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Meghan E. Bacino

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GENRE, PRACTICE, AND THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM: WHAT STUDENTS
LEARN ABOUT LANGUAGE AND COMMUNITY DISCOURSE PRACTICES
THROUGH A PEDAGOGY OF GENRE AWARENESS

VOLUME I

By

Meghan E. Bacino

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ABSTRACT

GENRE, PRACTICE, AND THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM: WHAT STUDENTS LEARN ABOUT LANGUAGE AND COMMUNITY DISCOURSE PRACTICES THROUGH A PEDAGOGY OF GENRE AWARENESS

By

Meghan E. Bacino

My dissertation study will answer the call for more situated, pedagogical research within Rhetorical Genre Studies. By writing and studying the conventions and functions of academic genres, everyday genres, and disciplinary genres, two semesters of basic writing students at MSU developed a genre metalanguage that allowed them to study the social workings of language and conduct ethnographic research into disciplinary and field-specific genres. By asking these students to reflect on both their process of developing a genre metalanguage as well as their experience researching and writing about disciplinary discourse practices, my research will provide an in-depth, negotiated account of what it means to impart genre pedagogy. I used student interviews, classroom work, my own journal entries and lesson plans, and analysis of students' final projects to answer both theoretical and practical questions relating to recent pedagogical conversations within RGS.

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To my family
who helped me see the Light
...within myself

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Introduction

At a conference presentation during my dissertation year, I talked about genre. For me, this was nothing new. I was something I had been talking about every since studying rhetorical genre theory helped me see new possibilities in my teaching. This presentation was exciting for me, though, because it was the first time I was presenting on what students had *told me* about their learning in my classroom. After my talk a soft spoken gentleman said he was intrigued by my approach to freshman composition. He continued: “So my question I guess...is...are you trying to FREE students? I wonder what the implications are if students study generic *conventions*...” My gut reaction was to say “yes I want to ‘free’ students!” But in a room full of rhetoricians, if you’re going to say you intend to “free” students, you better be prepared for a litany of challenging questions. In that moment—in the context of a group of literacy instructors—I also realized that the word *convention* connotes some kind of formula, or list of rules to follow.

I drew on the business card version of my teaching and explained my intentions in less than a minute. I smiled:

I see genre as a way to help students see how, in each piece of writing, a complex set of personal and social dynamics are at play. I don’t just want students to *do* writing conventions. I want them to understand what’s behind convention. I want them to understand how they fit into convention. So in a rhetorical approach to genre, students study generic *conventions* but also generic *functions*—of classroom genres, everyday genres, and disciplinary genres. So, yes, I believe I *am* trying to ‘free’ my students (bigger smile)... or at least give them the tools to be active negotiators in a way that I had never done before in my experiences teaching.

But there was so much more I could have said. I remembered when Samar compared the genres of Kuwait women's magazines to the genres of American magazines. Or when Martin, an international student from Korea, asked: "So you want me to write about *writing*? My research paper is about *writing*...the genres of engineering?" I considered these "aha" moments—moments where I saw a shift in student thinking. But to be honest, the gentleman's question threw me for a loop. Because although I had witnessed meaningful learning in my classroom, I knew that the theories behind my teaching and what I *saw* in my classroom were just the beginning of what I knew about how teaching genre impacts FYW instruction.

My background, experiences, and some beliefs about writing and teaching writing

While I didn't know it at the time, my interest in rhetoric started when I was 12 years old. In those days, I was a bus girl at my dad's Italian restaurant, which was located in Griffith, Indiana—right next to Gary, Indiana. I wore my own best black and white outfits to match the waitresses', and I walked around smiling, filling up customers' water glasses, and helping with side work (always finding something else to do when it came time to peel potatoes, however). I may have mentioned a time or two that I was Mike's daughter. Most of the time, it was generally known that the little girl pouring water was too young to be an "official" worker, and therefore, was part of the blood line. But I'd work in my identity when I could, and those \$5 tips rolled in like butter. What made the big tips even more refreshing was that my teenage siblings, who teased me since I was the youngest, were sweating in the kitchen—churning out pizzas and making an hourly

wage that I always surpassed. The money I made is still a comical bone of contention in my Italian family. Looking back, I see that maybe I was always destined to be a rhetorician.

Throughout my youth and later educational experiences, I've always relied on writing to get me through different life experiences and struggles. I still have journals from when I was in elementary school, I still love writing letters to loved ones, and I will never stop telling my students how language makes change. When I started teaching in graduate school, I knew I loved to write—and I knew something about theories of literacy instruction—but I soon realized how complex teaching writing was. Perhaps because just when you think you know how you'll respond to diverse students, just when you think you know you have a great assignment, you realize that you don't know. The more I learned, the more I wanted to learn. The more I knew I *had* to learn.

Beginning thoughts leading to my research

Since my graduate program was innovative, the professors in the program conducted diverse, discipline-changing research, and we were always encouraged to push the limits of our own thinking and research. From the beginning I knew that I loved teaching, and when I took a class about Rhetorical Genre Studies, I realized that my scholarship would be about teaching—and that what I had to say could have an impact on a strand of scholarship that was calling for more situated classroom research.

What first grabbed me about teaching writing through rhetorical approaches to genre was that this approach focused on “going meta” on different writing spaces in ways

that I had never considered. I was most intrigued by the notion that when we write, it's more than just our own minds and hands at work. Beyond notions of intertextuality and the obvious reality that writers get ideas through social interaction, RGS stresses that a writer is always working within and outside of *socially and culturally* created writing conventions and that writers enact various social roles through genres, which perform actions in particular communities. This approach to language and writing helped me really understand writing as more than just words on paper. I saw that a piece of writing is always, in a sense, *moving*—in a way that I had never felt before. RGS also made explicit the idea that writing is an important part of social practices. I began to realize how writing played such a crucial role in helping me maintain relationships and participate in different communities throughout my life. I wanted students to see this.

Approaching language learning from a genre standpoint also helped me put a name to *feelings* that I felt when entering different writing spaces—and to how I negotiated those feelings when I wrote particular genres. I thought back to the uncomfortable feeling of writing my graduate school admissions essay. And yes, when I wrote the divorce essay in 7th grade, I thought I described “the” family meeting like no one else ever had. I had always considered my writing to be something that *I* did, but when I considered the social spaces that surrounded me, I realized that although many of the emotions and ideas were mine, the *processes* I engaged in throughout different writing situations were direct results of the social surroundings I was in. My 7th grade teacher praised my writing. Looking back, I see that I was writing what I thought I should say—that the divorce made me stronger, that my emotions were neat and tidy just like my essay writing. Even at that young age, writing a narrative in a different circumstance

would have allowed me to convey my “real” thoughts. This tension continued through many of my writing situations, and more and more in graduate school, I began to feel how writing academically wasn’t exactly natural—like I had thought in college—but a direct result of consciously learning the conventions of academic writing.

In this sense, theorizing about genre and thinking back to my own experiences as writer helped me see my teaching differently. Anis Bawarshi’s (2003) *Genre and the Invention of the Writer: Reconsidering the Place of Invention in Composition* was perhaps the most influential work in terms of how I would apply rhetorical genre theory to my teaching. Bawarshi offered ways in which students could “go meta” on genres they wrote in the classroom and in their everyday lives. I remember reading the book in one sitting, avoiding all phone calls, and thinking: “yes, this is a very different way I could engage students with the social workings of language.” Maybe having students study generic conventions and functions of genres not typically associated with the FYW classroom and genres in disciplinary communities they would someday occupy would empower my students in their language awareness and ability to actively engage different writing spaces. I developed a coherent genre pedagogy and decided to make it the focus of my dissertation research.

Questions: the focus of the research

Rhetorical Genre Studies became popular in the early 80s, although genre approaches to literacy instruction—especially at the FYW level—have not found their way into composition classrooms and larger theorizing about teaching writing within

Rhetoric and Composition Studies. For this reason, there is a prevalent call within RGS for more local accounts of situated practice. I saw my work answering this call, and more broadly, since I didn't know anyone who used rhetorical approaches to genre as the main thematic focus of their approaches to teaching composition, I became interested in undertaking an extended study into my teaching. My umbrella research question is: "what does a pedagogy of genre awareness teach students about culture, the social dimensions of language, and community discourse practices?" To address my main research question, I collected data that would help me answer the following sub-questions:

- What did students learn about language and writing when they engaged with classroom activities related to genre?
- Which activities did students think were most useful in their explorations of genre? Why? What did the process of developing a metalanguage look like (in practice and reflection?)
- What did students learn by researching disciplinary genres?

Assumptions

In theory, I had created a pedagogy in which I stressed the "social" aspect of writing to a degree that I had never done before. However, a central focus of my theorizing and pedagogy was to consider how individuals engaged convention through their creative use of language. As a strand of teaching, many genre pedagogical theories challenge the Process movement for focusing too intently on inner voice, authenticity, and "writing to discover." I too thought ideas of writing to discover and inner voice oversimplified the writing process and left students ill-equipped to understand their own

writing processes. Then some intense personal shifts began to take place. After collecting all my data and conducting interviews, I moved to Chicago to write my dissertation and be near family. I wrote by day and waitressed in a bar at night. All seemed well at first, but the more I interacted with the patrons at my bar job and questioned some of the big transitions that were happening in my life, the more I felt exhausted and confused. I was experiencing some profound personal shifts, interacting with the masses at the bar (you wouldn't believe what happens in one 8-hour shift, really), and feeling an urge to write creatively.

Even though I was a soon to be Ph.D. in rhetoric, I had never really considered myself a creative writer. Sure, I could work with words. I could synthesize knowledge. But this feeling of expressing myself on a deeper level was new. I started buzzing with ideas and writing whenever I could. I remember when I started jotting down creative ideas on my "guest check" pad that I used to take drink orders. Sometimes the ideas would be tied to an interaction I had just had. Sometimes I simply got "hit" with an idea for a nonfiction article or a short story. I also started journaling about my experiences, which I would say was born out of emotional necessity. I eventually turned these entries into nonfiction vignettes. Despite feeling tired after a shift, I had such an excess of creative energy when I'd leave the bar. All I could do was get it out. Looking back, I realize I was living like a writer. Always taking notes. Seeing everything as a story. Everyone I waited on, every co-worker—they all became part of my inner dialogue and attempt to figure out life and what makes people tick. I wasn't really concerned with writing conventions as I had been in the academy. I just had to write.

Working with these emotions gave me inspiration for not only getting my feelings out—these emotions infiltrated my creative ideas, and it was only through these shifts that I started experimenting with different genres. Through this time, I felt a duality in my identity. Working as a waitress was something I had always done, but working in a city bar while writing my dissertation made the tension between my personal and academic life even more pronounced than it had been in graduate school. In addition, becoming an aspiring creative writer created a new duality, one that I wasn't sure would bode well with the dissertation process. I was at once actually feeling what was meant by notions of inner voice and the author within. Sure, some of my inner shifts were occurring as a direct result of my social interactions, but often times an experience or emotion would give me an idea for some other creative endeavor. I felt moved to write more than I ever had, and in this sense, my writing process was becoming more and more personal.

But in relation to my teaching and dissertation research, I was working within a strand of scholarship in which creativity was defined as a social, not individual process. Genre scholars (Mirtz 1997, Bawarshi 2004; Herrington & Moran 2005) have criticized the Process movement for positioning the writer as primary agent and neglecting the social situatedness of writing and the degree to which genre can generate and/or limit language. In this sense, we mislead students if we encourage them to just “write from within.” Before my dissertation, these ideas made perfect sense. But as I started, you guessed it, “writing from within” for the first time in my life, I began to think more and more about my own writing process and what moves students to write—both academically and creatively. I began to see more fully that conventions can be secondary to a writer's drive to write. At the same time, I knew that conventions affect what a writer

has to say and how they say it, especially in regard to academic genres. Teaching academic writing is different than creative writing in tangible ways, but my experiences focusing on the social aspects of language/writing in my teaching and then experiencing life as a creative writer made me further question the “tension” between writing from within and engaging with typified, social writing conventions. While this tension (and my own experiences) aren’t at the forefront of my study, the personal experiences that I experienced as I made sense of my data created an interesting backdrop and made me think about how my own evolving writing process challenged my beliefs about teaching writing.

As the gentleman in my conference presentation reminded me, focusing on convention often connotes rigid formulas. Therefore, genre approaches to teaching writing have been criticized for focusing too heavily on social conventions. I’ve always been somewhat irritated (to be frank) about the fact that rhetorical genre studies is always somehow “digging itself” out of the belief that genres constrain. I started my new approach to teaching with the belief that if students become more aware of how language works in diverse social contexts, they become more apt to creatively and actively use language within these contexts. So when the gentleman at 4Cs asked me if I wanted to free students, I guess the nerdy, academic side of my identity was happy. Because I had yet to figure that out. I didn’t necessarily want to free them *from* convention, but I did want to empower them. Now, as I’ve engaged with multi-layered aspects of myself, which in turn influenced my authorial identity, I realize just how much there is to learn about writing and the teaching of writing. I hope my students’ reflections offer a new glimpse into what students can learn about language and writing by studying genre.

Outline of dissertation:

Chapter 1 presents an overview of the pertinent research within RGS, including conceptualizations of genre within this strand of scholarship, theories of language and learning that relate to genre pedagogy, and practical applications of this approach to literacy instruction. In the last part of the chapter, I define the main theoretical foundations of my pedagogy—situating my teaching within RGS and providing a theoretical framework for how I will interpret student learning in my case study. I also provide a glimpse of some of my larger findings to help readers situate my work.

Chapter 2 explains my purposes for selecting the case study methodology as a more specific instantiation of the teacher research perspective and outlines specific ways that I see classroom research having an impact on RGS and Rhetoric and Composition Studies. In this chapter I describe the design of my research, its setting and context, how participants became part of the study, how I collected and analyzed different types of data, and how the intersection of data helped me answer current pedagogical questions within RGS. I end the chapter by complicating the overlap between my roles as both teacher and researcher.

Chapter 3 describes the two composition courses in which research participants were enrolled. In this chapter, I start by presenting the relevant differences across semesters, in terms of student demographics, major projects, and other relevant factors. I then use classroom work, post-class journal entries, and interview feedback to create learning “portraits” in which I show how students collaboratively engaged with scaffolded genre activities. I also provide individual feedback on activities when relevant. My main goal is

to re-create the activities in as much detail as possible so that readers can experience the activities as I did. After completing my study, I also went back and wrote brief contextual paragraphs that serve to foreground important concepts/implications that I discuss more fully in relation to individual and group learning in later chapters. In this sense, a secondary purpose of this chapter is to contextualize and make connections to chapters 4 and 5 where I feature individual students' development of a genre metalanguage and discuss how a larger group of students engaged with my pedagogy and the final project. When relevant, this chapter also includes tentative conclusions that I made during data analysis.

Chapter 4 features two students' individual literacy learning experiences in my classroom. Through analysis of relevant activities, assignments, projects, and interview feedback, I provide a negotiated account of each student's learning experiences. Some of the activities were featured in Chapter 3, and I also include students' engagement with individual assignments from various stages of the semester. As I studied how individual attitudes towards language and writing developed in my classroom—and how these attitudes and experiences related to student learning in the final project—I found connective links between aspects of each student's in-class learning and their final project learning. This chapter showcases those connections, while raising questions about individual literacy development that contextualize my focus on a larger sample of students in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5 focuses on how a larger group of students engaged with and reflected on their experiences researching disciplinary genres. In this chapter I combine my own analysis of

students' final projects with their interview feedback to explore themes and contradictions in both students' habits of thought and writing practices. After comparing the work of fall and spring students, I re-traced earlier chapters to make clear connections between specific aspects of both versions of my pedagogy and specific learning outcomes. Therefore, the second part of the chapter demonstrates my deep understanding of how my pedagogy influenced student learning, as well as how students' individual development and feedback helped me understand my own conceptualization of genre, theories about teaching genre, and more specific elements of practice. I divide the implications segment of this chapter into two sections: "Observations about Learning" and "Implications for Teaching." In both sections I situate my own understandings within RGS and Rhetoric and Composition studies. I conclude by raising questions/avenues for future research.

Chapter 1

Major tenets of Rhetorical Genre Studies and application to the writing classroom

While genre was once considered the ultimate constraint on writers, recent scholarship has explored how a social, user-based approach to genre can afford writers agency and give insight into how language mediates social experience. Far from literary studies' conception of genre as text classification or a tool for critics, genre scholars have subscribed to Carolyn Miller's (1984) approach to genre, which "centers not on the form of discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish" (24). Making action central places the focus on pragmatics instead of syntactics. As Miller (1994) notes, many rhetorical devices are located within genre (e.g., narrative, argument), but it is genre that has "pragmatic power as social action" (75). In their structural dimension, genres represent conventionalized ways to use rhetorical resources, but in the pragmatic sense, genres help people in communities "do their work and carry out their purposes" (75). This focus on social action and interpersonal relations has urged scholars to explore the social functions of texts—including what types of relations and ideologies create convention, how users perform actions with genre, and how language both defines and responds to social experience. Rhetorical approaches to genre seek to "explicate the knowledge that practice creates" (1984, 27), which places the focus on understanding how values and norms of wider activity systems (schools, workplaces, communities) are embedded in genre. Genre theorists ask the basic questions: What does a text do? For whom does it work?

To explore these questions, genre scholars attend to the "wheres" of genre—considering how genre both creates and responds to social context. Amy Devitt (1993;

2004) defines genre as the “dynamic patterning of human experience” (574) and “the semantic resources associated with situation types, the meaning potential in given social contexts” (17-18). Devitt’s focus on dynamism and meaning *potential* stresses the generative nature of genre. Writers *act* on genres, just as genres influence writers and reflect social norms. Anis Bawarshi (2000) defines genres as “rhetorical environments within which we recognize, enact, and consequently reproduce various situations, practices, relations, and identities” (336). Treating genres as environments makes genre an active *place* (vs. a static formula) that helps writers understand situation and actualize and (re)produce social practices. Anne Freadman (1994) also invokes a place metaphor, claiming that *where* a genre works is just as important as the textual features *within* the text. In this sense genres acquire meaning through their interactions with other texts, dictating how people “get along” (57-59).

In my own conceptualization of genre, I align most closely with these scholars because, unlike literary scholars who have positioned genre as a framework that writers *fit into*, these scholars focus on how writers “work on” genres as they enact various social roles, which are always evolving. Building on these scholars, I define genres as a *place of movement*—where action occurs both within and outside of the text. Since individual language use is always, to some extent, creative, and since social conventions exert influence on writers, viewing genre as a place of movement implies that, first, language use within a genre—in and of itself—moves. In this sense language does something; it represents not only the thoughts of the writer but also their life experiences, their participation within particular communities, their culture, and their beliefs about what type of expression/use of convention fits their intentions. Secondly, if genres perform

actions—or simply “move” in the world—then genres have a primary purpose and internal movement but they also contribute to larger community and cultural repertoires. In this sense, I define genre more in terms of social action and social roles than textual features. However, since generic patterns and conventions give insight into a genre’s action, studying language use and conventions within particular genres is an integral part of conceptualizing genre.

The notion that genres “work,” or perform social functions and help individuals negotiate interpersonal relationships, has highlighted the idea of writing as a social act and changed the way composition scholars are approaching the teaching of writing. As Charles Bazerman (1994) notes: “We have always known that writing is a social act, but in recent years we have begun to examine more energetically the implications of that for anatomizing the social location, dynamics, and activity of *each* instance of writing” (26, my emphasis). Subscribing to this notion, many rhetorical genre scholars (Mirtz 1997, Bawarshi 2004; Herrington & Moran 2005) have criticized the Process movement for positioning the writer as primary agent and neglecting the social situatedness of writing and the degree to which genre can generate and/or limit language. According to Bawarshi (2003), the movement “maintained the partial view of the writer as the primary agent of invention rather than as an agent who participates within a larger discursive and ideological agency” (60). The Process movement did this by equating good writing with notions of authentic voice, uniqueness, and individual discovery through language. Many composition theorists (Delpit 1997; Gee 1996; Royster 1996; Villanueva 2000) have been instrumental in questioning how the notion of expressing inner knowledge through writing assumed that all students had equal access to (or placed value on) standard

language practices. While there is disagreement about the extent that teachers should help students “master the genres of power” within RGS, scholars within this strand of scholarship always forefront a critical element. That is, they propose that students should not only become aware of their own writing processes but that they should understand how writing conventions both create and reflect larger social beliefs.

Like Rhetoric and Composition Studies, the genre movement also stresses an awareness of the social situatedness of language and writing. However, genre studies changes the game by asking writers to develop a discursive consciousness of how language utterances—through *conventionalized* forms—reflect and mediate cultural experience through the *actions* they perform. Many genre scholars (Bazerman 2004; Devitt, Bawarshi & Reiff 2003; Iwanicki 2003) have built on Wittgenstein’s theory of materiality, where language is “alive” and has “material, identity-related and social consequences” (Iwanicki, 508). And David Bleich (2001) has argued that theorizing about the materiality of language needs to be forefronted as a central tenet of genre studies. Bleich claims that the subject of writing should instead be the subject of language use. He proposes a pedagogy of exchange that “assumes the relativity of language use to culture but also an analogous relativity of individual language use to family, community, and individual history” (137). In practice, this means engaging students in “meta” discussions of how language use (within genres) represents their own experiences in particular communities and value systems, and how individual language use, in part, represents larger social beliefs.

As rhetoric and composition theorists, we are aware of the material aspects of language in our theorizing and in our research. But we often fail to engage students with

the interpersonal dimensions of language use. As Mary Ann Cain (2003) suggests: “putting language in the context of how it is actually lived is powerful” (490). Of course, even when students compose in genres such as standard research papers or 5-paragraph essays, language is “living.” The problem is that students are usually unaware of the social beliefs that govern these forms. Students often uncritically adopt these genres without thinking about where they came from or how they function in larger educational systems. We’ve all heard it: “That’s just the way you write in school.” But as Richard Coe (2002) claims: “Genre epitomizes the significance of approaching reading and writing as social processes in which individuals participate without necessarily being entirely conscious of how social the processes are” (3). Genre approaches to composition propose that teachers *forefront* these social processes, helping students develop a discursive consciousness of how their own writing is a social process.

This contrasts with process approaches that emphasize individual voice and pay little attention to how form and function (reflective of social norms) may influence invention and engagement with writing. But although recent genre theory is often theoretically positioned against the Process movement, many genre scholars (Herrington & Moran 2005; Kapp & Bangeni 2005; Richardson 2004) claim that, in practice, using process approaches can actually help students explore the social dimensions of genre. And conversely, genre approaches to teaching can still allow room for creativity and self-exploration. As Anne Herrington and Charles Moran (2005) put it, the main pedagogical implication of genre theory is not that there is no room for exploration but that teachers always attend to and complicate the genres they assign or ask students to explore. This includes school-based genres, as well as public and disciplinary genres.

In part because learning genre connotes notions of taxonomy and form, some have criticized genre-focused pedagogy for being reductive and deterministic. In addition, contending that writers are never alone in their construction of texts challenges some creativity theories and ideas of originality. If we say that writing is always a social act, then aren't we erasing the agency of individual writers? While the idea of *writing as a social act* has for long been a branch of social epistemic approaches to rhetoric and has more recently been the basis of new types of literacy instruction—i.e. ethnographic and multimedia writing projects—this idea has taken on negative connotations in relation to genre. Some fear that genre theory leads to recipe-driven pedagogies in which students become uncritical consumers. However, rhetorical approaches to genre don't erase the role of the individual but rather complicate where a writer is positioned and how genre might influence invention and the writing process. All writers have intentions. What is under dispute, and what genre theorists continue to question is: "where do writers get their intentions?" (Bawarshi 2004, 50). And how do generic forms influence the micro-level choices that writers make? While social approaches to invention and form are central to RGS, another foundational principle is that individuals are engaged in constant choice in regard to language and genre (Devitt 1993, 580). In this sense, far from being reductive or privileging form, genre studies highlights the role of the individual—while at the same time positioning the individual in a complex web of social relations.

Some practical examples illustrate how these theoretical arguments affect the teaching of writing. First, writing teachers can help students see how a complex nexus of relations influences what *goes into/helps construct* writing situations. For example, students rarely question the larger social norms and beliefs about correctness (Fairclough

1992) that govern what forms particular cultures and educational institutions value and pass down. On a more micro level, students don't think of their own writing in relation to the social space of the classroom. But many social factors and processes are at work: the teacher picks genres based on her beliefs about what is important, students write papers that the teacher and fellow students may read and (perhaps unconsciously) are influenced by these audiences (what parts of themselves they are willing to share or what they think the teacher wants). These examples emphasize the complex factors that surround and shape the writing situation, even if writers (or teachers) are unaware of these dynamics. Going "meta" on these social processes shows how creating genres involves more than just an individual writer's intentions.

Second, teachers can help students see how genre not only *responds to* social relationships but how genre also *builds/shapes* social relationships and norms, including cultural beliefs, subject positions, and identities. In my own scholarship, I remember being intrigued that there was so much to say about genres I had taken for granted in the past. For example, a eulogy shows that we celebrate someone's personal characteristics, life experiences, and accomplishments upon their death, whereas an obituary serves the function of displaying an individual's public persona, focusing mostly on their role in a family unit. Or consider how typical medical charts reveal the values of Western medicine, which focus on physical ailments and pay little or no attention to emotional or spiritual issues. These seemingly nondescript charts also set up particular subject positions between doctor and patient. That is, the genre plays a central role in governing the speech interactions and relationships that form during visits. Finally, the logs of social workers, with their lack of first person, reveal the field's belief that social workers must

record a detached version of their interactions with clients. In this sense the genre assigns workers a particular subject position, even if it does not necessarily reflect the personal nature of the experience. Exploring these seemingly “everyday” genres and the actions they accomplish in my own scholarship has given me insight into complex issues of how writing is connected to culture and identity. In the most basic sense, studying these genres reinforces what I have always believed: writing is never *just* writing. Exploring the social functions of genres not typically associated with the writing classroom links form to function and gives valuable insight into the idea of writing in relation to culture, identity, and social systems.

To connect genre to larger cultural beliefs and social systems, many leading genre scholars (Bawarshi 2003; Devitt 2004; Devitt, Bawarshi, & Reiff 2003; Freedman & Medway 1994; Miller 1984; Swales 1990) have made the link between genre and *community* explicit. Part of the goal in connecting genre use to community is to encourage members to become active participants. More specifically, the connection of genre to *discourse communities* has become central, although genre scholars have varying opinions as to how to define discourse communities and the extent to which members either subscribe to or deviate from community values and discursive practices. As Carol Berkenkotter & Thomas Huckin (1995) claim, research into discourse communities, in the most productive sense, can give insight into disciplinary communication (Berkenkotter & Huckin 1995) and open up discussions into the materiality of language. Aviva Freedman and Peter Medway (1994, *GNR*) also note: “The new term ‘genre’ has been able to connect a recognition of regularities in discourse types with a broader social and cultural understanding of language in use” (1).

The concept of language in use stems from M.A.K. Halliday's (1978) systemic functional linguistics. Genre scholars have also relied on M.M. Bakhtin's (1981; 2004) contributions to speech act theory and his notion that genres are dialogic, and Anthony Giddens' (1984) work within Activity Theory that stresses how individuals are always working within, and influenced by, wider activity systems. Some wider areas of study that have influenced the genre movement are critical discourse analysis and research into workplace writing. More recently, scholars (Bleich 2001; Iwanicki 2003) have forefronted material approaches to language in relation to genre. The next section describes in more detail how RGS fuses these foundational views of language, writers, and social systems.

Foundational views of language and social theories

In the late 70s and early 80s, M.A.K. Halliday's systemic functional approach to language became the basis of a genre approach to teaching writing in Sydney schools. J.R. Martin and Joan Rothery drew on Halliday's language theories as they conducted research into the genres students produced in elementary and secondary education. They helped institute a genre approach to literacy instruction, and soon scholars began trying to understand how Halliday's language theories could influence writing instruction at all levels. In the most basic sense, systemic linguistics seeks to understand language in its relation to context. As Martin and Rothery (1993) explain, the basic premise is that "if we know something about a text's context, we can make predictions about its grammar; and conversely if we analyze a text's grammar, we can recover information about its context"

(144). In this sense, language only becomes meaningful as it is understood in a particularized social context.

Within systemic linguistics, context is defined by *register* (including *field* = what is happening; *tenor* = who is involved; and *mode* = what role language is playing). While the concept of register seems difficult to apply to practical situations, John Swales (1990) notes how register can be thought of as “generalizable stylistic choice” (i.e.: the language of business reporting, the language of scientific evidence), whereas genres are more specialized, structured texts (i.e. a business memo or scientific report) (41). Swales and other genre theorists have adopted Halliday’s theory because it relates language to social environment and stresses semantics over syntactics. However, some scholars (Bawarshi 2003; Devitt 2004) criticize Halliday’s theory for making genre an element *of* register, contending that genre plays a more constitutive role. Bawarshi notes that genre is “...an integral part of the very social semiotic that is realized by register” (351). Nonetheless, Halliday’s theory remains foundational to genre studies because of its orientation towards social discourses rather than sentences.

Many genre scholars (Berkenkotter & Huckin 1995; Coe, Lingard, & Teslenko 2002; Freedman 1994; Hunt 1994; Miller 1984, 1994) also draw on speech act theory, which proposes that meaning is determined by the utterance and the action it performs (Miller 35). In this sense, a piece of communication can never be analyzed without regards to the audience or the social situation it was created in. While this foundational concept could also apply to rhetorical approaches towards language, it contrasts literary views of language and writing that accord more power to text—regardless of a real or implied audience. M.M. Bakhtin’s (1981, 2004) concept of dialogic communication that

states that language (and genre) must be analyzed as social action that occurs within recurrent situations has remained central to RGS. Bakhtin argues that speakers/writers use genres (everyday speech genres and more complex written genres) to work on an audience or at least invoke an audience.

Finding meaning in a speech event or genre means considering the interrelationship between speaker, audience, and generic conventions. Gunther Kress (2003) addresses this cyclical relationship by defining genre as “the shaping of text which reflects and is brought into existence as a result of the social relations of the participants in the making (writing/speaking) and in the use (reading/hearing/interpretation) of a text” (121). By emphasizing social relations, participants, and the active role of language (and interpretation), Kress builds directly on both Halliday’s three-part description of field, tenor, and mode and Bakhtin’s instrumental step in defining genre as social semiotic. In addition, Aviva Freedman (cited in Coe, Lingard, & Teslenko 2002) has been instrumental in applying the concept of “uptake” (taken from speech act theory) to genre studies. As she defines it, uptake equates to “appropriate ways to respond to past utterances” (73)—whether it be an everyday speech event or expression or a more complex written genre. In this sense, a listener/reader enacts an uptake as they engage in a typified response to some utterance. RGS has built on speech act theory’s major premise that we must “de-naturalize” language invoked in specific uptakes, mainly written genres. That is, we must understand what we take for granted about language and explore the tension between what individuals do in practice and how they fit into larger beliefs about communicating—beliefs that are instilled in the micro actions of various communities and social systems.

In doing so, it becomes important to consider how individual actions are linked to social motives. Many genre scholars (Bawarshi 2004; Berkenkotter & Huckin 1995; Devitt 2004; Miller 1984; 1994) have drawn on Anthony Giddens' (1984) notion of the "duality of structure" (which draws on Activity Theory) to understand how users actualize (and negotiate) individual intentions and social motives within larger social structures. As Miller (1984) notes: "At the level of genre, motive becomes a conventionalized social purpose, or exigence, within the recurrent situation" (35-6). Genres assign writers particular subject positions, which links genre to identity and also explores how writers negotiate social motives (typified response that a situation calls for) and intentions (individualized interpretations of social motives) (Bawarshi 88). Activity Theory makes individual actions primary, according individuals more power.

At the same time, structure is always an aspect of individual action and action serves to reproduces structure. To get at this theoretical relationship, Miller (1994) contends that to understand how individuals make structures work, it becomes necessary to understand smaller units such as *communities* and/or *collectivities* (72). Many scholars have responded to this call by complicating definitions of discourse communities and considering how linking genre to community can reveal the complex interrelationships between individuals and social structures.

Contexts of use: linking genres to discourse communities

If genres perform social functions, it becomes crucial to consider the relations that affect the making of a text as well as how texts reflect community value systems. Devitt,

Bawarshi, and Reiff (2003) note how genres must be viewed as “rhetorical manifestations of a community’s actions” (554). Miller (1984) also claims that for students, “genres serve as keys to understanding how to participate in the actions of a community” (39). While many scholars forefront the link between genre and community in theory, Devitt (2004) has argued that even with its strong focus on context, genre theory can sometimes focus too intently on text and underestimate the impact of “surroundings” (202). On this note, trying to define the micro interactions that occur within communities becomes difficult since a community is constantly changing and because boundaries around communities are permeable (e.g., members create their own sub-communities and choose levels of adaptation or individuation) (Thaiss & Myers Zawacki 2002). Nonetheless, this connection gives valuable insight into the social nature of writing and the way genre helps users get things done within specific communities. For this reason scholars have paid considerable attention to (and disagreed on) how to define *discourse community*.

The most widely accepted conceptualization of discourse community is John Swales’ (1990) notion that discourse communities are “sociorhetorical networks that form in order to work towards a common set of goals” (9). Swales distinguishes between *speech communities*, which work together to build solidarity and preserve a social fabric, and *discourse communities*, which work towards more functional pursuits and objectives (24). To achieve these objectives, discourse communities have several constitutive aspects: mechanisms of communication, methods of providing information and feedback, specialized lexicon, a set of genres, and a reasonable ratio of novices and experts (25-27). Swales’ definition is thorough and makes perfect sense when applied to certain communities (for example, an academic disciplinary community).

But there is still lack of consensus about the extent to which different types of social groups should be considered discourse communities. Patricia Bizzell (2002) cites Swales' example that small business owners, whether connected geographically or not, may share many of the same discursal practices. However, Swales claims that since this group has no common *discursive forum* and since members have not exercised *choice* in participating in a sanctioned community (Swales, cited in Bizzell 227), that they do not constitute a discourse community. However, Bizzell's work argues that this type of group does function as a discourse community, although she recognizes that members are often unaware of the discursive practices, socioeconomic and cultural experiences, and worldviews that have made them a part of that community (226-227). She claims that we must not underestimate the importance of worldviews and socioeconomic factors in contributing to the formation of discourse communities.

An example from my own upbringing sheds light on Bizzell's important point. Having grown up in the pizzeria business, I've seen that independent restaurant owners might be unaware (or just unaware in the rhetorical, academic sense) of their common discursive practices and objectives. However, their actions (and perhaps worldviews) do constitute a discourse community. For example, independent restaurant owners engage in similar speech genres with similar lexicon (greeting customers, talking the biz with other independent restaurant owners: "how's business"/"the warm weather has been killing business"/"I can't compete with these chain restaurants," and exchanges with delivery drivers); they use particular written genres (advertisements, ordering sheets, menus); and they gather socially, both informally or at sanctioned events such as restaurant shows. And to use Swales' idea that discourse communities have functional pursuits and

objectives, independent restaurant owners create culture, unite in their goal to compete with larger chain restaurants, and preserve working and middle class values. I invoke this example to challenge readers to consider alternate types of discourse communities. I also believe understanding the spoken and written practices of *any* community—despite whether or not that community’s “objectives” are clearly defined, visible, or institutionalized—is instructive to students. At the FYW level, exploring how individuals use language to mediate their participation in particular communities and conversely, how communities affect members’ discursive practices has heuristic value (exploring the social workings of language) even if we cannot pin down a precise definition of discourse community in scholarly and theoretical discussions. Genre serves as an important “way in” to understanding how language both creates and responds to these community discursive practices. As Swales claims, discourse communities possess a set of genres that make communicative activities possible (25). Exploring how genres work for members, and how members use them, sheds light on the larger goals and values of discourse communities.

The idea that genres “belong to” discourse communities has urged genre theorists to consider the extent to which members either conform to or challenge the community’s accepted discursive practices. While many have drawn on Swales, Freedman & Medway (1994) note that there is still considerable disagreement about how individuals work within or against generic conventions. For example, Bawarshi (2000) criticizes Swales for making genre a characteristic *of* discourse communities, arguing that the genre plays a more critical role in producing recurrence and that individuals play a crucial role in reproducing community values. Bleich (2001) and Christopher Thaiss & Terry Myers

Zawacki (2002) also challenge Swales' definition, claiming that if genre boundaries are loose, then no genre really belongs to a discourse community; it is only characteristic of those communities. In addition, since these boundaries are constantly changing, there may be more room for personal expression than some models suggest. Thomas Helscher (1997) also supports the idea that individuals can enact change within discourse communities but claims that overstressing individual change can be misleading because structures are more stable and powerful than some scholars recognize (29). This theoretical divergence is no surprise since discourse communities (as structure) function at an ideological (not apparent) level. That is, it is not always possible to measure the "micro" ways that users function in a community.

Deciding how to define communities or coming up with static models of how they operate seems less important than exploring *how language works for users*—especially in relation to FYW pedagogy. As Bazerman (2004) notes, if individuals see how genres function socially, they can exercise "social creativity" with language (as opposed to conforming or uncritically adopting language practices). To do this, individuals must begin to see how genres are *situated* in a sequence of smaller networks that comprise communities. If the most important element of genre studies is to consider how genres perform social functions, then the most practical, important pedagogical implication is that students understand different ways in which language mediates social experience and explore how writers work within larger activity systems.

Situating genre within communities and wider activity systems seems difficult, but Bazerman's (2004) theoretical framework provides a useful avenue into understanding how speech acts, genres, genre systems, and activity systems can help us think about

“how people using text create new realities of meaning, relation, and knowledge” (309). Like many genre theorists, Bazerman claims that genres are not just texts; they are “social facts about the kinds of speech acts people can make and the ways they can make them” (317). He draws on Miller’s notion of typification, where genres both realize and help constitute recurring situations—creating social facts that reflect shared, historical understandings. Bazerman explains the sequence: texts create social facts that are accomplished through speech acts; these acts are realized through genres; genres work together forming genre sets and systems, which work in a particular order; and finally, the working out of genre systems give us insight into larger systems of human activity (311). This somewhat systematic umbrella framework gives insight into how we can understand the smaller practices within discourse communities, which work within larger cultural dynamics. While Bazerman’s framework has been a useful theoretical backdrop in terms of scholars approaching (and defining) genres rhetorically, the final chapter of my study considers how we might make the notion of *genre sets* more visible and explicit in practice.

To preface detailed discussions of my own practice, in the next section I outline the two major schools of thought within RGS and how scholars within each “camp” envision and/or approach practice at different instructional levels. I also consider how RGS scholars view this theoretical binary and invoke different perspectives on how hybrid practices—including Process-based teaching—affect genre learning. I then describe how later chapters of my study will show the outcomes of my own hybrid approaches.

The “schools” of genre pedagogy: acquisition-based teaching versus explicit instruction

The North American of genre scholarship strand is influenced most notably by Kenneth Burke’s approach to rhetoric in composition studies, social constructionism, rhetorical versions of rationality, and speech act theory. The Australian school, on the other hand, is based more directly on M.A.K. Halliday’s systemic functional linguistics and has been applied more directly to secondary literacy instruction where students acquire specific institutional genres. Both schools emphasize the relationship between text and context while focusing on the social and ideological implications of genres. However, there is considerable debate as to how each camp approaches genre in practice. While there is not *always* a clear demarcation in terms of which strand pertains to secondary versus university-level writing instruction, the next section describes how the underlying theories of learning are more or less relevant to certain levels of students’ literacy development—as well as how different theories influence what types of literacy experiences teachers create for their students.

In theory, the North American school focuses more on the dynamic, provisional, “stabilized for now” (Freedman & Medway 1994, 9) nature of genres, emphasizing an exploratory, acquisition-based view of teaching genre and showing students how text is related to context. The Australian school, relying on a more linguistic, textual approach to genre, focuses primarily on explicit textual features. This school claims that teachers must master the genres of power and pass this knowledge down to students. For example, Martin’s “wheel model” entails a 3-part form of genre analysis in which teachers ask students to undergo sentence and clause analysis within several examples of a genre as a means to understanding both linguistic features and overall purpose (who wrote the

genre/for whom it was written). In phases two and three, students collaboratively create the genre and then construct an individual example (Cope & Kalantzis 1993). This model is systematic and shows a clear link between grammar and social purpose, which makes it effective in many post-secondary settings where students are just beginning to link grammar and structure to social purpose.

However, many scholars (Cope & Kalantzis 1993, Kress 1993) have criticized these types of approaches for making genres neat, fixed categories that students uncritically emulate. North American scholars (Freadman 1994; Freedman & Medway 1994) equate explicit genre instruction with prescriptionism and argue that it indoctrinates students into particular discourses without encouraging them to be critical. This type of teaching also has the potential to be exclusionary for students whose home discourse differs from forms of expression and language use in institutional genres. Therefore, as a means to be *critical* of genres *and* link them to larger social relations, Kress (1993) advocates discussing social purpose and function *before* analyzing textual features (23) and using analysis of textual features as a way into understanding *social relations* that shape the formation of a text—where genre is a social semiotic reflecting larger social relationships. I’ve found that students are often excited (and savvy) about talking about social purposes and functions of genres. I attribute this in part to the fact that they are university-level students—where in a secondary setting, students might have to start with textual features while the teacher more directly supplies the language to discuss how writing reflects social relationships. In later chapters, I consider what happens when students either talked about a genre’s function or its textual features first and what the implications are. However, it is also important to note that some generalized debates over

how to teach genre are actually linked to the issue of *where* students are in their literacy development. More published research like mine has the power to link more specific aspects of teaching to specific learning outcomes—making discussions more relevant to different settings.

For example, after understanding my own students' learning, I found that the divisions in terms of pedagogy are more oppositional in theory than they are in practice. I align with many leading genre scholars (Bawarshi 2003; Coe 1994; Devitt 2004; Swales 1990) who have argued that theorists and practitioners need to combine elements of both approaches if genre theory is to be used productively in practice. These scholars support explicit teaching methods but don't equate direct instruction with passing down generic formulas. For example, Devitt (2004) argues that we "mystify" writing if we don't teach genre (213). But even with explicit instruction, she argues that teachers must let students grapple with the messiness of genres (including conventions and variation). In addition, many scholars (Cope & Kalantzis 1993; Swales 1990) discuss the need for teachers to use their authoritative knowledge to scaffold genre lessons in an explicit, patterned, and predictable way—where grammar is presented as a social theory of language instead of a set of prescriptive rules. In this sense, the teacher is explicit, or transparent, about the *whys* of genre exploration, while still giving students exploratory analytic tools and using acquisition-based approaches when relevant.

