of individual identity as writers?
11. How important is that in your teaching of writing? Has that degree/level of importance/value changed for you as a writing teacher, now that you have completed instruction for these two sections of Essay Fundamentals?
12. Did you notice any differences between section 1 (PC) and section 3 students as to their respective development of writer identity? If so, how would you describe those distinctions?

• EFFECTIVE WRITING

13. How would you define trying to help students to produce "effective writing"?
14. How important is that in your teaching of writing? Has that degree/level of importance changed your views about teaching writing, now that you have completed instruction for these two sections of Essay Fundamentals?
15. Did you notice any differences between the two EF sections as to students' understandings of "effective writing"? Their production of it?

Appendix D: The Portfolio Culture

Essay Fundamentals/ 1

Fall, 1994

What is a 'Portfolio-Culture' Classroom? What Will It Mean to--and for--You?

In this class, as in all Essay Fund. classes, you will be expected to practice the process of writing and to produce quality work. But this class will be different, because we will take a unique approach to learning about producing and evaluating writing, known as the **'portfolio-culture' classroom**. Founded and practiced in the Pittsburgh Public Schools as a product known as Arts PROPEL, a 'Portfolio Culture' classroom is at least as much the environment we create together as it is the writing you will produce during the semester. As one Arts PROPEL student said,

It is a friendly environment of discussion and compatible argument, a place of freedom of the mind. . . . A place to explore what the written word is and what it can be. A place to express the feelings deep within ourselves.

At the heart of Arts PROPEL are three stages of thinking about and 'doing writing': **Perception, Production, & Reflection**. More about these unifying concepts later. First, here are the special qualities of the 'Portfolio Culture classroom' that you are about to join:

- Students & the teacher are co-discoverers.

--All of us will identify and explore strategies that contribute to 'good writing'.

- Assignments will be meaningful, because students will make decisions, even as they follow teacher guidelines.

- Many student and professional models will contribute to student-writers' choices, strategies, and products.

--We will consider the qualities of effective writing, based upon helpful models, your writing experiences, and group & class discussions.

In short, a 'Portfolio Culture' classroom is honest, challenging, and 'user-friendly'. It demands a great deal from all of us, but the results should be extraordinary. It will be up to all of us to make it so.

(See the reverse side for an overview of PERCEPTION, PRODUCTION, & REFLECTION.)

A 'Portfolio Culture' classroom combines (1) assignments, (2) discussions about and models of writing, and (3) self-assessment. Considering standards and criteria for reaching them will 'drive' each of the six writing projects you complete, and the **Perception-Production-Reflection** cycle of learning and doing will be at the center of it all:

Perception--Developing the Standards & Criteria

- Models of writing for each unit will be many and varied. You will supply some; I will supply others. Professional and student models will contribute to your understandings.
- Reading others' writing leads to a rich basis for judgment: What IS 'good writing'?
- Learning the language of standards & criteria contributes to understanding and performance.
- Students will make strong connections between reading and writing.

Production--Utilizing the Standards

- Models lead to students' production of their own original work.
- Standards & criteria direct students' writing, as well as their discussions about it.
- Students are encouraged to take risks and 'stretch' their interpretation of the standards for a given assignment; creativity is a part of quality!
- Students are willing to share their drafts; this contributes to their own and to others' learning and growth.

Reflection--Applying & Revising the Standards

Reflection happens when students--

- talk and think about the standards of good writing--and reading (literature).
- listen to or read the work of others and give or receive feedback.
- revise their work, for this is reflecting about choices they have made.
- take portfolios home to be shared with parents and other readers.

"Reflection is . . . the foundation of the classroom culture itself."

--Kathryn Howard, an Arts PROPEL teacher

Appendix E: Student-writer Interviews #1-3

Interview #1: "Progress As a Writer" (10/31/94)

1. What is the easiest part of the writing process for you now? Explain.
2. What is the hardest part for you now? Explain.
3. What can you do more easily now than you could at the beginning of the year (semester) or at some other point in the past? Explain.
4. How important is the sharing of writing with others in the class? It can be time-consuming; is it necessary or all that helpful? Explain.
5. Overall, what are your strengths as a writer? Explain.
6. What are some aspects of your writing that you would like to continue to improve? Explain.
7. What is your favorite kind of writing? Explain.

Interview #2: Part One, The Nature of Effective Writing (12/7/94)

1. For you, what does GOOD WRITING do or accomplish?
2. The dictionary* defines effective as "producing the intended or expected result; efficient," and "producing a deep or vivid impression; striking."