Some scholars (Freedman 1994) make a strong case that acquisition must always *precede* critical awareness, while others (Bawarshi 2003, Devitt 2004, and Swales 1990) aim to combine explicit and more acquisition-based methods. Still others (Richardson 1994; Freedman 1994) discuss the need to combine elements of the Process movement

with genre pedagogy. As my work will show, at the FYW level, the so-called debates are often mitigated by the fact that university level students are at a level where they can comfortably respond to a variety of methods. That is, in practice, there is more of an overlap in theories of pedagogy—where a teacher can build on her own responsiveness and background with Process approaches, acquisition-oriented techniques, and explicit approaches to genre.

What *types* of genre are under study—and at what level—is also an important branch of the “acquisition vs. critical awareness” argument that RGS scholars don’t always attend to. For example, if a teacher asks students to understand the social situatedness of a research paper at the same time students *write* a research paper, the fact that they are both writing the genre and becoming critically aware of its conventions will influence the balance and order of instructional practices. On the other hand, since many genre approaches at the college level ask students to study more everyday, public, or disciplinary genres, becoming critically aware of language and function is a more primary objective than actually being able to write the genres (at least in a FYW course) since students aren’t necessarily *insiders* in those communities. In this sense, North American pedagogical practices which promote studying disciplinary genres, for example, will be more focused on critical awareness and language as social phenomenon than actual mastery of the genres. Again, linking everyday, public, and disciplinary genres to their social function in ethnographic research is more relevant to the FYW classroom than it is to secondary instruction.

Since my work shows how I created critical study of genres not typically associated with the FYW classroom and presents the outcomes of hybrid genre approaches, my

study is instrumental in responding to Richard Coe's (1994) claim that we need to "de-polarize discussion about the teaching of genre" (158). He claims that:

...the most important lesson for student writers to learn is that genres are socially real and that to participate effectively in a discourse community one usually must adapt to (or around) readers' generic expectations. They should learn to notice genres, to make sense of genres, even to renovate genres. (165)

Throughout my study, I show how my students went "meta" on the classroom genres they wrote—and also how they became critical ethnographers of public and disciplinary genres that they researched as observers, while presenting their insights through class activities and research paper writing. Depending on the situation, to use Coe's language, my hybrid approaches allowed students to notice, make sense of, and to renovate genres. In addition, my sustained reflection on the different outcomes that resulted from mixing pedagogical practices from different "camps" (sometimes intentionally, sometimes as a result of being responsive) allows me to show how so-called polarized practices work together.

Making students active explorers of genre: how to build on their experiences and uncover tacit genre knowledge

As in any type of literacy instruction, when helping students develop a genre metalanguage, the teacher must find ways to uncover what students do with genre and help them articulate how genres function in their own lives. Janet Giltrow and Michele Valiquette (1994) make the distinction between "practical consciousness" (writing in a

genre, the act of doing) and “discursive consciousness” (explaining the conventions or uses of a genre, metaknowledge) (47). Students might not be aware of the complexity of what they do in practice, but I’ve found that simply asking the right questions and allowing for impromptu moments creates a space where students can bring valuable genre knowledge to the table. Margaret Willard-Traub (2003) asks an important question: how can we teach genre in a way that allows students to (1) draw on their own material experiences; and (2) understand how their lived experiences are lived out through the materiality of language?

Drawing on students’ experiences captures their interest, and more importantly, helps them create a metalanguage to understand what they already do in practice. In this way teachers can help students uncover what they tacitly know about genre. As Freedman (1997) notes, teachers must constantly remind themselves of the “complexity and sophistication that our students bring to the table” (188). Freedman claims that the success of teaching genre hinges on teachers creating a rich discursive context where students learn language is a form of cultural mediation and the degree to which the teacher can use directed practices to build on students’ knowledge (188). Students often aren’t used to studying genre as a form of rhetorical, cultural action. As the teacher introduces them to meta-discussions of genre, it is crucial to create an atmosphere and develop activities where students feel comfortable talking about the genres they use in their own lives. Later sections of my study show such moments.

These meta-discussions also prepare students to engage with the form and functions of genres that teachers ask them to write. For example, when teachers introduce the personal narrative, students could attend to the genre at the same time they’re

constructing their stories. As Ruth Mirtz (1997) notes, school-based writing is often treated as a “nongenre” (193). We know we’re assigning a personal narrative, and *we* might be aware of this genre, but we fail to address the unique positioning of this kind of storytelling. In my teaching, I have started by creating open-ended conversations about what makes a good story and where students see/experience stories—in their speech encounters or in writing. My students have often cited spaces like the family unit, children’s books, novels, and social situations. They’ve also explored various functions: narrative can entertain, teach children values, connect families, and serve as an “in” for friends getting to know each other. I have then asked how the communities we belong to teach us how to tell stories, moving on to how and why authors write stories in different contexts. In this sense narrative is an umbrella rhetorical category, which shows its “face” in many different genres.

I then address the conventions classroom-based personal narrative—highlighting how its social use in the classroom (being shared with students to learn about each other/being graded by the teacher) influences how and what students write. We also discuss notions of classroom writing and “correctness,” which influences students’ use of dialect or slang in particular ways. Making these social processes explicit helps students see how genre both *responds to* and *builds* social relations and norms. Process-based techniques such as freewriting are still important. But at the same time, students learn how to understand narrative as a broad rhetorical device and see their own personal narratives as genres situated in the larger web of first-year writing.

In my scholarship I’ve found that when teaching discipline-specific genres, many teachers combine more process-based approaches that emphasize individual discovery

with genre-based approaches that stress the social situatedness of disciplinary writing. As Rochelle Kapp and Bongi Bangeni (2005) note, the exploration of self or “use of self in text” doesn’t always equal personal narrative; there can be a “discoursal self, which reflects awareness of a discipline’s communication as well as individual agency” (113). For example, when teaching a social science essay to FYW students, Kapp and Bangeni (2005) created a unit that combined process, explicit, and acquisition-based teaching methods. They had students freewrite about their selected topic, look at generic models, and analyze textual features of these models. The teachers then used directed activities that asked students to move beyond the language and consider how the citations worked (how they create an intellectual history for the discipline, how they affect the believability of the text and the voice of the author). Then, as the students developed their ideas through their own research, they used a Process-based prewriting activity called “mind mapping” to organize their ideas visually. Finally, students had the chance to think about how they would “enter” the genre of the social science essay (114-122). As with many genre-focused teaching methods, there is the danger that students could uncritically emulate the models. But raising questions about the purposes of a discipline and how writing and text practices create an intellectual history—combined with the use of multiple and diverse models—allows students to learn the social conventions of a genre while at the same time helping them see the discoursal self they are constructing through their individual use of language. When possible in particular writing courses, I view this multi-layered approach as extremely useful in terms of locating the self within disciplinary writing.

I have also reflected on the teaching practices of other scholars who use genre as a way into issues of discipline-specific identity. For example, Shane Peagler and Kathleen Blake Yancey (2005) use Kress's notion of critique and design to analyze resumes as rhetorical texts (154). Their students linked diverse examples of the genre to writers' field-specific identities, considered how the resumes functioned in different communities, and explored how textual features could teach them something about what was happening in the job market. In another published example, Sallyanne Greenwood (1994) provided an account of her students' collaborative, ethnographic experience conducting generic research at an actual workplace. Students not only studied the genres within a functioning business but had the chance to interview insiders to get at larger questions of experiential knowledge, motive, and power dynamics in the workplace. After students gained genre knowledge through on-site experience, they collaboratively wrote genres such as company recommendations, business memos, and work orders. Although there is somewhat of a performative aspect involved in students' own constructions of the genres since they aren't yet *working in* a business community, Greenwood noted how the experience helped her students see "writing as action" (242). Overall, the proliferation of published accounts of diverse types of genre learning provided me with practical ways to approach genre, as well as helped me complicate what it means to teach genre as rhetorical action. In Chapter 5, I show what happened when I built on my students' unique background knowledge as a way to build a genre metalanguage that prepared them for research into disciplinary genres.

Research projects: how genre-focused activities segue into multigenre or disciplinary research projects

Since many genre pedagogies culminate in multi-genre and disciplinary research projects, in this section I briefly describe how approaching genres rhetorically builds on traditional approaches to teaching multi-genre research projects. I then consider the implications and challenges of having students study disciplinary genres in the FYW classroom.

Multigenre writing projects

Once students have been studying genres as rhetorical action, multigenre writing projects (in the most productive sense) create a space for students to engage with more public, action-based genres. When researching a topic, they're thinking about what genres suit their communicative purposes. Although some criticize the performative aspect of multigenre projects since students often compose genres that would function in communities that they're not a part of, Freedman (1994) claims that "critical consciousness becomes possible only through performance" (206). Students might "know" a lot about genre, and this type of project allows them to actively experiment and combine genres in ways that traditional essay assignments do not. Many scholars (Mack 2006; Moulton 1999; Mountford 1999; Romano 2000) have also claimed that multigenre assignments allow students of diverse backgrounds to make meaning through various genres that are not always associated with academic writing. Roxanne Mountford (1999) (citing Shirley Brice Heath) claims that the composition classroom must allow students to engage in nontraditional modes of writing such as collaborative dialogues, arguments that

explore options, and even riddles (372). Also, Nancy Mack (2006) relates multigenre writing to class by arguing that since working class language users are “more metaphoric than literal, more personal and particular than abstract and universal” (57) that we ought to create assignments that “give students the discursive space to construct a powerful academic identity that legitimates and ethically represents their multiple identities” (60). These narrative-oriented means of writing challenge what Tom Romano (2000) calls “paradigmatic” thinking, thinking that is analytical, factual, and linear—and often valued in classroom writing.

Recent work in RGS, with its strong focus on genre as rhetorical action, has extended the multigenre conversation. Many genre scholars challenge pedagogies that impart multigenre writing assignments geared solely toward student experimentation. While Herrington and Moran (2005) applaud Romano for his support of student creativity and originality, they criticize him for not addressing the teacher’s role and for not linking genre to social action (6). This worthwhile criticism still begs the question: if we are teaching the notion of genres performing social actions, how do we deal with the performative aspects of multigenre writing? Students’ work (usually) isn’t performing social actions beyond the classroom, as many of the public genres they compose would usually do. With multigenre projects, it is important that teachers create ways to help students become critical of why they’re selecting particular genres, what conventions the genres have, and how they are either conforming to accepted conventions or trying to break generic boundaries. Furthermore, if a multigenre project is positioned after many genre-based activities and analysis of classroom-based genres that precede it, it can offer a valuable element to the genre equation. Students can figure out what they have to say

about a topic, then decide which genre would allow them to make the best argument. In addition, the choice in selecting genres allows students to write more public genres, using their own creativity as well as thinking about the social actions that particular genres perform.

Research into disciplinary genres

Since genre studies has focused so intently on linking genre to disciplinary communities, many scholars (Bawarshi 2003; Devitt 2004) argue that introducing students to the way genres both reflect and shape larger discourse communities has meaningful implications for their future disciplinary study and, more broadly, the way they come to understand how language operates. In discipline-specific research projects, students aim to find out how genres function in practice: they study the language of discourse communities, find out what genres are most important, and think about how and why genres work for specific communities. Students present their findings in research papers, and sometimes, students write/experiment with the discipline's genres. These types of projects invite students to understand the materiality of language—that is, how language is situated in experience. The purposes and logistics behind teaching these projects have created much debate, leaving the field with unanswered questions. To start, it is important to explore how this unit might look in practice. Since this type of project culminated my pedagogy and presents a main point of focus in my research, I will explain how *I* have conceptualized this type of project, as well as how different scholars have talked about it.

In the later stages of graduate school, I remember discussing this type of project and my interest in conducting student-centered research into ethnographic, disciplinary research projects in a colloquium of graduate students and faculty. One of my professors asked me how having students research disciplinary genres differed from “writing in the disciplines.” First, this type of research assignment stresses a meta awareness of the social workings of writing within some community. The goal is not for students to actually learn how to master the conventions as much as it is to link genres to communities of use and analyze how language is connected to larger community values. On a practical note, although some students decide to research disciplines—wherein they interview one of their major professors, collect student papers and/or writing assignments from classroom settings, and conduct library research into that discipline’s journals—the majority of students I’ve taught have actually gone out into some field. They interviewed a field insider and collected genres that got tangible things accomplished on the job.

Again, in neither case did students actually *write* those genres; rather, they got an entrance into different communicative practices of their field. They also learned how to talk about writing on a “meta” level since they had to rhetorically represent their research in their final papers. While writing in the disciplines is extremely valuable in its goal for students’ writing courses to align with major courses, FYW research into disciplinary genres, in the way that RGS scholars and I discuss it, has a more critical goal and far-reaching effect: to help students make the theoretical connection between language use (within genre) and a specific community. This knowledge can enhance their role not only in some future discipline but in other institutional and social structures as well as more informal personal and cultural communities. They will, no doubt, have to acquire the

genres through experience in those communities. However, this type of project makes students more active negotiators of language use and helps them develop a meta understanding of disciplinary communication practices—the goal being for students to develop a deeper understanding of *why* communities have ritualized practices (through genres) and therefore, giving them the tools to actively negotiate those practices in the future.

Some scholars have suggested that to introduce students to difficult concepts of situated language and discourse communities, teachers can begin by creating a homework assignment that asks students to identify the communities they belong to and then explain the communicative practices in that community (Peagler & Yancey 2005, 155). Students might come up with everyday speech events, slang, written genres, etc. The teacher can then ask students to think of these utterances as genre, probing them to consider how they learned these genres and how the specific contexts of use (social settings) influence how they communicate/the different identities they take on. While teachers may still have to create explicit ways to introduce students to the concept of discourse community, building on their experiences in various speech or other communities is a good place to start.

For graduate students who are actually entering disciplinary communities, Swales (1990) suggests that teachers hone in on day-to-day genres to see how scholarly correspondence works. Students could analyze genres such as memos, letters to dissertation committees, or letters to researchers. The teacher could offer models and also allow students to look at their work to see how their own writing works as “rhetoric in the world” (79-82). Graduate students gain experiential knowledge as they go, but helping

them develop discursive consciousness of seemingly everyday disciplinary genres would ease the burden of entering an unfamiliar discourse community. More importantly, these activities would help them situate themselves as more critical, active participants. This example supports Swales' conception that "...a genre-centered approach is likely to focus student attention on rhetorical action and on the organizational and linguistic means of its accomplishment" (82).

"Contexts of use": studying genres outside of their social settings

While graduate students actually participate in the discourse community, creating disciplinary research projects for FYW students is difficult since most students are not yet active members of their chosen disciplinary communities. Since relating text to context is the main goal of these research projects, one of the most important questions relating to pedagogy is how students can study and write genres outside of their "context of use." While some genre-focused methods have invited students to explore the generic dynamics of school-based genres (where students are actually participants *in* the context), post-secondary genre instruction has urged students to study more public genres or field-specific and work-related genres. Invoking Miller's claim that genres perform repeated social action, Ann Johns (2002) warns:

...if we choose to examine or write texts within our literacy classrooms from academic or professional genres created within communities of practice, we remove them from the authentic situations in which they have been employed and from the very individuals of who are community insiders. Texts then become artifacts for study rather than tools for achieving repeated social action. (239)

Johns seems to caution against treating genres as textual objects and implies that users best understand genres' functions by exploring them in their actual context of use.

This aligns with the recognition that in disciplinary discourse communities, genre knowledge is always situated and rarely explicitly taught; rather, this knowledge is “internalized unconsciously through participation in discourse communities” (Swales 1990, 11). The question that is raised is whether students actually learn about the genres (and values) of discourse communities if they're not actually *in* the communities acquiring the language habits. Freedman (1994), citing the importance of experiential knowledge, warns that teaching specialized genres too long before students actually participate in discourse communities is ineffective because there is too much of a gap in experience. In addition, even if students study genre as a way in to understanding the materiality of language, some scholars (Devitt, Bawarshi & Reiff 2003) note that the materiality idea doesn't always give insight into complex motives and relations, including ideology and power dynamics between people (559). My study includes the work of both novice insiders and freshman students who had no experience in their fields of study, which I used as a comparative element that helped me explore the implications of students studying genres outside of their communities of use. In this sense, my work responds to scholars questions of context of use and access to knowledge of insider motives.

In addition, with this type of ethnographic research, the teacher's role becomes an issue since students are writing about communities the teacher may not know much about. Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995) join Freedman (1994) in questioning the extent to which writing instructors can “teach” genres of different discourse communities that

they're not a part of (153). If disciplinary genre knowledge is "situated cognition embedded in disciplinary activities" (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 3), then it makes sense that someone who doesn't participate in a community can't teach students about the community.

However, as I established earlier, since the whole point of genre-focused pedagogies (especially at the university level) is to engage students in a messy process of exploration where teachers aren't passing down generic formulas, the teacher as an "authority figure" is no more of an issue with this approach than it is with any other. Teachers can scaffold genre-based activities throughout the semester, preparing students for their own ethnographic research. In addition, as Chapter 3 will show, during the disciplinary research project I taught, I found that creating a lesson discussing my experiences interacting with and writing genres in my own discourse community was a valuable way for me to use my more expert meta-language to show students the relationship between form and function in a specific community. As Herrington and Moran (2005) remind us, teachers and students each bring "particular genre sets" (249) into the classroom. As I did, to help students understand the idea of genre – genre set – genre system – activity system, teachers can create directed lessons in which they "go meta" on their own experiences writing specialized genres within different communities. Then, the focus is on language and writing as social semiotic, not necessarily mastery of disciplinary genres.

I also required my students to interview disciplinary insiders to ask questions like how members learn the genres and how different genres function. This lends itself to a more material (vs. linguistic or textual) approach to genre and allows students to interact

with someone who actually has experience acquiring and using the genres. Swales (1990) reminds us that a single genre may have multiple purposes, where some are intended and some are not—depending on the audience and context in which they’re read (47); for example, reading a legal narrative would be very different for an outsider than it would for someone trained to read legal documents (73). Since textual analysis cannot always give insight into social motive, talking to community insiders is essential. Just as I had discussed motives and functions of different genres in my field, I encouraged students to ask these types of questions of their interviewees.

As many scholars have noted, insider knowledge is crucial because when analyzing just textual features, an outsider can never fully understand a writer’s intentions and purposes. John Dixon (1994) claims that if we adopt Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism then we must remember that we can never *hear* a writer deliver their words out loud (and hear intonation, sarcasm, etc), nor can we be exactly sure where a writer starts from (level of knowledge, other conversations, worldview, etc.). This reminds us that (1) texts pursue many functions and we might not be aware of all of them; and (2) it is hard to be sure exactly what a writer has in mind (149). The function and meaning of a text hinges on multiple, often hidden factors. Since talking to an insider uncovers these dynamics, I created this type of meta-discussion before the interviews and during subsequent class discussions. As Swales claims—and as later chapters of my work will reveal—the fact that generic purposes may be hard to get at is itself of considerable heuristic value: “Stressing the primacy of purpose may require the analyst to undertake a fair amount of independent and open-minded investigation, thus offering protection against a facile classification based on stylistic features and inherited beliefs...” (46). In my own

teaching, for example, having students study a business mission statement from a pharmaceutical company engaged them with discussions of primary and secondary purposes—even though I hadn’t directly used this terminology. On their own, students linked the genre to issues of profit, work morale, and community-specific roles, which often led to discussion of the multiple motives behind the genre.

Of course nothing compares to the experiential knowledge of acquiring genre knowledge inside of a community, but the combination of directed activities, interviews with insiders, and textual analysis helps students see how genres perform social actions. In my experiences, I’ve found that even if students don’t end up in the community they have studied, they are still engaging with the materiality of language—examining language as it is used in lived experience. So whether they’re engaging with public and creative genres (in multigenre projects) or disciplinary genres, students are somewhat removed from the actual communities of practice. But students are learning the important lesson that language is socially real. This doesn’t happen in writing classrooms that assign only essays or narratives without constantly attending to the concept of genre and positioning genres in socially real “spaces”—whether it’s a classroom, a newspaper, or a disciplinary community.

Lingering questions: the “practice” of recognizing that genres aren’t fixed

One of the most important lingering questions in regards to genre pedagogy goes back to how we define genres. As Johns (2002) asks: if we agree that genres aren’t fixed, then how do we teach them and keep pedagogy current? (237). More specifically, if

scholars agree that common conventions characterize a genre but that there is always creativity in language use, then an important avenue of research lies in exploring what types of variation retain both function and appropriateness (Bishop & Ostrom 1997, citing Devitt; Bazerman 2004). While these are important questions that are often applied broadly to discussion of theory and practice within RGS, with approaches like mine that seek to make student active negotiators of genres— rather than mastering genres that the teacher passes down—teachers can easily keep a genre pedagogy current by using the right heuristic questions, having students come up with their own practical examples, and helping students become aware of what they already do with genres in their own lives.

In addition, my activities often involved questions like, “what are the implications of writers deviating from the norm?” As Chapter 3 will show, for instance, my students were often very articulate about the differences between deviating from the norm in a workplace genre verses a creative magazine article or song lyrics. In this sense, if students are constantly “going meta” on genres, the challenge of keeping pedagogy current rests mostly on whether or not the teacher creates the space for turning both classroom and public genres “on their heads”—that is, having students become active negotiators of the hows and whys of writing practices, not just uncritically adopting generic conventions.

My pedagogy: where I fit in and what space I create for genre exploration

In line with the North American strand of pedagogical scholarship, the foundational pedagogical theory I’ve built on is Devitt’s (2004) notion of a pedagogy of *genre*

awareness—a state where students become able to discern between constraints and choices and consider “how the forms of a genre reflect the contexts within which the genre functions” (198). In this sense my particular goals within each activity revolved around the social functions and contexts of genres, while textual features were used a means to explore these ideas. Studying the actions that genres perform gives writing more of a use-value vs. a product-oriented approach to writing. In my class we collectively studied genres such as wedding announcements, rap videos, newspaper editorials, even our own syllabus; we also studied disciplinary genres such as business memos, meeting minutes, and academic journal articles. We’d ask: what does this genre do? How does it somehow define this community or culture? How does the individual write it? Aside from these foundational questions that I developed by reading diverse scholars’ work, I built more directly on Bawarshi’s (2003) pedagogical suggestions—in terms of gaining theoretical ideas for pedagogical practices, as well as using specific, more “everyday” genres that she recommended for exploration in the FYW classroom.

Within my version of a *pedagogy of genre awareness*, I incorporated the following types of learning experiences into my classroom:

- reading rhetorically and situating readings within social contexts
- open, individual explorations of genres: creating individual assignments where students critically explored genres they were interested in
- collaborative explorations of genres: analyzing genres as a class and creating group examples of different genres
- extending analytic tools to a mix of everyday, academic, and public genres
- helping students become more aware of their own writing processes and reasons for composing. More specifically,

- having students compose many “standard” FYW genres but at the same time attending to the “wheres and whys” of these genres
- giving students the opportunity to experiment with and combine genres (i.e. multigenre project, multimedia project)
- combining elements of process based pedagogy and genre approaches to help students explore the idea that genres have action both within the text and outside of the text
- giving students a sense of freedom in terms of what types of genres they picked for analysis with disciplinary research

Throughout my pedagogy, and especially in the early stages, an important consideration I had to keep in mind was that although *I* could define a genre first and foremost by the action it performed, I could do this in part because of my extended study into language awareness and discourse practices. While scholars disagree about the degree to which genre should be defined by its textual features or action it performs, I side with scholars (Coe 1994; Kress 1993) who define genre first and foremost based on the action—or in my words, the *movement*—it accomplishes. However, since I see any genre having both internal and external movement, I also see the importance of exploring textual features as a means of understanding larger social purposes, especially when students are beginning their development of a genre metalanguage or exploring unfamiliar genres. Kress (1993) contends that we must pay attention to the social purposes and functions of a text *before* analyzing textual features (23). However, in practice, I don’t believe this is possible with genres that students are unfamiliar with. And if we ask students to challenge the boundaries of their knowledge of language, it is important to explore genres that students have no experience with. Therefore, I had to remain cognizant of the fact that students had less experience.

In this sense, whether or not we started an activity by exploring either textual features or connecting the genre to some community depended on whether or not students were familiar with the genre. I believe a teacher's flexibility and use of different analytic tools that are more or less relevant to different genres is more important than a rigid theoretical belief about the order of analysis. In addition, I align most with scholars (Coe 1994; Bawarshi 2003; Devitt 2004) who argue that students must explore the messiness of genres, with no expected outcomes. This basic foundation that genres are "loose" and that language use is always creative helps students see that individuals change genres, which changes convention, which influences discourse communities and larger activity systems. Therefore, our teaching practices must reflect this dynamic approach to genre.

As a brief glimpse into my foundational goals reveals, I did not have students analyze genres in order to adopt forms. Students' exploration of genres not typically associated with the writing classroom was meant to give insight into critical approaches to language. However, with the genres that students did write, I also kept a consistent focus on the genre—having students consider how the "space" of the FYW classroom influenced their composing practices. In this sense, I imparted that our classroom was a social space and asked students how their writing practices were influenced by this space. Again, I aligned with Coe's (1994) claim that "the most important lesson for student writers is that genres are socially real... They should learn to notice genres, to make sense of genres, even to renovate genres" (165). Simply having students critically analyze "everyday genres" that they took for granted provided a different level of critical language awareness that, up until I had taught genre, I had yet to see in my teaching. In addition, providing a more focused, critical lens into their own writing helped students

understand how their identity as writers within the space of a FYW classroom was influenced by a complex set of factors.

The impact of genre on writing instruction: how might RGS have an impact on Rhetoric and Composition Studies?

The theoretical tenets of rhetorical genre theory, along with the reflections on student learning offered throughout this dissertation, reveal how genres are both functional and epistemological. As Bawarshi notes, genres “help us function within particular situations at the same time they help shape the ways we come to know these situations” (339). So where genres were once thought to be regulative, exercising power over writers, rhetorical genre studies focus on the individual as an agent of change. Swales (quoting Homely) (1990) notes that genre approaches are often critiqued for being ideological; however, if we allow sufficient space for the questioning and critiquing of genres, then writing teachers “may come to see that genres as instruments of rhetorical action can have generative power” (92). Far from making the teaching of writing prescriptive, genre approaches have the potential to help students learn the social *through* writing (as opposed to just writing about the social).

But the question remains: even if students learn about culture and community discursive practices, do they become more active writers by studying genres? Does genre awareness necessarily translate into better writing? After all, the subject of FYW is writing, not genre. In addition, many colleagues have asked a critical and important question: how do genre approaches to teaching differ from rhetorical approaches to teaching? Since this is a multi-dimensional question which presents considerable overlap,

I will address what I perceive to be the main differences here. First, within English studies, *genre* has always been used a classificatory device to differentiate and categorize different types of writing. In this sense genre is a more specific, conventionalized instantiation of rhetoric, which applies broadly to situated communication. In this sense genre is a subset of rhetoric, although from this perspective, it is important to note that rhetorical devices, or specific communicative strategies, are located *within genre*. For example, if narrative is broadly considered a type of rhetoric, and more specifically a rhetorical device, it is clear that it shows its “face” in different genres—e.g., a personal anecdote at the beginning of an academic journal article, a description of an encounter in an ethnographic research paper, or a “remember when” type of anecdote in a letter to a loved one. The fact that rhetorical devices are located within genres, combined with the fact RGS stresses the teaching of genre as *rhetorical action* (Swales 1990), speak to the overlap between *rhetoric* and *genre*.

One main difference between the concepts, and therefore, how the different lenses would affect literacy instruction is RGS’ strong focus on linking genres to communities of use and larger activity systems—and more specifically, asking how conventions *reflect* communities of use. Although both rhetorical and genre approaches focus on social action, RGS more directly links the idea of typified writing conventions to community discourse practices. For instance, studying the rhetoric of some community might include a spectrum of discourse practices including writing, speech, dress, or artifacts. Studying the genres of a particular community would yield more of a focus on how community values influence typified writing conventions, as well as how writing conventions create values.

In line with current approaches to genre pedagogy, Swales (1990) claims that a genre approach to literacy instruction can facilitate mastery of rhetoric in ways that other approaches cannot. He writes: “There is independent value, therefore, in the small-scale rhetorical mastery effects that a genre approach is particularly and peculiarly able to foster” (234). Theoretically, both rhetoric and genre “do” something—that is, approaching some communication as a piece of rhetoric or as a genre might yield similar results since both approaches would not treat the text as an isolated work but would invoke the social aspect of the writing. But as Miller (1994) notes, although many rhetorical devices are located within genre (e.g., narrative, argument), it is genre that has “pragmatic power as social action” (75). Studying a genre rhetorically necessitates more of a focus on how social practices influence typified writing conventions and how users both re-create and challenge these conventions.

To bridge the pedagogical gap and forefront what happens when students study genres rhetorically, many scholars have made a call for classroom-based research. As Devitt (1993, cited in Coe, 77) notes: “Although some composition researchers have brought genre theory into university classrooms, it has been empirical researchers in professional communication who have most profited from and most developed Miller’s linking of genres to social contexts” (Devitt, cited in Coe et. al., 77). Other scholars (Freadman 1994; Devitt 1993, 2004) have made similar calls for genre-focused pedagogical research. Teachers can do ethnographic research in classrooms to understand students’ (with different worldviews and levels of textual knowledge) different understandings of genres. Devitt (1993) claims that situated research will help us “discover the most effective techniques of translating out genre theory into better writing

instruction and then into practice” (583). Perhaps more pedagogical research and testimonies of practice will highlight the generative power of teaching genre. And on a macro level, more research into the teaching of genre might necessitate a shift in the way writing teachers are educated (Berkenkotter and Huckin 1995), forging a closer link between RGS and Rhetoric and Composition Studies.

As scholars, we are keenly aware of how language mediates social experience and allows us to participate in particular communities. Thaiss and Myers Zawacki (2005), in their ethnographic research with professors of various disciplines, found that most teachers were aware of disciplinary generic conventions and were conscious of the choice of accepting the conventions or enacting alternative discourse practices. However, most of the informants rarely engaged students in these discussions (93). As teachers of writing and rhetoric, we are in a unique position to help students develop a metalanguage for realizing the generative and/or constraining power of genre. In doing so, we can better prepare them to be active writers in the genres they will engage with throughout college and in their future professions. As Robert Brooke and Dale Jacobs (1997) note: “As writers, our use of genre provides the social grammar that allows us to negotiate a self” (217). I hope my students’ unique learning experiences and my reflection on their learning will add a rich dimension to conversations about the implications of genre pedagogy.

Where my work fits in

Since my teaching built specifically on several North American scholars and included elements of explicit, inductive, and exploratory approaches to genre, as well as Process-based teaching methods, my reflections on pedagogy apply to several different strands of pedagogical scholarship within RGS. Each chapter provides insight into both individual and collective student learning, and in the final chapter my work culminates into two sections: “Observations about Learning” and “Implications for Teaching.” In these sections, I explore the following focus areas and questions:

- how students’ exploration of *genre sets* related to their engagement with the conventions of the genre they were writing in (research paper)
- how students approached the idea of *variation and flexibility* in genres; and
- how my students’ learning demonstrated the *tension/overlap between rhetoric and genre* and how their learning urged me to question my own theories of genre
- *how much metalanguage is necessary within this genre framework and how explicit, or transparent, do I have to be in helping students connect concepts?*
- *What are the limitations of having students study genres outside of their communities of use?*
- how does the tension between *rhetoric* and *genre* (in theory and practice) influence our theories of genre? How do our conceptualizations influence our practice?

Some of these issues were born out of data analysis, which—since they are based out of extended reflection of practice—offer new strands of conversation within RGS. The question of students studying genres outside of their community of use is one of the most current critical pedagogy questions within RGS; in regards to this question, my work

directly responds to what others have said about practice. In this sense, I hope understanding my students' learning will offer a student-centered, multi-faceted response to questions in a way that other scholars have not been able to answer them. Providing insight into all of the above questions situates my work most prominently within RGS. However, as I note in sections of the culminating chapter, much of my work applies to Rhetoric and Composition studies. I hope readers will find that even teachers who create *some* focus on genre—or writing as social semiotic—will benefit from my findings and the questions I raise in regards to language learning and writing instruction.

Chapter 2

Introduction

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) note that qualitative research often works towards “the hopes, needs, goals, and promises of a free democratic society” (4). At the heart of much qualitative research is the goal to make productive knowledge, knowledge that works towards the lofty ideal of doing “social good” one move at a time. In its most basic sense, productive knowledge making seeks to *do* something in the world—to impart some level of change or at least call for change. Productive knowledge making still relies on theory, although this type of knowledge strives to re-define the status of theory and challenge where theory is “made.” While the classroom is often viewed as a place where we enact theory or initiate what we believe to be good in teaching, I align with scholars (Lee 2000; Odell 1990; Okawa 1999; Ray 1993; Reither 1990) who advocate research perspectives that create opportunities for sustained reflection on our teaching—and more specifically, emphasize the need to integrate students’ sustained reflection into this inquiry—in order to make classroom practice a site of theory-making and disciplinary inquiry. In this sense, the research is action-oriented, or productive, because its purpose is to influence both theories of learning and ensuing practice.

Because I am interested in writing pedagogy, and since scholars within RGS (Freadman 1994; Devitt 2004; Berkenkotter & Huckin 1995) have called for more situated pedagogical research, I designed a study to find out what students learn through a pedagogy of genre awareness (despite my initial goals or what I believed to be “good” in teaching). In addition, since the notion of writing research as disciplinary inquiry has

remained more popular in theory than practice, especially at the post-secondary level (Reither 1990), my work offers a methodological model of productive knowledge-making through sustained reflection and analysis of various forms of data. In this chapter I start by articulating my research questions and explaining the purposes and goals of teacher research. I then describe how the case study methodology has allowed me to approach my research questions before providing full descriptions of my case—including descriptions of the institutional context surrounding my teaching, demographics of students, and specific methods of data collection.

Research questions

My umbrella research question is “what does a pedagogy of genre awareness teach students about culture, the social dimensions of language, and community discourse practices?” While the long list of scholarly perspectives that I described in chapter one have helped me develop my views on language and writing instruction, I was most inspired by scholars (Bawarshi 2003; Devitt 2004) who offered actual classroom practices/ways to engage students with genre. These scholars most directly influenced my pedagogy, and subsequently—as I imparted a genre approach to teaching writing—I felt inclined to provide more situated student reflection in my research. In this sense my core research question builds more directly on the pedagogical perspectives of Bawarshi and Devitt.

To address my main research question, I collected data that would help me answer the following sub-questions:

- What did students learn about language and writing when they engaged with classroom activities related to genre?
- Which activities did students think were most useful in their explorations of genre? Why? What did the process of developing a metalanguage look like (in practice and reflection?)
- What did students learn by researching disciplinary genres?

While various types of data helped me explore these sub-questions in relation to *my own* version of genre pedagogy, questions one and three were questions I had been exploring in my graduate scholarship. Based on my experiences teaching in the past, I knew that teaching writing through genre changed the landscape of the FYW classroom in tangible ways. For example, I knew that having students conduct ethnographic research into disciplinary genres would differ—both practically and rhetorically—from their experiences, say, researching a topic such as gun control. However, I made the questions as open-ended as possible in order let my data in a sense “speak for itself,” to remain open to new perspectives and untapped knowledge. In this sense, my sub-questions were both born out of my ongoing interest in theories of language and learning within RGS and more specifically instantiated through data I collected in relation to my own pedagogy and students’ reflection.

During data analysis (after my year-long data collection process), as I began to see different types of data complementing or contradicting each other, I developed the following procedural questions to help me explore my core research questions:

- How did the way students “talk” about language compare with the way they “wrote” about language/genre? What does this comparison tell me about what

genre learning can look like? How can it inform my approaches toward genre instruction?

- What themes/contradictions emerged from gathering reflection from diverse students?
- How will I interpret these themes within larger genre theories, pedagogical discussions, and accounts of student learning within RGS?

The Implications behind teacher research

As a foundation for my research, I draw on the notion that studying small pieces of learning can lead to larger change—within classrooms and within the discipline. Ruth Ray (1993) designates teacher research “action research” and claims it is both “intellectual and political in its impetus” (49). It is intellectual in its aim to re-shape pedagogy and theory by engaging with practice. It is political insofar as teachers are insisting that their situated experiences and local knowledge production become the basis of larger educational theorizing. As with most types of productive knowledge making, teacher research does not deny the importance of theory but instead re-defines where and how theory is made. Ray notes that an overarching goal of teacher research is to “end the domination of theory over practice” (27). Teacher researchers do this by examining the micro levels of interaction that occur within their classrooms. By designing research that rests on students’ and my own sustained reflection, I gained insight into how and why I teach what I do and found a voice to speak on pedagogical theory-making within genre studies. This extended reflection will fill in the pedagogical “gap” that keeps genre pedagogies from finding their way into composition classrooms. In addition, examples of genre pedagogies in action have the possibility of changing the institutional landscape of

the FYW classroom and adding a rich pedagogical dimension to Rhetoric and Composition Studies.

With its strong focus on writing instruction, Rhetoric and Composition Studies has long valued localized teacher research accounts of students' literacy experiences. In this sense, my research is not only a way into understanding our work as writing teachers but a way of adding to a rich rhetorical tradition within the discipline. Scholars (Berlin 1990, 2003; Lee 2000; Odell 1990; Wall 2004) position this type of productive knowledge-making as central to our work as writing teachers *and* scholars. By combining research with teaching, we not only work to improve practice for students but we also create new ways of *coming to know*. As Susan Wall (2004) contends, we must begin to understand teacher research as an "interpretive repertoire" and "rhetorical tradition"; in other words, we must position teacher research as not only a body of knowledge but also a practice of writing (290). By "writing their experiences," teacher researchers uncover deeper knowledge about their own teaching as well as provide models for other scholars to engage in similar types of research. This scholarship, that is to say, has the possibility of engaging teachers with theories of language and writing (the content of the piece of scholarship). Just as importantly, though, extended teacher research accounts such as mine provide models of *pedagogy in action*—adding to a teacher research community and implicitly making the argument that practice and student reflection can produce change.

Viewing the teaching of writing as a mode of inquiry has taken teacher research, especially at the post-secondary level, in a new direction. Amy Lee's (2000) recent work in critical pedagogy has urged the field to study the teaching of writing as a critical

process. While I am extending the teacher researcher perspective into genre studies, I align with Lee's research perspective in that she argues that we must be willing to "see what happens" when we teach, not necessarily view the classroom as a place to test theory or see if pre-determined outcomes are reached. While we may equip ourselves with theories of learning or ways to teach writing that we believe are useful, when we ask our students *what* they are learning, we uncover insight into language and writing that we can't know by reading their papers or watching them learn in our classrooms. In the words of Lee, "...idealized and generalized visions of writing pedagogy and our (reflections on) attempts to enact those visions within local and specific sites—are the mutually necessary, interdependent components of pedagogy" (2). By basing much of my research on student reflection, I uncovered deeper knowledge of how enacting particular genre-based teaching practices affects students' literacy learning. Although I charted the direction for my research (including research avenues and data collection procedures) and had the final say in what types of knowledge I chose to present, my research was contingent on student feedback. My students helped me create knowledge, and in this sense, their participation provided me with a sense of negotiated authority when speaking on pedagogical issues within genre studies.

My goal to create disciplinary knowledge (vs. just focusing on my own individual practice) stems from (1) my belief (and experience) that students teach us just as much about pedagogy as theories of learning do; (2) my frustration with the lack of extended research into university-level writing instruction; and (3) my hope that published teacher research models become more common in graduate rhetoric programs—leading more students to not only question their own (and often newly forming) beliefs about teaching

but encouraging them to explore the methodological practices and challenges of conducting teacher research. As Ray (1993) notes, teacher research “brings to light the dynamic tension between action (teaching) and research (knowledge construction), blurring traditional boundaries and challenging old assumptions that teaching and research, acting and theorizing, are contradictory aims” (52). With more published accounts, the traditional dichotomy between teaching and scholarship would become less rigid, which I believe has both individual and institutional implications.

For example, Ray (1993) notes that the opportunity for graduate students to engage with *teaching as inquiry* depends on the degree to which an institution either supports or impedes a “teacher research oriented program” (158). Many programs do expose students to situated accounts of students learning. However, as more triangulated studies into teaching are produced, graduate programs could create more of a focus on the *methodology* of conducting scholarship into teaching. In this sense, graduate students would read the scholarship not only for the content; they would also see a model of how to conduct an in-depth study into teaching. Therefore, graduate students would be more inclined to see their own teaching as a form of inquiry, and perhaps more students would pursue scholarship related to teaching.

These larger levels of change are of course dependent on the degree to which teacher researchers conduct and present their research. Many scholars (Fleisher & Fox 2004; Ray 1993; Wall 2004) claim there is a need for teacher research methodology to be self-reflexive and critical so that this type of research can clearly articulate its goals and raise awareness of these goals to the field. This entails the sort of critical methodology that is at the center of productive knowledge making; teacher researchers go beyond

merely telling other teachers “what happened.” Wall (2004), like Lee, asks: “...the guiding question must not only be ‘Does it work?’ but also ‘What are we working toward?’” (305). In this way teacher researchers question the assumptions behind their research questions and the ways in which they conduct and represent their research. According to Wall (2004), representing the process of knowledge-building (including informal notes, conversations, and other writing) has become a convention in rhetorical representations of teacher research (296). Through the representation of methodological practice, teacher researchers question the assumptions behind their research questions and practices; they also rhetorically legitimize their research.

The need for legitimization lies in the reality that much teacher research has been seen as “un-generalizable” or, in some cases, is not considered rigorous or theoretical enough. Louise Phelps (1991) equates research into teaching as disciplinary knowledge when it “makes a public claim on others for attention, belief, or appropriation, rather than merely announcing private experiences” (869). In this sense teacher research is rhetorical—not merely practical—in that it “seeks generalization through representation and communication in expressive forms” (869). Rendering their own experiences through narrative accounts and engaging with inductive, ethnographic methodological practices allows teacher researchers to create local *and* disciplinary knowledge.

To create this type of public knowledge, teacher researchers must always position their work within larger systems of meaning—be it an educational system, a university program, or even larger cultural approaches and beliefs about language and learning. Therefore, I have decided to shape and contain my research on genre pedagogy by using the case study tradition as a more specific instantiation of teacher research. This

methodology is a productive avenue into pedagogy because it focuses on studying some phenomenon in a bound timeframe, encourages diverse forms of data collection to pursue multiple sides to singular questions, and emphasizes the consideration of contextual factors that affect meaning gleaned from the “case” (Creswell 1994; Stake 2003). By defining the general goals and purposes of case study research, moving into the challenges that this type of research presents, and finally, outlining the specific institutional and classroom contexts for my study, I will bind my study and explain the procedures and rationales behind data collection.