With this definition in mind, how would you describe the qualities, features, or 'ingredients' of a truly effective piece of writing?
3. Which of those qualities, features, or 'ingredients' are, in your opinion, the most important? Why?
4. Now think for a moment about ineffective writing. How would you describe writing pieces that are NOT effective?
5. Can some errors or missing qualities be 'forgiven', and a piece of writing still be considered to be EFFECTIVE? If so, what are those less-important errors or qualities?

• The Random House Dictionary of the English Language (Unabridged), 1987. ed.

**Interview #2: Follow-up Questions, based upon
Student Writing Samples 'A' & 'B'**

1. Now that you have described Effective Writing, what qualities or features of effective writing, if any, 'come through' or appear in Sample _____?

2. Which one(s) of those qualities or features that you mentioned in your response to Question #1 do the most, in your opinion, to make this piece an effective one?

3. What, if anything, is INEFFECTIVE about this piece of writing? Please be as specific as you possibly can.

4. If you were to rate Sample _____ on a scale of 1 to 4, with '4' being MOST EFFECTIVE, and '1' being LEAST EFFECTIVE, what rating or score would you give it? Why?

5. Would you like to say anything else about the relative effectiveness of this Sample _____ piece of writing on you as a reader/listener? If so, what would that be?

**Interview #3: Final Interview (1/25/95)
based upon Final Reflection Responses***

* questions vary across individual student-writers

1. [authority] In your Final Reflection responses, you state, "As time progressed, my generalizations became more and more supported.
2. Was there any activity or any learning in the class between that paper [in-class essay] and the one you mentioned that you did better on?
3. Tell me a little bit about that part [receiving helpful feed back from parent as well as peer response group]: Did you talk with your mom because Mr. [Green] asked that you have your parents review your work?
4. I have a second question that has to do with your sense of authority, or for that matter, control over your writing. In the initial interview, way back when last September, you said this in response to question #2 ('In what ways are other people helpful to you as you work to improve your writing skills?'):

"It really helps me when teachers give me an assignment outline--what needs to be included, when and where everything is due."

Have your experiences in Essay Fundamentals, with beginning and completing a given writing assignment changed your views about the role teachers and others play in your writing process?

5. . . . Do you feel you had some latitude, some room to off a little bit on your own, even though the assignment was kind of layed out for you?
6. How would you describe the general guidelines for any given paper?
7. Did you feel free, though, if you wanted to elaborate on a given point, or create a voice you wanted to create, for example? You had choices like that?
8. Did you feel encouraged by people in writing groups that, while _____'s paper sounds a little different than someone else's, or her voice is a little bit different, for example, that that was OK?
9. [Identity] This question has to do with how you see yourself as a writer. If you'd like to look at your Final Reflection sheet: In your response to question #3, the question was, 'How do the changes you see in your writing affect the way you see yourself as a writer?'. You said,

"It takes time to improve, and everything I have tried, and either failed or completed with satisfaction, has helped to mold my writing style."

What did you mean by 'mold my writing style'? Could you say more about that?

10. When you think about--when you wrote 'style,' though, the other thing I wanted to know, did you mean the way that you use language and ONLY that, or did you mean other aspects of writing too?
11. Could you talk about some of the strategies you've tried this semester in Essay Fund., and how they helped you to 'mold your writing style'?
12. Did you do that same kind of process [with Mr. Green] with people in your group?
13. How do you usually go about revising? What is the next thing you do?
14. OK, so you felt like you could use people's suggestions, but even with Mr. [Green], you didn't feel like you had to do what he suggested, you didn't feel as though he expected it?
15. [authority, control] I'm going to go back again to your Final Reflection. This is question #5. It says, 'In what ways do you think class readings and activities have influenced your writing?' And you said, "I really enjoy writing groups and sharing pieces of writing." I know that you've talked about this, but could you tell me more about what writing group members did that was enjoyable for or helpful to you?
16. Could you tell me if by sharing--because you wrote that, too--do you mean offering criticism, praising your drafts, just listening, or what? Could you refer to a project you did where the writing group--the sharing in the writing group--really made a difference? What kind of sharing was it?
17. [effective writing, authority] I have one last question. Remember that I had you do an interview with me about a sample of your writing. When I asked you what qualities or features of effective writing were, in your opinion, the most important, you said, "Definitely set the tone from the beginning, not changing." Based on that opinion about what effective writing is, could you talk a little bit about one of your pieces that sets and maintains a definite tone?
18. Is tone pretty important? I mean, not just the Persuasive paper; it is an important aspect of your writing? Because that was the first thing you said about what effective writing is.
19. So do you feel like, as a writer during this semester, that you've gotten a better handle on creating and maintaining tone in a paper?

Appendix F

1994 Portfolio Field Trial Booklet (New Standards Project) English/Language Arts

fr. Portfolio #03162-07, Set B p. NS-8

High School Sophomore

Sample A: "Ode to the Basketball Courts"

When I take my basketball go to the courts. There are tall guys like skyscrapers. I fight my way on to the court to play. but they're always pushing me down. They're always triing to hold me back from being the best. You could smell the sweat on the court. So if they want some of me, I'll them that I can score. Let's see if I can get some respect. I take my first shot. Nothing but Nylon. They have the ball, miss the shot I leap into the air to pull down a rebound. I dribble down the middle of the lane and go all the way to the basket. After the game people want to congratulate me, I don't want to hear any of their thank you's. Now I'm going to play somewhere else to see if I can get some more respect.

fr. Portfolio # 03161-03 (p. NS-35)
High School Junior Honors Student
Sample B: "Why me?"

I can't believe it happened to me again. It was the week into our fifth game of the season, and our varsity football team had won their first league game after taking three consecutive losses in pre-season games. I started in that game against the Valley Vikings at free safety as a post second-string player because the first-string free safety missed (maybe even skipped) a practice the previous week.

After I had played in three defensive series, Coach Kingston pulled me out of the game and replaced me with that first-string safety. After we won, the coach pulled me aside on the way to the locker room and said, "Get ready to play first-string corner this week." In total astonishment, I simply replied, "Yes, Sir," and kept my excitement hidden as well as I could.

I walked back to the parking lot the way a person might if he had just been accepted to Harvard or Yale, won the lottery, or found a long-lost relative. With every step, I was thinking about the opportunity that had just been revealed to me, as well as about the responsibility that would be required if I wanted to be successful. Next to quarterback, cornerback had to be the most demanding position on any football team. And even though it was my old position as a sophomore on the JV squad, I knew from experience that it would be a tough job to handle. What made it so difficult was that one person was assigned to both outside containment and pass coverage at the same time--sort of like being expected to race backward to some unknown point on the field, all the while being prepared to run forward in a totally different direction in the blink of an eye, or the pitch of a ball.

Yet I also knew that this was my chance to win a starting position--and keep it. With that in mind, I charged onto the practice field that next week, determined to out-perform the other cornerbacks and my own "best-ever" days for the team.

Appendix G:
Student-Writer Questionnaires, #1 - 3

Questionnaire #1: “Initial View of Self-As-Writer” (9/19/94)

1. How would you describe “good writing”? (Be as specific as possible, please.)
2. In what specific ways can other people (teachers, friends, parents) be helpful to you as you work to improve your writing skills?
3. What is difficult for you as a writer? Why?
4. What would you say are your strengths as a writer? (What do you do well?)
5. What sorts of writing tasks--such as writing letters to friends, or completing certain school assignments--do you enjoy doing? Why?

Questionnaire #2: “Your Sense of Yourself as a Writer” (11/14/94)

Now that you have completed just over a full quarter of work in Essay Fundamentals, please answer each of the following five questions:

1. What do you like to do MOST in writing?
2. What do you like to do LEAST?
3. Where do you get your ideas for writing?
4. What do you think is important to know about YOU as a writer?
5. In what ways would you say that you ‘act like a writer’?

Questionnaire #3: “Final Reflection” (1/22/95)

Adopted from Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education (1993). Arts PROPEL: A Handbook for Imaginative Writing, p. 124.

How I Have Changes As a Writer

1. What do you notice when you look at your earlier work?
2. How do you think your writing has changed?
3. What do you know now about writing that you didn't know before?
4. At what points did you discover something new about your writing?
5. How do the changes you see in your writing affect the way you see yourself as a writer?

Appendix H: Three Reflective Documents

“Response Sheet: Reflections on Your First Quarter Writing Experiences” (11/16/94)

Please take another look at the writing that you have completed this quarter in Essay Fundamentals as you answer each of the following six (6) questions. (#4, 5, & 6 are on the back of this sheet.) Thank you!

1. What do you notice about your earlier work?
2. How do you think your writing has changed?
3. What do you know now that you did NOT know at the beginning of the quarter?
4. At what points along the way did you discover something new about writing?
5. Are there any pieces you have changed your mind about--that you liked before, but don't like now, or didn't like before but do like now? If so, which ones? What made you change your mind?
6. In what ways do you think class activities have influenced your writing?

A 'Satisfying' and an 'Unsatisfying' Piece of Writing (1/25/95)

Purposes: To discover what you have learned about writing, to see how far you have come as a writer, and to reflect on your standards for writing.