Case study methodology

The epistemological question behind all case study research is what can be learned by examining a singular case (Stake 135). Since there are countless avenues of possible research within any classroom, and since I’m interested in studying different aspects of genre pedagogy, the case study methodology has helped me frame and contain my research. To answer my guiding research question “what does a pedagogy of genre awareness teaches students about culture, the social dimensions of language, and community discourse practices?”, I had to look at my students’ *process* of acquiring a genre metalanguage. To this end, I used multiple forms of data to look across two semesters of teaching in which I enacted similar, but not identical, pedagogies. My “case” involves two semesters of teaching; in this chapter I will present the differences between the two semesters in terms of student demographics and differences across major

projects. (Chapter 3 will offer a more detailed description of the different class atmospheres and direction of activities). Since the pedagogies were different, in terms of both practice and outcomes, I bound my study by a focus on *curriculum*. I am pursuing the same research questions by studying both semesters, and I am using the same forms of data collection. So while I will represent the differences across the semesters, keeping my focus on *curriculum* will help me explore the same research questions over a prolonged period of time. I studied two semesters of teaching because (1) it allowed me to reflect on a wider range of literacy experiences; and (2) it helped me see how students engaged with my first version of the pedagogy in comparison to the second version, which I re-shaped after teaching the first semester.

Since I am studying my own teaching, my case study draws on ethnographic forms of data collection. Like ethnographic researchers, I am intimately involved with the research site, participants, and process of collecting data and constructing knowledge. In addition, my research will draw heavily on the ethnographic notion of “thick description”—as I undertake rich descriptions of various factors that affected my students’ literacy experiences, including the institutional context surrounding my teaching, the different layers of classroom activities and student learning, and the ways students’ diverse backgrounds and languages affected their learning. However, case study research “illustrates how the concerns of theorists and researchers are manifest in the case” (Stake 140-141), which differs from ethnographers’ focus on letting a site “tell its own story.” While my goal was to learn from my students, I did not enter the site completely open or let the site tell its own story as much as I selected particular types of data collection and research questions that helped me explore current pedagogical issues

within genre studies. However, since I also explored unexpected avenues as I made sense of data, in addition to the fact that (like ethnographers) I was not doing experimental research or testing a pre-determined outcome, my work both aligns with and builds on ethnographic forms of knowledge production.

The knowledge I am producing is local and situated, as I see my classroom as a rich site of inquiry. However, I want my work to transfer to other contexts. That is, even though I'm researching a genre approach to literacy instruction, I want readers to use my work as a way to complicate pedagogical issues and think about (or re-think) their own teaching and the possibilities in the first-year writing classroom. Those who already use genre might engage more deeply with their teaching practices. Those who don't might compare (or mesh) genre approaches to literacy instruction with their own approaches. In this sense, I classify my research as a combination of what Stake (2003) defines as an *intrinsic* case study—which is undertaken because the researcher wants an understanding of a particular case (as opposed to building a theory)—and an *instrumental* case study—where the researcher examines a case in order to make generalizations and gain insight into an issue (136-137). My research seems more instrumental than intrinsic because in trying to understand what happened when my students engaged with genre, I can respond to lingering pedagogical questions within genre studies as well as open up new possibilities for research. Stake notes that there is no clear line separating the intrinsic and the instrumental, but rather a “zone of combined purpose” (137). While I don't consider my students' individual learning experiences representative, I present a wide range of literacy experiences to reflect different learning outcomes. John Creswell (1998) calls this process “maximum variation” and claims it is a way to display multiple, even

contradictory perspectives about a case (120). In this sense, I believe my work is both immediately practical (to reflections on my own teaching) but also instrumental in terms of showing possibilities of what might happen with a similarly diverse group of basic writers.

The extent to which any case can be seen as “generalizable” continues to be one of the main challenges of presenting case study research. Stake (2003) claims that “most academic researchers are supportive of the study of cases only if there is a clear expectation of generalizability to other cases” (140). Whether or not knowledge can be transferred to other contexts has been a source of debate in many forms of qualitative research that aim to create productive (or practical) knowledge that is grounded in situated practices, not in universal structures or abstract Theories (Porter and Sullivan 1997). And since teacher research is both politically and epistemologically aligned with research perspectives that value contextualized and “bottom-up” knowledge production (Ray 1993), teacher researchers work within the tension of trying to create local and practical knowledge, while at the same time adding to larger educational theorizing. It seems that questioning what it really means to say something is “generalizable,” as well as how important it is that a researcher make *explicit* connections to other contexts are two important components of the issue.

First, we know that a piece of knowledge is always situated within some system, or larger web of knowledge. In this sense, as Stake claims, all case study research can be seen “as a small step toward grand generalization” (140), where “generalization can be an unconscious process for both the researcher and the reader” (146). For example, in my inquiry into what students learned about language when they studied genre, I made

implicit connections to other contexts. I may not have referenced other ways to teach writing (say, critical pedagogy or service learning), but teachers who work within these parameters are able to make comparisons and connections when they read my work. This raises the question of how explicit a researcher must be when presenting her findings. While comparing a genre pedagogy to another FYW pedagogy—or comparing my version of genre pedagogy to another version—might allow for a more direct contrast, I believe different readers engage with the implicit process of comparing my work to their own beliefs/ideas about what it means to teach writing. Questions of generalizability, and whether or not we should even strive for it, reveal how “case studies are of value for refining theory...as well as helping to establish the limits of generalizability” (Hays 2004). I see intrinsic value in reflecting on my teaching in a systematic way. I also hope the knowledge I built from my case will transfer to other educational and scholarly *spaces* (i.e., other classrooms and theories of teaching writing).

My Case

Institutional context

All participants were students in a Preparation for College Writing course that I taught at Michigan State University. As of August 2007, MSU had a total of 46,045 students: 36,072 undergraduate students and 9,973 graduate and professional students. Women make up 54% of the population, while men make up 46%. The racial/ethnic make-up of the entire student population is 7.4% African American, 5.1% Asian/Pacific

Islander, 2.8% Chicano/Other Hispanic, 0.7 percent Native American, and 84% Caucasian. Freshman students who are admitted to MSU represent the middle 50 percent of their respective high school graduating classes—having maintained a 3.4-3.8 grade point average and earned a combined SAT score of 1020-1240 or an ACT composite score of 23-27 (<http://newsroom.msu.edu/snav/184/page.htm>). The Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures designs and implements first-year composition courses (“Tier I” writing courses). There are 8 available Tier I courses (WRAC 110-150) with thematic focuses such as race and ethnicity, women in America, men in America, American radical thought, and the Evolution of American Thought (which represents the majority of sections and allows instructors to create their own thematic focuses). WRAC describes the aims of these writing courses:

The overall goal of Tier I writing is to prepare students for the kinds of writing they will be called upon to produce academically, professionally, personally and publicly...In our courses, students receive instruction and practice in drafting, revising and completing papers of various lengths, based upon sources that challenge them to seek new information and to reflect upon its relevance to their own observations and experiences... Necessarily, our courses are reading courses as much as they are writing courses, and these two activities tend to permeate each other. Ultimately, they are courses in critical thinking as students learn to question and connect, to analyze and synthesize.
(http://www.msu.edu/unit/wrac/t1/t1_index.html)

Students in the courses produce a minimum of 6,000 finished words of instructor-evaluated writing. Instructors are expected to distribute this word requirement in assignments including in-class essays, out-of-class essays, research or documented source papers, or essay examinations. Students must earn a 2.0 to move on to the Tier II writing requirement, which they complete within their selected majors.

While the majority of incoming freshman test into Tier I writing, PCW is designed for students who need extra development before entering Tier I writing courses. PCW is a one semester, four credit course (three credits from classroom meetings, one credit from computer lab time). MSU's website of course descriptions describes PCW as a course designed to help students improve basic composition skills such as pre-writing, drafting, revising, documenting sources, and using proper mechanics. However, graduate assistants and professors who teach the course emphasize the same principles as those described in relation to Tier I writing. In my professional experiences at MSU (teacher orientations, ongoing discussions with colleagues, and experience teaching both PCW and WRAC 150), I have found that knowledge of diverse discourse practices, expertise building on the strengths of PCW students, and ability to integrate diverse ways of learning into a single classroom are the main components that separate teaching PCW from teaching WRAC 110-150—while expectations and class assignments are similar. In this sense, students who take PCW are challenged in ways similar to students in Tier I writing courses.

The presence of diverse forms of learning in any PCW course stems from the diversity of enrolled students. The majority of students who test into this course tend to come from underprivileged backgrounds in the United States or from foreign countries. There is also a small population of middle to upper class students from the United States. English Second Language students who score an 80% on the Michigan State University English Language Test at the English Language Center are eligible to take PCW. Students who do not pass the test take either ESL 220 (6 credit writing and grammar block) or ESL 221 (3 credit writing); after completing either course with a 3.0, these

students can then move into PCW. (While taking ELC classes, students can also meet the pass requirement at any time by taking a standardized test such as TOEFL and earning the necessary scores). Although PCW is considered a freshman level course, international students often postpone taking this course until their junior or senior years. They often have a fear of taking an English writing course, and I have found that by the time they take the course, they have networked enough to know which teachers teach what, which teachers are “good,” and which teachers work well with ESL students. I have tried to draw on my students’ diversity as a resource to help me understand different types of language learning experiences.

My class: A look into “what’s going on” and my foundational beliefs about teaching

It’s the first day of the Fall, 2005 semester. Students walk in one by one, each looking more confused as the next. They’re whispering to each other more than a typical crop of new students does, and I’m wondering if I have part of my lunch on my face. I smile and smile, eventually turning to the chalkboard to write my name: Miss Bacino (I’m not ‘quite’ old enough for the Ms. title). They start whispering a bit more, realizing that I must really be old enough to teach them. I ask how their first day of classes is going, how dorm life is—anything to make them at ease in this “space” where we’ll write. “Come pick up a syllabus: we’ll go over it once everyone gets here. Can you put your desks in a circle?”

When everyone arrives, I do a formal introduction, telling students that I’m from the outskirts of Chicago where my dad runs a pizzeria. I explain that I came to Michigan

State mostly on a whim—that I once sat in their exact shoes, taking freshman writing in Bessey Hall. I go on and on about how writing has changed my life. I describe a story about my dad's business that relayed our family's Sicilian history (and made my dad cry). I speak of admissions essays that pushed me along in my education. Letters to loved ones. These examples provide the first lesson in my sappiness, and before I get carried away, I turn the floor over to my new students. "Hi, my name is Adrianna," my first volunteers tells the class. "I'm from Ohio, I'm a freshman, and I sing." "Wow, that's neat. Will you sing for us sometime?" I ask her. She gets a little nervous, so I turn to the class "Do you guys watch American Idol?" A round of groans and excitement fight for air space. (I find this division is almost always related to gender). I cut off the endless chatter and turn everyone's attention to the next student, Jenna. "Hey ya'll! I'm Jenna. I mostly be hyper, you know... but I really like to write. I'm pre-med, and I'm from Flint." It's all in a day—or should I say first class period—when I manage mine and students' nerves and excitement. Yes, this is the day I begin to impart what it is I believe to be "good" in teaching.

Since I see writing as a form of self-expression and a tangible skill that helps us participate in social conversations—I have always loved playing the role of a writing teacher. I tried to create a close-knit feeling in my classroom, making students sit in a circle, encouraging them to speak without having to raise their hands, or initiating activities that help students get to know one another. As a young teacher, I stayed "up" on what affected college students, and I believe students responded positively to this. For example, I could ask them to consider how they used means of persuasion in joke telling or testing and then help them learn means of persuasion in writing situations they initially

perceived as difficult or beyond them (I learned this tactic from one of my mentors). Or I would ask them about certain happenings in pop culture to get discussions going or simply to make them feel at ease in the space of my classroom. I've been accused of "caring too much"—but I have always believed that students developed a certain amount of accountability because they knew I cared about them on a personal level. Especially in my experiences teaching minority students, I always tried to make my own (and larger educational goals) transparent. It was common for me to say: *I'm asking you to do this because...or This kind of writing is an institutional stapleare you just being tortured, or is there a good reason you have to learn how to conduct and cite research??*

It was also important for me to allow for spontaneous moments in my teaching. The more I taught, the more I learned that listening was not a sign that I didn't have enough to say, or to teach, but actually a way to get "in the know." I valued what students thought of activities or particular ways of teaching. I think this also helped my students feel comfortable sharing work they had done outside of class or telling the class about experiences or struggles that affected them. For instance, one of my students shared poetry that he had written in jail. Another student sang a song she had written. One student explained that the most important piece of writing he had ever written was a letter to his sister who became pregnant at an early age. I viewed these occasions as not only acts of personal sharing but important lessons in rhetoric—showing writing as an integral part of carving out social relationships.

In the fall, I had the opportunity to teach 14 freshmen, three sophomores, two juniors, two seniors, and two Lifelong Education students (international students). Of this mix there were six ESL students (all represented Asian backgrounds including Korean,

Chinese, and Japanese), six African American students, eight Hispanic students, and three Caucasian students. In the spring, students represented the following grade levels: 19 freshmen, six sophomores, two juniors, and one Lifelong Education student. Of this mix there were 21 ESL international students (representing Arabic, Russian, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean, Nigerian, Mexican, Brazilian, Ukrainian backgrounds [14 had Asian backgrounds]), four African American students, one bi-racial student (African American and Caucasian), one Caucasian student, and one Indian student with Hindu background.

What I teach: background, goals and rationales, and specific genre approaches

Completing my graduate coursework in a program which emphasized writing as social action, watching inspiring teachers, and interacting with fellow grad students, I created the theme of “Space, Culture, and Identity” as the basis for my writing courses. In the syllabus I described the general purpose of the course:

PCW is a writing course designed to help you learn strategies and practices necessary for college level writing and beyond. For our inquiries this semester, we will focus on the *spaces* and *places* that define us—considering how culture, community, and other specific spaces we inhabit help shape identity and influence our perceptions of the world... Within this context we will consider how writing happens and how language is used in certain spaces that surround us. This will help us explore the cultural and social dimensions of writing, consider the implications of writing we encounter in our daily lives, and develop critical thinking and writing skills that will help you navigate your way around various rhetorical scenarios.

As I outlined in Chapter 1, my more specific foundational goals revolved around students complicating their own writing as well as analyzing and experimenting with genres they

were unfamiliar with. Here, I will present a more detailed look into how I sequenced learning activities in both semesters of teaching.

To start, during the first part of each semester, I introduced students to a range of cultural readings that showed how authors make or call for change in different social spaces. Readings came from *Critical Inquiries: Readings on Culture and Community*, edited by Jacqueline Jones Royster. I picked diverse genres dealing with topics such as Black Feminism, hip-hop, landscape as story, and urban schools. For each reading I asked students to compose reading responses in which they responded equally to content and rhetorical devices. I gave students the tools to analyze textual features including methods of persuasion, organization, voice, and use of sources. I also asked them to consider the author's social positioning and situate each piece within a larger cultural context or social conversation.

In the second half of the semester, we focused more intently on analyzing *writing*. While content varied, we studied the *generic conventions* and social functions of a range of everyday, creative, and disciplinary genres. Our foundational questions (in a nutshell) were: what does this genre do? How does it somehow define this community or culture? How does the individual write it? Working with these foundational questions, my students have explored how a letter to the editor functions within their college context, considered how hip hop song lyrics create and reflect community and cultural values, studied how the content and conventions of a business memo influence social roles, or explored how disciplinary insiders establish credibility through academic journal articles. After this type of literacy learning, I hoped students would have the metalanguage to

conduct research into genres in the disciplinary communities they saw themselves occupying.

In terms of their own writing, fall students completed four major papers or projects: (1) personal narratives, (2) ethnographic analytical papers, (3) a multimedia project, and (4) a research paper on disciplinary genres. During the spring semester, I replaced project 3, the multimedia project, with a multigenre project (in which students had the option to create multimedia). With the same foundational pedagogical practices, I adapted my teaching based on the overall atmosphere of each class, as well as students' response to activities. (I will present a fuller description of the differences across the activities and major assignments from each semester in the beginning of Chapter 3—including how students responded differently to activities and which activities I changed in the spring [and why] based on experiences in the fall). For the purposes of providing a look into the foundational practices and lenses I used in both semesters, the next section offers a brief explanation of how students considered both generic conventions and social functions (our foundational goals).

As I described in chapter one, even as students wrote their first paper—the personal narrative—I kept a consistent focus on genre even while I used Process-based activities to help students uncover specific feelings and moments associated with their stories. After using this genre-focused approach with the analytical essay and multimedia and multigenre projects, students engaged in the final, ethnographic research project. In the final project, students chose a discipline or field, interviewed a disciplinary insider, and selected five genres for analysis. Students presented their research in a 5-6 page

research paper in which they described textual features, generic functions, and larger values or goals of their chosen field.

During the final unit I modeled student work and presented Power Point lessons on thesis statements, citations, organization, and clarity. I also asked students to share their research experiences at various phases of the final unit. For example, one of my students studying theater talked about her analysis of “behind the scenes” genres like letters to cast members and director’s notes. By showing students how a seemingly oral, physical medium actually involved the circulation of various genres, students began to understand how the genres worked together to help the field “function.” Building on student work has always been a crucial element of my teaching; this practice also affected my research in the sense that I changed my spring practices based on how students responded in the fall. In addition, since most of my students have represented minority or ESL backgrounds, I have always tried to use cultural discourse practices and differences as a resource in relation to genre learning. I once had an international student explain how the 5-paragraph essay was “nonexistent” in his educational experiences in Brazil. His example allowed us to talk about academic writing conventions being culturally specific and helped students see that there is no single, correct way to do classroom writing.

The players: how subjects were selected for research

I collected all forms of data with approval from the University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS). Students could participate in the study to varying degrees, or not at all. Since teacher research can make students feel obligated

to participate, one of my colleagues presented two levels of consent forms to participants when I wasn't present and explained that I wouldn't know who agreed to participate until after final grades were submitted. Participants who agreed to participate in Level I research consented that their written work could be used for data analysis. Participants who agreed to Level II research also agreed to being interviewed once the semester was over (see appendix B for consent forms).

I chose the participants as follows: for data collected during normal class periods, the work done by students who consented to Level I research was used for data analysis. Thirty-two students (18 fall, 14 spring) consented to Level I research; 30 students (17 fall, 13 spring) agreed to participate in Level II research. To manage my study, I interviewed 13 Level II students from various ethnic and scholastic backgrounds. I selected students who regularly came to class and participated in classroom activities. In addition, since I wanted to understand a broad range of literacy experiences, I picked students who represented different cultures, ethnicities, and grade levels. I wanted to include international students in my study, and since many of these students represented higher grade levels, I chose to study students of different grade levels. The fact that many international students were older and took the course at the same time that they were taking their major courses provided a comparative element for later chapters when I consider how different students engaged with disciplinary genres. In addition, I believe the mix of grade levels in my research reflects the diverse populations that typically comprise preparatory writing courses. I conducted and tape recorded 11 interviews in person and sent two interviews over email. Throughout data analysis, I sent follow-up questions to students over email or talked with them on the phone.

Participants in Level II research (interviews) include eight male students and five female students representing the following demographics: (when I feature particular students in later chapters, I will present a more full description of their literacy experiences and background).

- Four Asian students
 - Two male, two female
 - All ESL, international students (representing Chinese, Korean, and Japanese backgrounds)
- One Nigerian student
 - Male
 - ESL, international student
- Two Caucasian students
 - both male
 - both native English speakers
- One African American student
 - female
 - native English speaker, home language is a combination of AAVE and LWC
- Two Arabic students
 - both female
 - both international students (from Kuwait), one ESL, one English native language

- Three Hispanic students
 - all male
 - two ESL, international students (representing Mexican and Brazilian backgrounds)
 - one student born in the U.S., home language is Spanish, school experiences all English-based

Part of the richness of my study derives from my opportunity to engage diverse types of learners, and I am also aware that working with ESL students puts a different spin on my study. First, in terms of interpersonal relations, I was aware that cultural differences not only affected how willing students were to be open about their learning experiences but also influenced the extent to which they could articulate in English what they had learned. Especially during the interviews, I made a concerted attempt to *listen* and allow students plenty of time to reflect on their learning.

I am also aware that students' diversity in previous life and educational experiences affected their language learning experiences in my classroom. Students brought unique genre knowledge with them, depending on where they were from and what types of writing and expression were typical in their culture. Whether or not students were U.S. born, whether or not students spoke a home language other than English, and the amount of time that students studied English in various educational settings (grade school in other countries, tutoring programs, or other college courses) all influenced their literacy experiences. As I asked students to consider how language helps us define our social experiences, ESL students might be more attuned to studying the English language on a meta level—or since they are first and foremost concerned with communicating

clearly/translating their thoughts in English, they might be challenged by the process of building a meta-language that asks them to consider the social workings of language.

These are some of the relevant issues/questions that occurred throughout my research.

While I cannot offer any direct responses to all of these issues, when I feature a particular student, I consider and rhetorically represent how his/her background seemed to play into the literacy experience.

Types of data collection

To approach my research questions, I gathered the following types of data:

- Student responses to in-class prompts and activities
- Lesson plans and teaching journal entries: throughout the semester, directly after each interview, and throughout data analysis
- Students' final projects
- End of the semester Interviews: 11 face-to-face interviews and 2 email interviews

(1) Student responses to in-class prompts and activities

Throughout the semester, I collected data to represent various classroom activities.

Before teaching I saw a natural three-phase divide in my curriculum:

- *Phase 1: introduction to rhetoric and genre* (definitions, learning how to read rhetorically, situating readings and student writing within larger webs of meaning).

- *Phase 2: is writing a private or social act?* (learning how to conduct ethnographic research, exploring genre “conventions,” practice composing diverse genres and considering their implications).
- *Phase 3: research into disciplinary genres* (using genre metalanguage to conduct ethnographic research into genre)

My rationale for collecting data based on particular activities and learning moments was to represent learning from all phases of building a genre metalanguage. I’ve also gone back to particular learning moments that students recalled when I interviewed them. Classroom data includes individual freewrites, group notes, and student letters. As I collected the data, I asked all students to respond (in writing) to procedural questions such as: what was most useful from this activity? What did you learn? What intrigued or confused you? I asked these basic, open-ended questions because I didn’t want to direct or lead students. During particular collaborative activities, I collected group notes as well as recorded my own version of what happened as groups presented their work. I also wrote extended journal reflections after those class meetings. Lastly, I periodically asked students to write me informal letters. For example, I would ask, “in your own words, tell me what you think the purpose of this project is.” I chronologically organized these various forms of classroom data, which represent students’ response to teaching methods and more theoretical prompts related to genre. Having them give feedback on teaching practices and theoretical prompts will allow me to discuss the procedural aspects of teaching, as well as gain insight into how their attitudes towards language developed.

Based on student feedback, I believe it’s easier to understand how to improve or change the procedural aspects of teaching than it is to trace how students’ attitudes

towards language developed. However, when I did extended analysis of the students I feature in chapter four, analyzing their responses to theoretical prompts along with considering their interview reflections “showed” me how their learning transpired and prepared them (or didn’t) for research into disciplinary genres. In addition to the classroom data, I also used lesson plans, classroom notes, and post-class journal entries to help me contextualize each learning moment and create class portraits that reflect all students’ engagement with pedagogy in Chapter 3.

(2) Looking at students’ final projects

Since a main goal of my research is to understand how students engaged with disciplinary genres, I analyzed their final projects paying attention to the following questions: How do students talk about language/genres in their field? What habits of thought do I see happening? How do students rhetorically represent what they have found? What are some of the limitations of having students research/write about disciplines and fields that they don’t actively participate in? My goal was not to measure how “well” students met measurable goals such as using proper mechanics. However, as I graded students’ projects and engaged in more sustained reflections on their projects, I began to see that having students write about writing (vs. writing about a topic) seemed to challenge the “standard” rhetorical conventions of the research paper. I began to see that this disruption has local implications (how I teach the research paper in a genre-focused class), as well as more institutional implications (if students do disrupt standard conventions in my class, what happens when they move into another composition classroom?).

(3) Reflective interviews

The purpose of conducting interviews was to engage students in sustained reflection of their literacy experiences in my class. From the students who consented to Level II research, I selected participants who I thought would reflect a broad range of literacy experiences and interviewed those who responded to my request for an interview. I conducted nine of the interviews in a private study room at the MSU library. I conducted two interviews at a local coffee shop. In each interview, I explained my purposes for conducting the interview (including reasons why I wanted to tape record) before starting interview questions. I conducted two interviews over email and included this introduction before listing the interview questions. Since my research is, in part, ethnographic, I designed my interview questions (see Appendix A) using James Spradley's (1979) technique of opening with *descriptive* questions, which allowed students to openly describe moments/items of interest from our class that were of interest to them. For example, "What do you most remember about our class? Or, What did you take away from our class that you think you still use?" These questions initiated a comfortable conversation since my questions weren't too specific or leading. Since I was most interested in their genre learning, I then moved on to a larger set of specific questions relating to genre and culture. Although I addressed pointed issues, I still tried to make the questions open-ended so that students would elaborate (vs. simply responding yes or no). Next, I asked students to reflect on the experience of researching disciplinary genres and engaging with activities during this unit. Finally, based on the ethnographic notion that informants often measure their knowledge by comparing their knowledge they

have gleaned in different domains (Spradley), I asked students *contrast* questions. For example, “In what ways was our writing class alike or different from writing classes you’ve had in the past?” Although I didn’t plan to directly address different pedagogical approaches in my research, I thought these questions might give me a richer understanding of their literacy experience in my class.

I developed my official interview questions at the end of the fall semester based on my sub-questions (i.e. What do students learn about language and writing when they engage with classroom activities related to genre? Which activities are most useful in their explorations of genre?) Although my interview questions addressed what happened in my classroom, I designed many questions “in spite of what happened”; that is, I didn’t look for things to ask students about during my teaching but instead wanted their reflection and open dialogue to help me answer my research questions. I felt that broad questions, such as “Which classroom activities and/or assignments have helped you understand the concept of genre”?, would better allow students to address their own learning and give me an idea of which activities were significant to them and why. However, as I developed my official list of questions I designed some questions *based on* what I saw happening in actual practice—(I consulted journal entries to look for activities that left me with questions). For example, one activity seemed to confuse many students, and I wanted to know if it was the way I designed the activity or if the actual content was too obscure. The idea behind the activity seemed foundational to my approach to teaching, so I wanted to dig more deeply into the way I presented it. I asked students about it: “When we talked about the social ‘function’ of genres, were you confused? Were there other ways I could have introduced this idea or made it more clear?”

In addition, throughout each interview students brought up other issues and concerns, which allowed me to explore research questions I hadn't anticipated. For example, with international students, I improvised certain questions that I couldn't ask American students. When I met with one Arab student, as we talked about an activity in which her group analyzed greeting cards, I asked if greeting cards in Kuwait were similar to greeting cards in the United States. This led into a discussion about the differences in genres in American vs. Arab women's magazines. At the end of the interview, she returned to this idea to offer a suggestion for my teaching. In this sense going "off topic" created important data for later chapters in which I offer new pedagogical practices based on students' suggestions.

During the interviews I took some notes as each student talked, but it was important that students knew I was looking at them and listening intently to what they had to say. I waited until after the interview to record questions, confusions, or interesting things that arose from our discussion. I also wrote an "expanded account" (Spradley) of my response, in which I went back to expand on key phrases or information that intrigued me or left me with questions. These entries helped me remember initial responses to the interviews during later stages of data analysis. I also went over them in between interviews, which helped me incorporate one student's interview into another. For example, with international students, I often offered another student's example if the interviewee couldn't think of any generic examples from their homelands.

Throughout data collection and analysis, I have also kept a record of field work journal notes to record questions, confusions, and bursts of inspiration that arose during the data collection and analysis phases. This part of my research has been used to make

sense of my data, but I have also used it as an element of analysis to help me understand how my beliefs have changed over time and document my process of knowledge-building. While the interviews constitute a main form of data in my research, my analysis of student work and my own personal journal writing will add a rich dimension to student reflection.

Triangulation: how I'm using my data

To answer my research questions, I engaged the concept of triangulation—or “using multiple sources of data and multiple methods for each (research) question” (Hays 2004, 228). More specifically, of the different types of triangulation available to qualitative researchers, I engaged in *methodological triangulation*, or “the use of multiple methods to study a single problem”; and *theory triangulation*, or “the use of multiple perspectives to interpret a single set of data” (Janesick 2004, 67). Since my “problem” involves a series of questions that helped me explore different facets of student learning, and since trying to understand how students learn involves both my own interpretations (what I see in class and what I see in their work) and their individual reflections, I relied on multiple methods to pursue different sides of singular questions. In addition, although I broadly situate my work with RGS, I have used various perspectives *within* RGS to interpret my research questions (e.g. different theories of learning and pedagogical lenses).

As I mentioned, in analyzing student interviews in conjunction with looking at student work, or by combining my reflection of a specific classroom activity with students’ reflections of the same activity, I answered specific research questions such as:

How does the way students “talk” about language compare with the way they “write” about language/genre? What does this teach me? How can what students tell me about what they have learned complement or influence what I think is happening as I reflect on my teaching? What does this comparison tell me about what learning can look like? These open-ended questions, as opposed to questions that would “test” a particular phenomenon, align with Denzin and Lincoln’s (2003, drawing on Flick, 1998, p.230) claim that “triangulation is not a tool or a strategy of validation, but an alternative to validation” (8). I developed my modes of inquiry based on my belief that is not always possible to know what students have learned based on what we see or what we think is happening or what we read in their writing. In addition, although I wanted students to study the social workings of language and wanted to know what they learned by studying genre, I did not seek to validate a *specific* or *measurable* learning outcome. Rather, I wanted to know how their reflection, combined with my own reflection, would help me answer pedagogical questions in a way that using singular methods would not.

The use of multiple methods adds a comparative element in my research in that it allowed me to draw conclusions at different stages of the research process (e.g. journal entries at the time of teaching, interview notes after post-semester interviews, and field work journal notes throughout the data analysis phase). In this sense, my use of triangulation has not only allowed me to pursue multiple sides of singular questions but to reflect on my interpretation of these questions in different *time frames*, which represents my continued attempt to (re) interpret student learning. Ray (1993) claims that teacher researchers increase the credibility of their work and align themselves with the methodological practices of ethnographers when they impart triangulation (64).

Since there was a prevalent call for more sustained research into genre pedagogy—which naturally coincided with a shortage of full-length, triangulated studies—I looked into other works on writing pedagogy for methodological models. To start, Lee’s (2000) methodological practices into her study on critical pedagogy have provided a triangulated model that has helped me consider how to use multiple forms of data to pursue questions into student learning. Lee uses analysis of student work, post-semester interviews, and in-class learning moments to consider how the “self” is constructed through writing and how teachers can create practices that allow for greater inclusion of diverse discourse practices. The triangulation she imparts helped me consider how to analyze and rhetorically represent student learning. For example, she excerpts large chunks from student interviews and uses extended written reflections to an activity to gauge student learning. Her work is more focused on the history of writing instruction than mine, but the sections devoted to student learning helped me consider how to balance analysis of student work, interviews, and interpretation and how to present detailed, rich accounts of singular assignments or activities.

Next, when more specifically thinking about how to rhetorically represent my work, I drew on Wilma Hook Romatz’s (2002) dissertation project that considers how drawing and visual learning affect and complement students’ writing processes. This work was particularly helpful in showing me that analyzing and rhetorically representing “small” learning moments that may at first appear insignificant (e.g. informal chatter during interviews or side notes or doodles on an assignment) was important in terms of (1) helping me understand students’ process of learning more deeply; and (2) allowing readers to *see learning in action*. After considering pedagogy for so many years, and

having a different and exclusive language for talking about it, I had to consider how students' own words could offer me a different perspective.

Both Lee's and Romatz's work stress the need for not only asking students to reflect on their learning but also considering students' process of learning, as opposed to interpreting from the outside or gauging student knowledge simply by looking at their written work. Since RGS has yet to see a full-length, triangulated study on genre pedagogy, I used many forms of diverse data that allowed me to talk about pedagogy in a more extensive, negotiated way than other RGS scholars had done. Initially, I wanted the majority of my study to focus on students' experience researching disciplinary genres. I developed this research goal because I knew that many FYW teachers did not ask their students to do this type of ethnographic research; and again, I thought my work would build on RGS scholars (Bawarshi 2003; Devitt 2004) who advocated this type of culminating research in the writing classroom. I soon realized that I couldn't talk about what students learned about disciplinary genres without presenting a richer account of how they developed the genre metalanguage and analysis tools to undertake such research. In this sense I started envisioning my work as becoming more process-oriented, showing how students engaged with a semester-long genre pedagogy. A more detailed look at how I approached different pieces of data will illuminate how I first approached different pieces of data and then worked to combine them to more fully answer my research questions.

To analyze the interviews, I started by re-reading the interview transcripts and freewriting about interesting or confusing things students said. I then returned to my post-interview journal entry to see if my thinking had changed since conducting the interview.

At times, I would situate a particular piece of student reflection within a theoretical frame if I saw a direct link between what they were saying and issues that genre theorists have raised. Other times, I would simply raise new questions for myself. After analyzing a student interview, I began analysis of that student's final project. I started by freewriting about the starting questions I had developed for analysis of student papers. I then returned to my analysis of that student's interview and tried to see what she said about the final project (in the interview) and what she wrote about in her final project. I looked for links and contradictions, trying to understand the relationship between *talking* about learning and *writing* about learning.

I did first-round data analysis of the papers written by the 13 students whom I interviewed, and in an attempt to manage my study, I used the work of nine of these students in Chapters 4 and 5. When I feature two individual students in Chapter 4, I pair interview data with close analysis of their individual assignments, engagement with individual assignments and group activities, and the final project. By highlighting the complexity of an individual experience, I create a negotiated, in-depth portrait of genre learning and development. I also engaged in several rounds of data analysis of seven other students' papers and interview feedback. I feature these students' learning in Chapter 5 to both add to and challenge the themes that arose when I created the individual portraits that make up Chapter 4.

Study design: how my positionality and collection of data within my own classroom influences knowledge construction

Since I was both teacher and researcher, I faced a couple of important challenges. First, it is common to think that someone discussing their own teaching is biased or lacking an outside perspective (Ray 1993, 62). However, I believe since I charted the development of individual students and talked with them in personal interviews (where they were comfortable opening up to me *because* of my personal demeanor in the classroom and role as teacher), my insider perspective was a benefit. For example, with one of my featured students, I learned that this student had actually learned more than he could clearly represent in his research paper. This student's disconnect between intake and production of knowledge (through research paper writing) would not have been evident if I hadn't studied his development in my classroom and interviewed him. If an outsider read his final paper, the product, and tried to explain what this student had learned in the class's culminating project, her explanation would be incomplete. Ray explains how this insider benefit improves the level of detail in research: "...observation from an exterior point of view could never be the same as comprehension from within" (96).

On a related note, as I analyzed my data, I had to be cognizant that my goals and rationales behind activities and projects didn't skew or affect my analysis. I wanted to know "what happened" when students engaged with different activities, and of course, when something unpredictable or seemingly off topic occurred, I had to chart this—despite how it influenced my authority as a teacher or beliefs about teaching. Rhetorically representing honest, possibly messy teaching moments seems to impede the "scholarly

way” of speaking with authority or presenting clear arguments. This rendering of narrative experience blurs the lines of private and public identity, and although my positionality in the classroom is not at the forefront of my study, my decision to use *my* teaching as the basis for disciplinary knowledge raises a certain level of vulnerability. Also, I had to consider that if my research did not conclude with any direct answer or argument (as much scholarly writing does), my work could face scrutiny in the discipline.

Since my research is based on my own teaching, this possibility was inextricably linked to my role as a teacher. But many teacher researchers (Lee 2000; Okawa 1999) claim that a researcher’s willingness to change her beliefs about teaching/student learning can actually be liberating for other researchers. Gesa Kirsch and Joy Ritchie (1995) note that the researcher cannot only be self-reflective about her positionality but also must represent how she has changed through the research process—with this reflection becoming part of the write-up (15). Wall similarly contends: “...her narrative can be read as research only if it persuades readers that its author has changed how she understands herself and the world” (297). The presence of change in the write-up and possibility of completely altering her pedagogical perspective implies that the identity of the teacher is evolving; it also grants the researcher agency by giving her an authoritative voice over her experience.

In terms of design, I contended with what Creswell (1998) refers to as the problem of “studying your own backyard.” By analyzing a rhetorical situation that I was a central part of, and creating a study that is *based* on my teaching, I had to consider how the design of my study both generated and constrained what counted as data and knowledge. First, in terms of how my positionality was directly related to my study, I believe the

level of comfort I had developed with research participants (in the classroom) proved generative in the sense that they felt comfortable providing open, honest feedback in their interviews. This level of comfort also allowed me to contact them by phone or email even after the interviews if I needed clarification of data or thought of new questions, which several times added a rich element to initial data analysis.

Second, my design afforded me the chance to keep whatever pieces of student learning I thought were pertinent to their genre learning. In this sense I had access to a wide range of student work throughout each semester. Although the majority of data was *based* on my teaching—representing practices that I had also been doing the year prior to collecting data—the fact that I knew I was conducting research also led me to introduce students to theoretical prompts that I don't think I would have done before. In this sense my research perspective added to the depth of my teaching repertoire. On the other hand, my access to student work was also a challenge in that for the purposes of manageability, I had to decide which activities *I* thought were most instrumental versus keeping every single assignment or having students reflect on every single activity, which was not always possible in an hour long class. I didn't want my research to interrupt my teaching or take up extra time and interrupt classroom flow. I made a concerted effort to consider the implications behind selecting certain activities for data. In addition, since my research also reflects activities that students deemed important in their interviews, I tried to provide a negotiated balance when I feature activities. Throughout each semester, I maintained a journal, but in the ethnographic interviews—once students *told me* which activities they thought were useful—I was at times constrained by the fact that I hadn't asked the class to respond, in writing, to that activity.

On a related note, as I interviewed research participants after each semester, I was aware that I could talk about their learning more deeply if I could have gathered their individual feedback at various phases throughout each semester. For ethical and institutional reasons, I couldn't know who had agreed to participate in research until after each semester. Although some students I interviewed had very vivid memories of particular activities, I would have been able to gather more detailed accounts if I could have talked to them "on the spot." Especially in relation to individual learning portraits that I present in Chapter 4, being able to chart selected students would have afforded me an even more detailed look into their literacy experiences. For institutional reasons this was an obstacle I couldn't overcome. I did my best to glean as many details as possible from the various forms of data I could collect.

Since I interviewed 13 diverse students, my study design afforded me the opportunity to decide which students to feature individually *after* I had analyzed a large sample of students' learning experiences. There was instructive reflection in all of the interviews, but when deciding whom to feature, I tried to use Creswell's (1998) practice of "maximum variation" (120) to display different perspectives. So in one sense the number of interviews I conducted proved generative since I could select from diverse experiences. However, one challenge I faced was that often students who had very detailed interviews didn't necessarily engage with classroom activities/work in a detailed manner. At times I could make this comparison instructive, thinking about what was missing in the student's knowledge base that prevented him from engaging with the assignment—or why he could *talk* about learning so many things in the final project when the actual project was somewhat incomplete. Since personal issues also influenced

the extent to which students engaged with assignments, I had to balance my own interpretation with what students told me in their interviews, which proved to be a difficult but generative part of my study.

While I drafted many of my specific research questions before and during my teaching, I allowed new questions to emerge during the research process—based on student feedback and how I saw different forms of data complementing or challenging each other. So while my research was bound by a pre-determined time frame, design (teacher research via case study), and specific research questions, I use the final implications chapter to raise both practical and theoretical questions that arose throughout my research. I will also offer students' suggestions for new teaching methods in hopes that my students' voices offer RGS an untapped perspective in regard to pedagogy.

Chapter 3

In this chapter I describe the two composition courses in which the research participants were enrolled. I start by presenting differences across semesters—in terms of both pedagogy and student demographics. Next, by using student responses to in-class writing prompts and reflective exercises, my own post-activity journal entries, lesson plans, and student interviews, my goal in this chapter is to create a picture of my version of a scaffolded genre pedagogy by allowing readers to experience the activities as I experienced them. While readers will get insight into how my pedagogy unfolded, this chapter is also meant to contextualize the individual literacy development and accounts of student learning that I present in chapters 4 and 5. In this sense, I draw on these activities in later chapters as a way to understand both individual learning and what spaces of learning particular activities allowed for. I also returned to this chapter after completing my study to frontload each activity with brief references to final implications. In this sense, readers will be able to situate each activity within my study, while at the same time, experiencing most details as each activity “unfolds.”

Since the main principle of a *pedagogy of genre awareness* is to allow students to explore the tension between constraints and choices and to understand genres as dynamic and socially real, my theoretical framework (as seen through the activities) lends an exploratory approach to genre. In other words, I did not provide students with formulas or rigid frameworks for analyzing or writing genres. Instead, I scaffolded a pedagogy that allowed students to *build a language for talking about genre*. This exploratory framework has influenced every activity. As I engaged in my study, I also realized that

this pedagogical framework allowed for a more open-ended approach to my research since I didn't seek or try to measure specific outcomes.

For the purposes of this chapter, I picked some activities that were instrumental to students' process of building a genre metalanguage. These activities were either foundational early on in the semester or played a key role in helping students develop analysis techniques that they used in their ethnographic research. I also selected activities that the 13 students whom I interviewed told me were useful. My primary goal was to approach the activities from a macro perspective since showing my pedagogy in action involves a complex set of dynamics that all students were a part of. When drawing on students' in-class responses to an activity, I will only use the voices of the 32 students (18 fall, 14 spring) who consented to Level I research (class work). When I include students' post-semester reflection on particular activities, I'm using feedback from students who consented to Level II research (interviews; not necessarily just those students I feature later). I used pseudonyms to protect students' identity.

Two versions of my pedagogy: student demographics and class atmospheres, major assignments, and teaching practices/activities

In the fall, the class atmosphere was lively, to say the least. On a typical day, students would enter class joking and telling stories—their cell phones buzzing with the latest hip-hop beats. Again, most of the students (14) were freshman; three sophomores, two juniors, two seniors, and two international Lifelong Education students made up the rest of the group. (MSU offers Lifelong Education status to students who are not actively

pursuing an undergraduate or graduate degree; many international students enroll in English language classes with this status before being admitted to the university). Of this mix there were six ESL students (all represented Asian backgrounds including Korean, Chinese, and Japanese), six African American students, eight Hispanic students, and three Caucasian students. Overall, the strength of this class was their high levels of creativity and energetic spirits. I worked to help them adapt to college classroom etiquette, believe in themselves, and hand in their work on time! I found that most students were unfamiliar with notions of *rhetoric* and *genre*, but once I found ways to build on their backgrounds (e.g., analyzing rap videos or analyzing newspaper articles that dealt with racial issues), I saw valuable learning and watched them acquire the tools that would help them study unfamiliar genres. Some students had picked a major and had ideas of what they wanted to “be,” but most were more focused on the now: making it through this semester. The major papers students composed were: (1) personal narratives (place memoirs); (2) ethnographic analytical papers that depicted a cultural scene; (3) a multimedia project in which groups picked a political song, conducted research, and remediated the song/message through the combination of visual, textual, and auditory mediums; and (4) a final research paper that presented their findings on disciplinary genres.