- Directions:**
- Review EVERYTHING that you have written this year in Essay Fund.
 - Select a piece of your writing--from your writing folder or your journal--which you would categorize as 'satisfying', and another which you would categorize as 'unsatisfying'.
 - Respond to the following questions ('unsatisfying' on the reverse side).
 - Place both pieces (photocopy if a journal response) and this reflection in your writing folder.

The 'Satisfying' Piece

1. Which piece did you select? (assignment/title/date of completion)
2. Why do you characterize this piece as 'satisfying'?
3. What did you learn about yourself as a writer from your work on this piece?

The 'Unsatisfying' Piece

1. Which piece did you select? (assignment/title/date of completion)
2. Why did you characterize this piece as 'unsatisfying'? Please provide very specific reasons/explanations.
3. Given the opportunity, how would you revise this piece? Why?

Appendix I: Essay Fundamentals Course Description

One Semester
Grades 11-12

_____ High School

COURSE OUTLINE

Essay Fundamentals

DESCRIPTION

Essay Fundamentals is an advanced course focusing on expository writing. Assignments will include personal, research, analytical, persuasive, and narrative writing activities, along with language development and peer support exercises.

UNITS

I. BASIC ESSAY FORM

- A. Goals. To understand what an "essay" is, in comparison with reports, narratives, and summaries.
To understand and be able to use the 5-paragraph essay format.
- B. Concepts, Skills, Terminology.
- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| 1. Sentence variety | 5. Introductory paragraph |
| 2. Paragraph skills | 6. Concluding paragraph |
| 3. Thesis & full thesis | 7. Title |
| 4. Body paragraphs | 8. Development via example, illustration, or concrete language |
| a. Supporting arguments | |
| b. Transitional devices | |
| c. Point of view | |
- C. Assignments. Write one 5-paragraph essay--a personal profile.
Steps will include pre-writing and discussion, thesis construction, first draft, conferencing, revision, and final draft.
Read Chapters 1-5 from The Lively Art of Writing.
Complete exercises selected from the LAW text.
- D. Vocabulary Unit(s). To emphasize the value of vocabulary to writing and the expression of ideas. Begin a sequence of 15 college-level vocabulary worksheets and root study (one worksheet per week throughout the semester).

II. PERSUASIVE ESSAY: Expansion of the 5-Paragraph Theme

- A. Goals.
- To improve upon and go beyond the 5-paragraph format
 - To explore and practice persuasive/rhetorical skills
 - To understand and use library research techniques
 - To understand and use the MLA style works cited format
 - To develop skills in adapting topics to appropriate paragraph development and sequence, methods of paragraph development (Fact, Example, Opinion, followed by Reason, Incident)
 - To develop an understanding of the forms of evidence (Authority, Observation, Statistics, Intuition, Convention, Common Knowledge)

To develop skill in the use of definition to clarify ideas
 To develop skill in the use of parallel structure
 To develop skill in the use of transitional devices

B. Concepts, Skills, Terminology

1. Library research skills
2. Primary and secondary sources
3. Within-text citations and Works Cited references (MLA style)
4. Formal and informal definition
5. Parallelism (varying uses and application)
6. Transitional devices
7. Use and analysis of evidence

C. Assignments. Write one 5-8+ paragraph essay using primary and secondary sources. Writing process includes prewriting, first draft, conference (s), revision, and final draft.

Read in LAW text, Chapters 7 & 10.
 Complete assignments related to chapter and unit content.

III. DEFINITION ESSAY

A. Goals. To build upon learnings: essay structure and technique
 To adapt the essay form to the requirements of effective definition
 To focus on fluency and flexibility of research and use of evidence
 To continue growth in sentence variety, personal voice, and language development

B. Concepts, Skills, Terminology

1. Logic & Argument (Fallacy, Validity, Truth, Syllogism, Premise, Deduction, Induction, Propaganda, Definition Techniques)
2. Sentence Variety (loose & periodic; short and long; sentence openings)

C. Assignments. Write a Definition Essay of 5+ paragraphs employing definition techniques, sentence variety, and appropriate logical/rhetorical devices.
 Read Chapter 9, LAW
 Complete related assignments, including journal entries, team critiques, and teacher-provided exercises.

IV. ANALYSIS ESSAY

A. Goals. To extend the multiparagraph essay to in-depth analysis
 To improve reasoning/rhetorical skills
 To extend use of definition skills

B. Concepts, Skills, Terminology

Appendix J
The Persuasive Essay: Differing Instructional Sequences, Sites A & B

Session #1 (10/24/94)

Site A (Portfolio-Culture)

Reflection: 'Reflective Write #1' (Opinion piece due; reassessment of Personal Objectives)

- Teacher-initiated discussion of overall strengths and weaknesses of the Opinion pieces; Introduction of this second major unit: The Persuasive Essay.
- Writing Team: Share & discuss objectives previously established for the Opinion piece.
- Teacher-initiated discussion: Class review of ongoing, class-generated list of qualities of good, effective writing.

Site B (Traditional)

- _____
- As per Site A
- _____
- Teacher-initiated review: "The Qualities of Good Writing"

Site A

Session #2 (10/26/94)

Site B

- Teacher-initiated overview of unit requirements and distribution of article, re the nature of persuasive discourse.
- Perception 1: In teams, share student-provided newspaper editorials acc. to (a) emphasis upon three central appeals and (b) overall effectiveness. Record learnings in course journals.
- Brainstorm topics for own persuasive essays

- As per Site A
- Whole-class discussion, teacher-provided editorials and related commentary: The effective persuasive piece.
- As per Site A

Site A

Sessions #3 & 4 (10/28, 10/31)

Site B

- Teacher-student and writing team reviews of preliminary thesis statements
- Production 1: Students draft first segments of persuasive essays, drawing upon techniques & approaches they have recognized and discussed, RE teacher- and student-provided editorials.
- Library research time

- As per Site A
- Traditional pre-writing activities: Students independently incorporate thesis and development elements as explained by the instructor (Day 2).
- As per Site A

Site A**Session #5** (11/2/94)

- Library research time
- Perception 2: "Source Perceptions" (form)
Students assess, acc. to preliminary thesis, the apparent relevance and value of source information.
- Introduction and first segment of Persuasive Essay draft due for Session #7.

Site B

- As per Site A
- _____
- Students turn in source notes for teacher check and review.
- As for Site A

Site A**Session #6** (11/4/94)

- Perception 2 Follow-up:
"Source Perceptions: Group Response" (form)
- Team review: Available evidence in support of preliminary thesis, plus first segment response.
- Additional research time

Site B

- _____
- As for Site A
- As for Site A

Site A**Session #7** (11/7/94)

- Perception 3: "A Mark-Up Guide" (form)
Students (a) read & discuss strengths/weaknesses of self-selected sample essays, (b) respond individually to questions re Thesis, Content, and Style, then (c) share findings.
- Meet individually and in teams with the instructor, re first segment of own persuasive essays.
- Reflection 2: "Reflective Response: The Opinion Paper"
Review evaluation of Opinion Paper in light of new knowledge and understandings, re the art of persuasion. Respond to questions re writer's objectives for Opinion Paper. Review/revise objectives for the Persuasive Essay.

Site B

- _____
- As per Site A
- _____

Site A**Session #10** (11/14/94)

- Parent Review: Students take Working Portfolios home for parental assessment of student progress, re stated objectives.
- Production 2: Students either revise first segment or draft next segment, according to techniques learned and issues discussed (whole-class and in teams).

Site B

- _____
- Students draft independently

Site A**Session #14** (11/23/94)

- Reflection 3: "Guided Questions for Reflection: Your First Draft of the Persuasive Essay"

Site B

- _____

Appendix K: The Showcase Portfolio

Essay Fundamentals . 1

Showcase Portfolio

A Guide to Your Showcase Portfolio Packet

Dear Writers,

The first step to success on what will amount to 25% of your grade in Essay Fundamentals is really quite simple: READ AND BE RESPONSIBLE FOR FOLLOWING THE GUIDELINES AS THEY ARE EXPLAINED IN THIS PACKET. As you complete the persuasion and literary analysis essays, you will also be expected to begin to think about and begin to document your overall writing progress this semester. Your **Showcase Portfolio** will be due at the beginning of the period on _____.

I trust you to take your responsibilities seriously and to do your very best; here are some 'pointers' to consider as you do just that:

1. On choosing work for each of the four Portfolio requirements . . .

- A 'work' is the entire project, including all drafts, for each major writing assignment, such as the Childhood Experience paper. In other words, you could not choose an early draft for one Portfolio requirement, and another draft of the same paper to satisfy a second requirement.
- Please choose a given Essay Fundamentals product or project only once, BUT feel free to choose either or both of the final two projects.

(I may not have evaluated the Literary Analysis essay in time; therefore, you would make a photocopy of your final draft before turning the original in to me.)