The multimedia project was something I developed in a digital rhetoric graduate course I was taking during the fall semester. I created the focus of “political songs” since this group of students always talked about music. In groups, students were to remediate the song through a multimedia text—combining visual images, text, and sound effects to tell the “story” of their song in a different medium. To integrate research assignments and

have students add a richer perspective to their compositions, I required them to include information about the artist/group and social context. I also asked them to consider what audience the song affected as well as what community or cultural values the song reflected. Although I felt somewhat out of my element in terms of teaching multimedia, I created a consistent focus on genre in an effort to make the project a natural part of students' development of a genre metalanguage (e.g. song lyrics as genre, genres of music/how particular genres reflected cultural values, how students perceived or defined the texts that they had constructed). Groups used Power Point and Movie Maker to complete their projects. They had fun with the project and took pride in presenting their work to the class. We also had post-project discussions in which students tried to classify their work or think about how their multimedia texts combined generic conventions and how these texts differed from what they would have done in writing. The purpose of these discussions was to add to their genre metalanguage and transition them into the final project.

Although some students seemed prepared for the final project, I noticed that many of the students were initially unsure as to what the final project expected of them. During the final unit, I created many collaborative analysis activities (e.g., analyzing our own course syllabus, a sample business memo, or an advertisement) because I recognized that analyzing something in a field or discipline they were unfamiliar with was more daunting than analyzing a genre of music, a rap video, or an in-class reading—all genres that we had covered and of which they had experiential knowledge. However, I worked to convince them that they could use the same analytic tools with genres they had never come across. Again, building on students' strengths and making explicit what they

seemed to do in their own lives, and what we did throughout the semester—was a crucial component of my fall pedagogy.

I thought the fall was my most diverse mix of students until I met my spring students. I had never taught students from so many different countries. Most students (19) were freshman; there were also six sophomores, two juniors, and one Lifelong Education student. Of this group there were 21 ESL international students (representing Arabic, Russian, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Nigerian, Mexican, Brazilian, Ukrainian backgrounds [14 had Asian backgrounds]), four African American students, one bi-racial student (African American and Caucasian), one Caucasian student, and one Indian student with Hindu background. Students were very aware of the cultural differences. They always seemed to note their unique perspectives when talking about a reading and especially a racial issue. Early in the semester, most Asian students were hesitant to participate in classroom dialogues. I (along with other students who would talk to me after class) recognized this cultural difference and tried to find inviting ways to involve everyone. As the semester progressed and all students became comfortable with my calling on them, many Asian students played an active part in classroom discussions. Spring students seemed more accustomed to mainstream educational etiquette (coming on time, paying attention, being serious about class work). I mean this as more of an observation than a judgment of either class. In fact, I found great payoff in experiences such as convincing one of my apathetic fall students that carrying a backpack represented complex dynamics: preparedness, respect for me, respect for himself, and of course the greater chance of actually getting something out of an activity since he would have his

materials! Everyone noticed *the* day Aaron walked in with a swagger *and* a backpack. That moment was about life, not just classroom etiquette or literacy instruction.

On the whole, spring students picked up notions of *rhetoric* and *genre* more easily than fall students. Based on the fall semester, I had also developed a more coherent pedagogy and re-implemented a multigenre project for project number three (instead of the multimedia project). I taught the multigenre project in the spring because I had taught it several times before and believed students engaged with the concept of genre in a more critical way through this project, which I believed would lead to a more seamless entrance into the final project on disciplinary genres. I made this decision based on my experiences teaching the year prior, and more specifically because fall students seemed somewhat ill-prepared to conduct research into disciplinary genres (despite having talked about how genres reflect community values in diverse contexts). In chapters 4 and 5, when I consider how different students engaged with each version of my pedagogy, I use the different projects as a comparative element as I make sense of students' individual learning experiences.

In the spring I also used a complex, three-part genre analysis question set that I adapted from Bawarshi's (2003) *Genre and the Invention of the Writer: Reconsidering the Place of Invention in Composition* (see activity to follow). I had used some of Bawarshi's questions with fall students. However, I returned to Bawarshi's more extensive method of analyzing genres later and decided to challenge spring students with the entire list of questions—even though when I first came across the list, I thought that some of the questions might have been too difficult for beginning composition students. I found that using the whole list helped spring students think more deeply into the various

uses (and users), functions, and textual elements of particular genres. Overall, in the spring I found that my more focused lessons, students' more in-depth engagement with activities, as well as their strong focus on experimenting with and critically thinking about various genres in the multigenre project prepared them more fully for researching disciplinary genres. I also think that the overall feeling that they seemed comfortable with the idea of someday *being a member* in a particular discipline gave them more confidence when they entered their final ethnographic research. In these ways, I point to differences in my pedagogy *and* student demographics and habits as rationales for a more seamless—and in some ways more multi-layered—genre-based learning experience. Of course, individual learning experiences differed in many ways. Individual feedback helped me chart how differences in pedagogical practices affected each group of students.

How I'm describing each activity: general template and explanation of how data yielded different means of presentation

As I re-create what happened in my classrooms, I realize that writing *about* what happened during a dynamic activity is difficult since re-creating the actual action, intensity, and other small nuances is hard to do in writing. However, I kept detailed post-class journal entries, and I've tried to rhetorically represent the complex dynamics and movements of activities in this chapter. I hope readers can, in a sense, "watch" each activity. I used the following general organizational method as a template for each activity:

- Rationale and description of the activity (to provide both immediate context and placement within a scaffolded pedagogy);
- How students responded to the activity—based on what I saw *in class* and how students responded *in writing*;
- My post-activity journal entry; and
- Interview feedback from individual students (when relevant)

Not all portraits look the same since different pieces of data were more or less relevant to different activities. Since my research is *based* on my teaching, I did not pre-determine which activities I would present in my research. For example, if a student interview yielded detailed information about a particular activity, this often persuaded me to feature the activity. In such a case, the “interview feedback” section is longer than it might be in other activity portraits. Or if throughout the semester, I asked students to respond in writing to the “design” of a particular activity (which I didn’t do in relation to all of the following activities), this portrait will look different than another since I used more data in relation to the activity. At times, I considered an activity instrumental when students didn’t bring it up in their interviews. Conversely, students brought up activities in their interviews that I hadn’t had all students respond to in writing. I provide as much detail as possible, even though the portraits didn’t yield identical sets of data—and therefore, means of analysis and rhetorical representation. Whenever possible, I use students’ exact words. At times, when I refer to a collective discussion, I used my journal reflections to help recreate classroom dialogue. It wasn’t always possible to use exact quotes, but I used students’ exact words when I had them documented in my journal and/or class notes.

During the drafting of this chapter, after considering how the various forms of data intersected, I included commentary between each activity that reflected tentative conclusions/how my thinking changed—from the time of teaching to the time of drafting my research. Although the principal focus on my study is to understand what students learn about language and writing through genre-focused activities, I also keep a focus on pedagogy—including how I would change procedural aspects of my teaching and elements of activity “designs” based on student learning and feedback. Therefore, this chapter includes how I reflected on both language learning *and* design. Again, I also returned to this chapter after I completed all chapters to frontload certain activities with more detailed context or brief discussion of specific outcomes/elements of analysis that I discuss in more detail towards the end of the dissertation. I used this tactic to guide readers and prepare them for the kinds of learning that I discussed in the activities; this was also my way of providing a sense of connection between student learning through activities (this chapter) and more specific elements of their individual learning (Chapters 4 and 5).

Foundational activities for both semesters

“Is writing a private or a social act?”

I used this activity to create a foundational focus on the tension between writing being a private or social act. Since I designed the activity in a way that creatively elicited

student participation, both groups of students responded positively to the activity—that is, they had a lot to say. I combine discussion of both semesters, highlighting the differences across each. This activity paved the way for exploring the relationship between authors and convention.

Rationale and description

At the beginning of Phase 2 of my teaching (about 4 weeks into both semesters), I had students get in groups and pretend they were on a legal team and had to defend the following statements: (1) *Writing is a private act*; and (2) *Writing is a social act*. I told students to come up with an argument for both sides, even if they agreed more strongly with one of the prompts. We would then decide which legal teams made the most compelling arguments. We had been trying to situate our readings in particular social contexts, and I created this activity with the belief that students had a longstanding belief that writing was something that individuals *do* by themselves. Although many approaches to teaching writing emphasize the social nature of writing—in terms of how people write (e.g., what kinds of texts) and how writing fits within social conversations—teaching writing by focusing on genre focuses more intently on the tension between individual authorial choices and social conventions. Specifically, I sought to build on complicate Bazerman's (1994) contention that *every* piece of writing is socially situated and other genre scholars (Mirtz 1997, Bawarshi 2003; Devitt 1993, 2004; Herrington & Moran 2005) who have criticized the Process movement for positioning the writer as primary agent and neglecting the social situatedness of writing and the degree to which genre can

generate and/or limit language. I considered these ideas/debates foundational to a genre approach to literacy instruction, and I thought the activity would be an approachable way for students to begin working with these theoretical ideas, providing a backdrop for the rest of the semester.

In the activity students first had to tease out the terms *private* and *social*. I purposely introduced the theoretical statements with little background so that students could find different ways to make sense of the terminology. Up to this point, students had been practicing reading rhetorically, trying to understand how readings were constructed and how readings fit into particular social contexts. They had just finished writing their own personal narratives, and we were moving into the ethnographic analytical essay where they would analyze a cultural scene. In the fall I had students get in groups and brainstorm collaboratively. In the spring I had students freewrite about both statements individually before starting a dialogue in groups. In both semesters students were confused by the terminology of the phrases, which ended up being a heuristic. When groups raised their hands, I told them to try and think about all possible meanings of the statements.

“What happened”: how students responded

First, in both semesters when students talked about writing being private, many of them brought up genres like journal writing and letters where you “don’t have to worry about forms and proper grammar.” Many groups also brought up more everyday uses of writing such as personal notes or to-do lists. Here are some of the ideas from group notes:

- “What we write about can be very personal”
- “We express individual creativity through writing”
- “We usually write in private areas where people can’t bother us, plus we use our hands to write, which is an extension of who we are”
- “Sometimes writing can be used for public purposes: if you don’t want others to know something about you, don’t write it down, or burn it!”

In both semesters, students cited more public genres (magazine articles, books) where people write about very private things. Students said people’s reasons for sharing personal stories might be to educate, raise awareness, or entertain. In the fall one student brought up that many writers use an alias if they want to protect their personal experiences. So in terms of both use *and* content, students addressed how writing can be a very personal, private experience.

In the fall, I had to direct the discussion toward content. I raised the question: “well how do we get things to write about?” In the spring one of my students, Tobin, beat me to the punch. He asked a group that was presenting: “Where do we get our thoughts from?” This same student wrote on his group notes: “The writer’s social experience acts as his reason to write.” When his group presented their social argument to the class, they brought up the fact that certain types of writing such as written laws, standards, and religious texts dictate how people act in different societies. They also argued that we have things to write about because of our experiences that we have with others. At this point someone in the class joked that this group got “all deep!” During the fall discussion, several groups said that writing is social in that we are influenced “on different levels” by certain forms of writing. Their examples included billboards, advertisements, and political speeches. I thought these examples were interesting because they expanded the

notion of “writing” to include visual and spoken mediums. Through their own examples, I noticed students addressing how writing both represents and shapes culture. At this point students didn’t have the actual language to articulate this “meta” point, but citing actual examples “in action” was effective—or at least accessible—in a way that talking about this notion theoretically would not have been.

In both semesters, after we addressed content, I directed the discussion towards form. I wanted students to think about generic conventions so I asked: “Well, where do we learn *how* to write different all these different types of writing?” Their gut response was to say, “we learn in school...” Then I inquired: “Is this the only place we learn how to write?” They then brought up certain communities that teach them, e.g., the hip hop community. They also said that when they read authors they like in magazines such as *Vibe* or *Rolling Stone*, they might try to write like them. I noticed students made the common demarcation between school and public writing. I remember asking them: “Who came up with ‘school writing’? For example, where did the 5-paragraph essay come from?” In the spring, one of my students from Brazil, Renaldo, said: “In my English classes, they were all about the 5-paragraph essay, but then I went back to Brazil, and my teacher said, ‘what is this? Just let your thoughts flow.’” His experiences taught the class that writing can be culturally specific and that the 5-paragraph essay is not the only “right” way to do school writing.

Phase 2 activities based on students' interests: continuing to build a genre metalanguage

In the following activities which focus on (1) fall students' analysis of a rap video; and (2) spring students' analysis of genres they used in their personal lives; and (3) spring students' analysis of genres they collectively picked out of a newspaper, I show how my responsive teaching created a space for students to study genres they either interacted with or used in their personal lives (outside of class). I classify these activities as similar in that they occurred during the same phase of teaching; more importantly, the first two activities were unplanned. I created these activities “on the spot” in relation to what was happening/interesting to students at the time. In this sense, I used specific metalanguage questions that I was working towards at that juncture of teaching, while giving students some authority in picking the genres we studied and/or discussed. In the third activity, while I designed the homework assignment sheet, I allowed students to collectively pick the genres that they would study (out of the campus newspaper). This section is particularly helpful in terms of showing how to build on both students' participation in discourse communities and their unique background knowledge—which as I argue in Chapter 5—is especially important within a pedagogy of genre awareness.

Fall: “Analyzing a rap video”

In this activity, I describe how students opened up the textual features of a “rap video” as genre. I showcase how students discussed the connection between the conventions of the video and community values and show ways in which students'

discussion was similar to a Cultural Studies approach to opening up this text. I discuss how—*with their own language and practical examples*—students discussed difficult theoretical concepts that went beyond discussions of rhetorical devices to consideration of how *social conventions were linked to community and cultural values*. They also discussed how the video “functioned”—that is, how it was consumed by culture, how artists/producers created and maintained values, and how larger attitudes towards women were influenced by the video. In this sense, my approach built on a Cultural Studies approach but “opened up” the video in a way that rhetorical or Cultural Studies approaches towards the same text would not have.

Rationale and description

It was our weekly allotted computer lab time (once a week for two hours), and I faced the eternal problem. I saw several students on Facebook (an online social network), and some were busy doing searches on the Internet. Since there was a projector screen connected to my computer, I asked a couple of students to come to my desk and decide on one of the most current, popular rap songs. I picked rap because I knew the majority of my students listened to it. In about three seconds, they agreed on “Dip, Set (There It Go)” by Juelz Santana and we downloaded the video. Since this was an off the cuff activity, I didn’t have much time to plan. I had already considered doing something with a rap video since I knew my students loved rap. When I had done so, I questioned how doing a rhetorical analysis of a rap video was different from analyzing the video as a genre. But just as music is classified by genre, I believed that music videos had

developed different types of conventions, or at least expectations—depending on the type of music and the communities that listened to it. Miller (1984) argues that “genres serve as keys to understanding how to participate in the actions of a community” (554). Other scholars’ (Bizzell 2002; Devitt, Bawarshi, & Reiff 2003; Swales 1990) also claim that communities maintain a distinct set of genres that carry out larger social objectives. I thought that asking questions about the hip-hop community/culture that students were a part of, interested in, or influenced by would be a productive way to get them thinking about how genres reflect and influence larger social goals. I had always had the goal of building on students’ interests in my teaching, and looking back, I was also instinctively building on Margaret Willard-Traub’s (2003) claim that if we are to teach genre productively versus approaching genre as “formula,” then we must find ways to draw on students’ material experiences—where they explore the social effects of language in circumstances that matter to them. I wasn’t 100% convinced that students would stay focused enough to get anything “academic” out of this type of activity (scholarly self vs. mainstream self). I took the risk.

We had already done various types of rhetorical analyses but hadn’t yet dealt with genre analysis. For this activity, I told the students we would focus on the lyrics, beats, visual images, performers/actors, and whatever else came up. Aside from rhetorical devices, I also said that I wanted them to think about what *effect* or *function* the video had on different communities. Some questions we explored were, how does the video *reflect* the community (the hip hop community or other communities)? And how does it *create* values for different communities or age groups? This activity allowed me to make these questions more *explicit*, although we had explored similar concepts in the private vs.

social activity when students brought up their own examples. I told them to watch the video once. The second time around, I asked them to jot down notes. Then I gave them time to freewrite or make sense of their notes before we talked as a class.

“What happened”: how students responded

During whole class discussion, students started with the familiar “sex sells” talk. They described the women in the videos and said that rappers and producers want women in their videos because that’s what the public wants to watch. Some students thought the women’s roles degraded women. Some, however, thought that the women in the videos played an empowering role. This created some debate. I tried to direct the conversation toward the *video*, asking students if women’s roles in other genres of videos were different, based on the type of music and what the people that watch particular videos want. One student, Thomas, said that with many rock music videos, women also played a very sexual role. He used the word “video vamp.” This led another student, Destiny, to note that many rap lyrics focus on, as she described it, “the booty.” So it made sense to her that there were curvy women in the videos that flaunted their bodies. She cited some of the song lyrics and said that the acting corresponded to the words. Some students noted that a focus on “the booty” was a value in the black community, while others made the argument that rap has gained a much broader influence. These students argued that all types of people listen to rap and that the types of women in rap videos are getting more diverse. One student, Aaron, agreed but said that most people watching rap videos want to see Black or Latina women. Some students thought his statement was reductive.

Students then directed the conversation toward “bling,” saying that rappers always flaunt their jewelry and “ice” (e.g., diamonds) in their videos. Some students thought it was “annoying” that rappers always flaunt their money. Two students, Jose and Richard, made the argument that the flaunting was more than just flaunting—that it was more so a symbol of the underdog succeeding. I asked if they meant that the in your face “bling” was political. They got very passionate about this, saying that rap, as a genre of music “was all about bringing black people up.” It was clear that students were saying that rap videos reflect deeper values of the black community, so I asked them if they thought the videos *created* particular values? Many students said they thought young people mostly watch the videos and may feel like they want to strive for material wealth after being exposed to the videos. One student, Arianna, was adamant that rap music was more than bling and booty. She said that even though everyone watches the videos, she doesn’t think people watch the videos and get bad ideas about women or take the videos too seriously. She criticized the rap video industry, saying that rappers and producers “aren’t really creative with their videos...it’s like people just expect every video to have the booty shakin’ and bling...no one really cares that much.” Another outspoken student, Jenna, agreed with her but argued: “It ain’t right, how women always be half naked!” She thought the images did have a big effect on the communities that watch them. Students could have talked about these issues all day. At times, I felt like I had to direct the conversation back to questions on genre. However, since students were so interested in all the relevant issues, I felt like we covered some important things, including women’s roles in the videos, material wealth in relation to hip hop, and what communities expect from rap videos.

Post-activity journal reflection

In my journal entry after class, I noted that if we had had more time, I would have been interested in pushing the race question and trying to talk about the supposed boundaries of rap communities and how these boundaries relate to discourse practices. Students did talk about “hip-hop women”—that is, what types and races of women have entrance into the community (or at least entrance into the rhetorical manifestations of the community). One thing I would have also improved was to find ways to elicit participation from international students. They seemed to listen, but most ESL students didn’t speak up during the activity (in Chapter 4, I describe how one of my feature students reflected on her participation in this activity). I sensed this was a combination of not being comfortable in confrontational, or at least spirited, dialogues and possibly not being as interested in rap music. For the sake of focusing on genre and not just talking about music or other relevant issues such as material wealth, I noted how I often had to direct the conversation and ask pointed questions. Students seemed to respond positively to this, though. As a group, they engaged in more detailed analysis, which led some individuals to re-think their views. Some students, of course, were so invested in their opinions and strong interest in hip-hop that they didn’t budge on the points they made.

Tentative Conclusions

After analyzing the interviews and my own journal entries, I realized that this activity was more instrumental than I had thought at the time I taught it. I hadn’t initially planned to feature the activity. I hadn’t even planned the activity as part of my teaching.

Therefore, I didn't create an interview question specifically about the activity. However, there are several significant learning points that came across through this activity. First, students were using a complex means of analysis with a genre that they were interested in. Perhaps doing a rhetorical analysis or studying the video as a cultural artifact would have resulted in a similar conversation. However, looking back, I notice that without using the word *social convention* or *rhetorical conventions*, students were talking about just that—how the conventions of the video, and not just rhetorical devices, were linked to community and cultural values. Next, students talked about how the video functioned: how it was consumed by culture, how artists/producers created and maintained values, and how larger attitudes towards women were influenced by the video.

The following directive questions that I asked were instrumental: *how does the video reflect the community (the hip hop community or other communities?* and *how does it create values for different communities or age groups?* Students seemed to focus more on what the video reflected, but when I asked them (explicitly) if they thought the videos *created* particular cultural values, they had a lot to say. In this sense, my instruction helped students add another dimension to the discussion. In addition, as I engaged in data analysis, I saw a direct link between the idea that genres create values (that came out in this activity) and the practical examples they had brought up in the private versus social activity. For example, in the private versus social activity, students brought up how billboards, advertisements, and political speeches influence American culture.

As I mentioned, the genre focus of my pedagogy opened up this text in similar ways to a Cultural Studies approach, which I had imparted in earlier versions of my teaching (the year prior) and which I consider to be an underlying thread of my genre

approach to teaching as well. However, the questions that asked students to consider *how the conventions of the video both reflected and created the values of different communities* opened up this text in a way that other approaches would not have been able to foster. For example, *through students' own language*, there was a clear connection between community discourse practices, culture, and rhetoric—and how the genre was the “place” that all of these dynamics came together. In this sense, the affordances of my particular approach added more depth and critical thinking than other approaches would have fostered (in Chapter 5, I consider how having students study more than one video would provide even more depth and create a focus on “variation”).

Spring student examples: “bathroom graffiti and military letter”

Rationale and description

In the spring, we similarly talked about how genres reflect community roles and discourse practices. In his interview, one student, Renaldo, brought up our discussion of bathroom graffiti and whether or not it should be considered a genre. In class, this discussion organically led to a discussion of personal letters in the military. Like the rap video, I hadn't initially planned to collect data in relation to this activity and/or feature it. However, Renaldo thought this was an instrumental activity, and I valued his feedback because he was a leader in the class. In addition, the more I considered different activities while analyzing my data (e.g., the rap video), the more I became convinced that students can engage in complex analysis with an unplanned, off the cuff activity. In addition, these

unplanned activities often built on other activities in ways that a planned activity could not have.

The activity transpired when Renaldo, who always came in with something to say, entered the room talking about the writings he had just been reading in the men's bathroom. Class was about to start. More and more students began chiming in. Instead of going with the activity I had planned, I decided to build a genre discussion into the conversation Renaldo had started. Students liked the fact that we departed from our normal routine, and they laughed a lot during this activity. Since Renaldo started the discussion in class, and since the way he informally talked about bathroom graffiti in his interview mirrored the way he started the dialogue with other students, I will start with a segment of his interview.

The bathroom graffiti came up when I asked him: "After being a student in my class, did your concept of genre change? In what ways?" Here is Renaldo's response:

Renaldo: ...did it change? I guess it's just realizing that genres, it's not just the stuff we learn in English class, but anything, the writing we see in the bathroom, the post-its, emails...that all the stuff you see, there's always a method or guideline to it, even bathroom stalls writing...there IS a guideline...

Meghan: What's the guideline?

Renaldo: There's like...you have to write something mean...

Meghan: Or something obscene and vulgar? (laughs)

Renaldo: yeah

Meghan: Cuz you're anonymous...

Renaldo: You're anonymous, and then you always have to comment on other people's comments, and draw an arrow, and you know....cuz if you're looking at one comment, there's like a whole bunch of arrows...

Meghan: Like a little network.

Here, Renaldo talks about how the content and style of communicating is dictated by what's expected in bathroom stall writing. I will now show how students collaboratively engaged with the graffiti discussion.

“What happened”: how students responded in class

When we talked about bathroom graffiti in class, other students described what kinds of things are written about. They said that sexual innuendos and jokes make up much of the content. A couple of students also brought up that political messages or advertisements for social gatherings are sometimes written on the stalls. They also discussed form—how people respond to others' messages using arrows to connect related ideas and how writers will use a lot of exclamation points and visual messages like symbols, smiley faces, or other graphic images. Students also brought up the types of places where this genre is most likely to appear. They noted that depending on where you are (e.g., a college vs. a high school) and what community is involved, the content varies. Most students hadn't thought of this genre discursively, or even thought of it as a genre. In class, Renaldo argued that it should be a genre because it had certain rules and functions just like the other genres we had been studying. (A homework assignment just prior to this had asked students to select a genre, find three examples of it, and describe the commonalities or differences in convention across the different examples. Students had picked poems, political cartoons, newspaper front page stories, etc.). During class that day, students discussed concepts like social convention, audience expectations, and

content. One big theme was how the social environment had a strong influence not only on what people said but how they said it.

The focus on social environment led one of my older international students, Hyun, to bring up a genre that he used during his stint in the Korean military. He talked about the importance of personal letters while he was away from home. The main purpose of a personal letter, of course, was for soldiers to keep in touch with family and friends. However, Hyun more critically built on the idea of social environment influencing writers by telling the class that he could only write about mundane happenings and couldn't share any top secret information including missions or locations of duty or even what he was doing on a daily basis. He said that he was always aware that some higher up might read the letter. So although the genre was personal, he recognized how his social environment influenced what he could say.

I'm not sure that Hyun had ever articulated this discursive consciousness before. It was something he simply *did* because he had to, but the more Hyun took the floor in class, I could tell he was very aware of what he wrote (or didn't) in the letters and why. Uncovering and sharing this practical and discursive consciousness was extremely valuable to the class. Many students had never thought so deeply about the genre of a personal letter. In this case, a personal letter functioning in a military context can almost be considered a sub-genre. Its form and function diverged from common personal letters, reflecting the context in which the genre operated. My student's experience taught the class these important lessons.

Post-activity journal entry

Aside from the productive discussion we had about genre, the class meeting was important because (1) it was unplanned and built on students' interests, which seemed to elicit enthusiasm; and (2) it was Hyun's first time speaking for an extended period. His participation was not only a breakthrough for him, but since it directed the last part of class, his role set a positive example for other ESL students who didn't feel comfortable speaking in class. Even though the design of this activity took shape as it unfolded, I learned to be flexible in my teaching. Building on an informal conversation that students initiated provided me with an "in" to many of the same concepts that I would have focused on in my planned lesson. I was excited about the "flow" of the class.

Tentative Conclusions

Although this activity was unplanned, looking back, the informal design as well as the way students took the floor allowed for important genre learning. Again, I saw students engaging in meaningful discussion of the materiality of genres from their own lives. Janet Giltrow and Michele Valiquette (1994) make the distinction between "practical consciousness" (writing in a genre, the act of doing) and "discursive consciousness" (explaining the conventions or uses of a genre, metaknowledge) (47). In both discussions, students made the transition between explaining what they did in practice, and then considering the "whys and what happens" that related to their acts of doing. Making this distinction aligned with my foundational goal of having students see genres as socially real.

Although I liked the fact that students for the most part directed this activity, during data analysis I again saw that I could have made more explicit theoretical points or direct comparisons between, say, the military letters and other genres we had analyzed. On the other hand, I am so used to being overly analytical in my role as a scholar that I'm not sure making the theoretical overlap explicit was necessary in terms of students' learning. I began to wonder: *Do students get the same thing out of an activity if they are implicitly uncovering concepts (often through practical examples) that I believe are theoretically pertinent to scaffolding genre pedagogy?* For example, Devitt (2004) focuses much of her work on the tension between the extent to which genres both constrain and enable users, which relates directly to Hyun's example (his social role influencing the genre, which in turn, created rhetorical constraints). Also, in relation to the discussion of bathroom graffiti reflecting different communities and "making" authors write about certain things in a certain way if they want to be "in the know"—that is, part of that rhetorical community. Although exploring these theoretical concepts underlay my approach and my general goal for students to study the social workings and uses of language, during data analysis I questioned the extent to which I needed to be explicit about specific points. Being explicit about these points could have been a useful way to make my overall pedagogical goals more obvious, although I believe students got those concepts through their own practical examples.

Spring: “newspaper articles”

Rationale and description

Soon after their discussion of bathroom graffiti and military letters, I had students study a letter to the editor and front page news story from the campus newspaper. Two of the seven spring students I interviewed brought up this activity as instrumental in understanding generic functions. They had first analyzed the two genres for homework. We then collaboratively discussed findings. While only two students cited this activity as being instrumental to their development of a genre metalanguage, I chose to feature it here because it provided the basis for one of our most constructive whole-class discussions. Students had a lot to say, and at times even had productive debates. I attributed their excitement to the fact that they had a hand at picking the genres.

When I assigned the homework, I brought in a stack of campus newspapers and told students they could pick any two genres for analysis. The students decided on a front page news story, “F-word more prominent than before” and a letter to the editor, “People should learn more respect for others.” I suspected they picked the first article so that they could talk about the “F” word in a class setting. A campus police officer had written the second genre they selected, complaining about a young woman he had ticketed for parking in a handicapped spot. Everyone at MSU seems to have something to say about parking issues and ticketing, and the students seemed interested in the topic. For homework, students answered the following questions about both selections:

- (1) Identify the genre/name the genre

- (2) Provide a brief summary about what is being communicated. What is the message behind the genre? What is the author's purpose?
- (3) Spend time analyzing the language and communication style. Build on the tools we've been developing. (i.e., organization, tone, visuals, citation of experts, use of personal narrative, whatever is relevant).
- (4) Consider the USE of the genre. Where is the genre located? What kind of audience is targeted? What kinds of genres are located near this genre?

"What happened": how students responded

I started the whole class discussion with the open-ended question: "What did you find in your analysis?" One student, Sid, started off the letter to the editor discussion by saying that the author was "too pushy" in trying to communicate. Other students agreed, noting that the tone was angry and defensive. Some students agreed with the author, and some dismissed the author's message because they didn't think the angry tone was a good way to persuade a wide audience. One student pointed out that the author started with specific personal experiences with others and used *they* in reference to them. But at the end, the author switched to *you*, using phrases such as "you should take the time to realize that there are others in the world around you. Try a little respect." Again, some students thought this was an effective rhetorical move. As one student, Adara, noted: it "makes you stop and think; it makes it more personal." Others thought it mis-marked the audience, attacking the average reader and putting people off. One student, Tobin, noted that the author seemed to imply that all college kids are disrespectful, which offended him.

Since I noticed that the author's positioning as a parking cop seemed to influence the way students read the letter, I raised a question about authorial identity. I asked: "In a

letter to the editor, does it matter *who* writes the letter? In other words do you read the message differently if it's say a teacher or a mother or a law enforcement figure writing the letter?" One student said that in this genre the author usually lists their title, age, or other markers below their name. He said that he always looks to see "who they are because then you know if you can trust them or not...well...somewhat....I don't know...." Another student said that she could be persuaded by anyone if the letter was well-written and had a good message. This led us to a discussion of the author's identity being visible. Students thought it really mattered WHO does the writing in this genre more so than other genres. That is, if the letters send a community message, my students wanted to know where the author "fit into" the community. We then moved into discussion of the genre's conventions and function(s). Students said letters to the editor mostly attempt to persuade people to think differently about some issue that is happening in the community. Students also noted that letters to the editor respond to some issue that was previously written about in the newspaper, probably recently in the same newspaper—i.e. other letters to the editor, editorials, or articles. One student, Tamara, said that "people will like fight in these letters...you have to be strong with your words."

We then moved into analysis of the news story. Students said that the usual function of this genre was to inform. However, many thought this piece was more persuasive and one-sided. They said that the author didn't state his opinion outright but kept quoting outside sources that represented one side. The content was about the proliferation of the "F" word. The author cited mainly old people who were dismayed. Student noted that older age groups are more "conservative" and "old-fashioned." One student, Gina, brought up the fact that at the end of the article, an MSU student was cited.

Still, Gina thought that the article had an imbalance of sources, which proved that the author was biased. Many students agreed with the content of the article but said they thought it was too one-sided to be a news story. We didn't have as long to talk about this article because we ran out of time.

Post-class journal entry

In my post-class notes, I had reflected on several things about the class. First, it seemed that the fact that students had a hand at picking the genres combined with the fact that the content was interesting and relevant increased their investment. I also noted that several Asian ESL students had spoken for the first time. I attributed this to the overall good flow of conversation. I also thought that since students had thought about the issues for homework that they seemed more likely to speak in class. I also noticed that, in their own language, students talked about writing conventions, means of persuasion, and authorial positioning. For example, with the letter to the editor, they talked about social conversations and mentioned how the genre works with and responds to other genres in the newspaper. Question four on the assignment sheet, "What other genres are near this genre?," directly encouraged students to talk about how the letter worked with other genres. They seemed to be building a genre metalanguage—doing deep rhetorical analysis and having insightful conversations about the two genres' social functions.

Relevant interview feedback

This activity was the first that came to mind in Renaldo's interview. He most remembered this activity because of the collaborative knowledge building:

...the newspaper articles that we read....analyzing the different genres... the group work was really nice cuz everyone always seemed to have different ideas, that you don't think about until you sit in a group, and then you're like 'wait.' So it's kinda interesting, and I don't know...with the newspaper articles I remember people were really interested...and they had already been looking at them and everyone noticed different stuff about the way they were written and had different opinions and stuff....

Tentative conclusions

Having students engage with genre questions individually and collaboratively picking genres they were interested in seemed to be the most crucial determinants of this activity's success. I also think the genres were "socially real" more so in this activity since the genres were in the campus newspaper and written by local authors. In this sense, the users (both writers and readers) of this genre were local. Since students were consumers who were directly affected by these genres, they seemed more invested. Renaldo's point about collaborative knowledge-building was important. Aside from diverse opinions about the content, students did not always agree on the effectiveness of certain rhetorical devices. So textual analysis—and discord in opinion—helped them dig deeper into what a genre "should contain" and more importantly, how these communicative devices affected the audience reading the newspaper.

After analyzing the rap video activity, the impromptu class about bathroom graffiti and military letters, and the newspaper articles activity, I realized that since the majority of students were actual consumers of these genres, they seemed both enthusiastic and able to engage with difficult theoretical concepts tying conventions to particular authors and communities. In addition, the overall strength of all activities was students' use of practical examples to get at theoretical concepts. These activities were instrumental in raising the questions: *how much genre metalanguage is necessary at various stages of building a language for talking about genre? Does it matter if students use our language when they seem to be opening up texts in practical ways that foster rich literacy learning?* In Chapter 5, I respond to these questions in relation to my own pedagogy as well as raise questions for further research.

End of phase 2: digging deeper into genre

Fall: “freewrite + whole-class discussion (theoretical prompt about authors and convention)”

The following activity was also instrumental in showing me the importance of students invoking their own practical examples—even within a prompt that asks them to respond to theoretical, or more open-ended, questions about authors, convention, and genre. As I present the activity, the reader will see that in class, students were most vocal about the prompt that asked them to include personal examples—leading to a lively, productive discussion about authors and convention. Overall, students addressed issues

such as audience expectations, the role of individuality and originality, and the emergence of genres. The notions of genres carrying out *social functions*—a key component of my own and other genre pedagogies—always seemed present, even if the idea wasn't explicitly stated.

Rationale and description

In the fall, once students had developed an introductory genre metalanguage, I wrote some theoretical prompts on the overhead. I asked them to freewrite on their own before we talked about each statement collaboratively. The prompts read:

Do you agree with the following statements?

(1) A writer is always influenced by the social context they write within.

(2) A writer can break genre conventions. If so, can you provide examples of when this happens? What are the end results?

In the first prompt, I purposely invoked the word *always* to make the statement extreme. Earlier in the semester students seemed equally compelled to argue that writing is both a private and a social act. I wanted to see how they would respond now that we were further along in the process of developing a genre metalanguage. I made the first prompt open-ended because I wanted students to use their own language to consider where individuals get ideas for invention and enter different writing spaces and forms. This prompt doesn't *directly* invoke a focus on genre, while the second one does.

For the second prompt, I wanted an avenue into RGS's idea that genres both constrain and enable writers. Devitt (2004) notes that a crucial aspect of a pedagogy of

genre awareness is that students become able to discern between constraints and choices and, at the same time, look at how “the forms of a genre reflect the contexts within which the genre functions” (198). I started the prompt with an active voice—i.e.: “A *writer* can *break* genre conventions”—so that students would think of the writer as an active agent. Asking “what are the end results?” was my indirect attempt to get students thinking about how social expectations also influence the writing process. I wouldn’t say I had a specific expected outcome for the activity, but I did hope it would open up a discussion of how genres change and emerge. In this sense, I imparted a particular theoretical lens while trying to create the space for students to discuss whatever they wanted. Students wrote for almost 20 minutes, and we used the last 20 minutes to have a whole class discussion. None of the fall students that I interviewed brought up this activity. However, we had a productive whole-class discussion this day. This activity was one of the best avenues into discussing the relationship between authors and convention.

“What happened”: how students responded

a. Class discussion

In class, students seemed more interested in discussing the second prompt: *A writer can break genre conventions. If so, can you provide examples of when this happens? What are the end results?* In my post-class journal entry, I wrote down some of the key moments. I considered these as key moments because these points started lively discussions.

Arianna: “Well you know, genres can change, just like Notorious B.I.G. changed the genre of rap music.” She went on to describe his lyrics and beats as “switching up the game forever.”

Thomas: “When the individual is outnumbered by a group, then they follow genre conventions.” He went on to describe business communication in which a member must follow the “proper means of communication so that they fit in and look professional.”

Jorge: “Sometimes the best writers break convention, and that’s what makes them great.”

Jenna: “...yeah but you can’t just go breaking grammar rules and think you’re being different. I mean, c’mon....”

When they discussed the second prompt, students viewed breaking convention as both a positive and negative thing. Some students equated breaking convention with breaking grammar rules. One student, Jenna, was adamant that you have to have a good reason for breaking grammar rules. Another student, Jill, agreed with her, comparing school papers where you “have to be proper” and more “free” genres like poetry or letter writing.

One student, Arianna, took the conversation in a different direction, associating convention with an accepted way of expression. When she brought up a famous rapper that many students were interested in, others agreed that Notorious B.I.G. had a permanent effect on the genre of rap music. They cited other rappers that they felt held a unique niche (e.g. Tupac Shakur, Talib Kweli, and Common were the examples I remembered). They described these rappers as socially conscious and associated them with creating their own conventions (e.g. sounds, lyrical schemes, and messages). Most thought this was a positive thing since they thought these rappers either made people think or encouraged listeners to use struggle as a positive force. I asked students if they thought that “originality” was what made these rappers different. One student, Ricardo, said that he didn’t think it was originality because these rappers combined different beats

and styles that “were already out there—and made them their own.” He went on to describe how an audience knows a rapper: “...like the sounds...when you hear B.I.G, you know it’s him. You know the voice and the beats too.” He also described how an audience doesn’t always realize that “there’s tons of guys behind it too...who produce it and combine the beats.” Arianna then talked about an artist’s “vision”—arguing that rappers as well-known as B.I.G. still maintain the artistic vision and make final decisions in production. She also talked about how well he was received by both black culture and mainstream audiences, arguing that if the audiences didn’t “buy into his style,” then his attempts to be different would have been “in vain.”

I then asked the class to cite other genres where they’d seen authors do “something different.” One student, Jorge, brought up *Rolling Stone* magazine where authors write articles about musicians. He described the articles as a combination of interview with analysis. He described the articles as “raw”—saying that the authors will often point out a musician’s imperfections or downfalls (e.g., drug use, bad relationships). He went on to say that other magazines aren’t as real, often chronicling current events or talking about “feel good” stories. Jorge also observed that the articles within *Rolling Stone* have probably evolved, questioning whether or not elements of American culture like reality TV have made it more acceptable or at least common to talk about shocking things or someone’s personal life. Students seemed interested in this topic. One student, John, chimed in and talked about “knowing what to expect” in a *Rolling Stone* article. He said that no matter how different the people being chronicled are, you can always expect to read a description of their appearance, who they’re in love with, and some strange fact from their past that tries to get the audience to “like them”—

no matter if they're good people or not. John's tone was often sarcastic, which led some students to provide spirited—or antagonistic—responses. Some students agreed that the articles were monotonous, but some argued that the articles changed depending on who the subject was. In relation to John's "list" of what the content of these articles offered, another student, Thomas, said: "Well that's usually what we want to read about because it's the same things everyone goes through." Students used up all of the class time discussing this prompt, although they indirectly hit on aspects of the first prompt through their discussion. In the next section I will address how students responded, in writing, to both prompts.

b. Written responses

For the first prompt, *A writer is always influenced by the social context they write within*, the majority of students agreed (I had permission to use work from 14 students). However, within the "agreed" category, there were diverse responses, which led me to divide their opinions into three categories: (1) students who agreed with the prompt, while associating the idea of social context with *content* (*i.e. a place to get ideas*); (2) students who agreed, while associating the statement primarily with *elements of form* (*i.e., grammar rules, style, ways of expressing*); and (3) students who disagreed.

In these individual responses, almost three quarters of students thought of social context as somewhere to get ideas. Some students made general statements. For example, Jenna wrote: "The writer has to get their inspiration from somewhere." Another student, Luis, responded similarly: "Yes because everywhere around you is a social context, meaning wherever you go you will be influenced in some way." One ESL student seemed

to express similar sentiments, although his word choice was a bit unclear. Martin wrote:

“I totally agree that a writer is always influenced by social context because of the interaction between people. The social context is related to what people do and how their activities interact people.”

Other students in this category responded by making references to *specific* social contexts. Jose, who uses an essay on chemical combustion as an example, brings an awareness of disciplinary knowledge to the forefront:

I agree with the statement...because when someone is writing about something, that person must have an adequate amount of knowledge on what they are writing on. An example, if I were to do an essay on chemical combustion of an element and not know one bit about what I am writing, then my essay wouldn't have any 'congruence' to it.

In his example, someone immersed in understanding the field of engineering invents based on knowledge they acquire through direct learning in that field. In this sense, the social environment (and knowledge to be learned within it) gives the writer tools for invention. Jose doesn't explicitly discuss form, although he does say an essay must have “congruence.” He seems to use this word to connote coherence, or plain “making sense.” Another student, Richard, on the other hand, explains how the experience of being in jail stirred up internal feelings that made him want to write: “I agree with this statement because people usually [sic] write about there [sic] surroundings and how it affects [sic] them like when I was in jail I would write poems about struggle [sic] and hardships in my life.” Jose seems to describe the synthesis of knowledge, while Richard describes how social environment inspires personal expression.

Two other students in this category, Jorge and Arianna, agreed that a social context influences a writer; however, they also noted that sometimes people write

personal stories or write from within without necessarily being influenced by the social. Jorge explains: “Sometimes people write personal stories without ‘social influence’; but yes, because I wouldn’t write this unless I were asked to do it by my professor.” Arianna notes the tension between writing from within and getting ideas from a social context: “Yes...the social context gives the person the insight...then on the other hand there is [sic] some writers that can write about anything rather from within or looking in...” Another ESL student expresses somewhat of a “split” answer. Lily wrote: “Usually, from social context, writers find some information and write a story. Social issue is good things to write a story. People are interested in social contexts....actually, I don’t know exactly about social contexts.” I didn’t interview Lily, but during data analysis, I was left feeling that although she did have some kind of conceptualization of social context, she didn’t know exactly how to articulate what she meant—or at least was ambivalent about how to define social context and how it affects a writer.