2. On Writing Team & Parent or Guardian assessment (see packet) . . .

- You will be given class time on _____ to review one another's Showcase Portfolios (Writing Team Review).
- You must obtain a parent/guardian's review of your Portfolio (see Packet) by class time on _____, when **conferences** begin. If parents will not be available that previous weekend, you may choose another adult (but NOT a teacher or coach at this school) who knows you well to complete this requirement for you.

3. Miscellaneous . . .

When in doubt, discuss your questions with your Writing Group, or check with me. Remember, you are college students now!

Putting It All Together:
Your **SHOWCASE PORTFOLIO**

. . . a student-centered, reflective portrait of your writing experiences, answering such questions as . . .

- What changes have taken place in your understandings about writing and about what it means to be a writer?
- What evidence of writing--process and product--does your work present?
- In what ways does all of your work 'add up' to a record of your interests, your thinking, your effort, your versatility, and your accomplishments as a writer?

You will be creating your **Showcase Portfolio** by taking an inventory of your work in Essay Fun, selecting pieces from your writing folder and describing some of them in a detailed way, and writing a Final Reflection. More specifically, your Showcase Portfolio will include:

- A **Table of Contents** that is a record of the pieces in the portfolio and the dates on which they were written.
- A '**Satisfying**' and an '**Unsatisfying**' piece of writing. You will explain why you chose each, what you learned from writing them, and what you might now do differently.
- A **Biography of an Important Piece** of writing, in which you describe the process you used to create that piece of writing. (You will answer questions about and write the 'story' of the work's development over time.)
- A **Free Pick**: A piece you have selected that 'rounds out' your portfolio and provides a picture of yourself as a writer.
- A **Final Reflection**: You will look at your writing for the semester and describe the changes you see in the writing--and in yourself as a writer.

Portfolio Assessment: Purpose & Criteria

“Showcase Portfolios are intended as . . . student-centered, reflective portraits of student experiences with writing, including process as well as product. . . . They are tangible collections of student interests, thinking, effort, versatility, progress, accomplishments, and skills.”

--from Portfolio Assessment in the Reading-Writing Classroom (1991)

Dear Essay Fun students:

Obviously, your Showcase Portfolio will be important to you--and to your success in this class! Due on _____, your Showcase Portfolio will be worth 25% of the course grade AND will be an essential resource when you conference with me about your growth and accomplishments as a writer. As you complete the remaining work in Essay Fun, it would be a good idea to keep the Showcase Portfolio you are about to create in mind.

Just as you decided upon your own writer's objectives for major papers, you will also select **4-6 key criteria**--writing features & standards--that will contribute to your Showcase Portfolio evaluation. You must choose at least one criteria from each of three categories. Additional criteria may relate to any one or more of the those categories.

These categories and the criteria relating to them are based upon your Writing Group and our class discussions of the qualities of good writing. The categories are:

- **Accomplishments in writing**
- **Use of processes and resources for writing**
- **Development as a writer**

The categories and their related criteria are listed on the reverse side of this sheet. Please note that I will use this same form when you and I confer about your work--and when I evaluate your Showcase Portfolio. I hope your Showcase Portfolio becomes the sort of portrait of you as a writer that you will truly value!

Sincerely,

Portfolio Evaluation

Student-writer _____

1 Inadequate 2 Low Acceptable 3 High Acceptable 4 Outstanding

The contents of this student's Showcase Portfolio demonstrate:

----- • **Accomplishment in writing (overall score)**
(Student initials indicate 1-2 criteria to be doubled in value.)

- selecting and meeting specific writer's objectives _____
- formulating an appropriate thesis _____
- establishing and maintaining purpose, such as to describe or to persuade _____
- writing to and for an identifiable audience _____
- developing and organizing effective supporting arguments _____
- using specific detail in support of ideas and arguments _____
- composing effective and varied sentences _____
- following basic rules of usage, mechanics, and spelling _____
- selecting and incorporating vivid, appropriate language _____

_____ • **Use of processes & resources for writing (overall score)**
(Student initials indicate 1-2 criteria to be doubled in value.)

- awareness of strategies and processes for writing _____
- use of processes: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing _____
- awareness of features & qualities important to effective writing _____
- researching, selecting, citing, and documenting source materials _____
- using a variety of resources in the composition of an essay _____
(one's own, the school's, the community's)
- ability to describe what one recognizes and knows about writing _____
- ability to see & build upon strengths & opportunities in one's own writing _____
- constructing, negotiating, and sharing meanings in small-group
and whole-class discussions _____
- reading, reviewing, & evaluating essays using specific criteria _____
- making use of Writing Groups & activities to improve one's own writing _____

----- • **Development as a writer (overall score)**
(Student initials indicate 1-2 criteria to be doubled in value.)

- progress from early to late pieces: growth & development _____
- increased understanding of features & options important to effective writing _____
- writing for different purposes and audiences _____
- sense of self as a writer, including goals, purposes, & achievements _____
- evolution (growth & change) of personal criteria and standards for writing _____
- development of a personal writing style _____

This student's strengths as a writer include:

This student's developmental needs as a writer include:

Biography of an Important Piece of Writing: Questions

- Project (ex., Definition Essay) _____
- Title _____
- Date of completion _____

DIRECTIONS: As you answer these questions, please be as COMPLETE as you possibly can, for your answers will be the basis of the story—the 'biography' of this important piece of writing—that you will write for your Showcase Portfolio.

1. How and where did you get your idea (or ideas) for completing this writing assignment?
2. What was your PROCESS in writing this piece? Consider what you did when you were:
 - a. prewriting/planning.
 - b. drafting.
 - c. revising.
 - d. reflecting.
3. In what ways did the piece CHANGE from first draft to final copy?
4. What about this project/paper was HARDEST for you to do?
5. What was the EASIEST for you to do?
6. Did you ever 'get stuck' at any point when you were writing this piece? If so, what did you do?
7. Did you share your writing with someone else to get their ideas or suggestions for improving it?
If so, how did this sharing change the way you looked at and thought of or about the piece?
8. How did you feel about the piece when you were completing a 'final write' of it?
9. Is there anything else you think is important about your work on this piece and which adds to the picture of this 'biography' of it? If so, please describe it.

Biography of a Work: The 'Story' of

Now that you have answered the nine questions about this piece of writing, you should be ready to write up its 'story'. What follows are two Biographies of a Work as written by high school sophomores. I'm sure that you will do an even more thorough, more REFLECTIVE job with your own Biography!

When you have finished writing your own Biography of a Work, attach it and your answers to the nine questions to the piece of writing, along with all of the notes, reflections, and drafts that belong to it.

Sample #1: Untitled

My writing process begins when I think of a good topic sentence for my paper. After my first sentence is written, my pen begins to flow with ideas and words I never knew existed. Everything is written down like one big mess on paper. The ideas are [then] arranged in a mannerly fashion so they make sense. Nothing complicated, just simple ideas in chronological order.

After everything is in some kind of order, I reread the organized ideas and turn them into a rough copy of my paper. Now the proofreading stage takes place. I think of what could be omitted and what could be placed in. I work on my vocabulary to make the details of my paper sound more sophisticated. My rough copy is jam-packed with new ideas and details. I rewrite my rough copy to make it look more organized.

I proofread once more and after everything is perfect, start writing my final copy. While writing my final copy, I see what once were just ideas turn into a paper that I can be proud of. Finally, it's finished! I turn in my paper feeling good about it because I know I did it right.

Sample #2: 'The Birth of David'

While sitting in my room watching *Some Kind of Wonderful*, a movie I highly recommend, the notion of homework came into my mind. Ten-thirty at night is an awful time to start a new English assignment, but I guess you can call it the time of 'David's' conception. About half an hour later, my character David came to life as an attractive, inventive, sensitive young man whose hobby was being perpetually cool. After getting his insides and outs generally on paper, I went to a computer thesaurus to look at some unique words to complement David's personality. That was the easiest thing to do. The hardest, as always, was my own faults of writing--the spelling, sentence structure, punctuation . . . Maybe they're hard because I consider them so trivial. I worked for about 3 nights on the piece, not for that long though I thought, to make this piece original, I must put in as much of myself as possible.

At last, when I knew that any more detail, dialogue, and sentences would ruin David's secretive nature (totally planned), I gave it my John Hancock and turned it in.

Cover Sheet for Writing Selection

Name _____ Date _____

Assignment (e.g., Definition Paper) _____

Personal Writing Objective(s):

Intended Audience _____

- **Briefly describe this assignment: What were you asked to do?**
- **What do you like best about this piece of your writing?**

Cover Sheet for Writing Selection

Name _____ Date _____

Assignment (e.g., Definition Paper) _____

Personal Writing Objective(s):

Intended Audience _____

- **Briefly describe this assignment: What were you asked to do?**
- **What do you like best about this piece of your writing?**

Writing Team Share & Review

Writing Group member's name _____

Writer's name _____ Date _____

Now that you have worked with and supported this writer in Essay Fund., please listen carefully as s/he shares this Showcase Portfolio with you. Your comments will become a part of the Portfolio, will contribute to its overall quality, and will support the writer when s/he conferences with me, so please be as specific and direct as you possibly can. Thank you!