Next, two students agreed that writers are always influenced by their social context but associated social context with elements of form. The first student, Jill, makes a general statement: “Social context influences how I am going to write.” Nikki invokes disciplinary writing in her example: “Yes. Some fields are very strict about forms, for example, when music therapist writes a documents [sic]...there are some basic rules (model) for the documents. Also each field has tendency [sic] to use a lot of technical terms...these aspects eventually influence the style of writing.” The last student who agreed with the statement provided a somewhat vague response, which made it hard for me to fit her response into a specific category.

Only one student whose work I could use came down on the side of disagreeing with the statement. Thomas wrote: “I agree that the writing would be different if the author was writing privately when compared to a classroom environment where the work must be turned in. In any other situation I would say ‘no.’ I don’t believe a difference in public environment would or should affect a writer’s content.” Thomas seemed to focus intently on content—making the distinction between what we write about in a class setting, “where the work must be turned in” vs. what we write about in other environments. When he said he doesn’t think that public environment “would or *should* (my emphasis) affect a writer’s content,” he seemed to emphasize the role that authorial agency plays in the writing process.

In response to the second prompt, *A writer can break genre conventions. If so, can you provide examples of when this happens? What are the end results?* In their freewrites, students had diverse responses and examples. Therefore, I divided the responses into four categories:

- Students who associated writers breaking convention as a “good” thing—showing individuality and creativity
- Students who thought writers could break convention and associated breaking convention with both positive and negative outcomes
- Students who associated breaking convention with negative outcomes (e.g., not following the “proper” way to write).
- Students who wrote vague responses (I wasn’t sure if they understood the prompt).

To start, three students associated breaking convention with individuality and originality. These students expressed this as a positive thing. One student, Jorge, said: “Rules are

made to be broken...sometimes to get their point across, it's necessary for writers to break rules. Being different would create new ideas that can become new ways for people to write." Another student, Richard, also brought up the creation of new genres. He wrote: "I think a writer can break the rules like the way I write no punchion [sic] or poems sometimes when you break rules it may start a new genre." The third student in this category, Jill, associated breaking convention with personal expression. She cited poetry as an example of a genre that allows writers to "go with the flow." Another student, Lily, also noted how individuals have the power to change genres. She wrote:

There are fixed genre conventions. Some people write a story according to the rules, other don't. I think as writer breaks the rule he/she can make another genre and rule....If everybody writes a story according to the rules, there are no development. Breaking the rules will endure and create new rule [sic] and genre.

Lily accorded individuals the power to change genres. She used the word "endure" to describe how individuals can create social convention, or as she puts it, "new rule [sic] and genre."

Next, four students thought that writers could break convention and associated breaking convention with both positive and negative outcomes. Like the first category, many students associated breaking convention with originality. However, they also noted that sometimes when writers try to be different, their point gets lost. Thomas commented that sometimes individuals may risk their sense of "belonging in a community" if they don't communicate according to accepted ways of communicating: "I think that a writer can break the rules. But one must be aware of when this can and cannot be done. When the audience of those who think the rules must be followed is outnumbered by those who want something different, it is ok." Another student, Jenna, noted how writers must have

a purpose, focusing mainly on grammar: “I think a writer can break the rules in certain genres because it makes them unique...Then again, it can have bad grammar. A writer can’t write terrible and expect to be a ‘unique writer.’ It has to show that their writing is different in a positive way.” Destiny provides a similar response (I’ve preserved features of Destiny’s use of her primary discourse, AAVE in the following quote):

Yes, a writer break the rules you have to break down the understanding of the rules. It can turn out being positive or negative. And it have to be a style or a purpose like ‘poetry’... it can be a lot of rule breaking with grammar can so on. They way the writing is interacts with the style and punctuation...positive it has to make since [sic], negative it shows no point.

The next student, Arianna, talked about authorial purpose and invokes the importance of audience:

I think that a writer can break the rules of certain genres but it has to be an extreme breakthrough with negative and positive outcomes full of purpose. The positive outcomes could be that you reach a large amount of people and people love what you do...like “Biggie” (the rapper). He broke lots of rules and said a lot of things but people could understand and relate. The negative could have been that his music could have been pushed away...then breaking the rules would have been in vain.

Three students fell into the third category: these students associated breaking convention with negative outcomes, including the risk of an audience not understanding what an author writes or breaking grammar rules. One student, Luis, said that when an author breaks grammar rules, sometimes the author’s point gets lost. Another student, Martin, said: “if you break the rules, people may not like what you did or disagree what you did.” In this example, Martin seemed to position audience expectations over authorial agency.

Another student, Nikki, used her experience in the field of music therapy (she was an international senior) to discuss disciplinary discourse practices. She wrote: "...in the music therapy area, if you break the rules of writing, it is sometimes dangerous that therapist might reveal the private information of the client, or therapist...it's also less professional if you break the rules." Here, Nikki showed how writing in her field reflects the important value of confidentiality and professionalism in the mental health field. Lastly, two students provided vague responses that I couldn't neatly classify.

Post-class journal entry

Students were more vocal about the second prompt since I asked them to provide examples. In the first theoretical prompt, students seemed less apt or interested to bring up examples or start discussions. When discussing the second prompt, Arianna's example that related to rap music started a lively discussion, and Jorge's more specific focus on genre through the *Rolling Stone* examples built on her example nicely. The divergence in opinions allowed us to collaboratively talk about elements of form, content, and community discourse practices. Students also mentioned topics like audience expectations, the role of individuality and originality, and the emergence of genres.

Tentative conclusions

The notions of genres carrying out social functions always seemed present, and students' practical examples illustrated this concept. In both their individual freewrites,

and subsequently, class discussion, I would have liked to see even more students cite even specific examples (as some had done with rap music, poetry, and narrative).

Spring: “6 genres activity”

This activity introduced students to digging deeply into “everyday” genres and provided them with a more extensive list of analytic tools to build on their genre metalanguage. In addition, as I found towards the end of completing my study, this activity was instrumental in terms of: (1) illustrating the theoretical concepts of *genres having a social function* and *genres working together* through a diverse set of everyday and academic genres; (2) complicating the tension between students’ concepts of *rhetoric* and *genre*; and (3) providing a bridge for the types of detailed analysis that spring students would engage in when they researched disciplinary genres in the final project. Students’ group analysis of diverse genres and subsequent collective discussion—in which they learned about each other’s genres—together provided an avenue into the above concepts in a way that I hadn’t anticipated. A more detailed look at the activity reveals these concepts “in action.”

Rationale and description

Four of the seven spring students I interviewed brought up the “6 genres activity”, which we did about midway in the semester (after the newspaper genres). In *Genre and*

the Invention of the Writer, Bawarshi (2003) provides a 3-part analysis used to explore a genre's *situation, communicative features, and overall function*. Although I had read these questions prior to each semester, I didn't use the exact list as a resource until the spring semester. As I discussed earlier, I adapted some of the questions for the fall, but I felt that the spring students were more adequately prepared to engage with the more extensive list of questions. I brought in a diverse mix of genres including wedding announcements, a front page news story, an academic journal article in psychology, an advertisement from a women's magazine, comic strips, and greeting cards. Some of the genres I selected—for example, the comic strip and the greeting cards—were examples provided in Bawarshi's book. One of my primary goals was to have students explore a diverse mix of genres. I selected some genres based on what I thought students would be interested in and others that I thought they had never explored on a discursive level. In this sense I built on Bawarshi's pedagogical suggestions and incorporated my own ideas into the design of the activity. At this stage in the fall, I had built on a lot of examples from students' own lives, and we had talked about genres' uses/social functions and how they were connected to community and cultural discourse practices. I introduced the "6 genres activity" to more directly and thoroughly explore these concepts in the spring.

I also started with the assumption that having each group extensively analyze one genre would provide more full analysis because they would have more time to go into in-depth discussions. I also thought it would be productive for groups to teach each other since the genres were so different and functioned within diverse social contexts.

Bawarshi's list also made many theoretical ideas more explicit, forcing students to push the limits of their own opinions about generic forms and uses. In addition, some of the

questions focused on the relationship between writers, readers, and convention—which was a foundational concept in the theoretical prompt activity that I had introduced at this stage of my pedagogy in the fall. I hoped Bawarshi’s questions in relation to a mix of scholarly, creative, and more “everyday” genres would take my spring students to a new “meta” level (for example, I was almost certain that they hadn’t interacted with an academic journal article for purposes other than gleaning content. I was also pretty sure that they had never analyzed everyday genres such as greeting cards or newspaper articles (discursively) to the extent that I asked them to in this activity. In short, I thought the activity would be more productive in both terms of design and a more detailed exploration of genre. Students worked with the following list of questions:

Part 1: SITUATION of the genre

Setting: Where does the genre appear? With what other genres does this genre interact?

Subject: When people use this genre, what is it that they are interacting about?

Participants: Who writes the genre? How do we know who the writers are? Who reads this genre? What kinds of characteristics do readers of this genre possess? Under what circumstances do readers read this genre?

Motives: When is the genre used? For what occasions? Why is the genre used? What purposes does the genre fulfill for the people who use it?

Part 2: PATTERNS in the genre’s communicative features

Content: What topics are talked about? What content is typically included in this genre? What is excluded? What sorts of examples are used?

Structure: How is the genre organized? What parts make up the genre? What layout is used? How long is a typical text in this genre?

Language use: What types of sentences does the genre have? (long, short, complex..) Do they use passive or active voice? Are they varied?

Diction: What types of words are most frequent? Is slang used? How would you describe the writer’s voice? Why is this voice used?

Part 3: OVERALL ANALYSIS: What do patterns reveal about the situation?

What can you learn about the “actions” being performed through the genre by focusing on its language patterns and communication strategies?

What can you say about the genre?

How does it give you insight into our culture?

What attitude towards readers is implied in the genre? What attitude toward the world is implied in it?

What do participants (writers and readers) have to *know or believe* to understand to appreciate the genre?

Who is invited into the genre? Who is excluded?

What roles for writers and readers does it encourage or discourage?

“What happened”: how students responded:

Each group selected a genre, and while most groups were satisfied with their genres, one group complained they got stuck with the “worst genre,” the academic journal article. Some students complained that this activity made them think too much, but their lively conversations led me to believe something good was happening. While I had initially planned to have the groups present their work, they needed the full class period to answer the questions. When I realized time was running out, I told the class that I would construct a Power Point to show their work and allow them to speak about their genres during the next class.

Based on their group notes, my Power Point illustrated what different groups said about their genres. Here are some examples of the kinds of meta discussions that students had. First, the group that studied different greeting cards noticed that there were almost sub-genres within the greeting card (i.e.: jokes, writing reminiscent of personal letters,

visual messages). My bullet points demonstrated their discussion of sub-genres, and as I presented the lesson the group added in a more general discussion of greeting cards. They told the class how they had talked about how audience affected a greeting card's content. For example, depending on what gender the different cards targeted, the authors used different writing styles and included different messages. For example, a birthday card geared toward a man might focus on celebrating the night, or celebrating the woman on the card (naturally, this led to a discussion of "cheesy" cards with pictures of models or body builders). On the other hand, a card geared toward a woman might focus on celebrating life or friendship. Here, they used the examples I had handed out and also talked about greeting cards they had given or received in their own lives. I saw them discursively articulating common conventions of different types of greeting cards, which they probably had noticed on some level throughout their own life experiences but more fully articulated in this lesson.

Another group analyzed a print advertisement from a women's fitness magazine. The ad attempted to sell a low-carb energy bar and was predominately visual. A mother hugged her young daughter, and there was a to-do list over the picture which read: *(1) Keep the weight down; (2) The carbs low; (3) And the joy high*. Two students in this group were advertising majors and noted how the purpose was to sell the product and "increase brand awareness." In this sense readers could become more empowered by learning about a new product that would contribute to a healthy lifestyle. The group also joked that in American culture, no carbs equals joy. This group was made up of all Asian international students who noted that while many cultures value skinny women, American culture is more focused on a "no carb" approach to dieting and lifestyle. In this

way the ad contributed to the pressure women face to be skinny. They noted that the visual effect of the ad might make readers want to emulate the mother who was energized, happy, and beautiful. In terms of the genre's use, the group noted that its placement in a fitness magazine targeted a core audience. They thought the genre was geared towards most women, although women who didn't want to have children might have been excluded. They also noted that the genre interacts with a digital genre: the company's web page, which was listed in larger letters than any other text on the ad.

Aside from these examples, I would like to focus more specifically on the group that studied a Calvin and Hobbs' newspaper comic strip in order to more fully illustrate all of the elements of Bawarshi's 3-part analysis of *situation*, *communicative features*, and *overall function*. I picked this group because (1) they had the most detailed list of notes, which allowed me to create a detailed Power Point; and (2) their analysis created an interesting conversation in class, which helped students collaboratively analyze a seemingly simple, everyday genre in detail. I also believe this example illustrates how a focus on genre moved beyond rhetorical analysis to discussions of *use* and *motive*.

Part 1, SITUATION:

- Appears in newspaper, purpose is to provide social comedy
- Motives of the genre: to give people a break from reading, entertain, make them think about everyday issues
- Writers of this genre are humorous, artistic people
- Audience might be younger age groups? (or just anyone who wants to be entertained)
- Certain comic strips might attract followers
- Comic strips make people laugh, for entertainment, while political cartoons more aimed at getting people to think about specific social issue, although comic strips may get people to think about important things like relationships, personal quirks, etc.

Part 2, COMMUNICATIVE FEATURES:

- Content: family, relationship, everyday issues and struggles
- Structure: Organized by sequence with speech bubbles; several frames
- Language Use: short, simple lines, lots of punctuation (! @#!), “bubble talk,” conversational phrases, words to describe sounds that “bring comic to life”

Part 3, OVERALL FUNCTION:

- Actions are overly dramatic and many things are going on at once
- Good break from reality but can still give insight into deeper human emotion
- Genre presents “light” attitude toward the world
- To read a comic, you don’t need anything but an open mind
- Accessible to people of all backgrounds, educational levels
- But, only reaches people who read the newspaper (this might isolate certain age groups or cultures)
- Although comics are simple on the surface, some comics have indirect humor and sarcasm that only educated readers might understand
- We live in a visual culture: people “read” images easily, enjoy break from reality
- In general, this genre can become somewhat commercial: products, movies, t-shirts, etc. made off comics (larger relevance than just newspaper); sometimes comics become the basis or template for movies

Post-class journal entry

Overall, students seemed very interested in this activity. Using Power Point seemed to capture most students’ undivided attention, and many groups had the chance to speak about their work. In my journal I reflected on the comic strip group because students from other groups seemed especially interested in this analysis. In addition, even though this genre seems more “everyday” and perhaps “surface level” in comparison to other groups’ genres, this group didn’t take the accessibility of newspapers for granted, which seemed like a new idea to most students—even myself. The group noted that the general purpose of a comic strip is to entertain. But they addressed users of this genre—and how certain users might be excluded—based on level of education, culture, etc. Also,

in terms of RGS' notion that genres perform social actions and work with or affect other genres, the group highlighted a very tangible action of comic strips. Comic strips (they cited Garfield, Calvin & Hobbs) do not exist in isolation but are interconnected to commercial uses (whether it's other genres like templates for movies or actual products). I thought this group's responses opened students' eyes to the *use* of the genre, highlighting what people do with comic strips, why they read them, and how only certain groups may read or understand the genre. I thought this group did a great job of deep analysis, which showed me that almost any genre can be analyzed extensively—through “fun” or seemingly simple, non-literary genres, students still explored complex theoretical ideas.

Relevant interview feedback

The lesson stood out to students for different reasons. In his interview one student (Renaldo) said that the handout questions were “deep,” forcing them to think about genres they would normally take for granted. His group analyzed a wedding announcement, and he said that he would usually take wedding announcements as a “cheesy” genre and not pay much attention. But focusing on the picture of the couple to be married and the way the announcement was written helped his group discuss “what a big of an event a wedding is” in most Americans' lives. Another student, Rae, said: “In class you're giving like birthday cards, advertising, I realize that ‘Oh!’ there's so many kinds of genres, that these were called genres...it's things that are so common and we use it every day, I never thought...that it's a kind of genre.” She also commented more directly on Bawarshi's means of analysis:

Rae: I think the handout you gave...I remember the questions, the big list of questions...how to do it, so basically we just answer those questions...I think it really helps. I can understand what you want for the assignment...and answer more specific questions than we did before...

Meghan: ok good...so do you mean, when I kept on beating it into your head (Rae laughs), the questions about situation, communicative patterns, and overall analysis?

Rae: uuh, huh. Yeah..

Meghan: so having the 3 part way to analyze helped?

Rae: yeah it really helped cuz I know what you're trying to say, what you expect for the analysis...

I then asked her if the Power Point was helpful. She said: "...yeah it helped. I remember I can compare my answer...some answers would be similar...this is how they see the question, this is how they answered the questions." Here, Rae addressed how she could compare her group's analysis of a print ad to other groups who had analyzed very different genres with the same means of analysis.

In her interview another student, Samar, said that the "6-genres activity" (her group analyzed the greeting cards) showed her that some genres can be a combination of "little genres." She said: "...the greeting cards can be a picture genre, and then a greeting card itself is a genre, and then what's written in it, like if it's a poem, or a joke, then that can even be a genre." When she reflected on the activity collaboratively, she said that seeing other group's answers "helped cuz I think you put like you know, you wrote how each one uses the genre...you know, for example, you wrote you know under the comic strip, when it's used, who uses it, why they're used, like for what occasions...." She also commented on her previous perspective that genres must be literary: "I didn't think of genres at first like that...I just thought genres were like books. Fiction. Nonfiction. Cuz

that's what we learned in high school...we didn't think about how pictures are genres, or how comics are genres, you know...it's different." To conclude the two-day activity, I included a big picture section, explaining how they'd use the same 3-part analysis when they analyzed disciplinary genres in their final project.

Tentative conclusions

As I engaged with this activity during several rounds of data analysis, I made several insights. First, students' high level of engagement with this activity showed me that students could engage with complex, "meta" ideas while analyzing more everyday genres. Next, the design of the activity was effective in that groups had the time to answer more questions in relation to a single genre. In addition, after analyzing the interviews and reflecting on students' feedback, I believe this lesson gave students specific analytic tools that they would use in their own ethnographic research into disciplinary genres. As Rae noted in her interview, she saw how the same form of analysis could be applied to a diverse array of genres—which I believe gave students confidence in terms of approaching disciplinary genres in their final projects. Since most students at this level were not yet insiders in disciplinary communities, I realized that they might be intimidated analyzing genres they had never written or used. However, this activity was an important bridge because even though many groups were familiar with the genres I asked them to analyze, they had never analyzed them in such depth. They could then engage more productively with disciplinary genres.

Phase 3 activities to start off the final unit

Fall and spring: “drug company mission statement”

This activity was instrumental because students had the chance to collaboratively analyze a real-world example of a business genre. At the time of the activity, I noticed students treating the document as an active genre rather than an inert text. That is, students addressed how the mission statement was tied to company motives, worker roles, and ultimately, profit. In the spring students more directly invoked how the conventions of the mission statement were both connected to and reflective of these larger goals and values, which told me they had a more in-depth metalanguage for talking about writing as social action at this point in the semester. In Chapter 5 I also consider how analyzing different examples of company mission statements would give students an avenue into the concept of variation within a single generic category.

Rationale and description

Three fall students I interviewed brought up an activity that revolved around analyzing a mission statement from a pharmaceutical company. None of the spring students I interviewed mentioned this activity, but I had it marked off in my teaching journal as a productive whole-class discussion. In both semesters, as students began the final unit researching disciplinary genres, I thought it was important to collaboratively analyze genres from different fields. I wanted students to extend the same means of

analysis they had used with more everyday genres to disciplinary or field-specific genres. I had access to this genre because I had a close friend who worked for a large drug company. I thought the mission statement was a good example of a non-literary genre. I also thought it was a genre many students would come across if they went into any kind of business setting. While my friend protected the name and location of the company, she happily supplied me with sample genres from her field. The fact that she had adhered to confidentiality standards was a heuristic for me. I explained to my students that she did this and asked them for possible reasons. In the fall a couple of students said that the company who wrote the mission statement probably did not want other companies to know “what they did.” In the spring students made similar claims, although one student brought up the fact that my friend was probably had legal obligations to her company—that she couldn’t share company information with people that didn’t work for the company. In both semesters I explained that my friend, upon gaining employment at the company, had signed a confidentiality agreement stating that she would not share company-specific information, including certain verbal encounters with doctors or written materials that divulged specific company procedures. I told the students the document was given to a pharmaceutical sales team located in a suburb of Detroit. My friend wasn’t sure who wrote the mission statement.

In both semesters we did the activity in the computer lab. I allowed students to pick their own groups and asked them to either handwrite or type up their notes. Both sets of students had already worked on doing analysis of diverse genres—in terms of both textual features and social functions/uses. In the fall students used a set of genre analysis questions that they had used in previous assignments and activities. In the spring,

students used Bawarshi's 3-part analysis, which they had used in the "6 genres activity". In both classes when groups presented their findings, I asked for volunteers to start the discussion. Then, other groups began chiming in, and we had a more free-flowing conversation. I recorded students' observations on the projector screen in order to capture details from the conversation. This technique also seemed to give students the "floor." Since I was busy typing, they relied on each other to keep the conversation going.

The one page mission statement has a title, followed by a bolded quote from the company's founder. The quote reads: "We try never to forget that medicine is for the people. It is not for the profits. The profits follow, and if we remember that they have never failed to appear."-George W. _____ (last named covered). A one-paragraph mission statement follows the quote, and a section entitled "Our Values" makes up the remainder of the genre. There are five value statements; each one has three or four supporting statements. To provide a reference of the language and content, here are the first two value statements: (1) "We are committed to the highest standards of ethics and integrity"; and (2) "We recognize that our ability to excel depends on our integrity, knowledge, imagination, skill, diversity, professionalism and teamwork."

In the fall, groups analyzed the genre according to the following guidelines:

(1) Identify the genre

(2) Do a rhetorical analysis of the document

- a. What is being communicated?
- b. How is the message communicated (language use, tone, format, style, visuals...)

(3) Make sense of the "context" (just like we did with other genres)

- a. who wrote the document/for whom is it written?
- b. **what is the purpose of the document?**

c. what other things influence the way this genre functions?
(values of the field, language used in the field, the way you think it might work with other genres, anything that you can think of.....)

“What happened:” how fall students responded

a. In class

Since attendance was low that day, students formed three groups. One student chose to work alone. After answering the questions in groups, we came back together to discuss students’ responses. Students started by talking about elements of their rhetorical analyses. One group said the language use and writing style were “not too complex” but noted that only people within the particular field would understand certain acronyms and specific sales techniques. (e.g., the “QCS”: Quality Customer Selling sales model). Group 2 said the values and goals were purposely created as a succinct list so that employees could remember them, or refer to them easily. One student said the tone was “business-oriented,” which she associated with formality. Another group said that in their discussion, they had a disagreement over whether the genre was informative or persuasive. They decided it was ultimately informative—to inform employees of the values of the business—but also thought that it was persuasive in that it tried to “make the workers believe in the sales model.” This started a lively conversation with the rest of the class. One ESL student said: “I think the genre is to improve workers’ goal and passion.” Other students agreed that if the employees were more enthusiastic, then the company would make more money.

Post-class journal entry

One of the most productive parts of class was when students talked about the dual purposes of the mission statement—and then considered how the different purposes affected employees. In their own words, students addressed the roles of employees and how the mission statement related to level of enthusiasm, which in turn, affected the company. In this sense the mission statement seemed part of a cyclical relationship. It seemed as if over half of the class participated/was interested in classroom discussion; however, I would have liked everyone to be more involved.

b. How students responded in writing: group notes

The groups described the purpose of the mission statement as follows:

Group 1: “The purpose of the genre is to inform what they want workers to do and why they are in first place among other companies.”

Group 2: “The purpose...is to educate the workers to develop business skills and also how to be professional and how to use the language correctly.”

Group 3: “The purpose of the genre is to convince workers that the company is more for the people than for profit. This keeps diplomacy between the drug company and the people.”

Group 4: “The purpose is to show the good qualities of the company and good working techniques.”

Overall, these responses seemed somewhat general. Students did note general purposes and uses of the mission statement (e.g. “to inform employees, to educate workers, to show the good qualities of the company”). But they also provided “loaded” statements that would have been a good basis for more in-depth discussion. For example,

when Group 2 described the importance of being “professional,” they note that workers have to know “how to use language correctly.” It would be productive for students to explore what it means to use language “correctly,” (how and why norms are established) as well as how an individual’s language use changes depending on what setting they are in. In addition, if this point had come up in class, I would have asked if getting employees to use language correctly was more of an indirect (or secondary) function of the genre, or if students thought it was one of the main purposes/uses. We hadn’t really talked *directly* about primary and secondary functions of genres, which would have allowed us to get into a bit more depth about social functions and possible (unplanned) effects of genres.

Tentative conclusions after comparing classroom discussion to group notes

Aside from what groups wrote about *purpose*, I found other insightful claims in the written responses that didn’t come up in class. First, Group 2 wrote that “the values provide *roles* (my emphasis) that you have to play if you want to be successful in the company.” This would have been a good avenue into discussions of identity in business and how individuals negotiate their roles. Students implicitly touched on this when they talked about the workers’ demeanors, or level of “passion” for work. However, I would have liked to dig deeper into what they thought about identity in the workplace. Next, Group 3 wrote that “pharmaceutical companies must pay close attention to their language use and how the public may analyze their texts.” This statement was somewhat contradictory considering this group also wrote that the genre was written for company insiders (noting the internal use). I wondered if the students were hinting at legal issues or hinting at the fact that drug companies in the U.S. often face scrutiny. At the beginning of

their analysis, they did note: “A mission statement written by a pharmaceutical company may differ from one written by some other profession.” This point would have been a good way to show variation within this generic category (in Chapter 5 I consider the possible effects of providing students with more than one mission statement).

“What happened:” how spring students responded

a. In class

In the spring, students analyzed the genre according to Bawarshi’s 3 part analysis. Students organized themselves into a total of four groups. One student decided to work by himself. Once we started the discussion, students started by talking about the form of the genre, including organization, word choice, grammar, and style. In terms of format, they noted that the document was very organized. Group 2 said it was “clean”—meaning it was laid out like a list of numbered sentences that were easy to follow. They also noted a use of active voice, “serious” and “to the point” language, and simple sentence structure. The student who worked alone described the language as “awkward.” When I asked him what he meant, he said “it’s not smooth, like how someone would talk.” Several students said this was because the genre had so much formal, “businesslike” language.

When we started talking about the function of the genre, students said the primary function of the document was to emphasize the goals of the company and describe its values. Group 2, which happened to have several advertising students in it, said that the “bottom line” was increase sales and stand out from, or create a better reputation than,

other companies that sell the same product. Renaldo, who was part of Group 1 (who described the genre as “fake”), said: “It’s all about money...these ‘values,’ it’s all just to get money.” He proceeded to say that drug companies are billion dollar companies that practically “encourage” people to take drugs. He also said that in Brazil, where he’s from, that people don’t rely on drugs like Americans do. This prompted one student, Drew, to bring up advertisements that promote anti-depressant drugs. Some students seemed uncomfortable with this discussion. One student, Tamara, said that drug companies help millions of people; she said that, of course, they make money but asked the class: “What would we do without drugs? Lots of people need them...” Students played an active part in directing the conversation, and the majority of the class seemed interested in talking, especially when several students started the “big-business” debate.

Post-class journal entry

Overall, students were really interested in this activity! It was nice to see them engaging in productive debate that touched on cultural values, discussions of big business, and the motives of drug companies. More importantly, they tied these discussions into discussion of the mission statement more directly than fall students had. For example, there were more divergent opinions about textual features *and* the use of the mission statement, which allowed us to consider the mission statement on a more multi-faceted level—which I believe encouraged students to view the document as a more active part of business relations.

b. How groups responded in writing

In their written responses, students had varied opinions. In their “overall analysis” section of their written responses, the groups said:

Group 1: “It is a very well written mission statement, but it feels like it is fake and they are trying to suck up to the reader of their text.”

Group 2: “The mission statement is set up for the purpose of the whole company. This is a list of goals and targets the company wish to achieve and in some way try to motivate the sales steam. But still the main idea is to increase sells [sic] and market share.”

Group 3: “The purpose of this document is to provide their customers with fair, balanced, and accurate meaning and relevant information for them to identify appropriate patients that would benefit from the product and service.”

Group 4: “This document is important because it shows the buyer a glimpse of what the company is about. It also allows the buyer to see that the company has a will to serve the people rather than it self [sic]. Which really helps sell the product.”

Group 5: “This document informs the employees of their high qualities, values, and mission that the company possesses so they would see if they qualify to do the job.”

Like fall students, spring students defined the general purposes of this document as being to “set up the purposes of the company,” to provide relevant company information, and to inform employees. Two of the groups misidentified the audience; Groups 3 and 4 cited customers and buyers as audiences, even though in the beginning of class, I told them that the target audience was a pharmaceutical sales team near Detroit (during data analysis I wondered if this stemmed from the fact that many business mission statements *are* geared toward the public, which I hadn’t taken into account at the time of teaching). Three groups (1, 2, and 5) kept the focus on the company—in relation to discussions of motivating employees, outlining general company goals, or producing profit for the employees. Two of the groups (3 and 4), however, misidentified the audience and also seemed to provide a more altruistic response to the mission statement.

Group 3 said that the mission statement plays a part in the company's attempt to identify people that "would benefit from the product and service." Group 4 similarly wrote that the genre showed that the company "has a will to serve the people rather than it self [sic]." They noted that this attitude was tied to profit; this group's interpretation seemed multi-faceted.

Tentative conclusions after comparing classroom discussion to group notes

As demonstrated by the trajectory of the discussion, the *discussion* of groups' written responses was so valuable because many of the groups started by writing about the obvious goals of the document (the more immediate function of listing values of a particular company). Four out of the five groups described the purpose as clear-cut, almost "motive-free." But since one group questioned the larger goals and functions of the drug industry, one small genre allowed students to have a deeper discussion about the industry's values. That is, they talked about the values of the company at hand but also discussed the values of "big business" and American consumers. The class discussion was also important because although I had told the class that the genre was geared towards a drug sales team, many of them misidentified the audience in their written responses (they thought consumers would read the document). The group discussion cleared this up. Students also did a good job digging deeply into the textual features of the genre and then discussed how the form reflected function and created values.

Tentative conclusions after considering both semesters

In both semesters I saw students treating the document as an active genre rather than an inert text. That is, students addressed how the mission statement was tied to company motives, worker roles, and ultimately, profit. In the spring students more directly invoked how the conventions of the mission statement were both connected to and reflective of these larger goals and values, which tells me they had a more in-depth metalanguage for talking about writing as social action. In addition, after doing second-round analysis of both semesters and especially the fall version of the activity, I realized that since profit is such an integral part of business, and therefore business genres, that this activity would provide a perfect avenue into discussion of primary and secondary generic functions. This could have involved a sort of “reading between the lines” approach to analyzing textual features, as well as how the multiple goals (from writers and business executives) influenced workers’ roles and how they developed different layers that defined these roles. And while profit is more or less relevant to other disciplines and fields, students could then use elements of this discussion as a comparative element when they considered social roles within disciplinary communities—and how genre helped effect these roles.

Phase 3 directed lessons: using models to show disciplinary genre analysis in action

In both modeling activities that I describe below, I used past student work to discuss ways to talk about genres within the generic conventions of a research paper. I

also went “meta” on genres from my own discipline—providing students with practical examples that I use as member of the rhetoric and composition studies discipline and creating a focus on both writing conventions and social uses. Many students from both semesters pointed to the modeling activities as instrumental in their learning—in terms of both seeing different ways to talk about genre and showing them how to present their research in the final paper. More specifically, after looking at my pedagogy and student learning holistically at the end of my study, I found spots in the spring activity where I could have raised even more critical questions to help students grasp theoretical concepts.

Fall: “models on Angel (in computer lab)”

Rationale and description

Three of six fall students (Nikki, Martin, and Jose) I interviewed said that during the final unit, the most useful activity was a presentation of models on Angel (our class website). I collected an array of examples from past students’ final research papers to teach a lesson on thesis statements and topic sentences. I also showed sample paragraphs in order to show students *how* students had talked more extensively about genres in diverse fields. My goal in this lesson was to: (1) focus on how students would present findings in within the generic conventions of the research paper; and (2) to show disciplinary genre analysis in action, alerting students to *how* past students had talked about genre. By breaking down the examples, I wanted to show students different ways they could incorporate analysis findings and integrate sources (from their interviews, as well as their own explorations of genres). I posted the models on Angel and presented the

lessons on the computer lab's big screen. Students followed along on their own computers, and throughout the lesson, I asked questions to elicit their participation. Parts of the lesson represented explicit instruction—as I pointed out particular aspects of student writing that I thought were instructive. At times, however, I asked for student responses to the models before I said anything. I wanted them to consider, in their own words, how certain examples either worked or didn't (and why).

“What happened”: how students responded

To start, the first screen contained a list of thesis statements from student projects. I asked students to jot down which thesis statements they thought were good, which were bad, and why. I then asked them to answer the following question for each example: “Based on this thesis statement, what would you guess this paper is about?” I explained that, of course, they were guessing. However, I thought that this heuristic might help them see how a thesis statement sets the tone for the content of a full paper. I provided five examples from papers on diverse fields and disciplines: commercial real estate, engineering, the military, advertising, and psychology. To illustrate how students talked about both a “good” and “bad” thesis statement, I will provide one example of each.

First, most students thought that the thesis statement from the military paper was the most detailed thesis statement. The statement read:

In the military the different genres in this field serve the important purpose of communicating orders and maintaining organization; those at the top do most of the writing and depending on who is receiving the order, the language and style of writing change; the most crucial aspect of writing in this field is that it is timely; without a specific flow, the organization of the military falls apart.

Many students thought this was a good example because it not only told them that writing was important in the military but it showed who does the writing, addressed how the writing changes depending on context, and made the genres in the military seem like a crucial aspect of operation. Some students criticized the length of the thesis statement. One student, Thomas, joked that there were “way too many semi-colons” and said that he would have broken up the statement into two sentences. This led students to talk about sentence structure, as well as whether or not it was important to say everything in one sentence. We had talked about introductions being a road map to any paper. In this example, students said they thought the thesis laid a clear foundation for the rest of the paper.

Next, many students cited the following thesis statement as a poor example:

In the commercial real estate business, the most important thing is your reputation; since sales are made based on your reputation, anyone in the business should start building credibility from day one.

To start, students criticized this example for being too general. Many students said that the thesis was clear and made sense but that there was no mention of genre or writing. One student, Jorge, said that based on the thesis he expected to read a paper about “how to make a sale” or how to “get a good reputation and make money.” One student, Aaron, then asked: “What if he (the author) wrote about how the different writings can build your reputation?” As students began to think about this question, I chimed in and asked: “Ok, if he were to do that, how might he be more direct and detailed about that in the thesis statement?” Students came up with specific ways the thesis could be re-phrased.

The different ways helped students see that there were very different ways to go about a thesis, as long as it was thorough and clear. While the models were somewhat de-contextualized, students had productive discussions about language use and how a thesis sets the overall tone and purpose to a research paper. (In Chapter 5, I consider how my experiences having students write research papers on disciplinary genres versus writing about a topic has urged me to re-think the generic conventions of the standard research papers, specifically the “thesis statement.”) In the second part of the activity, we used the same means of analysis to look at eight sample paragraphs in order to see topic sentences in action and to consider *how* students had talked about different genres and integrated sources in their final projects. We talked about topic sentences and looked at how students had combined textual analysis with discussion of the actual function of the genre—as well as how students talked about users (authors and readers).

Post-activity journal entry

This activity helped students get a better sense of how to present their research findings. In my past experiences teaching, I had often had success with modeling, and this semester I made a concerted effort to use diverse examples in terms of fields of study as well as means of presentation. Most students seemed to concentrate on the examples. Posting the models to Angel also gave students an important reference. I encouraged students to look at the examples as they got closer to drafting their own papers.

Relevant interview feedback

One fall ESL student I interviewed, Nikki, said that the modeling activity helped her see how she would write about her research findings. She also mentioned that she referred to the models even after the activity. That is, once she had drafted sections of her paper, she went back to compare her own work to the examples on Angel. In her interview, she suggested that (1) I be even more direct about pointing out specific parts of the models; and (2) that I make sure to express that individual writers do very different things in their writing so that students don't "copy" the examples. Since my goal was to show an array of examples and not make the models seem static, her suggestion was important in terms of helping me re-think how I might improve the lesson. In his interview, another student, Martin, who was also an ESL student, expressed that the modeling activity helped him think about how he would organize his research but suggested that I spend even more time "teaching the research paper." He said he had never written such a "long research paper...especially about the writings of engineering." I could tell that the concept of researching writing had challenged him and that he got stuck when it came time to *write about writing* and organize his findings. These suggestions helped me see that I might spread the modeling activity out into two days, as well as create more explicit lessons on the research paper.

Spring: “models on power point: activity that I added using fall student work”

At the time of their interviews, many students cited this activity as being crucial to their understanding of how to present research findings in the final paper. I later found that at this stage of my pedagogy, I could have asked a couple key questions that would have helped students make connections between the theoretical concepts they had been exploring—through both their own practical examples and pointed meta language from me—throughout the semester.

Rationale and description

Four of the seven spring students that I interviewed brought up this activity, which I presented about halfway into the final unit. Students had already decided what discipline they would study and were in the process of interviewing an expert in their field and collecting genres. We had just analyzed the drug company mission statement and were nearing the end of the semester. In this activity, I presented a Power Point in which I built on fall students’ work and used a couple of examples from my own life. The purpose of this activity was to show students how past students had analyzed textual features and generic functions. Like the fall activity I described, I had already shown models of actual papers in another lesson. By looking at past student work and doing analysis from genres I used in my own life, my main goal in this lesson was to provide a more situated account of the research tools current students had learned and were about to use with disciplinary genres. I used a fall student’s (Nikki’s) analysis of music therapy genres, two fall students’ examples from engineering, and ended by talking about

disciplinary genres that I engage with as a writing teacher and member of the rhetoric and writing discipline.

I considered this a directed lesson; however, it is important to note that although I pointedly talked about textual features and generic functions, I wasn't being *explicit* in the way that many associate with the term (e.g., showing the genres as static, or templates). Many genre scholars (Berkenkotter & Huckin 1995; Freedman 1994) have questioned the extent to which writing instructors can "teach" genres of different discourse communities that they're not a part of (153). If disciplinary genre knowledge is "situated cognition embedded in disciplinary activities" (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 3), there are a couple of important components to the issue. First, how can we help students study situated knowledge from the outside? Second, if a teacher is unfamiliar with genres in diverse discourse communities, how can she best equip students to analyze genres in their chosen fields? Through my scaffolded genre activities, students had already learned specific analytic tools. I thought showing the tools in action, including how other students and I had gone "meta" on a diverse mix of field-specific genres would be an effective way to show situated knowledge in action, despite the fact that students weren't yet part of their disciplinary communities. I was direct in that I showed particular ways of talking about genres, but I tried to impart that conventions were somewhat generalized based on my own experiences writing and interacting with the genres.

“What happened”: how students responded

To start, I presented slides from Nikki’s work with music therapy genres. I chose personal logs and music composition since Nikki had rich analysis of these genres in her final paper. The slides read:

(1) Personal log (based on session with client)

- Written directly after session to capture therapist’s immediate thoughts
- Charts patient’s attentiveness, progress, symptoms, etc.
- Can never use “I” (first person): maintains “professionalism,” even though very personal experience
- Therapist maintains authority: “speaks about” the client
- These logs can seem impersonal, even though the sessions are very personal (sometimes emotional)
- Writing has to be somewhat detached
- Kept as an official file/very important and confidential
- Genre seems like a list of notes but has very meaningful function in the field: charts the patient’s session needs and progress

(2) Music Compositions (sheet music)

- Melodies correspond to needs of patients
- Different strategies used for depression, ADD, trauma disorders
- Different melodies affect brain differently: repetitive beats vs. “up and down” rhythm
- Different types of music for children vs. adults (lyrics, rhythms)
- Therapists = Musicians
- Many write the music for patients
- Sometimes therapists co-write music with patients: this collaboration good for patients
- This genre is the foundation for the whole field
- Musical compositions = treatment (natural remedy, often used instead of drugs)

In her work, Nikki addressed various features of her genres—including written, spoken, bodily, and auditory forms of expression. She also mentioned who created the genres and how they’re used to build social relationships and healing patients.

For my own examples, I chose to describe the common conventions and uses of the teaching philosophy and recommendation letter. The slides read:

(1) Teaching Philosophy:

- Written by teacher, expresses values about teaching
- Audience = usually Dean or Department Heads
- First Person (“I”) since it relates directly to personal experience in the classroom
- Since it’s used by people who evaluate the teacher, very important document
- This genre reflects personal experience but somewhat formal: the writer must maintain professionalism, might want to maintain scholarly tone and style
- Combination of persuasive writing (in terms of teaching goals/why they’re important or worthwhile) and narrative (some teachers include actual experiences with students or descriptions of activities)
- Lots of Jargon (only people in composition can understand some of the terms: i.e.: “pedagogy” = teaching practices)
- This genre very important to teachers who value teaching (function both personal and public: this combination often difficult to negotiate)

(2) Recommendation Letter

- Written by teachers; used by students of various levels, scholarship committees, college boards
- Purpose(s):
 - provide account of student’s strengths
 - ultimate purpose = to “get” something (scholarship, entrance into program, job)
 - give student credibility
 - reward student for good performance, work
- Language use very proper
 - Main features:
 - (1) provide context (how you know student)
 - (2) Write about student’s strengths, assets, performance in your class
 - (3) Close with a compelling statement: “this student is an excellent candidate..”
 - (4) List your contact information
- Genre has pretty rigid conventions
- Writing “in” this genre can be difficult
- Hard to represent relationship with student in one letter
- Might want to make letter more personal but want to accomplish the purpose of the genre

- Entering this genre, teacher might experience conflicting identities (teacher, authority figure, scholar)
- Genre “private”
 - Students generally can’t see recommendation letters
 - Kept in student’s confidential file
 - Only read by a select few
- This genre central to teacher’s job
- No one explicitly teaches instructors how to write it (not in education or on the job)
- In my experience, this genre acquired through situated experience and practice

Lastly, I used the same means of presentation to discuss student examples of engineering genres including schemata, journal articles, and public press releases. These directed lessons allowed me to talk discursively about what I did in practice as well as how other students analyzed genres in their final projects. My insider knowledge allowed me to discuss how genres assign us subject positions and relate to our identity, how genres work to get something done in a disciplinary community, and how form reflects function. In addition, by including past students’ work, I hoped that students would see that through their interviews and analytic tools, they too could “go meta” on genres in their fields—even though they weren’t yet insiders.

Post-class journal entry

As I presented this directed lesson, students were in circle, which usually elicited some sort of side chatter. But during this lesson, students showed their undivided attention. Since I directed much of the activity, students weren’t necessarily an active part of the activity, although two students that talked to me informally after class told me that they the lesson helped them understand even more what was expected of them in the final project.

Relevant interview feedback

The four students that brought up this activity all said they became clearer about the expectations for their own final projects after seeing the Power Point. Samar said: "...we saw what you were expecting... how detailed it should be...and what you wanted us to write about." Another student, Renaldo, said that doing this activity right after analyzing the mission statement helped him see "how the genres in different fields...like are so different...it just helped seeing some variety." In addition, all four students mentioned the design of the activity. Since most of my lessons weren't so directed, they said the fact that I had constructed a Power Point let them know it was important to pay attention. They also liked being able to see the slides on the big screen. I also posted the slides on our class website so students could refer to them during different stages of their own research.

Tentative conclusions after considering both semesters

After looking at how both groups of students responded to the modeling activities during data analysis, I saw how important these activities were—especially since I knew the fact that students are *writing about writing* presented them with a new set of challenges, or at least influenced how they approached their research papers. Spring students benefited from having the first set of models (on research paper conventions) *and* the more directed lesson that provided models of analysis in action.

Closing

Building on the activities presented in this chapter, the next two chapters will focus more deeply on two students' engagement with genre pedagogy and more specifically, their processes of researching and writing about disciplinary genres. In addition, as a result of reading a larger sample of students' final projects and finding new questions I wanted to explore in the early stages of my research, I will spend time considering how the presentation of disciplinary genre analysis might challenge accepted conventions of the research paper.

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GENRE, PRACTICE, AND THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM: WHAT STUDENTS
LEARN ABOUT LANGUAGE AND COMMUNITY DISCOURSE PRACTICES
THROUGH A PEDAGOGY OF GENRE AWARENESS

VOLUME II

By

Meghan E. Bacino

A DISSERTATION

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Rhetoric and Writing

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Chapter 4

In this chapter I feature two students' individual literacy learning experiences in my classroom. Through relevant activities, assignments, and projects I provide a detailed account of how each student developed a genre metalanguage through genre-focused activities and how this semester-long learning influenced their engagement with the final project in which they researched disciplinary genres. More specifically, I've created portraits of individual learning by analyzing pieces of each student's in-class written work, notes and participation from relevant group activities, and final projects. I also relied on each student's post-semester interview/reflection to both build on and challenge my own assumptions about their learning. While I created a strong focus on pedagogy in Chapter 3 by showing how fall and spring students collectively engaged with classroom activities, my primary goal in this chapter is to showcase individual literacy development in order to provide a more in-depth, detailed account of how individual attitudes towards language and writing developed in my classroom—and how these attitudes and experiences related to student learning in the final project.

Since students' individual literacy learning is intertwined with my own genre pedagogy, a secondary goal of this chapter is to consider how a richer understanding of individual learning experiences will influence my own pedagogical practices. Therefore, while most of my analysis focuses on each student's language learning, at times I make remarks regarding my pedagogical practices. Since RGS scholars who focused much of their work on pedagogy influenced what I taught and at times how I taught it, here and in later chapters when I talk about "improving my own practice," I'm trying to not only

understand my own teaching more deeply but to add to disciplinary conversations about genre pedagogy. For example, in the foundational activity “Is writing a private or social act?,” although I created the *design* of the activity, this theoretical distinction/overlap is one of the main threads that underlies RGS’ theorizing and discussions of the pedagogical implications of teaching genre. In addition, in the “6 genres activity”, I built directly on Bawarshi’s (2003) pedagogical suggestions that followed a book length discussion of the theoretical implications of an exploratory approach to teaching genre. Finally, since my pedagogical practices combined elements of explicit and exploratory approaches to genre as well as Process-based activities, my hybrid practice can shed light on different pedagogical strands within RGS.

In this sense, I use what students told me about my teaching as a way to offer a situated account of genre pedagogy in action—adding to disciplinary theorizing about genre pedagogy. More broadly, I also hope other writing teachers who compare my approach to FYW literacy instruction with their own approaches or gain tangible ideas as to how they might incorporate genre into their classrooms benefit from my sustained reflection on my (co-created) teaching practices. Constructing individual learning portraits that include students’ reflection has been one of the most useful avenues into considering what types of teaching practices create not necessarily particular *types* of learning but open spaces for explorations of language and genre. In addition, some of the students whom I interviewed offered unique cultural perspectives, giving me ideas for teaching genre that I hadn’t considered or read about within RGS scholarship. In this sense combining a reflection of how I would change “my” teaching with a consideration of what new heuristics I will incorporate based directly on interview feedback will allow

me to offer the discipline new possibilities—that is, tangible teaching practices—in relation to genre pedagogy.

Since I transcribed the interviews myself, engaged in several rounds of data analysis, and continued to experience changes in my thinking while drafting this chapter, I made a concerted effort to provide markers of *when* I or a student made a particular claim or came up with a particular piece of analysis. In order to understand both versions of my pedagogy, I selected one student from fall and one from spring. I selected these students after analyzing all Level II student interviews, and I provide a detailed description of why I selected each student at the beginning of her portrait. After providing tentative conclusions at the end of each student's portrait, I begin Chapter 5 by considering how other Level II students related to or challenged the themes present in the portraits.

Nikki

Background information: getting to know Nikki

In the fall, I met Nikki, who was a fourth year international student from Japan. She had studied English in Japan towards the end of middle school and throughout her secondary educational experiences (about 5 years) before coming to the United States. At home, her parents spoke mostly Japanese, although they encouraged her to study English because they thought studying abroad would be a valuable part of her future. From the moment she walked into my PCW class, I knew she took her education seriously. She sat up straight, looked me in the eye, and always led her group's discussion during classroom

activities. Nikki was curious. “Making the grades” was important to her, but she always wanted to understand *why* we did a particular activity or project. Nikki’s major was music therapy, and by the time the semester was over, she had secured an internship in California that she would start after graduating in the spring. Outside of her field, her favorite type of writing was diary writing. She told me that she most uses writing to express herself, create memories of her life, and create music compositions (her own and music to be used with patients). After reading her personal narrative and getting to know her outside of class, I learned that Nikki was in touch with her spirituality and thought on a deep level about what she wanted out of life. When I asked her to write a personal bio, she wrote:

It is important to me that I can feel happy and peace every moment of my life, and feel that I am here with purposes. For example, I don’t have to be a millionaire if I am enjoying my work and find it as “meaningful” to me. Life is not about money or status, but how I interpret every moment of my life is [sic] meaningful or not.

Nikki majored in music therapy, which she told me was her way of making her profession meaningful. Through therapy she said she could help people who were emotionally disturbed or inflicted by a physiological disease. She described music therapy as “really deep” because it blends elements of psychology, brain waves, and the composition of music. By the time she took my class, Nikki had already taken over two years of major courses and was working in her field with a field instructor—observing therapist/patient interactions and moving into her own sessions. Nikki’s experience in her field is one of the main reasons I chose to feature her learning. Since she studied and participated in her field at the same time she researched field-specific genres in my class,

I thought it would be valuable to compare how she talked/learned about disciplinary genres to other students who hadn't entered their majors yet. Since I was also interested in how ESL students engaged with my version of genre pedagogy, and since Nikki was a committed student, she has been a valuable resource as I considered ESL language issues and considered ways to improve my pedagogy for all students.

Nikki's conceptualization of genre

One of the first things I asked in the interview was how Nikki would define genre. In my class we studied the concept, but we never *contained* it. Of course I raised questions that asked students to consider the social implications of genres, but I had never offered a formal, textbook definition of genre. Nikki had her own terminology: "a genre is a subject that was built by....many different aspects." Nikki pointed to classical music to illustrate her point, saying how there is a cultural background, for example European, then there are the kinds of instruments that are used, then she says that all these different "environmental and unique aspects get together and become one...the genre." Here, Nikki uses metaphors of place and building, which implies that genres are actively constructed in some particular setting. When I provoked the terminology "environmental aspects," Nikki reiterated: "yeah...all these things become one."

Nikki had studied piano for 22 years at the time of our interview. While we had talked about her love of music and her role in music therapy, as I analyzed her interview and learning experiences during data analysis, I realized I hadn't directly asked her how much/if she had studied the concept of genre throughout her musical study. I later

emailed her, asking how familiar she was with the concept of genre before our class. She told me that growing up, she had only studied classical music. During this study she was introduced to different *eras* of music such as Middle Age, Renaissance, Baroque, Classical, Romantic, and 20th century (contemporary) music. She said that in college when she switched her major to music therapy, her teachers more explicitly talked about genre—as in focusing on the different musical aspects and stylistic elements of Jazz, Pop, Rap, and Dance. She said that looking back, she would now consider the different eras as offering different *genres* of music. But at the time, her teachers never used the term *genre*. In addition, Nikki said that it wasn't until my class that she associated genre with writing.

When Nikki spoke about how my class was different than other English language classes she had taken, she expressed that what was new to her was the way we focused on “writing systems.” Nikki said that she liked how we did close analysis of how “people are related to their environment,” which helped her pay more attention to how she experienced different relationships in her life. In terms of her own writing process, Nikki also felt like she got better at writing transitions, organizing her papers, and improving her grammar. When Nikki entered my class, she had strong English writing skills. When she spoke she communicated clearly but at times had trouble with syntax or translation issues. Nikki met with me in office hours often—at least five times throughout the course of the semester—to work on writing skills like improving clarity, using proper articles, and writing effective transitions. I attribute Nikki's improvement in my class to her willingness to meet with me one on one to study these grammatical and organizational skills in the context of her own writing.

Nikki's learning in action: building a genre metalanguage

"Is writing a private or social act?"

In the foundational activity, "Is writing a private or social act?," Nikki participated in a group with three other international students. As I described in chapter three, I had students get in groups and pretend they were on legal teams, having to defend the following statements: (1) *Writing is a private act*; and (2) *Writing is a social act*. I told students to try and come up with an argument for both sides, even if they agreed more strongly with one of the prompts. In the fall, students brainstormed in groups, wrote down the main points for each side, and then presented their arguments to the class. Although I don't have an individual account of Nikki's learning in this activity, I will provide her group's written notes, as well as her own and her group's participation in the collaborative dialogue. To start, the group notes read:

Writing is a private act: We express individual creativity through writing, and the way we talk to our loved ones is private. So if we write letters or even emails we don't want anyone else to see...like when we use nicknames or expressions, only we write those things and only someone we love is supposed to understand. No one else supposed [sic] to see these types of writing. Also when we tell stories, we have our own way of telling them...we tell about what things happened to us. And we usually write in private areas where people can't bother us, plus we use our hands to write, which is an extension of who we are.

Writing is a social act. The most writings we do are in school so this is a good way to make the case that writing is very social. Many types of school writing have students do specific type [sic] things that the teacher make [sic] them do. Also when we live in the social we have interaction [sic] that give us ideas for our writing. For example, many writers who write novels learn about what they write by living those things in their real lifes [sic]. We learn by different types of

writings too so these authors are teaching us something and we think different.

In my journal entry after class, I noted that Nikki's group was somewhat shy in terms of participating in the whole class discussion. When her group presented their arguments to the class, Nikki read the first paragraph above, and one of her group members read the second paragraph. Some groups used their notes as a reference, but many were very theatrical in their presentations—improvising and adding in outside examples. Nikki's group didn't speak much other than reading their written notes. Since they didn't talk much in class, or agree/disagree with other groups, and since they provided equally persuasive arguments in their written notes, during first-round data analysis I gathered that they agreed equally with both prompts.

In class and in their group notes, Nikki's group showed how writing helps us communicate with loved ones, which they described as a very private, personal act. They cited letters and emails as examples of these types of communication. They also noted that storytelling can be a very personal act in that each person who tells a story has their own unique way of relaying it. At the end of the first paragraph, the group wrote: "And we usually write in private areas where people can't bother us, plus we use our hands to write, which is an extension of who we are." They were the only group to allude to the actual *physical space* of writing, as well as the fact that we write with our hands. Writing with our hands seems like an obvious point. However, they also note that our hands are an "extension of who we are," which told me that they associate this point with aspects of identity.

In their second argument, Nikki's group noted the social aspect of school writing in that teachers "make" students do particular types of writing that they wouldn't otherwise do. In terms of content, they also noted that we get ideas for writing through our social interactions. They ended this argument with the point that writing can make social arguments and influence the way readers think. Overall, Nikki's group made several meta comments about writing processes and form. I wish they had spoken more in class. I attribute their shyness to two factors. First, it was early in the semester, and since the group was composed of all international students, they seemed hesitant to speak in class. Second, since the design of the activity involved students pretending they were lawyers—making arguments—these students may have been unaccustomed to this type of persuasive speaking.

"Comparing two in-class genres: the personal narrative and analytical essay"

The next piece of Nikki's learning stems from an in-class activity in which students compared the generic conventions and their own experiences engaging with the first two major papers—the personal narrative and the analytical essay which depicted a cultural scene. As Mirtz (1997) has warned, student papers are often treated as a "non-genre" (193). Therefore, I wanted students' genre analysis to involve their own in-class writing assignments, and although we hadn't answered in depth questions making the connection between genre and community use/social function, my goal was to lead students towards an awareness of the conventions they had worked within thus far. In addition, in my prior teaching experiences, I found that projects that involve *choice* of *genres*—i.e. a multigenre or multimedia project—seemed to demand students' reflection

in a way that other projects did not; it is common to think that if students get to choose what genres fit their needs, then they must explain their rhetorical process and decisions to us. However, within any genre approach to teaching, there is a *consistent* focus on both in-class genres and genres students' analyze. We had talked about the common conventions of each genre as well as what I expected of students. Through this activity, I wanted to know if students remembered the general conventions we had talked about earlier or if after having written the genres themselves they had challenged any of the common assumptions behind the papers. I was also curious if they could talk *discursively* about what they had done in writing. The prompt read: "In your opinion, what are the differences between writing a personal narrative and writing an analytical essay? How are the two different? How did you see your writing process change across these two genres?"

Nikki had written about being out in nature with her family for her personal narrative (place memoir). She described how she learned the "simple" lessons of life through the outdoors and quiet peace of being in nature. For her analytical essay, in which students wrote about some cultural scene, Nikki analyzed an Asian restaurant that represented Japanese culture through its music, décor, dual language menu, etc. In her written response, Nikki viewed the two genres as very different (at times ESL language issues are obvious, but I would like to preserve her exact language. I've used a [sic] notation when I thought a language issue interrupted meaning):

The genres are very different. A personal narrative is mostly about the writer/self...his/her experiences, thoughts, and believes [sic]. Analytical papers also consists [sic] of writer's opinion, but they are derive [sic] from their findings and researches [sic]...not only do they talk about writer's opinion, but also do talk about the relationship

between things, such as environments and people...and report the cause and effect. The analytical paper is more like learning than personal narrating.

When I read her response during my first round of data analysis, it seemed that Nikki established a clear boundary between the two genres. She described a personal narrative as a genre where writers express their own “experiences, thoughts, and believes [sic].” Since she described analytical writing as based on “findings and researches [sic], Nikki associated this genre with “learning,” whereas she seemed to associate personal narratives with self expression and inner knowledge. Nikki indirectly focused on the expected conventions of the genres when she discussed what type of content is generally included in each genre and how writers develop their “opinion” within each genre. After re-reading the response several times while drafting Nikki’s portrait, I saw that when she said each genre contains the author’s *opinion*, there was an overlap in her analysis of the two genres. She seemed to imply that a narrative presents the author’s opinion/viewpoint more obviously, while analytical writing includes an author’s interpretation of outside factors. Overall, she didn’t talk much about actual writing conventions, and although she seemed to indirectly refer to her own experiences writing the analytical paper in my classroom (i.e. students focused on how people interact in a particular environment, or cultural scene), she didn’t talk explicitly about her own personal writing process or specific writing strategies that she used in each genre.

“Analyzing the rap video”

One of the next activities, which I featured in Chapter 3, was the unplanned activity in which students analyzed a rap video. For this activity, students focused on the lyrics, beats, visual images, performers/actors, and whatever else came up. Aside from rhetorical devices, I also asked students to think about what *effect* or *function* the video had on relevant communities. Some questions we explored were, how does the video *reflect* the community (the hip hop community or other communities)? And how does it *create* values for different communities or age groups? As I mentioned in chapter three, after class I had noted that I would have liked to find ways to elicit participation from international students. Most ESL students didn’t speak up during the activity, and Nikki was one of these students.

To understand Nikki’s learning in this activity, I relied on her individual notes and freewrite as well as what she told me about the activity in the interview. The informal notes that Nikki jotted down during her second viewing of the video were:

- the rappers like money
- they wear a lot of jewelry and drive fancy cars in the video
- I can’t understand everything they say
- The beats are low
- The music have [sic] very low tone, which make lower mood
- There are a lot of women in the video. Their appearance is about sexy.
- The community...I don’t know (here, Nikki draws several doodles)

In the freewrite that Nikki wrote based on these general notes, she wrote:

What I can say about this community is...I donno. I have seen videos like this sometimes, but I don’t know much about this types [sic] of music. I see in this video that there is a lot of show. I guess rap is flashy in a way but I can’t really say about this.

In her first set of written comments, Nikki was able to make comments about the immediate rhetoric of the video. For example, she linked the visuals, content, and lyrics to larger ideas such as money and sex. In her second set of comments, Nikki couldn't say much about how the genre connected to community since she was unfamiliar with, and therefore hesitant to say much about, both rap music and the actual video. Since this was such a lively activity, I asked her about it in her interview. She told me that she learned a lot by listening to her classmates talk about the video but that although she had been exposed to rap music through music studies, she didn't listen to it on her own time. Nikki said that she was shy talking about racial issues that revolved around black culture or white culture because she felt like an outsider. She didn't cite the activity as important to her genre learning but remembered that particular class being lively and interesting when I brought it up.

“Analyzing political songs in the multimedia project”

Although the main focus of this chapter is to show how students engaged with classroom activities and the final project, the work that Nikki did in the multimedia project (project 3) was especially interesting because of her background in music. In her group's classroom presentation, she made several insights about genres of music/genres of song lyrics that reflected her unique, studied musical background. In this sense, she played a leadership role in her group, so I've decided to feature this aspect of her learning. Again, in the multimedia project, students did a visual remediation of a political song. Throughout the unit I built in discussion of genre. I wanted to focus on how song lyrics reflected cultural values but at the same time influenced various cultures. We

started the unit by deciding what makes a song “political.” We then did rhetorical analyses of a couple of songs as a class. We talked about how different genres of music affected an artist’s lyrics and questioned whether or not song lyrics—as written texts without actual music—should be considered a genre. Although we never reached a resolution on this, students compared song writing to other creative genres such as poetry and rhyming. This comparison was a heuristic in and of itself.

Students also talked about how song lyrics stood somewhat in “opposition” to academic writing or more formal genres (they mentioned newspaper articles, which they cited as informative). Comparing different genres was instructive in that we talked about how the rhetoric of each genre fit some distinct purpose and social function. We also talked about song lyrics within different genres sending different messages, which reflected the targeted audience. For example, students noted how pop music lyrics are often very general and usually focused on love and relationships. Several students also made the distinction between “gansta rap” and “political rap”—noting how the lyrics in gangsta rap are more predictable and simple than political rap, which has more complicated rhyme schemes because it includes more “meat” (as they called it), or important social messages or things that are happening in the world. Students then formed groups, picked a song, and conducted research into the artist/group and the time period when the song was released.

Nikki’s group chose a pop song, “Where is the Love?,” by the Black Eyed Peas. They used Power Point to visually and textually convey what they interpreted the song to be about. Nikki worked with three other female, Asian international students. Nikki’s group used a lot of bullet points in their visual presentation. The song played in the

background as they described the group's background and rise to fame, what messages the song sent, how the actual music related to the lyrics, and what audience/community they thought it influenced. They talked a bit about pop music reaching younger audiences, which they said was important in terms of sending positive messages to youth. They also talked about how the lyrics reflected the social climate at the time (e.g. "war on our shoulders" referred to the war in Iraq). Nikki's group thought the Black Eyed Peas sent an anti-war message.

More specifically, Nikki's group started their slides by talking about the racial make-up of the group, which included White, Black, and Filipino artists. They thought this mix sent a positive diversity message to the audience—which they classified as urban and mainstream youth. They spent a lot of time citing actual lyrics and then pulling in research that was related to the lyrics. For example, when the song talked about war, they cited recent news clips about how many soldiers had recently been killed in Iraq. They also showed a clip of an anti-war demonstration. Nikki's group also spent much time building on the theme "Where is the Love?" in their bullet points: they explained that pop lyrics often send broad but important messages to youth. On a related note, they said that the main chorus lyric, along with the catchy way it was sung, ingrained the idea into listeners' minds. In this way, they saw the genre of pop music as having a far-reaching effect since the audience could easily remember the message.

In the next part of the presentation, Nikki's group described the melody as "slow, methodical, and pleasing." They also noted how the singing and music were high-pitched. In the post-presentation discussion, I noted that Nikki explained in detail to the class that not only was the message more uplifting than lyrics of many other genres, but

since the notes were higher, they affected the brain differently than rap music, which generally had low tones and strong bass. I knew she was in music therapy and had probably been the one to educate her group on this point, so in class, I asked her to elaborate. This created a lively discussion since students always seemed willing to talk about music. Several students asked questions, and Nikki talked a bit about music therapy and how therapists often treat depression or other health conditions with music that has a calming, pleasing affect on the brain. This was one of the highlights of their presentation—sometimes implicitly and sometimes directly making distinctions between different genres of music.

Overall, Nikki's group's project was systematic, detailed, and direct. The consistent use of bullet points made the project a bit dry in comparison to other groups who had used more symbolic visual images, but her group had the most thorough outside research of all the groups. With Nikki's unique perspective, they also created an important class discussion in terms of comparing how pop lyrics differed from rap lyrics (out of 7 groups, one chose pop music, one chose rock music, and the other 5 chose rap music. So the majority of students were prepared to talk about rap). Nikki's group used their song as a springboard for talking more generally about the written and musical conventions of pop music.

Learning during the final unit

Final project assignment

To build the context for the final unit, as well as provide more specific information regarding Nikki's research and writing process within the parameters of the final project, I've included the complete fall final project assignment sheet below:

Final Project

"The space of discipline and field-specific writing: determining the 'social' through genre"

Purpose: Building on the type of research (mini-ethnography) that you did in paper 2, you'll be conducting a more in-depth ethnographic study of the writing of some profession or discipline you see yourself being part of in the future.

(1) The first purpose of this project is to **familiarize** yourself with the genres (written, visual, or spoken) that make up your chosen discipline or profession. You should pick a "space" that you see yourself occupying, and if you're unsure, pick a discipline that really interests you. (note: a discipline has a wider scope, whereas professions are more specialized. For example: the discipline I'm in is composition/rhetoric and my profession is a writing teacher. There is the broad discipline of medicine, while there are many more specialized professions within the medical field.)

(2) The second purpose of this project is to explore how the different genres provide a "way in" to **understanding larger issues** like the values, belief systems, and social roles within your discipline or profession. Depending on what you choose, the focus will vary. But the goal for everyone is to see how the genres teach you the meaning of "community"—that is, what do the genres teach you about how the community "works." How are the writing practices an important part of getting things done in your community?

We've been exploring and analyzing various genres, and the goals for this project build on this knowledge. You're trying to understand how the genres function and why they function that way (more specific questions below).

Part 1, Research/Fieldwork requirements: (more detailed explanations to follow)

(1) Interview with a discipline/field insider (more details to follow, to be turned in for homework points)

(2) A minimum of 5 sample genres reflecting at least 3 different genres

-you can collect writing samples from the person you interview or ask this person to direct you to sample genres
-you can also look through journals/magazines/publications from your field (I will present a lesson on how to navigate the online journals from the library website)
-please talk to me if you have trouble finding sample genres. I will help direct you to sources.

Part 2, Analysis questions for EACH genre (same ?s from past group work):

(1) Identify the genre

(2) Do a rhetorical analysis of the document

- a. What is being communicated?
- b. How is the message communicated (language use, tone, format, style, visuals...)

(3) Make sense of the “context” (just like we did with other genres)

- a. who wrote the document/for whom is it written?
- b. what is the purpose of the document? What action does it perform in your field? What does it “do”?
- c. what other things influence the way this genre functions?
(values of the field, language used in the field, the way you think it might work with other genres, anything that you can think of.....)

☺ This is an exploratory project! Each individual paper will allow you to tell the story of *your* field. You don’t have to answer all of the above questions; simply pick the questions you think most fit the genres of your chosen field. We will analyze sample field-specific genres in class and link them to “community” in the same way we’ve done in past activities.

Part 3, Paper requirements: In a 5-6 page reflection paper (MLA citing), you will respond to the above issues. While the content will vary from paper to paper, each paper must have the following:

1) **a clear thesis:** this is our most “thesis-driven” writing to date. Your introductory paragraphs should give the reader an idea of where you’re going and why what you have to say is important. We will work on thesis statements in class.

2) **logical organization:** can the reader follow it? How are you building on a main purpose? How do the paragraphs relate to one another?

3) **clarity:** again, the reader should be clear about what you're trying to say. This does not mean that your ideas can't be "messy," that you can't explore contradictions that you're finding. But the way you write about these ideas/relate them to each other must be clear.

4) **language use & style:** Your language use in this genre will be more formal than the other genres you've written. Avoid being too conversational, although you can still use first person when appropriate (since this is ethnographic research, not just book research).

5) **integration of sources:** this project will not turn out if you don't do quality research. Once you've done it, we will work on how to integrate your sources into your writing. Inserting sources "smoothly" is one of the most important things in a research paper.

***SOURCE REQUIREMENT:**

- AT LEAST 5 CITATIONS IN THE BODY OF YOUR PAPER (from interview and documents)
- MLA WORKS CITED PAGE

"Students' written response to final project"

After the multimedia project, I introduced the final project. Since I introduced the project with over four weeks to go in the semester, we hadn't analyzed any field-specific genres yet. I explained that we would use the same genre analysis techniques we had used in other activities, but I still realized the project was something entirely new and possibly intimidating to students. For this reason I asked students (in the last 10 minutes of class) to write me an informal letter about (1) their gut response to the project; (2) if they understood what I was asking them to do; and (3) if they understood the actual *language* of the assignment sheet.

In Nikki's written response, she wrote:

I think this is a very tough project! But the idea is very interesting. I have never thought about how people write and communicate depending on the *field*. I think the assignment sheet gave me clear ideas of what I have to do in my research but I still need the examples of student's [sic] paper so that I can make sure I do the right thing in my paper...5-6 pages is a lot of work!!! But I think I get most of the words in the assignment sheet.

I remember after Nikki turned her response in, she stayed after class to make sure she had a clear understanding of the project. She explained that when her classmate first started reading the assignment sheet out loud, she thought the purpose was to study her major generally. But as we talked and I refreshed her memory about some of the activities that had asked students to connect a piece of writing to some community, she became clear on what the project asked students to do. In her interview she explained this initial confusion again:

At first, I wonder [sic] why you want us to study our major.... I thought it's kind of like stereotype, it's like if you study the stereotype of a people, it's like...more like 'let's analyze about your field'....what types of people study there, what kinds of things are going on in the field...but yeah like finally when I got the idea of the writing thing, the project...I'm like 'ohhh! I see...ok, that's more interesting. Kind of how like [sic] the whole community thing, when we talk [sic] about writers and who they affect, how they fit within some community.

"Field-specific genres: analyzing a pharmaceutical company mission statement"

To start the final unit, I asked students to collaboratively analyze a pharmaceutical company mission statement in class. We did the activity in the computer lab, and I

allowed students to pick their own groups and asked them to either handwrite or type up their notes. Below I've included the questions I used in the fall, as well as Nikki's group's written responses:

(1) Identify the genre

Drug company mission statement

(2) Do a rhetorical analysis of the document

a. What is being communicated?

The workers are being informed about what they are expected to do and why they are in first place among other companies.

b. How is the message communicated (language use, tone, format, style, visuals...)

Language use and writing style are not too complex but only people within the business would understand specific abbreviations and sales techniques...for example, the "QCS": Quality Customer Selling sales model.

(3) Make sense of the "context" (just like we did with other genres)

a. who wrote the document/for whom is it written?

For the sales workers.

b. what is the purpose of the document?

To inform the workers but also to make the workers want to believe what they sell. They can always have the document for a reference.

**c. what other things influence the way this genre functions?
(values of the field, language used in the field, the way you think it might work with other genres, anything that you can think of.....)**

We think the workers probably learn about these thing [sic] in meetings and training, and the genre acts as a reference so they always know what to follow. The business setting is very formal too so the writing is formal. Maybe when they talk about their jobs and what to do it's not so formal, but the writing is formal.

In the group discussion, Nikki's group didn't say much, but at one point, Nikki said: "I think the genre is to improve workers' goal and passion." I had written down her idea on my computer screen notes, and in my journal entry I noted how this initiated a productive dialogue among other students. Other students agreed that if the employees were more enthusiastic, then the company would make more money. Some said this as simply an observation, but some students were skeptical of drug companies. These differing opinions directly influenced what students determined to be both the purpose and function of the mission statement. When I interviewed Nikki, I asked her if she remembered the activity. She wasn't one of the three fall students that brought up the activity on her own, but once I refreshed her memory, she remembered it.

Meghan: Did that help you? Analyzing a genre from business?

Nikki: Yeah, I guess...I mean, it's boring to me actually...the business things. My group they liked it...they were in marketing or something I think. They did a lot of the talking in our group...I mostly listened (laughs nervously)....

Meghan: Ok, I understand. It was boring! Did it help you as far as seeing how people *used* the document, like how it functioned?

Nikki: yeah. I see...ok, this is very important in this business. I see how people follows [sic] it...and they have to...to keep a good standing. Still to me though...kind of boring. I like analyzing music better (laughs).

"Freewrite + whole-class discussion (theoretical prompt about authors and convention)"

After students had interviewed a disciplinary insider and collected genres, I introduced the theoretical prompt that I described in Chapter 3. Students responded to the following theoretical prompts:

Do you agree with the following statements?

- (1) A writer is always influenced by the social context they write within.
- (2) A writer can break genre conventions. If so, can you provide examples of when this happens? What are the end results?

Nikki believed that writers are influenced by their social context and, in this written response, she associated social context with elements of form. In response to the first prompt, she wrote:

Some fields are very strict about forms, for example, when music therapist writes a documents [sic]...there are some basic rules (model) for the documents. To write an observation document, there are rules as well. Also each field has tendency [sic] to use specific words...psychologist use [sic] a lot of technical terms. Medical field use [sic] a lot of medical terms..so on...these aspects eventually influence someone's style of writing.

In response to the second prompt, she wrote:

In the music therapy area, if you break the rules of writing, it is sometimes dangerous that the therapist might reveal the private information of the client, or therapist...it's also less professional if you break the rules.

"The research paper: modeling past student work to explore writing conventions"

In the final two weeks of class (after students had done the bulk of their research), I spent time helping students learn the conventions of research paper writing. When I asked Nikki which activities helped her the most during the final unit, she quickly pointed to this modeling activity. To show sample thesis statements, topic sentences, and methods of organization, I showed students models of past student work on Angel. I referred to this particular activity in Chapter 3. The samples I used were from the prior

semester of teaching when I wasn't yet engaging in my dissertation research. My goals in this lesson were to: (1) focus on the genre of the research paper; and (2) show disciplinary genre analysis in action, alerting students to *how* past students had talked about genre. By breaking down the examples, I wanted to show students different ways they could incorporate analysis findings and integrate sources (from their interviews, as well as their own analysis of genres). When Nikki talked about the activity, she suggested how I might improve it:

Yeah, the models really help...maybe if you have time, you might want to simplify it even...using the model is really strong. But sometimes since the individual has very strong personality, in the way they write, so some people get it, but some people don't...so maybe you might want to point out things more...'this is this, this is this'....so you identify that point, or make up sentence that is more simple and obvious.

Nikki told me that she went back to the modeling activity, which was posted on our class website, during her drafting stages: "...introductions are always a hard part for me, and I have no idea....but I look [sic] at the good examples, and I tried imitating, and say....ok....that's what I need to do." This activity was both related to considering different habits of thought in this type of research as well as showing students different means of rhetorical presentation. Nikki's strong recollection of how instrumental the activity was to her drafting stages showed me that it's important to use past student writing to show students conventions within the context of this type of research.

Nikki's final project: the genres of music therapy

When analyzing her research paper about the genres of music therapy, I tried to understand Nikki's habits of thought, paying attention to how she balanced analysis of textual features and discussion of different genres' functions within music therapy. I start by addressing the content of her paper to consider what habits of thought Nikki demonstrated. I then consider more specific elements of form—that is, how she engaged with the conventions of writing a research paper. I conclude the portrait by addressing how she reflected on her research experience in her interview. This portion allowed me to compare what I saw happening in her work with her own reflection of the process of researching and writing about disciplinary genres.

Habits of thought

In terms of the content of her paper, Nikki spent the majority of the time talking about writing as a social relationship, highlighting *who* writes different genres and *how* they're used. To start though, she talked generally about research papers and case study reports—two genres she lumped together and described as “the most common forms of writing in the field.” She talked about the formality of the documents, the use of APA style, and the “very technical and professional expressions.” She wrote that these elements combined “give the strong reliability of their (professionals in the field) work.” Nikki didn't cite any particular papers or reports. This section was very brief, taking up one short paragraph of her paper.

In the next four sections, Nikki provided analysis of *session documents*; it is here that she began talking about social relationships. First, she started by describing activity plan sheets:

Activity plan sheets consist of four areas: one for indicating the materials that the therapist plans to use, another for the activity that the therapist plans to do in the session, a third for the objective that the therapist plans to specifically work on relative to the client's needs (e.g. the client should increase his ability to move his arms), and a final area for the session observer, which is either a student or another professional music therapist, for commenting if the plan has been met or not.

Nikki continued her paper with more specific textual features of the activity plan sheets.

...the therapist should not use proper nouns, such as the names of the client or therapist...therefore, the therapist uses the terms 'therapist' and 'client' instead...Student therapists oftentimes plan an activity and write...'Th (therapist) will play the drum with the Beatles' music.' However, this is too broad of a description of the activity. The therapist should subdivide the activity into smaller steps, such as 'Th will teach Cl (client) simple rhythms , and then Th will ask Cl to sing the song along with the rhythm. This is an important procedure for therapists to get clearer assessments of the clients' skills.

After describing activity planning, Nikki discussed the other two session documents: *observation documents* and *post-session evaluative documents*. With observation documents, Nikki explained how a professional therapist watches a session, takes notes on what is happening, and charts how the client is responding. Nikki wrote, "The observation document is usually handed to the student after the session." In the next paragraph she explains that the therapist who conducted the session will write a post-session evaluative document in which they "add his or her subjective narrative to the document. It is usually a personal narrative, and it is allowed to use 'I.' Evaluation documents can be considered to be informal." Again, Nikki talked about specific writing

devices but didn't quote directly from any specific genres. In this sense her discussion of specific rhetorical devices applied (generally) to all similar examples of the genre.

Nikki spent the next three longer paragraphs describing *music compositions* (actual sheet music), explaining how the musical notes along with lyrics are tailored to a patient's needs. She also explained how, often, the music is composed *with* patients to make treatment more collaborative. Here she cited one of the experts she interviewed:

In addition to using existing music, music therapists often compose their own music, depending on their clients' needs. For instance, many therapists have their own original "hello song." A professional music therapist, Mr. R. (Nikki's interviewee) who works with children with mental disorders, such as anxiety disorder, ADHD, and autism, has a unique hello song. He sings "shake another hand, shake [sic] hand next to ya, shake another hand and sing along..." The song is accompanied with simple chords played on a guitar, and the lyrics are not too hard to sing... The purpose of the song is to encourage each client to enjoy the music, to promote a non-threatening environment, to pay attention to the lyrics and to interact with one another...

Nikki had more detailed analysis in this section, addressing the written, spoken, bodily, and auditory forms of expression that make up the genre.

In the next section of her paper, Nikki further explained how writing music compositions can be a collaborative process between therapist and patient. She described how a patient in a wheelchair once verbally composed the following lyrics: "If I could walk/I want to go climb a mountain/I want to see the world." Nikki's analysis following these lines reads: "It is very important for the clients, especially depressed ones, to express themselves some way and to blow all their concerns and wishes out." In this case she explained how the therapist may create a particular sound or string of chords that would complement the theme of "climbing a mountain." Nikki explained in her writing that this collaborative creative process allows the patient to play an active role in his

healing. According to Nikki, music compositions are the most important genres in music therapy since they provide the foundation for her whole field.

Research paper conventions

After considering the evident habits of thought in her paper, I more intently focused on how she engaged with research paper conventions. First, her thesis statement/purpose for writing was mainly informative, listing the main documents used in the profession. She did refer to the “use” of the documents, saying that during different stages of music therapy treatment (pre, during, and post treatment) that “compositions are treated as very important information for both communicating with other music therapists and their own future studies.” She doesn’t cite any particular values of the field or necessarily make any persuasive claims about music therapy. I did get a clear sense of what types of content the paper would include, however.

In terms of organization, Nikki started by talking about published documents but devoted most of her paper to actual session documents that took place in the field. She cited her main expert (who she refers to as Ms. S) in 4 of 10 total paragraphs. She also cited another professional music therapist (Mr. R) in one paragraph. She consistently cited her experts after talking about either textual features or use of a genre. Nikki seemed to use the experts to support her own analysis, and in some cases, the analysis was found *in* an experts’ quote.

At times Nikki quoted an actual genre that she had collected (e.g. “Th will play the drum with the Beatles’ music”), but she often discussed general features of certain

genres and cited her experts without quoting a particular genre. Nikki didn't provide in-text citation references after most quotes, and at times when she cited actual language or textual features, I was unclear if her information came from her interview or from a specific genre that she had collected. By looking at her works cited page, I could sometimes gauge where something came from, but she didn't use in-text parenthetical citations consistently.

In terms of her topic sentences, which we worked on in class, Nikki used somewhat general topic sentences when she introduced a new genre. For example: "The most common forms of writing in this field are research papers and case study reports" or "Music therapy session documents are another main form of writing in the field" (1). The topic sentence in her conclusion was more specific, although still pretty broad: "Music therapy is not only related to art, but also to science; therefore, music therapists require a broad range of knowledge." Her transitions showed a clear shift in purpose and let the reader know what she was going to talk about. At times, the topic sentences could relay more specific information. She had consistent rich analysis, but her topic sentences didn't always reflect this.

Presenting her work: Nikki sings to the class

When Nikki presented her work to the class, I had a proud teacher moment! She actually performed some of the singing lyrics that she had used with a client, and I can still visualize her excitement and the class's positive response to her (and interest in her field). In my journal entry, I noted how Nikki spent the majority of her presentation time

talking about sheet music (just had she had done in her paper). The class laughed and applauded her. Afterwards, several students asked her who made up the lyrics, how the patients responded, etc. I felt like her animated presentation really made the genre come “alive” and showed the class how a written—then performed—genre built the relationship between therapist and client.

Interview feedback: comparing Nikki’s reflection on the process of doing the final project/what she learned with my own analysis of her work

In this section I combine Nikki’s reflection on the process of doing the final project with my earlier analysis of her written project. First, Nikki explained to me that the thought of analyzing genres seemed “nitpicky” to her, and not to my surprise, told me that she would never have looked so deeply into genres she used in her field “if it was not class work.” When I asked her if she became aware of things that she unconsciously did (or thought about) when she wrote/engaged with music therapy genres, she responded: “...yeah because when I started doing it (writing music therapy genres), it came naturally...I was so involved in the writing, every week, after every session...I have this client, I have to write this...especially evaluation...and there’s certain types, certain way to write and I just followed it.”

I then asked Nikki if she thought her research in my class would make her a more active member in her field. She responded:

Nikki: Yeah...especially since we focus on the writing style...it’s really important in this field...I think...ummm....it (the project) helped me kind of...really...re-learn.

Meghan: Re-learn. Yeah. That’s a really good phrase...what do you mean by that exactly?

Nikki: ...like re-learn, kind of your own style, or study...cuz we have learned how to write things in the class, in the music therapy class, but then in a different class, really analyzing the kind of writing, it's a reminder.... and well this is kind of selfish thinking, but ummm, people want to study their own major...so if the class is somehow related to your own major, then it helps the people, so the writing class is very important because you need it in your own major too...like I'm taking a writing...too...and also I have Music 381 class, which is writing Tier II....that's neat cuz I focus on that class cuz it's related to the music....and the same thing, if the other Tier I English class, the writing class, if it's related to your own major, then....maybe people will appreciate it more...

She then told me that analyzing *why* the rules existed taught her about professionalism in her field. She described the final project experience as “beyond schoolwork”:

I think, personally, the process of this research paper...maybe I found professional kind of things, kind of like I interviewed with my advisor, and it's more like beyond schoolwork, more like how the profession/field works...by chatting with the advisor about the writing style, and more like *why* we have to do this type of writing... because there's so many confidential things in this field. So that's why....there's so many reasons to choose that style of writing... so that kind of taught me that...the professional field that I'm going to be involved...and yeah...it kind of reminded me about the professional...

Here and in other parts of her interview, Nikki talked a lot about *professionalism*; she also talked a lot about *confidentiality*. In her paper, however, she didn't use the word *professionalism* until the very last sentence, saying that through the documents “professionalism can be clearly seen.” Her use of passive voice tells me that she was trying to say something larger, although she couldn't quite articulate it. While passive voice can often be a translation issue, out of all my ESL students, Nikki seemed to have the strongest command of English language use and used active voice in her writing. In the above quote, she also mentions *confidentiality*: “...there's so many confidential things in this field. So that's why there's [sic] so many reasons to choose that style of writing.”

However, when she wrote about genre in her project, she never even used the word *confidential* or elaborated about the “reasons why” members would choose particular ways of writing or discusses how they learn how to write these documents. This told me that she was aware of the importance of patients’ rights in the healthcare field on a meta level—although she didn’t *explicitly* state this in her writing.

Another interesting thing I noticed is that in one part of her final project Nikki refers to a music therapists’ process of composing music as an original and creative process (for example, the “hello song”). However, throughout the paper, in her interview, and in her response to the in-class theoretical prompt about authors and convention (where she talked about “strict rules”), I got the feeling that she sees members of this field being more constrained than they are able to *create*. Again, in her paper she described how the therapist’s song was “original”: this creativity reflected what the therapist thinks the patient needs, and the main purpose of the genre is to get the patient to *interact*. Many genre scholars (Bazerman 2004; Devitt, Bawarshi & Reiff 2003; Iwanicki 2003) have built on Wittgenstein’s theory of materiality, stressing that students must understand how language is “alive” and has “material, identity-related and social consequences” (Iwanicki, 508). In this example, Nikki showed how the language quite literally came alive. The lyrics were paired with music and sung out loud, affecting the mental state/identity of the patient. And again, the tension between individuality and social expectations could have come out more clearly (since I could tell Nikki was aware of this tension on some level).