--Mr. _____

1. Which piece of writing in the Portfolio tells you the most about this writer?
2. Why? What, specifically, does it tell you about the writer?
3. What do you see as being this writer's strengths? (List 2-4, please.)
4. What surprised you in some way(s) about this writer's work or accomplishments?
5. What questions do you have about this writer's work that, if answered, would give you an even clearer 'picture' of his or her understandings about writing and about what it means to be a writer?
6. (optional) In what specific ways did this writer prove to be a helpful Writing Group member during the time you worked with him or her?

Parent/Guardian Review

Student-writer _____

Reader _____ Date _____

Essay Fundamentals students know that the Showcase Portfolio is intended as a REFLECTIVE PORTRAIT of their writing experiences, and that it should answer three key questions:

- **What changes have taken place in the writer's understandings about writing--and about what it means to be a writer?**
- **What evidence of writing--process and product--does his or her work present?**
- **In what ways does all of your son or daughter's work 'add up' to a record of his or her interests, thinking, efforts, versatility, and accomplishments as a writer?**

Please read your son or daughter's **Showcase Portfolio**, from the **Table of Contents** to the selected individual pieces and the **Final Reflection**. Please also note the student-writer's self-assessments as well as teacher and peer reviews of his or her work. I believe that the best assessment of student writing begins with the students themselves, but must be broadened to include the widest possible audience. In that spirit, would you kindly respond to these questions? (Students will be able to refer to your reflections as they conference with me beginning on _____.)

1. Which piece in the Portfolio tells you the most about this student's writing?

2. What does it tell you?

3. As you consider all of the pieces in the Portfolio, what strengths do you see in his or her work?

4. Now that you have reviewed the Portfolio, what signs of growth do you recognize in your son/daughter's writing over the semester?

5. Does this Showcase Portfolio of your student's work surprise you in any way? If yes, how so?

Thank you so much for investing this time in contributing to a fair--and reflective--assessment of your student-writer's work in Essay Fundamentals!


HIGH SCHOOL


November 16, 1994

Dear Parent or Guardian of _____,

Writing teachers have always believed that the best assessment of student writing begins with the students themselves, but must be broadened to include the widest possible audience. I encourage you to become part of that audience as your student begins her or his second academic quarter in Essay Fundamentals.

Very soon, your son or daughter will be creating a **Showcase Portfolio** by selecting certain pieces from the writing folder, describing in detail the writing processes that led to a given 'polished paper', completing an 'inventory' of writing experiences, and composing a "Final Reflection" that reviews his or her progress and identity as a writer.

Your contribution to this process is vital! Please read everything in your student's folder, including papers-in-progress, final products, and student and teacher commentaries. Each folder is set up according to most recent (top) to earliest (bottom) order. Folders also include written questionnaires reflecting students' perceptions about their work in the class.

Feel free to talk with your son or daughter about the writing folder if you would like to do so. Then, please take a few moments to respond to the five questions attached to this letter, and sign your name for verification. **Students will receive credit for returning this letter and form on Friday, November 18.**

Thank you for supporting this important work!

Sincerely,

CURRICULUM VITAE

Stephen James Pearse, Ed.D.

EDUCATION

Ed.D.	University of Washington	1989-1997
Master of Arts for Teachers	University of Washington	1979-1981
Bachelor of Arts English Education	Western Washington University	1967-1971
Teaching Certificate	Washington	1971

UNIVERSITY TEACHING

Adjunct Professor: Assessment	Seattle University	Fall, 1996
Instructor: Teaching Secondary English	University of Washington	Fall, 1994
Adjunct Professor: Cooperative Learning/ Thinking Skills	Seattle Pacific University	1988-1989

PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHING

10-12 English	Shorewood High School Shoreline, Washington	1975-Present
7-9 English	Einstein Junior High Shoreline, Washington	1973-1975
9-12 English	Town of Webb Schools Old Forge, New York	1971-1973

HONORS

Washington Award for Excellence in Education (Christa McAuliffe Award)	1997
Great Expectations "Class Act" Award (KSTW-TV, Seattle-Tacoma)	1991
Instructional Improvement Award (compensated leave)	1988-1989
Golden Acorn Award, National PTA	1988

PUBLICATIONS

Contributor, <u>Programs & Practices: Writing Across Secondary Courses</u> A. Gere, P. Farrell, & A. Young, eds.) Heinemann	1994
Contributor, <u>Roots in the Sawdust</u> , A. Gere, ed., NCTE.	1985