Another thing that stuck out to me in the interview was that when I asked Nikki about the notion that genres have a *social function*, she told me she was confused by this

terminology whenever I would say it in class. She said that she couldn't really explain the concept even at the time of our interview. In other parts of the interview, she referred to the environmental factors that shape a genre, talked about what she described as "writing systems," and talked a lot about how writing both reflected the relationship between music therapists and related to confidentiality within music therapy. So she was always referring to the social function of language and relating genres to work roles/relationships/identity. Since she was such a committed student, I wondered how I might make the idea of *social function* a more tangible, simple concept—or if the theoretical aspect of the concept was less important than students actually providing their own practical examples of genres' social functions.

Tentative conclusions about Nikki's development of a genre metalanguage and literacy learning

Nikki's literacy development in my class told me that she developed a language to talk about the social workings of language. In the foundational activity of the semester, Nikki's group talked about writing on a "meta" level—making several insightful arguments about how writing can be both a personal and social act. They connected personal writing to expressing emotions, cited genres that are used privately between loved ones, and noted that we all have "our own way" of telling stories, or relaying experiences that happened to us. Nikki's group also expressed that writing aids the transmissions of ideas, noting how writers get ideas through social interaction and influence readers with their ideas. Lastly, Nikki's group noted how school writing necessitates proper forms, which students learn directly through their educational

experiences. Most of the group's response seemed to focus on content; however, they hinted toward the idea of socially created conventions when they included the school example. The open-ended design of the activity allowed Nikki and her group to come up with their own examples and ideas in regards to both prompts. When I asked Nikki about this foundational activity in her interview, she didn't remember details or how which side she agreed with more strongly at the beginning of the semester. At the time of our interview, she first said that she agreed equally with both statements. After thinking about it for another moment, she said that in her own life, she felt that she used writing more for social purposes and was influenced by the different contexts she wrote within. She cited her school writing, admissions essays for internships and graduate school, and documents she wrote in her music therapy sessions as examples of writing that she used for social purposes. In the interview Nikki also said that she wouldn't "just know how to do these writings" if she hadn't learned them in school and gotten feedback from outside sources.

When she talked about her own experiences writing the personal narrative and analytical essay, one main thing that stuck out was that Nikki associated analytical writing with "learning" since the generic conventions (at least of our class version of the genre) required "findings and researches [sic]." Since the conventions required the inclusion of what she describes as "outside knowledge," she equated this type of research and writing with knowledge creation. She also noted that each genre contains the writer's "opinion," however. In this sense, her response revealed comparative elements and similarities of the genre. Nikki's response was rather brief. Although she talked generally about the genres, she didn't provide much specific information about specific rhetorical

conventions or about her own writing process. At this stage in the semester, she seemed to talk generally about the genres but didn't invoke more specific elements of analysis.

When Nikki engaged with the rap video activity, she didn't seem comfortable making claims about the common conventions of the rap video and how the video connected to community values. The first part of her written responses expressed that the low tones of the music influenced listeners, resulting in a "low mood," as she described it. In this way her knowledge of different genres of *music* and their conventions started becoming obvious in a way that other students' background knowledge did not. As far as discussing the conventions of the rap video—and other rap videos—Nikki wasn't comfortable making claims or connecting the video to community use. She was able to make comments about the immediate rhetoric of the video. For example, she linked the visuals, content, and lyrics to larger ideas such as money and sex. But it seemed that students who had prior knowledge of the conventions of rap videos and the hip hop community in general were more able and apt to link the actual video to cultural and community beliefs. For instance, they compared the video with other videos that were alike or different. In her interview Nikki told me that she transferred the "community thing" that she had learned in the rap video to her research in the final project. In this way I see that the activity helped her develop a metalanguage for linking a genre to a particular community and/or larger culture. But after looking more closely at her literacy development, I see that students who had prior knowledge of the relevant cultures and communicative practices that we discussed in this activity engaged more fully in the class discussion. In addition, Nikki's experience taught me that using only one video may lead

to students' essentializing generic conventions and cultural practices of certain communities.

Building on this learning, in the multimedia project, Nikki's group made a clear connection between the conventions of pop music to the community that the music affects. They talked about the lyrics (the message), the style of lyrics, and how the high melodies influence listeners. Nikki's background knowledge and what I perceive to be a more developed way of talking discursively about generic conventions at this point in the semester allowed her to talk about her song in a way that other groups could not. For example, her group used their specific song as a springboard for talking more generally about how the written and musical conventions of pop music compared to genres of music that other students had studied. Nikki played a leadership role in terms of contributing her knowledge of genres of music.

When I first introduced the final project, Nikki was confused as to what the assignment expected of her. In her immediate written response, she said she understood the language of the final project assignment sheet; however, when she stayed after to talk to me, I realized that she actually wasn't clear about the main purpose of the final project. What she was initially confused about was that I *was* asking her to study what "kinds of things are going on in the field," although I wanted her to use writing as a way into these larger ideas. When she stayed after class, though, it seemed that when I explicitly brought up past activities, she saw that I was asking her to link genres to a field in the same way I had asked students to link writing to other communities in the past.

In some of the activities during the final unit, Nikki talked a lot about how writers "have to" conform to certain community-driven values in order to maintain good standing

and “be professional.” In this way she seemed to continually hint at the idea of social roles—how members of particular fields occupy social roles. For example, when her group analyzed the pharmaceutical mission statement, they said: “The workers are being informed about what they are expected to do and why they are in first place among other companies...” They also noted another purpose of the genre—“..to make the workers want to believe what they sell.” Here, their analysis of the sample genre created a focus on community-driven social roles and expectations. Nikki’s group also made an interesting distinction between spoken and written communicative practices. They noted: “Maybe when they talk about their jobs and what to do it’s not so formal, but the writing is formal.” They then re-iterated that the writing acts as a formal reference.

When Nikki engaged with the theoretical prompt about how writers fit within convention, she kept a similar focus on community-driven writing practices and social roles. Since so many of the activities and goals at that time of the semester revolved around field-specific writing, Nikki talked specifically about her field, music therapy, even though the prompt didn’t necessitate this focus (actually, many students did not invoke their final project knowledge in the way that Nikki did). Her written response talked about how you “can’t break the rules of writing in music therapy” because if a therapist does break the expected writing conventions they might reveal client information or seem less professional. Again, the focus seemed to be mainly on the social roles that the members occupy, not necessarily their own personal engagement with the conventions. In this activity many students noted how individuals often break conventions, leading to alterations in genres and new communicative approaches (i.e.

some examples some cited in their written responses and in class were genres of music, magazine writing, and poetry).

In the interview when Nikki and I talked about her learning in the final project, she told me that the project forced her to “re-learn” certain genres, which she said made her more conscious of her writing practices. Her new way of talking about genre reflected Giltrow & Valiquette’s (1994) distinction between “practical consciousness” and “discursive consciousness” (47). Through her experiential knowledge in her discipline/field and the exploratory approach to field-specific genres in my class, Nikki became able to engage in both types of knowledge. Nikki participated actively in all classroom activities, and as I studied her learning through scaffolded activities in data analysis, she demonstrated a clear development in her ability to talk about writing on a meta, almost “outside” level. That is, she had strong written skills from the start, but as she learned to reflect on what she did/what other authors did, she seemed to become more comfortable talking about the social workings of language. Especially in relation to her final project, as I studied what habits of thought she demonstrated, I saw that she developed a *discursive* consciousness of genres in her field—which, in her interview, she described as a valuable means of making her own practices more deliberate.

In her final project, Nikki had the most detailed analysis of documents that pertained to music therapy sessions (musical compositions and post-session evaluative docs). In fact, I used her discussion of music compositions during the spring semester. I attributed this deep analysis to the fact that Nikki told me that she had interacted with these genres and talked about them with the professional music therapist she interviewed. This extensive analysis contrasts the beginning of her paper when she talked about

published research papers and case study reports. Her analysis of these genres was brief, and she referred mainly to textual features. For example, she wrote that authors can never use “I” in research writing and must never refer to names of people. She didn’t give much insight into who wrote the genres, how the genres functioned in the field, or *why* they were written that way. Her only analysis said that these genres “give the strong reliability in their work.” Since published documents in any field speak to reliability, I was interested in knowing more about how these genres define music therapy. It seemed that with documents she hadn’t engaged with yet that she kept the focus on textual features. But when she had either written or interacted with particular genres, she had a better balance of textual analysis and discussion of the genre’s purpose and social function. Reading her analysis of music compositions and post-session evaluative docs, I could almost *feel* the genres’ movement between people. When I read her analysis of published documents, I envisioned still documents.

As a novice insider in her community, Nikki was in a unique position to talk discursively about genres she had actually used. At times she spoke generally of textual features, citing interview feedback as supporting evidence. At times, she quoted her sample genres. In writing up her research findings, she excelled at describing textual features within all genres and, especially when describing music compositions and post-session evaluative documents, she engaged in rich analysis of how the genres both reflected the immediate social setting and actively created tangible outcomes for patients. Swales (1990) notes that much genre knowledge is “internalized unconsciously through participation in discourse communities” (11). In addition, Nikki had received direct instruction as to how to write these documents, and she told me that sometimes her

professors would explain reasons why—for example, “this rule is necessary in order to protect a patient’s identity”—but sometimes she simply adopted forms without thinking much about them. In relation to genres she had actively written or participated with as a novice member of her disciplinary community, she talked more about the social context and use. With documents that she hadn’t yet interacted with much, she focused more on listing textual features without providing much analysis. In this sense I questioned how useful it was for her to explore published documents written by community insiders such as graduate students, professors, and professional music therapists. Her writing that described these documents seemed to go through the motions as opposed to later sections which revealed an active, interested engagement with the genres.

Nikki was a more active member in her community than younger students, and she still didn’t seem equipped to speak deeply about genres that she hadn’t written or used yet. In line with Ann Johns’ (2002) warning that studying genres outside of their community of use presents the challenge that students aren’t learning the genres through situated experience, I saw a couple of related issues. There was a clear demarcation between Nikki’s analysis of published genres, which focused on the textual features *within* the text, and her discussion of music therapy genres, which combined analysis of textual features with discussion of how the genres *work* in the field. *This made me wonder if freshman students who had no experience in their disciplines/fields would focus intently on textual features while paying little attention/showing a limited understanding of the social functions/uses/experiences of writers inside the community.* Understanding Nikki’s learning helped create this comparative element. In Chapter 5 I consider how younger students’ experiences compared with Nikki’s.

While an implicit focus on healing patients read through most of her project, what seemed to be missing from her project was an explicit discussion of how language use and genre depicted the community's *values*. In her interview, Nikki *did* talk about professionalism and confidentiality, which tells me that she made the connection between genre and the value systems of music therapy. She never came out and defined what professionalism means to music therapy, and she never connected issues of confidentiality to larger legal or health care issues. In addition, I would have been interested in a more direct discussion of how individual therapists infuse their own creativity within the parameters of a session and common conventions of the session genres. Discussing these two aspects would make a more explicit connection between how individuals work within community values. Studying Nikki's learning helped me see that I might build in more activities towards the end of the final project unit that would ask students to take their textual analysis and freewrite about what they perceived as the values of their fields. *While I had showed students models of past student work, it would have been productive to give students more individual attention (during Phase 3) about eliciting the deeper value systems from their analysis and helping them be explicit about this in their writing.*

Finally, a larger theoretical question I'm left with after studying Nikki's learning is whether or not she will be a more active member of her disciplinary community after having done this project. Part of the goal in pedagogies that stress the connection between genre use and community is to encourage members to be active participants (Freedman & Medway 1994). In addition, genre studies draws heavily on Activity Theory, which stresses the primacy of how *individual users* actualize and negotiate their own intentions

in the midst of social motives, which comprise larger social structures. Nikki's increased discursive awareness told me that she became more *aware* of music therapy's generic conventions. And her reflection on her own learning tells me that she has considered the *whys* behind the genres she studied and that she's passionate about her path in this profession. But if part of the purpose of this project is to make students more active members/transform disciplinary structures (in the long run), I'm wondering if she questioned anything about her subject positioning or the way patients are positioned? How can I even judge the extent to which I want students to question the values of their field? I lean towards thinking that Nikki will be a more active music therapist after becoming more discursively aware of what she does in practice. Although the question of her becoming a more active member isn't measurable at this stage, based on her interview feedback, Nikki seemed to have studied the social workings of language in a way that she would never have done if she hadn't been required to engage in this type of ethnographic research.

Samar

Background information: getting to know Samar

Talk about spirit. Samar was motivated and caring, and she always completed her work thoughtfully. When Samar thought an activity was boring—or noticed the class wasn't as engaged as usual—she would stay after class and give me her opinion. Samar made me laugh, and I appreciated having a “co-teacher” in the spring semester. I chose to

feature Samar's work because she was tri-lingual, and although she was raised in Kuwait, her first language is English. In addition, Samar played a leadership role in my classroom, participating in all classroom activities and completing all individual assignments with genuine interest. I found her language repertoire and background experiences interesting since she could speak so many languages, but more importantly, I thought the combination of a rich background in *studying* language and her active participation in scaffolded activities within my classroom would provide me with a rich, detailed account of how (and why) different aspects of her language learning occurred in my classroom. Also, Samar's perspective as an international student, which I understood more fully through our lengthy interview after the semester, gave me several ideas of how to include students' diverse cultural knowledge in my approach to genre (I discuss these ideas in the second part of Chapter 5).

Samar's self-written bio expresses more about her unique character and background:

I am currently a freshman international student from Kuwait attending Michigan State University. I study biotechnology/biochemistry/engineering. My first language is English. I've been in American School all my life but I can also speak Arabic and French. The form of writing I tend to use most is email. I write a lot of emails to friends, family, and also school related things ...it is also a way to communicate my emotions as much as I like. I sometimes write emails to myself expressing my feelings; it's like my online diary in a way. Emails also help me connect with my family a lot. I don't get to talk to them much because the phone lines don't really connect that much to China (which is where they are currently living) so I can send an email anytime I want, knowing they will read it and reply. What I want out of life is a lot of things. I'm not really sure what I really want. I'm majoring in civil engineering but I'm also interested in biotechnology because biotechnology is related to doctors. I want a major that can take me places, get me a good job, make my family proud of me and of who I've become [sic]; I want to feel like I accomplished a lot coming to America and studying and feel that all the hard work and all the home sickness pays off!

Samar often stayed after class to chat with me or talk about her heavy course load. Several times she expressed that she wanted to make her parents proud by earning a high grade point average. Samar came from a culture where arranged marriages were customary, and she liked to talk about relationships and marriage with me. Since I was in my mid 20's, she was surprised that I wasn't married yet (I jokingly told her I would at least *think* more about marriage after writing my dissertation). We often talked about different cultural perspectives in relation to marriage and how women balance careers with family life.

Although Samar was majoring in the sciences, she loved to draw and write creatively as well. Samar had a strong capacity to adapt to different genres. That is, if we were doing something more fun and creative, she could step into that space of writing easily. When we did more analytical or research-based writing, she adapted easily to those conventions as well. I would say she excelled at more formal types of writing. Getting to know her and her writing in class, and especially after interviewing her, I realized that Samar could “do” diverse types of genres better than she could discursively articulate how and why she made particular rhetorical choices. However, in our interview, I felt like together we explored the concept of genre in ways that neither one of us had done before. Through her practical examples, Samar gave me a different cultural lens, which had an impact on how I theorized about and plan to teach genre. I also could tell she became more able to discursively discuss what she did in her writing practices and her explorations of genre the more we talked in the interview.

Conceptualization of genre

When I interviewed Samar, she expressed that before taking my class, she had only associated the concept of genre with literary genres—an attitude she said she had adopted through her prior educational experiences. In our interview she expresses her new conceptualization of genre:

Samar: It's a classification..of....different....categories of writing.

Meghan: Ok, anything else?

Samar: ...yeah, like anything can be a genre, like pictures, words...they can all be put into genres and then sometimes one thing can be more than one genre...like you know, the greeting cards...

Meghan: Oh yeah! From the “6 genres activity”...explain that a little more to me...

Samar: ...for example, the greeting cards can be a picture genre, and then a greeting card itself is a genre, and then what's written in it, like if it's a poem, or a joke, then that can even be a genre...

Meghan: Yeah, ok, good....so it's a combination of little genres?

Samar: Yeah...like little parts have their own meaning, like they could stand alone and still say something.

Samar's conceptualization illustrates that she operated with a broad conceptualization of genre, which I will consider as I make sense of her learning in my classroom.

In the next part of her interview, she commented that what was different in how we approached writing was that I “made” students look at what was in the piece of writing and how it was written and used. She commented that students had to consider “how the author uses it...and then...what's the meaning, like how does it affect different types of people...,” which led to the following dialogue:

Meghan: All right...so you were able to think about a genre, like, not just what's there on paper, but how it's used in the world, like socially?

Samar: Yeah...I didn't think of genres at first like that...I just thought genres were like books. Fiction. Nonfiction. Cuz that's what we learned in high school, or you know, middle school through high school...we didn't think about how pictures are genres, or how comics are genres, you know...It's different.

Meghan: Ok, in high school, in your English class, was it more like literary genres?

Samar: Yeah, like fiction had to be this. Nonfiction had to be this. And then like...in libraries they were usually classified that way, and you know, you never saw a genre like comics being classified as a genre, they were different...

Meghan: Ok, so you focused more on literary genres.

Samar: ...yeah, and we talked a lot about the *story* in high school...you made us like answer all those questions! (both laugh)...like why it was written that way, how it was used...you know, we had to break everything up into little things, you're not just looking at something like one whole thing, their [sic] were all these different parts and things...and like how it came to be.

Here, when Samar refers to "all those questions," she was referring to Bawarshi's analytical questions revolving around *situation*, *communicative patterns*, and *overall analysis*, which I introduced in Chapter 3. A more detailed look at Samar's learning in action will show more specifically what Samar learned about language and writing by engaging with this type and other forms of genre analysis.

Samar's learning in action: building a genre metalanguage through classroom activities

"Is writing a private or social act?"

In the foundational activity, "Is writing a private or social act?," spring students wrote individual freewrites before participating in groups and classroom dialogue. Samar

responded with the following insights about both sides of the question. Her individual written response reads:

Writing is a private act: Our own imagination leads to our writing. We personally think of ways that we're more comfortable in writing, and we write. For example, in a diary, it's private. We choose our own techniques and freely write without guidelines. Even though any given assignment in an English class or any class may be the same topic with all students...but each person is unique in his writing by the word choice or conveying their thought.

Writing is a social act: We are influenced by what we read and hear every day. Writing is a developing skill that you would learn as you advance in life by reading and experienced [sic] different levels of life and samples and we tend to imitate the schemes of writing like the thesis statement, supporting sentences, re-stating the thesis...that kind of format stuff.

In my journal entry after class, I noted that Samar's group played an active part in the discussion, not only presenting their thoughts but asking important questions of other groups. Based on her group's written notes and participation in class, they agreed more strongly with the statement: *writing is a private act*. One of the quotes on the top of their notes said: "We express individual creativity through writing." Aside from journal writing, as Samar had written about in her individual response, the group cited personal letters, poems, and song lyrics as genres that allowed them to "express what's inside." However in class, Samar's group also focused a lot on "school writing" and talked about having to follow "proper guidelines" that they wouldn't otherwise follow. When I raised the question to the whole class, "*Where do we learn how to write different all these different types of writing?*", it was Samar's group that quickly responded that we learn how to write in school. Other groups seemed more apt to cite outside influences. Her response, along with her group's, didn't come as a surprise. She had always expressed

being serious about her education, and I knew mastering “school writing” and maintaining high grades was important to her. However, in her written notes, Samar wrote that even when writers engage with guidelines such as school assignments, “each person is unique in his writing by the word choice or conveying their thought.” Also, the very first sentence of her individual response said that “our own imagination leads to our writing.” These ideas speak to an individual’s unique relationship to convention. Samar seemed to impart that writers always have unique ideas and use language creatively—even within particular language schematas.

“Comparing two in-class genres: the personal narrative and analytical essay”

The next piece of Samar’s learning stems from the activity in which students compared the generic conventions and their own experiences engaging with the first two major papers—the personal narrative and the analytical essay which depicted a cultural scene. As in the fall semester, I asked spring students to write an in-class written response comparing the two genres. In her written response, Samar first started with a list of general bullet points:

- (1) What are the differences between a personal narrative and analytical paper?
 - Purpose
 - Subject matter/content
 - Tone, language use, writing style
 - Viewpoint
 - Writing Strategies

The first list seemed to lead Samar to cite some more specific differences across the genres. Her next list of bullet points reads:

- Analytical paper was more descriptive
- Analytical paper is based on what you see, what other people are doing
- Analytical paper was kind of based on facts, whereas a personal narrative was more in that you could make up things
- Analytical paper was from different point-of-views and personal narrative was more from your own point-of-view, not having to worry about outside factors
- Personal narrative was more informal than analytical paper
- The personal narrative was something you experienced whereas the analytical paper could have been about a new place, like something you experience for the first time.
- Analytical paper was boader [sic] than the personal narrative

Here, I think Samar made a strong connection in terms of how viewpoint affects the content of each genre. She talked about how authors writing personal narratives can “make up things,” which I thought referred to an author’s freedom to (re)create an experience. Samar seemed to believe that when an author is being “analytical” about something that he presents a more detached point of view—one which Samar believes results in a more objective stance. Samar talked about the personal narrative being more informal; however in our class, since students did an analytical essay depicting a cultural scene (in which conducting interviews was a component), I allowed students to use conversational language, including first person and dialogue. It also interested me that Samar brought up the point about experiencing something for the “first time” (referencing her experience writing the analytical essay about a cultural scene). She seemed to distinguish between the personal narrative, which includes writing about an experience—which she described as something in your memory—with writing about

something external, which she thought happens more distinctly as an external experience. Samar didn't discuss many specific writing conventions in her response, although many of her bullet points did seem to implicitly address how rhetorical strategies would change based on her points of analysis (i.e. a more "descriptive" paper would have more details, describing a personal narrative as more "informal" would affect the genre's stylistic and rhetorical elements, etc.)

"Individual take-home assignment: 'A critical look at genre'"

As we moved into the second half of the semester, more fully exploring generic conventions and uses of "everyday" genres and beginning the multigenre project, I created an individual assignment in which students explored generic conventions of a genre they were interested in. In her interview Samar cited this activity as being crucial to building a genre metalanguage since it was students' first experience exploring a genre they got the chance to select. Samar was interested in politics and told me that the minute she received the assignment sheet, she knew she would analyze political cartoons. Below is the assignment sheet I passed out to students (I used these questions before using Bawarshi's extensive analysis in subsequent activities):

Purpose: The purpose of this assignment is to start exploring genres (and the writing conventions behind them) that you come across in your daily lives.

What to do:

- (1) **Pick a genre** that you're interested in
- (2) **Find 3 examples of this genre.** For example, if you pick a "newspaper editorial," I want you to find 3 different editorials. If you pick poetry, I want

you to find 3 different poems. It doesn't matter what the content is, and it doesn't matter where you find the genres or who writes them. You're going to start exploring the way the genres are written.

(3) **Do an analysis of each genre.** Follow these steps:

- a. Identify/name the genre (is it a poem? political cartoon?)
- b. Provide a brief summary about what is being communicated. What is the message behind the genre? What is the author's purpose?
- c. Spend more time analyzing the language/communication style: What kind of language does the author use? How is the piece organized? What is the tone? Are there any visuals? Does the author cite experts? Is it mostly the author's opinion? Is it sarcastic? Serious? What kind of audience does the author want to reach (i.e.: where did you find the genre)?

*You don't have to answer all of the questions; different genres will lead you to very different responses. The most important question: **Exactly HOW is the author trying to communicate a particular message?**

(4) Once you've done your close analysis of the genres, **look across your responses and comment on what you've found.** Do you see patterns in the way each one is written? Are there differences? What can you say about this GENRE?

*Remember, you're looking at 3 examples of the same genre. The goal is to try and understand how this genre is written/what the writing conventions seem to be. This is an exploration, so I don't expect you to be an expert. Good luck!

Samar selected three examples of political cartoons from Sunshineweek.org. In her interview she told me: "...it was basically a site dedicated to criticizing President Bush, you know, like dedicated to raising the public's awareness about things." To show how Samar engaged with the assignment, I provide Samar's extended analysis of one of her cartoons and then include her final analysis in which she compared the three examples to look for patterns and contradiction across her generic example. In the first political cartoon, the author drew the "Google" search engine logo with a heavyset federal agent in the background. The man's black jacket read "FEDS," he wore an earpiece, and his

angry eyes represented the “oo” portion of the “Google” logo. Here is Samar’s analysis of part 3 of the assignment sheet:

a) Identify/name the genre (is it a poem? political cartoon?)

Online political cartoon.

b) Provide a brief summary about what is being communicated. What is the message behind the genre? What is the author’s purpose?

There is a lot of buzz about the government want to monitor what people do for the government’s sake. Everyone is getting angry at President Bush for wanting to take away people’s individual rights for the government’s sake. The author is using the google search engine as an example of something most everyone uses. So the man in the picture looking very angry with his eyes as part of the google title is showing that everything you do may be monitored by the government. He is a federal agent, and the author’s purpose is to warn people that there [sic] actions can be watched.

c) Spend more time analyzing the language/communication style: What kind of language does the author use? How is the piece organized? What is the tone? Are there any visuals? Does the author cite experts? Is it mostly the author’s opinion? Is it sarcastic? Serious? What kind of audience does the author want to reach (e.g., where did you find the genre)?

The author’s opinion is more liberal. He is sarcastic but sending a serious message. The artistic details like the raised eyebrows, mean-looking eyes, and wide shoulders are used to show the seriousness of the government. The man is almost as wide as the screen, looking like a big football player. This is meant to show that the government is strong and can sometimes do whatever it wants. The author also plays on the google title again since it is probably the biggest search engine out there. So the tone is sarcastic and showing the author’s political beliefs. The tone comes through with all visual things since the point is to send a message with a brief cartoon. The audience can feel the message quickly. The audience is probably a younger audience since a younger crowd enjoys political cartoons. The site where I got it is online, so it is out there for anyone to see.

Samar’s other two cartoons also dealt with the government infringing on individual rights; one showed a caricature of President Bush. After providing individual analysis of

all three cartoons, Samar moved into discussion of generic patterns in part four of the assignment sheet:

Once you've done your close analysis of the genres, look across your responses and comment on what you've found. Do you see patterns in the way each one is written? Are there differences? What can you say about this GENRE?

Different authors drew my examples, so I can say that there were differences in the actual art but all authors seemed to be against President Bush so they all sent similar messages. I think the pattern is that they were all critical against the current government. And they all showed exaggerated images of either the president or a government agent. So sending a quick message through a visual was the same across all cartoons. All authors have their own style which is why some relied more on big pictures, some on text. Two of the cartoons had writing in bubbles, and one only had the picture with barely any text. The writing in the two cartoons was very brief. One sentence was used to help the reader understand the picture. The visuals in all cartoons were the most important, which is pretty standard with political cartoons I think. The whole point of a cartoon is to "show" something without having to read a lot of stuff. I can say this genre is entertaining but the whole point is to criticize a serious issue. I think young people like this genre because they are interested in politics but probably don't have time to study all of the issues all the time. I agree with the authors [sic] messages. I like these examples.

"Six genres activity"

Next, Samar cited the "6 genres activity" which I featured in Chapter 3 as a crucial aspect of her learning since she was exposed to a range of everyday and scholarly genres. Samar participated in the group that analyzed greeting cards. They were enthused about the activity. All played an active role in group work and classroom dialogue that took place the next day as I presented slides of different groups' extended analysis. In her interview Samar told me that this activity taught her that a single genre can be composed of what she described as "little genres." Since she had brought up this idea at the start of

our interview as she explained her conceptualization of genre, I knew it was a concept that resonated with her. When I asked her if she meant “sub-genres,” she said yes. She continued to bring up this idea throughout her interview and in relation to her final project. After analyzing her learning and interview feedback, I see that the “6 genres activity” provided her with a *direct* entrance into this idea, even though teaching with the notion of “sub-genres” wasn’t something I had planned.

In her group’s notes from this activity, the group wrote that the two cards they analyzed in class—as well as cards they had sent or received in their own experiences—were often made up of jokes, writing reminiscent of personal letter writing or poetry, and visual messages including pictures or symbols such as flowers or staged photographs. In class, when I presented slides of each group’s extended analysis, Samar’s group described to the class how these various modes of communication changed depending on what audience was targeted. They cited differences between male and female audiences and whether the card was being sent to a friend, girlfriend/boyfriend, or family member. The class enjoyed talking about this genre since they had all engaged with examples of the genre at various stages of their lives and personal relationships. In this sense the broad appeal and circulation of the genre encouraged students to talk about *general* generic conventions—citing examples from outside of class—in a way that, for example, the group analyzing the academic journal article could not (since most students didn’t engage with this genre yet). Samar was a leader in terms of citing how she had used greeting cards in her own life. Much of her correspondence with her family that lived in China took place through written correspondence such as emails, letters, and greeting cards. In

class, she shared that even when she couldn't go home for holidays, she always sent her family greeting cards.

Since Samar had participated actively in this class activity, when we talked about it in the interview, she had a good recollection of it. She said: "...the greeting cards can be a picture genre, and then a greeting card itself is a genre, and then what's written in it, like if it's a poem, or a joke, then that can even be a genre...like little parts have their own meaning, like they could stand alone and still say something." In addition to reiterating the presence of sub-genres, Samar also cited this activity as instrumental in her learning because she said this activity showed her more everyday genres in action. This idea of genres in action came up in our interview when I had asked her if the concept of genre having a *social function* made sense to her. Devitt (2004) often uses the terminology of genres having a "function" (198). In this sense the metaphoric idea that genres are "places" as well as the more pragmatic notion that genre perform actions, or functions, in particular places created the basis for encouraging students to explore the broad idea of *social function*. I tried to use this terminology often, and through various practical examples in the "6 genres activity," I tried to impart the concept.

Samar talked about the terminology in her interview:

At first when you kept saying it, it was confusing. Cuz at first I had no idea you know what you meant by genres having a *social function*... cuz I only knew of genres as like nonfiction, fiction...I thought the social function was just to get people to read them...or like an overview of what people write about, or get ideas you know of different stories...but then like when groups analyzed the wedding announcements...and the journal article...and I think we even talked about wedding invitations later, I realized they're all genres getting used for different reasons...like...they have more meaning.

Here, Samar seemed to make a general statement that books such as fiction and nonfiction had a social aspect in respect to *authors*: authors want “people to read them [the books].” In addition, in the middle of the quote, she equated “social function” to “an overview of what people write about, or get ideas you know of different stories,” which implies that *authors* get ideas, or content, from some social aspect. Samar said that what changed in her thinking after the activity was that she had a more inclusive genre “scope” and realized that the diverse genres we explored all get “used for different reasons...like...they have more meaning.” After engaging with this last part of the quote during data analysis, I saw Samar referring to the fact that these genres had particular effect, or functions, in terms of how they were used in the world (versus how literary works are used by authors). In this sense the first half of the quote seemed to focus on *authors*, whereas the last part of the quote expressed her broadened genre scope and provides an implicit focus on everyday *users* who engage with everyday genres. After we explored this concept in the interview, Samar vividly described how a fellow group’s analysis of comic strips stood out in her memory as well. She talked about how the comic strip example showed her that comics have “a lot more relevance” than she had thought before. Through the diversity in *practical examples* that we studied in the 6-genres activity, Samar seemed to express her knowledge of genres having a social function.

Learning during the final unit

Final project assignment

In the following spring assignment sheet, I've highlighted the sections that differed from the fall assignment sheet. The main goals and requirements remained the same; however, I incorporated Bawarshi's 3-part analysis technique that spring students had used throughout the second half of the semester (see bolded section in Part II):

Final Project

"The space of discipline or field-specific writing: determining the 'social' through genre"

Purpose: Building on the type of research (mini-ethnography) that you did in paper 2, you'll be conducting a more in-depth ethnographic study of the writing of some profession or discipline you see yourself being part of in the future.

(1) The first purpose of this project is to **familiarize** yourself with the genres (written, visual, or spoken) that make up your chosen discipline or profession. You should pick a "space" that you see yourself occupying, and if you're unsure, pick a discipline that really interests you. (note: a discipline has a wider scope, whereas professions are more specialized. For example: the discipline I'm in is composition/rhetoric and my profession is a writing teacher. There is the broad discipline of medicine, while there are many more specialized professions within the medical field.)

(2) The second purpose of this project is to explore how the different genres provide a "way in" to **understanding larger issues** like the values, belief systems, and social roles within your discipline or profession. Depending on what you choose, the focus will vary. But the goal for everyone is to see how the genres teach you the meaning of "community"—that is, what do the genres teach you about how the community "works." How are the writing practices an important part of getting things done in your community?

We've been exploring and analyzing various genres, and the goals for this project build on this knowledge. You're trying to understand how the genres function and why they function that way (more specific questions below).

Part 1, Research/Fieldwork requirements: (more detailed explanations to follow)

(1) Interview with a discipline/field insider (more details to follow, to be turned in for homework points)

(2) A minimum of 5 sample genres reflecting at least 3 different genres

-you can collect writing samples from the person you interview or ask this person to direct you to sample genres
-you can also look through journals/magazines/publications from your field (I will present a lesson on how to navigate the online journals from the library website)
-please talk to me if you have trouble finding sample genres. I will help direct you to sources.

Part 2, Analysis questions for EACH genre (same ?s from past group work):

(1) SITUATION: Setting, subject, participants, motives (who writes the genre? who uses it? why is it even important?)

(2) PATTERNS in communicative features: content, structure, language use, voice, tone, use of visuals, sarcasm, citation of experts, etc..

(3) OVERALL ANALYSIS: what is the “action” of each genre? What do the genres teach you about your “community”? In what ways are the genres important to your community? What do they teach you about your community?

☺ This is an exploratory project! Each individual paper will allow you to tell the story of *your* field. You don’t have to answer all of the above questions; simply pick the questions you think most fit the genres of your chosen field. We will analyze sample field-specific genres in class and link them to “community” in the same way we’ve done in past activities.

“Field-specific genres: analyzing a pharmaceutical company mission statement”

When spring students analyzed the pharmaceutical mission statement, Samar was part of group 5 (as described in Chapter 3). Samar usually chose to work with her good friend, Adara. This day was no exception. The two of them completed the group work on

their own. Their notes were straight-forward, not quite as lengthy as their usual work. Since this was the first field-specific genre all students analyzed, I knew some students might have a hard time answering all of Bawarshi's questions, so I told them to do their best and skip questions they couldn't answer. Samar and Adara described the features of the document as follows (for purposes of clarity, I've added the questions, even though the group notes provided only answers in response to numbered questions).

Part 1, Situation

Setting: Where does the genre appear?

This is a genre for drug company employees near MSU, somewhere in Michigan.

Participants: Who writes the genre? How do we know who the writers are? Who reads this genre? What kinds of characteristics do readers of this genre possess? Under what circumstances do readers read this genre?

Managers and bosses write this genre for their employees. The employees read it so they know what kind of practices to follow. The employees need to know how to do their job so they have to have certain kinds of characteristics on the job.

Motives: When is the genre used? For what occasions? Why is the genre used? What purposes does the genre fulfill for the people who use it?

This document informs the employees of their high qualities, values, and mission that the company possesses so they would see if they qualify to do the job...the employees of the company use it to know what to do. They probably refer to it all the time...the main motive would be to set the employee's standards to meet the company's expectations.

Part 2, Communicative Features

Content: What topics are talked about? What content is typically included in this genre? What is excluded? What sorts of examples are used?

The mission and list of values is talked about.

Structure: How is the genre organized? What parts make up the genre? What layout is used? How long is a typical text in this genre?

The format is that it opens with a quote from the founder and goes into a general mission statement, followed by a list of values in bullet point form.

***Language use:* What types of sentences does the genre have? (long, short, complex..) Do they use passive or active voice? Are they varied?**

The language is very formal...with long sentences and big words. The sentences are easy to read, though and with the bullet points, it's easy to read and check off.

***Diction:* What types of words are most frequent? Is slang used? How would you describe the writer's voice? Why is this voice used?**

The voice is formal because that's how you have to be in formal business documents. It would be different if someone was talking about the values maybe. In a meeting or something. There are words about 'sales models' that probably only business people would understand, or have to learn about at the job.

Part 3, Overall analysis

What can you learn about the “actions” being performed through the genre by focusing on its language patterns and communication strategies?

That the business setting is formal. If they want employees to follow the values, they have to come off as professional and serious. The language shows that they want the document to be taken seriously.

Samar and Adara answered most of the questions in their notes, although they didn't get to several questions in the “overall analysis” section. Most groups didn't, but we got a chance to discuss most of the questions during collaborative discussion. Samar and her partner seemed to consistently connect the formality of the document with the company's desire to have their employees take the document “seriously” and follow the listed values. Most of the responses mentioned things like “formality,” “meeting company expectations,” and giving employees a list “to follow.”

Samar's group notes (and their participation in classroom dialogue) revealed that she and Adara read the document at face value, equating it with a normal part of the

business. Some groups questioned the company's motives and therefore the document; in addition, some groups questioned the "flowery" language of the document—almost reading "between the lines"—which led them to question the company's motives (again, some specific points of discussion were profit, drug companies as "big business," and cultural values). Samar and Adara didn't get into such external factors, keeping most of their focus on the actual document and its primary use within the company. They talked generally about the roles that workers occupy on the job when they wrote: "The employees read it so they know what kind of practices to follow. The employees need to know how to do their job so they have to have certain kinds of characteristics on the job."

Samar's project: the genres of civil engineering

Habits of thought

As I analyzed Samar's final project during data analysis, I noticed that the idea of "sub-genres" that arose during the 6-genres activity bore direct relevance to her final project that described the genres in the *field* of civil engineering. In the second half of her introductory paragraph, Samar wrote:

The foundation of civil engineering is build [sic] upon the verbal, written, and visual communications. In this field, memos, specifications, letters, emails, visual aids, proposals and contracts dominate the communication dialogue each with its own distinctiveness. These little genres come together to culminate each with its own distinctive features, which are mounted into a unique final technical report.

Here, she conveyed how singular, or “little genres,” made up the culminating genre, the technical report. I realized this was different from how she described “sub-genres” making up the greeting cards. However, in her interview she had talked about the sub-genres in the greeting cards being able to “stand alone” in the same way that her paper expressed the idea that “little” engineering genres stand alone with their own meaning, even while contributing to the overall meaning and function of the larger genre, the technical report. In this sense, there was a theoretical connection despite the fact that the practical examples were much different in regard to rhetorical conventions, scope, and use.

Samar completed her paper with her friend Adara (they were in the same group for the “6 genres activity” as well). I hadn’t intended the project to be a collaborative project, but as I mentioned, Samar and Adara often worked together, were both freshman, and were interested in the same field of study. Like many collaborative projects, the students’ work had both an individual and collaborative component. Samar and Adara completed their interview together, although they analyzed different genres from the same technical report (which they turned in during the final unit for individual homework points). I encouraged them to piece together their genre analysis as a pair, helping each other decide a logical organization. I also asked them to read through the paragraphs together in order to keep the paper consistent in tone and style, even though they had completed different portions of the paper individually. In this sense, although Samar and Adara analyzed genres separately, they often stayed after class and came to work with me during office hours, so I was able to chart both of their individual learning processes in the final unit. I knew both students played an equally active role in the project, and I

knew that together they understood the features and functions of all of the genres in their project. Since I am focusing on individual learning in this section, for the purposes of clarity, in the following sections of this chapter (and the next chapter), I will reference Samar's learning—even though parts of the knowledge she created were co-constructed.

Throughout her paper, Samar spent the most time talking about the social functions of the genres she analyzed and presented a fair amount of analysis of textual features. Since the order she presented the genres in reflects the order in which an engineering team *used* the genres, I present portions of her paper in the same order she discussed them in her project—paying attention to what she talked about, how she talked about language/writing in use, and the extent to which she described a genre's social function and its textual features. First, Samar described that memos grant the worker a degree of authority since they represent the main document that updates a manager on a project's progress. She wrote that although memos are “low key” in the sense that they are not formal, they “give them [workers] a chance to have a ‘word’ in what is happening” with a particular project. Samar writes:

In the course of doing the design, workers write memos which portray their needs and present the status of their course of work... it is a short one or two page, concise document that is used to solve problems either by informing the manager about new information like policy changes or price increases...or writing up opinions about how to change the way something is being done. The main concept is to have the message being very simple, informative, and persuasive.

Samar then described textual features such as inclusion of the company logo, a professional title, and an introduction that that included the date and names of sender and receiver. When she described these features, she wrote that these features presented a sense of “professional ownership” over the job being done. She wrote that although

memos are somewhat brief documents, unlike emails, memos have to be delivered by hand. Those who write the memos deliver them by hand or place hard copies in their manager's/supervisor's mailbox.

Samar's paper then moved into a lengthy section on proposals. Again, she first described the various writers and readers of this genre and how it was used. She cited "managers and engineers" as the main audience for the proposals since the function of the proposal is to present a problem and solution for a particular job or task. Samar wrote:

Proposals may be solicited or unsolicited...In a solicited proposal, a company advertises to solve the problem. The companies send out a proposal which addresses the issues that need to be solved. After the proposal is sent, the company reads the proposal and tries to come up with a plan for starting on the research and solving the problem. However, in an unsolicited proposal, there is no request for a way to solve the problem. The engineer initiates his/her own ideas and recognizes the client's problem. The engineer writes up the problem and the solution and presents it to the client.

Samar then cited some textual features of a *specific* proposal that she analyzed as part of her research. She described the basic format which includes five main sections: a title page, introduction, statement of the problem, objectives, plan of action, and management plan. She then went into more detail with some of these sections: "The diction used in the introduction is usually complex and very descriptive and detailed. This is used because the writer wants to 'grab' the reader's attention and make them interested in the proposal in order to make their proposals succeed." Samar continued that the body of the text proposal is persuasive, including "expected benefits," "percentages and criteria," and other visual aids such as diagrams, timeline figures, and a reference page to "convince proposal reviewers that the writer understands the proposed topic and solution." At the end of this section, Samar noted that proposals include a lot of "engineering jargons

[sic]” and range anywhere from 10 to 50 pages (we had talked explored the concept of *jargon* in class and discussed examples such as legalese and medical terminology). Samar ended her section by stating that once a proposal is approved by management, “...civil engineers go into depth and formulate a specification.”

In the next section, Samar described two subsequent genres, specifications and contracts, which are written directly after and as a result of a proposal being accepted.

She wrote:

Civil engineers put together a jigsaw puzzle of constructing their ideas based on a restricting document which facilitates their plan of action into quantative [sic] and qualitative data. Specifications are very precise documents used to list everything about all the materials that are going to be used.

Samar continued by citing her own example of this genre, which had been given to her by her interviewee. The specification dealt with a road construction project on MSU’s campus. She first cited the main sections of her example: “preliminary tasks, costs, payment schedules, project schedule, and monthly progress reports.” She then discussed the genre more generally, noting that many specifications include blueprints and visual designs “which help the engineer better visualize the design.” She ended the section by stating how specifications were included in a “contract” to “overlay the guidelines and steps of construction that all parties have to abide by.”

Samar began discussion of her next genre, the contract, by stating:

The most important genre in all of civil engineering is probably the contract. Without the contract, the engineers and workers wouldn’t know what to work around in a matter of finance. The contract limits the workers, and is a way to resolve everything....It is a legitimizing document that can range anywhere from 10 to 80 pages...The contract is ‘a down to the last penny’ explicit document that it saturated with large quantitative numbers of how much

each process will need...To establish credibility in this genre, many signatures are found under each claim.

After this general discussion, Samar cited the example of this genre that she collected in her research. She didn't cite the actual language but described the specifics of this genre: a bulleted list "to organize the ideas and descriptions of different construction materials showing quantity, unit price and intended use of each item."

Samar's paper ended with the culminating genre, the technical report. She described how the technical report is "the principle in the basic engineer's task in the end of each assignment." Samar wrote how the reports range from 50 to 500 pages, explaining that "the whole process from scratch by using...all the other genres that were used during the process. This genre is built upon the other genres. The report summarizes everything done in the construction of the project." Samar then quoted her interviewee, who said: "...the report summarizes all the fundamental communication techniques held in this profession." Samar noted how a technical report includes a table of contents which lists all included genres (some of which she described in her paper). In the technical report section of her paper, Samar singled out three small, integrated genres that increase the functionality of the technical report.

First, she talked about the "executive summary," which is a 1 -10 page document located in the beginning of the technical report. She discussed this smaller genre within the technical report section because she cited it as a crucial aspect in the "use" of the genre: "Many engineers take into consideration that like themselves, other people who will read the report might be constrained for time and would like to just skim through it all (the technical report). To do this, people can't skim through a 500 page report...so

they would prefer to look at the executive summary.” She wrote that along with text that summarizes the report, the executive summary may contain pictures, graphics, or citations to establish credibility. Next, Samar singled out the “appendix” as an integrated genre that engineers will use to look up specific memorandums, visual aids, transcripts of conversations, and other reference documents. She also devoted a brief section (five short sentences) to discussion of a “transmittal letter”—a logistic genre that literally rests on top of the technical report and “informs the readers of the report contents...this is in integrated genre within a larger genre.” Although Samar didn’t devote independent sections to analysis of the executive summary, appendix, and transmittal letter, she saw a need to mention how each one contributed to the use and functionality of the technical report.

In her conclusion, Samar summarized the genres she discussed and then moved into a brief section that addresses aspects of an engineer’s identity—both in the field and out. She wrote: “The interaction of an engineer with these documents creates the engineer’s personality and affects the communication dialogue the engineer uses in his everyday life.” She ended with a quote from her interviewee: “Being an engineer, we are much more quantitative and more concise than everyone. We can be annoying, but we tend to be very objective—lower on feelings. We have to stop sometimes and tell ourselves that everything shouldn’t be so organized.” Although most students didn’t address how an insider’s identity changed in and out of the field, I thought this added a different dimension to Samar’s conclusion without “opening a new can of worms.” Throughout her paper, she focused intently on how genres in the civil engineering field facilitate social relationships and interactions in regards to specific projects. In this sense,

she talked a lot about who does the writing and how the different genres are used by different levels of workers and managers. Explaining how these rhetorical situations affect an insider's role/work identity on the job implicitly read through the entire paper; ending the project speaking to how this on-the-job identity may spill over into an engineer's private identity was an interesting reference to the overlapping of public and private roles.

Research paper conventions

In relation to how Samar *presented* her research, Samar's paper spent more time discussing the use/social function of her genres. Her textual analysis occupied less space in the paper. One recurring rhetorical practice in her final paper was to *begin* each paragraph talking about each genre's social function and use amongst workers. Her topic sentences never described a genre's immediate purpose or textual features without first talking about who writes it/who reads it and how it affected the flow of the project. In this sense her topic sentences all revolved around the social function of her chosen genres. Her analysis of textual features—including format, diction, word choice, jargon, etc—seemed to play an almost supporting role to discussion of the different genres' functions and uses amongst workers.

Another rhetorical practice in Samar's paper was the way she organized the genres. The order of her paragraphs showed a chain of operation. That is, she explained how each genre affected/worked with another and also discussed the time sequence that the genres worked in. For example, when a proposal was approved, the next genre had to

be a specification. In addition, although Samar didn't count the executive summary, appendix, and transmittal letter as genres that would count toward the project's genre analysis requirement, she noted how these three integrated genres increased the functionality and contributed to how the technical report was used by both writers/senders and receivers. When Samar described how she organized her paper in our interview, she explained that the order she presented her genre analysis in throughout her paper reflected how her interviewee explained the genres worked in real life. This read through very clearly. Her writing was easy to follow, and how she organized it reflected her analysis/understanding how the genres worked together.

Interview feedback: comparing Samar's reflection on the process of doing the final project/what she learned with my own analysis of her work

When Samar and I spoke about her process of engaging with the final project in our interview, the first thing she told me was that she liked the personal, real-world aspect of this project. As I mentioned, Samar and Adara had a successful interview with Samar's professor, and she said that her interviewee helped her understand "what's going on in the world about it (civil engineering)." The professor they interviewed was enthusiastic about the fact that they were doing this type of project in their writing class and was very open about talking about the work he had done in the discipline and field.

Based on what she told me in her interview, I found out that Samar approached engineering as both a field of study and an actual field. For example, her professor had talked to her about some of the classes he taught and what kinds of writing he assigned his students. In more detail, though, he actually talked to her about road construction

projects that were taking place on MSU's campus. All of the documents he helped her gather were part of an actual construction project, so Samar's written final project talked about "on the job" genres. In this sense, since her paper reflected the field, I wouldn't have known the extent to which she had learned about the discipline if I hadn't interviewed her. Aside from helping her get "in the know" with a particular type of civil engineering project (road construction), Samar said that, overall, the project opened her eyes to the fact that there were so many more genres than blueprints—which, she explained, most people typically associate with the field of engineering.

When I first read her project, and as I analyzed it during the data analysis phase of my research, I saw Samar engaging in very specific, meta ways of talking about how language functioned in her field. She talked about the genres' project-level purposes, how writing influenced or created power relations, work relationships, and established credibility; and most importantly, how the genres worked together in a sequence to get tangible tasks accomplished. Again, the paper provided a clear sense of how genres come together to produce a technical report, which she described as the most important genre in that it combines and documents smaller genres of a particular job. In this sense Samar talked about written genres being very alive and dynamic.

However, in the interview when we talked specifically about what Samar had learned about language and writing through the final project, her gut reaction was to say that language use in her field was simply "direct" and "to the point." She started talking about memos and the technical report—two genres that she remembered in detail. To understand more fully the extent to which she could *articulate* what she had learned

about language through her research and writing process, I initiated the following dialogue:

Meghan: Ok so that's really good. You were just talking about the language in the different genres...did you feel like you kind of explored "why" language is like it is in the different genres?

Samar: ...Yeah like in the technical report they want every single detail that happened...uumm...like what you know, every single thing you did from the beginning to the end..they wanted you to collect all the memos that you did, all the blueprints that you did..it all has to be documented.

Meghan: So like everything that led up to it...

Samar: Yeah like *every single* thing. And it has to be so detailed...but also in the beginning thing, you know you have a little 2 page summary of what the whole report is about...and they say that's for people who don't have time to read the whole report. So they just read the first 2 pages...

Meghan: oohhh, yeah.

Samar: they get an overview...so you know that helps, with time and all.

Both here and in her paper Samar talked about the importance of many of the smaller genres' functionality and "ease of use." So in her interview when her initial response was to say that she learned that language and writing in her field were simply direct, she seemed to be referencing the "little genres." In this sense, her gut response to say that writing was "to the point" didn't tell the whole story of her field. In her writing she seemed to always show how her selected genres represented a creative use of resources (this was one of the strongest aspects of her paper, actually). However, when she *talked* about the genres in the interview, she didn't seem to express their dynamism to the extent she did in her writing. That is, when I read her project, I understood the genres as an active part of operations. But when she talked about the genres, she talked more about

textual features. I didn't think she could verbally express all that she had learned about the values of her field through the research and writing process. *After comparing what and how Samar wrote about her field with how she talked about it, I became interested in knowing how I could encourage students to make (and talk about) explicit connections between how the values of the field influence the conventions of the genres and vice versa? This was also a point of interest after studying Nikki's learning since Nikki (conversely) talked about her learning in more depth than she had actually written about it.* I address this more fully in Chapter 5.

Tentative conclusions about Samar's development of a genre metalanguage and literacy learning

In the early stages of the semester ("Is writing a private or social act?"), Samar seemed to express that even when writers follow guidelines such as school-based genres or schematas that they always use language and thought creatively. In addition, in her comparison of personal narratives and analytical essays, she talked at length about an author's viewpoint and relationship to writing. Samar extended this focus on the individual in her analysis of political cartoons, while at the same time speaking to the fact that the political climate at the time inspired all of her chosen authors to send similar, sarcastic social messages. She also described how the conventions of political cartoons reflect their use; readers want a quick, entertaining glimpse into a serious issue. Her learning in these early activities seemed to speak to an individual's unique relationship to convention. Within RGS, Gunther Kress (2003) has been one of the main scholars to stress that even when considering what "social principles...generate the textual forms"

(86), we must always consider how individuals engage in “creative play with language” (40). In her own words, Samar consistently expressed the unique relationship a writer has to convention.

Samar’s learning in regards to the “6 genres activity” seemed to reflect the idea of writing as more of a *social* process. More specifically, her feedback told me that (1) a diverse set of practical examples helped her distinguish between literary and non-literary genres; (2) through the diversity in *practical examples*, Samar expressed her knowledge of the concept of that genre have a social function, or use; and (3) that a single genre may be composed of *sub-genres*. To start, Samar’s reflection on her learning in this activity told me that Samar learned that seemingly everyday genres have particular effects, or functions, in terms of how they’re used in the world (verses how literary works are used by authors as she had talked about in relation to her high school educational experiences). Her reflection expressed a broadened genre scope and provided an implicit focus on everyday *users* versus just writers and readers of literary genres.

Next, her group was the only one in the collective discussion to talk about the notion of *sub-genres*. All groups seemed to talk about each genre being made up of a combination of diverse rhetorical devices, but Samar’s group was the only group to bring up the idea of sub-genres. In my teaching I used analysis questions that asked students to explore how different rhetorical, or communicative, devices often made up a single genre. *However, I had never explicitly taught with the idea of “sub-genres” in mind. This idea came out of Samar’s (and her group’s) learning, and throughout data analysis, I have thought of this idea both theoretically and practically.* For example, if Samar would have studied, say, the academic journal article which was all text, would she have

considered the idea of sub-genres? Or was the combination of *visuals and text* within the greeting cards the main thing that led her to this idea? *Also, how would focusing on “sub-genres” change my own approach to genre, and subsequently, my teaching? How would my approach to this idea influence students’ genre learning in my classroom? How would it lend itself to how loosely I allowed students to classify genres, and does it matter?* Aside from these unanswered questions, at this point in her development of a metalanguage, I saw Samar beginning to view writing as a more social process than individual act.

As Samar began to engage in exploration of *field-specific* genres (i.e. the drug company mission statement and civil engineering genres), she placed more of a focus on writer’s inhabiting particular social roles that are almost dictated by the field. In other words, she didn’t talk much about an individual author’s creative use of language or agency within these forms. She seemed to focus more on the genres and schematas as static; there seemed to be more of a shift towards writers occupying social conventions and worker roles without as much agency as she had expressed earlier. However, she addressed interesting issues about workers’ roles on the job, and therefore aspects of their identities/social roles. In the final project, she demonstrated (sometimes indirectly) how workers used creative resources to propose ideas, but there wasn’t an explicit discussion of how individuals engage with/learn how to write within the conventions of the genres. This focus wasn’t a requirement, and focusing on it was perhaps beyond the scope of Samar’s project. *But I began to wonder if a downfall of the project is that students don’t always get to talk to the people who actually wrote the genres.* In this sense they might not be equipped to understand the *process* of writing the documents or the experiential

knowledge or creative use of language that accompanied the composition of the different genres.

In relation to the final project, Samar's work also contributed to my understanding of one of my main research sub-questions, which is: *What are some of the limitations of having students research/write about disciplines or fields that they don't actively participate in?* Samar's final project experience taught me about the importance of a thorough interview with a field insider. After analyzing her work, as well as comparing it to other students' work (which I present in Chapter 5), I've learned that her professor's openness, combined with the fact that Samar had a partner in creating a collaborative dialogue with him in the interview, provided Samar with an extra solid foundation for the project. Her professor provided her with her actual genre examples and talked about *those* examples. Many students had to conduct interviews over email since the professors/insiders had full schedules. Samar's work seemed to show a more equal balance between analyzing each genre's rhetorical features and discussing its actual use than many students' work. After looking at a large sample of student work, I saw this as a direct result of her professor's willingness to engage in an extended interview and follow-up questions. In addition, the fact that all of her genres related to the same field project provided a sense of coherence in terms of content. This also seemed to help her understand larger aspects of her field such as worker relationships, identity roles, and genres helping to accomplish tangible tasks.

On this note, since Samar did such a thorough job of talking about language/writing being an essential aspect of establishing work relationships and communication, getting jobs done, and documenting all aspects of a project, as I analyzed

her paper several times I was clear that talking about *social functions and relationships* was the primary focus of her project. I believe her ease in talking about writing on this meta level built on her learning in several of the activities from the second half of the semester that I described, especially the “6-genres activity.” Her project reflected this new way of talking about genre. While she seemed to first view writing as something individuals do, she moved into thinking that expressed that writers are part of a larger social web.

Since there was such a focus on *the social*, citations of actual textual features played a somewhat important, albeit secondary role to her discussion of functions. So the content of her writing—or the habits of thought and ways of talking about genre I saw happening—didn’t necessitate actual textual citations as much as other students’ projects did. In addition, in my experiences teaching citation conventions in standard research papers (in which students write about a topic) and teaching this type of paper, in Samar’s case I didn’t see in-text citations being as crucial in terms of supplying evidence. In Samar’s case the richest learning seemed to be in the sections where she talked about writing getting something done and providing the basis of social, on-the-job interaction. Much of her credibility stemmed from her interview feedback, which she cited often. In terms of textual features, she *explained* more than she actually cited actual language.

Analyzing Samar’s learning raised several questions for me, especially as I compared her work to other students’ learning (I present these questions in Chapter 5). When I emailed her several months after our interviews to request a bio, I also asked how our study of genre was influencing her current educational or composing experiences. Samar wrote:

Every time I do something I find out its [sic] related to genre. When I'm listening to music, every song is categorized into different genres, whether its pop or rap or rock. When I'm writing emails, that's a genre of writing, or when I'm writing a personal narrative or a research paper, those are all genres. Greeting cards themselves are classified as a type of genre let alone what kind of greeting card I give out, whether it's a birthday or a 'get well' card. A lot of things I do can be classified into different genres.

After our class, Samar seemed to operate with a very open-ended definition of genre, almost equating genre with *any classificatory device*. Her practical examples in the second part of the above quote—the personal narrative, research paper, and greeting cards—were all genres she had studied or written in my classroom. However, what was intriguing to me about this response is that she says: “Every time I do something I find out its [sic] related to genre.” This is a broad conceptualization, and as I mentioned with her experiences in the “6 genres activity” (sub-genres), sometimes I wonder if Samar was using *rhetoric* and *genre* interchangeably. At times, she seems to be talking more broadly about communication, or language in action, but uses the term genre.

Closing

In Chapter 5, I consider how these and other questions raised in relation to Nikki's and Samar's learning related to elements of all Level II students' learning. Although I haven't created in-depth learning portraits of all Level II students, I consider how their interview feedback and learning within the final project related to or challenged some the themes/contradictions that surfaced in relation to Nikki and Samar. I also

consider how these students' learning may be connected to fall and spring versions of my pedagogy.

Chapter 5

In Chapter 3, I provided a detailed look into how students collaboratively responded to genre-focused activities. In Chapter 4, I traced two students' development of a genre metalanguage. My principal goal in the first part of this chapter is to use the work of a larger group of students to answer one of my main sub-questions, "What do students learn by researching disciplinary genres?" Since ethnographic research into disciplinary genres culminated my version of a *pedagogy of genre awareness*, reflecting on students' final project experiences will allow me to speak with more disciplinary authority when discussing *what types of language learning and writing practices* happen when students conduct research into diverse fields. While many scholars provide critical questions about how students can study disciplinary genres, my work is the first to reflect on situated accounts of students' unique experiences, including how they approached (and talked about) the genres of different fields and how they engaged with research writing conventions. Since studying their final project learning related directly to their semester-long development, I also gained insight into how their literacy learning related to specific pedagogical practices. Therefore, the second part of this chapter discusses the implications of particular approaches to *teaching* genre.

To understand students' final project learning, I looked for themes and contradictions during several rounds of data analysis. I also used some of the themes from the last chapter as a comparative element. For purposes of manageability, within the group of Level II students (13) that I interviewed, I'm using the work of three fall students and four spring students. Since I am also referencing Nikki's and Samar's

learning, this chapter addresses learning experiences of nine students. Although tracing each student's individual learning over the course of the semester was beyond the scope of this study, many times students' post-semester reflections provided me with a deeper insight into their individual learning. Therefore, I selected Level II students that I had extensive interviews with (I didn't use email interviews) as a way to provide the most rich, negotiated accounts of their literacy experiences. Throughout this chapter, when relevant, I include interview feedback as I provide my own analysis of students' work.

Drafting Chapter 5 was the most exciting phase of my study because as my data pushed me to ask new questions, I began re-tracing activities from earlier chapters to look for possible reasons for specific aspects of individual learning and views towards language. In this sense, I *used* my data differently than I had anticipated and understood individual learning and my own pedagogy in more depth. Making these connections also helped me consider how my practice matched my theorizations of pedagogical practices—as well as expanded my own *theorizations* about genre. The specific implications I introduced in Chapter 3 will help readers make clear connections throughout this chapter.

Since my teaching built specifically on several North American scholars and included elements of both explicit and inductive, exploratory approaches to genre, as well as Process-based teaching methods, I see my work applying to several different strands of pedagogical scholarship within RGS. In this sense, while understanding my own practice deeply has been invaluable to my own teaching, my work—specifically, the culmination of my analysis in this chapter—also serves as a model that stresses the importance of teacher research not only as a way to speak with authority about practice but as a way to

include students' voices and learning in our own scholarship and *theorizations* about genre. Since I created many of the thematic focuses in this chapter after finding out where my open-ended questions led me, my work brings attention to elements of practice that have yet to be discussed explicitly within RGS. In addition, I also respond to important questions in the field since I see my negotiated reflection adding a rich element to published accounts of practice and theoretical discussions of pedagogy. In the next section and throughout the chapter, I address what new questions my work raises.

To approach both student learning *and* practice, I divide this chapter into two sections: "Observations about Learning" and "Implications for Teaching." Specifically, this chapter focuses on:

- *how students' discussion of genre sets influenced students' engagement with research paper conventions*
- *how students approached the idea of variation and flexibility in genre*
- *the challenges of having students study genres outside of their communities of use*
- *consideration of how much metalanguage is necessary to student learning within a genre framework: balancing practical examples with metalanguage; and*
- *how student learning unveiled the tension between rhetoric and genre—leading me to expand my own notions of genre and call for more discussion of this tension within RGS*

Four of the five points listed above resulted from my data pushing me in those directions. Since the question of having students study genres outside of their communities of use (point 3) continues to be at the center of pedagogical debates, this question was something I had considered even before I created my pedagogy. Therefore, I found it important to address this disciplinary question in relation to my students' learning. In both sections, I situate my own understandings within RGS and Rhetoric and

Composition studies. I conclude my study by raising questions/avenues for future research.

Observations about learning

All of the thematic focuses in this section were born directly out of learning phenomena that I found after comparing my analysis of students' final projects with their own reflection. Often, students' reflection on their classroom learning helped me make causal arguments for particular learning outcomes. I begin the section on student learning by considering how students who studied and represented *genre sets* in their final papers compare to students who studied *disassociated and/or mock genres* that didn't relate to a real-world project. I then describe the learning of certain students who included the notion of *variation* and *flexibility* in genre in their final projects and consider why the presence of these theoretical concepts was slight, despite the fact that my pedagogy (in theory) built heavily on these North American approaches to genre.

As I compared Level II students' habits of thought in the final papers during several rounds of data analysis, I saw that *what* students talked about had a direct connection to *how* they talked about it. That is, students' habits of thought were inextricably linked to how they engaged with the generic conventions of the research paper. It is important to note that since I was not measuring specific outcomes, when I make implications and use evaluative language such as *successful* learning or *detailed* learning, my assumptions are based on my own assessment of how engaged students

seemed in their learning and analysis—as well as how well they incorporated some of the key concepts from the semester (e.g., genres as social action, discourse practices relating to larger social tasks and values). While these stances are subjective, I provide detailed reasons for making particular claims.

Genre sets, disassociated genres, and variation within genre: How students' habits of thought related to their writing practices in the final project

Research into *genre sets*

Students who showed an understanding of genres being used in a *sequence* were more apt to discuss how writing performed social functions, carried out social relationships, and got things “done” in their community—as opposed to students who talked about genres in isolation or disassociated or mock genres, which often resulted in discussion of only textual features. These differences across habits of thought also influenced how students engaged with the generic conventions of the research paper: students who showed a genre sequence, discussed a full genre set, or had some discussion of genres “working together” within a real-world project had better organization, topic sentences, and provided more detailed analysis of how the genres reflected the discourse practices of their fields/disciplines.

I will start by showing the habits of thought and writing practices of students who explored genre sets and/or genres working together. First, as I described in the last chapter, the way Samar talked about her genres—and organized them in her writing—showed a chain of operation. She kept a consistent focus on the time frame and sequence that the genres worked in. For instance, when a proposal was approved, a specification

followed. In addition, Samar described how the executive summary, appendix, and transmittal letter increased the functionality and contributed to how the technical report was used by writers/senders and receivers. Her paper's organization reflected this, and Samar's topic sentences all talked about a genre's social function and use; this recurring rhetorical practice across topic sentences unified the paper. In our interview, Samar explained that the order she used reflected how her interviewee explained the genres worked in real life. In this sense, there was a clear connection between her habits of thought—e.g., a focus on the genres' *use* amongst workers in a particular *sequence*—and her strong writing practices.

In Nikki's final paper, the most rich analysis and clear writing occurred when she began talking about music therapy session documents—how they worked together in a sequence and how these genres maintained social relationships. As I described in Chapter 4, Nikki had actual experiential knowledge with session documents. Like Samar, in this part of her paper, she similarly described how four genres were used in a specific sequence: activity plan sheets (pre-session), observation documents (during session), evaluative documents (post-session), and music compositions (pre and during session). There was a clear sense that the genres work together, in order. This section of her paper contrasted the beginning of her paper in which she briefly talked about research papers and case study reports. In this opening section, there was less of a focus on writing as a social relationship, and in terms of how this beginning section fit with the whole paper, it seemed less important. Overall, Nikki's topic sentences were somewhat general; they let the reader know what she was going to talk about, but they didn't as clearly show a chain of operation, as do Samar's topic sentences. But both Nikki's organization and analysis

were strongest in the sections where she linked specific genres together—and showed how they work in a chronological sequence.

John, a senior student who studied the genres of police enforcement, showed similar traits in habits of thought and rhetorical practices. John described how the “ultra organized process of law enforcement involves many genres that work together to get things accomplished.” There was a consistent focus on the social functions of the genres and a sequence of operation. For example, in a large section of his paper, he described how when a civilian is arrested, officers write incident reports, which create a “paper trail.” These reports are a crucial part of a civilian’s file and are used in court proceedings, along with more official “history files” that detail a civilian’s past record. When introducing his genres, he consistently focused on how the sequence of actual events related to the sequence that the genres are written in. His organization and topic sentences clearly reflected this. His paper had a logical organization, and it was easy to follow. When reflecting on the project in his interview, John discussed how the genres related to the sequence events when enforcing the law:

The project just makes me realize how organized I have to be, the chronological sequence, the time of events...and you know just how honest and truthful it’s (the writing) gotta be, cuz when you write those police reports, you’re gonna be risking somebody’s you know, life, whether or not they gonna get out of it, be on probation, parole, go to jail....or even prison.

In his paper, in terms of talking about his genres’ social uses, John also kept a consistent focus on who writes the genres and how they learn how to write them (which he learned from his interviewee). He also described the different audiences that a single genre could be geared towards. For example, he explained how judges, chiefs, sergeants,

lieutenants, prosecutors, defense attorneys, victim's parents, and the suspect all get copies of incident reports. The length of these reports is dictated by the magnitude of the crime, but they are written in the same format. Here, John cited his interviewee who explained that officers received direct instruction on how to fill out the reports and were repeatedly reminded of the importance of as much detail as possible. On this note, John also talked about the wide use of narrative in many law enforcement genres since police officers must "tell the story of what happened in as much detail as possible." John then described how different audiences use the reports. In his paper, John said: "Prosecutors pay more attention to every single detail since there [sic] the one's [sic] who have to use all available information to make their case." John kept a consistent focus on the *use* of the document—how it related to time, users, and carrying out important legal proceedings. His organization reflected this recurring habit of thought.

Rae, a spring semester, junior-level marketing major who conducted her research with a partner in the field of business, also focused on the social uses of her genres and discussed how genres work together. She conducted her research at a travel agency located close to campus and spent time interviewing the manager, who was very helpful and interested that Rae was conducting this type of research. She collected and analyzed the following genres: instant messaging (through "Winpop"), a quarterly business review, email (both internal and external to customers), newspaper advertisements, online press releases, the company website, and brochures. In her interview, Rae expressed that she put extensive thought into how to organize the paper since she was dealing with so many diverse genres and types of communication. She ended up classifying the genres as either "internal" or "external" communication. In this sense, her organization reflected the use

of the genres, not necessarily the textual features or styles of communication. She expressed how she came up with her organizational method in her interview:

Rae: Yeah I learned how to analyze things, andyou have to like, how do I say it? Unite everything together....cuz they are all so different genres, and we have to pick different genre, and you have to think of some way to link them together...so this is the hardest thing, so I just, separated it into 'internal, external'....

Meghan: yeah that was good how you did that in your paper...

Rae: Yeah so at first I thought, 'how am I going to link them together?' cuz they are so independent, I can say that, but if you think of it like a story...this happens in this company...you can link together, so I put it in: they are trying to communicate internally and externally, how they communicate their promotion methods to the public...

Meghan: ..ok, so what do you mean by *independent*?

Rae: ...you know just such different ways the writings are done...but they're all important somehow, and like used together...just different ways of trying to get the same things done sometimes...like sell vacation packages..

M: so I think that was a really good way to organize it. Your paper was way more organized than a lot of people's so what made you decide that way in the end?

Rae: because I'm an advertising major, so I just think of it this way..

Meghan: that's good...

Rae: yeah because we study this, this type of promotion and marketing strategy and stuff like that, but there's more external, yeah sure they have internal...I don't know it just came up...

When Rae first described the genres as *independent*, I thought she meant they all functioned alone. But when I probed the question a bit, I realized that by *independent*, she meant that the way the writing was done was so varied and unique that she saw that the natural, or logical, way to tie the paper together was to discuss what types of things the genres "got done"—which always involved whether or not the genres were used internally to communicate or externally to sell products.

Rae's organization was one of the strongest aspects of her paper. Her genres—and therefore, organization—didn't always reflect a *chronological* sequence like the above students. However, her work was similar to their work in that she spent much of her analysis talking about how genres worked together. For example, in one section of her paper, Rae discussed how newspaper ads and public press releases were published around the same time (usually around spring break) to attract new customers. She wrote: "Lindee (her interviewee, my pseudonym) claims that the strategic plan for Artvan travel (my pseudonym) is emphasis on newspaper ads especially when spring break and summer holidays are around the corner...since their target audience is college students." She then cited a specific ad and talked about the use of price incentives and discounts before getting into more specific elements of format, text, and visuals. After talking about the ads, her next paragraph explores press releases—which she described as a "self-serving or human-interest story created by an organization, given to the media to generate the company's brand. She then cited one of her examples of a press release, which was entitled "Artvan Travel's Amazing Summer Travel Options Send More Students Overseas This Year." She writes: "In this press release, the author is persuading and encouraging prospect [sic] and customers to join Artvan in the summer by citing a statistic code of [sic] 27% of all college students travel internationally for summer." She then described how press releases are posted on the company's website at the same time that Artvan launched newspaper ads—so that when students entered the website, they have a story to read, instead of simply looking at rates/travel packages. This section mostly clearly demonstrated the social uses of the genres and how they worked together in time and space.

Research into *disassociated genres*

Students who talked about genres that didn't relate to each other or show any sequence demonstrated somewhat disconnected writing. Although much of these students' analysis and description was thorough, focusing on genres in isolation maintained more of a focus on the language within genres—with less of a focus on how genres performed social functions. In these cases, students often had difficulty organizing their papers or providing a “unified whole” with strong, detailed topic sentences. This type of language learning often, but not always, focused more on textual features than that of the first group of students.

I will start by demonstrating elements of student learning within this category, while highlighting more specific nuances within this group. To start, Thomas, a fall, sophomore-level student who studied a beef export business, included memos, a formal personal letter written to an employee, emails, and a “Summary of costs Incurred” document. Like the above group of students, Thomas's paper focused on who *wrote* his selected genres and what general business functions the genres performed. He discussed that, often times, upper management did most of the writing. He also discussed the immediate actions of his genres in most of his analysis sections. For instance, in one section, he cited an actual letter of termination. In other sections, he talks about how a business executive sent memos “including information about price changes and sales tips” and/or more informal memos that may involve “simple reminders such as an upcoming meeting...or other specific business to discuss.”

However, although Thomas had some focus on the social use of his genres, he didn't talk about those genres specifically working together. That is, he seemed to rely

mostly on his interview feedback and talked generally about the genres—he usually talked about the textual features or uses of the genres without quoting specific language. He used parenthetical citations to cite his specific documents, although his analysis could have applied to other examples of the same genre most of the time. I could tell Thomas conducted thorough research and spent time on his analysis, and after comparing his work to other students, I saw that the fact that he analyzed his genres in isolation—that is, they didn’t work together or affect each other—explained why *the way he wrote* his paper was disconnected.

First, Thomas seemed to organize his paper by simply jumping from genre to genre. His topic sentences were general; there was no reason why the paragraphs couldn’t have been organized another way. On a holistic level, although Thomas made some larger level claims about why upper management did most of the writing and why certain genres were necessary, he didn’t establish a network of operation with his genres. I attributed this to the fact that although he had real-world examples, the genres weren’t related. When I asked Thomas what was significant to him about his final project learning in his interview, he said: “I’ve become aware of who has to communicate to who [sic] to get things going....like how people share ideas, the ideas that are shared.” This confirmed one thing I had inferred: much of his learning focused on *who* did the writing, which was memorable to him and told me that he learned a lot about who writes and interacts with his genres. However, he had trouble engaging with some of the rhetorical conventions of the research paper, which reflected that his genres didn’t work together—or he at least hadn’t made explicit how they worked together.

Ron, a junior-level, spring ESL international student, studied the discipline of computer science and showed some similarities to the way Thomas engaged with research paper writing. At times, Ron had detailed analysis and connected his genres to their community of use, but overall, his paper jumped around a lot in terms of organization and topic sentences. This lack of flow seemed to reflect the fact that he spent the majority of his paper talking about textual features and purposes of computer science genres *broadly* without talking about specific, real-world uses of the genres. Ron collected a personal memo, a flow chart, a status report, a technical report, and a journal article. He also talked generally about the use of email. He discussed why a specific genre was important in the field, and at times, discussed who wrote a specific genre.

In his interview, Ron told me that he had interviewed a computer science professor who led him to examples, which he told Ron were the most common genres in the field. He quoted his interviewee often, and used the interview feedback to talk *broadly* about different genres. For example, in his section on memos, Ron wrote:

Memos are simple but strong and efficient means of communication with others for collaborative projects. Generally they are used to easily share some important notices or for business purposes. Never concerned about formality or procedure, they are very conversational and free, and sometimes use technical terms since the contents are usually related directly to the work.

After this general discussion, his next sentence read: "For example, one memo sent to another teammate shows the pseudo code for the software developed, which is a general programming code written in a specific programming language (Personal Memo, 1/29/99)." Ron invoked a specific example of the genre and provided a parenthetical citation, although there was not enough detail or citation of actual language to tell me

where this memo came from—or what type of project it was related to. The example provided a specific example of a memo, although Ron could have explained more about what type of project or situation the memo related to.

This example reflected one problem that arose throughout Ron's paper: he collected his sample genres online or from computer science courses. They represented real examples of the genres, although they weren't being *used* in an actual community of use—or I should say, Ron didn't articulate what community they had been used in, so I was unsure. For example, in his section on technical reports, Ron discussed the general use of technical reports and showed a clear understanding this genre was important to his field. He noted that technical reports “are written cooperatively by the workers, and they are mainly very long in length and full of diverse features such as schematics, pictures, tables, and numbers, needless to say a great number of technical terms.” He then invoked two specific examples, “Feasability of Implementing a Departmental Intranet” (from 1996) and “Using a Tablet-PC to Provide Peer Review Comments” (from 2004). He discussed some specific elements of format and textual features in relation to each, and his rhetorical practice of talking generally about the genre and providing two examples would have worked very well except that he didn't provide analysis about exactly what communities these examples came from and what social function the genres accomplished. As the dates of each report reveal, they were written in different time frames and communities of use. By looking at the works cited page, I saw that Ron found both technical reports online, which explained why his analysis didn't go beyond describing textual features and general purposes. Throughout his paper, Ron's genres didn't relate to each other because they didn't align in terms of content or actual use.

In his interview, Ron told me that he had a hard putting his analysis on paper because there were “too many things to analyze...too many different types of writing.” As his learning in the final project demonstrated, he became more aware of specific textual features of genres in his community, although his paper’s lack of flow (through topic sentences) and coherence (in terms of organization) reflected the fact that his habits of thought revolved more around textual features than actual use. However, he could have spent more time citing *actual* textual features to lend some credibility to his general claims. In his interview, Ron also told me that the main benefits of the project were: “..I can get some information about my future field, what kinds of genres they use...and I can be involved in more...simply I could have a chance to have a look at genres.” This segment of his interview confirmed what I thought after analyzing his written work: Ron developed an awareness of several computer science genres, although his research process didn’t necessarily allow him to engage with research paper writing conventions or make any larger level claims about his field. (I also provide a detailed analysis of Ron’s introduction/thesis statement, which was unlike any other student’s introduction, later in this chapter).

Martin, a fall, sophomore-level ESL international student kept a similar focus on textual features, talking generally about writing in the field of engineering. Martin interviewed a Ph.D. student in the discipline who led him to two sample genres: a graduate level engineering course syllabus and an academic journal article. Martin also collected a magazine article from an engineering trade magazine. He didn’t reach the minimum research requirement, although in one lengthy section of his paper, he described an engineering “project”—one that his interviewee had participated in. As I

learned in his interview, he counted this section as part of the minimum requirement, although he didn't address any specific types of writing associated with the "project."

Overall, Martin's paper fell short since he combined elements of the discipline and field and analyzed genres that weren't related to each other. The section in which he talked broadly about a project led me to believe that his focus was more about "what happens" in engineering, rather than trying to find out what the *genres* of engineering taught him about engineering. He seemed aware that writing should be a focus, as I saw in one section in which he devoted a whole paragraph to quoting segments of his interview where the interviewee described the "informal" style of writing in many engineering genres. In another section, Martin quoted his interviewee: "The writing of engineering is creating solutions to problems...a significant part of this field consists of using technical knowledge to transfer from students' ideas and concepts, and senses on the field of engineering into reality." This broad discussion occurred in a few parts of his paper—and, again, he didn't invoke any specific genres to show which genres were informal or how technical knowledge appeared in genres.

When Martin did invoke specific genres, he showed an awareness of the general textual features and format and the immediate purposes of each genre. For example, when he talked about academic journal writing, he talked about the broad purpose of journals. In addition, he was also one of the only students to use a course syllabus in his research. Martin showed an awareness of the language use and general purpose of the syllabus and provided detailed analysis. He discussed how a particular objective is sought after in this graduate level course: "The content and perspective from the syllabus are the

primary objective of the course, C++ codes change.” He then wrote that the goal to teach

“C++” codes differentiated the syllabus from other fields:

...by comparing other academic programs which use more normal writing and basic language to express a to-do list, the language of the syllabus looks like a steelyard which means when one side uses informal language more, the other side must use normal language less. It depends on what fields you are in and how many different types of language you can understand.

Here, Martin seemed to reference jargon, or at least showed an explicit awareness that language use and learning objectives are different across disciplines. As an ESL student, Martin was working hard on expressing himself clearly in English, and in the above quote, I understood his main point, although I was a bit unclear as to exactly what he meant.

After talking about the syllabus, Martin provided a section on magazine articles in trade publications. He uses the IEEE Magazine, which he described as “a theme paper publication, with one theme published each issue.” (Note: during data analysis and drafting, I found out that the IEEE is a large technological association which publishes journals, transactions, letters, and magazines in various fields such as engineering, telecommunications, and power and energy. The association has an online digital library which includes various journals, magazine, letters and other transactions. In this sense, Martin refers to *one* magazine from this larger network). He wrote: “Examples of current and future theme [sic] include: system analysis and interpretation, information theory society, Infrared imaging, molecular electronics...”—to name a few of his 12 listed examples. Next, he invoked a specific example and said: “One paper from the IEEE magazine described the software engineering in a company where the author had

worked...the topic makes audiences interested in engineering fields, and tells readers what engineering writing is and what different genres of writing showed up in the magazine.” Again, I got a clear sense that he had become more *aware* of trade publications, although his analysis was mostly general about content in the field.

Overall, the combination of discipline and field-specific documents not working together seemed to give Martin increased knowledge about the field’s content. However, in his writing, it was unclear exactly what types of genre learning occurred throughout his research. When we talked in his interview, Martin said that he had difficulty writing the research paper since it was his first time writing this type of genre. We had worked on writing conventions in class, although I realize that never having done a research paper, as well as the fact that Martin was continually working to improve his English writing skills, influenced the extent to which Martin could express himself in writing. After seeing the pattern in several students, though—where students collected unrelated, at times random, genres—the lack of coherence in terms of his genres and content seemed to affect his organization and analysis.

Research into *variation* and *flexibility* within genre

The next group of students showed some overlap to the group who studied disassociated genres; however, their work discussed the presence of variation and flexibility within singular generic categories in a way that most students’ (in either of the above groups) work did not. Therefore, I separated them into their own smaller category, although I will highlight the similarities they showed to other students.

To start, Renaldo, a spring international student from Brazil, studied the field of engineering. In his paper, he talked about the field of engineering and collected what seemed to be disassociated genres. Like many of the above students, although he was focusing on what gets done in the *field*, his genres weren't related to a unified project. Renaldo's genres included technical reports, visual graphs, Power Point presentations, blue prints, and online memos (memos delivered through email). Although his topic sentences weren't very descriptive—e.g., “Since engineering deals with a lot of math it is very common for an engineer to come across graphs”—I found that his organization was clear and reflected a detailed understanding of how genres in his field perform social functions. In this sense, I had a hard time categorizing his work in relation to other types of student learning.

One recurring rhetorical practice of his paper was that he always provided detailed analysis, quoting textual features from his genres *and* talking about who wrote the genres/how they get things done in the field. For example, in his section about graphs he talked about the general features/formats of graphs, cited a specific example, and ended the section by listing other types of graphs that apply to engineering (bar graphs, pie graphs). So he recognized the variation across this genre, and said that the type of graph that's used reflects the specific type of job. In another section, Renaldo uses a similar practice. When talking about blue prints, he provides different types of blue prints that reflect civil, electrical and mechanical engineering. For example, he wrote:

..in civil engineering blue prints are used to show an engineer the structure of the building, where the main columns are, where the electrical wiring is and plumbing too. In electrical engineering a blue print is most often used in showing how a circuit works, it has special symbols for each piece in a circuit. Mechanical

engineering blue print [sic] is probably the one any has seen and they just do not know. A mechanical engineering blue print is also known as a blow up image, it is often seen in instructions to set up a table, desk or closet.

Here, I see a similar focus on variation across the different examples of the same genre. When Renaldo talked about technical reports, he also stressed that all technical reports aren't identical but that they typically involve the same general format and include the same types of information and styles of communicating. In this section, instead of quoting an actual technical report, Renaldo cited his interviewee. He talked in detail about the genre format and what types of information and language are used for what purposes, although, again, since he didn't have an actual example of a technical report, he didn't cite any specific language. He showed a newfound *awareness*, although contrasting his discussion of a technical report to Samar's—who talked in much more detail about textual features, use, and what other genres were integrated into the report—I see that not having an actual technical report that related to a real-world project prevented Renaldo from analyzing the genre to the same degree that Samar did.

In our interview, Renaldo told me how he had collected his genres. First, he told me that the engineering TA (Ph.D. student) who he interviewed directed him to an engineering website where Renaldo gathered most of his genres. This explained why his genres weren't related to an actual project. When we talked more specifically about what he learned about language through his genres, he told me he had a hard time writing about all that he had learned—and also that there are so many different types of examples within a single genre. He said in his writing he felt that he had to divide the genres into what he called “subgenres” (e.g., when he talked about the different types of blue prints).

He related this example to an example from his own life: "...yeah I guess with the genres I had, you could even make subgenres of the genres..like emails, there's different types of emails...friend emails, boss emails, family emails...and I don't know like my friends, we'll use curse words and make fun of people, but for my mom and dad it will be more you know, like informal, but you know...nice." Here, Renaldo stressed how *individuals* adjust to audience, even within a singular generic category. He had also done this when he iterated in his paper that blueprints have the same basic purpose, even though their content and rhetorical features change across projects/purposes. He didn't directly invoke the idea of how writers work within genre in his paper, but he made the theoretical connection about genres varying—or being flexible—in his interview. Samar also used the terminology "sub-genres," although she talked about this idea in a different way. Samar seemed to more so stress the notion of "communication in action," whereas Renaldo indirectly referenced the notion of variation across generic examples.

Overall, I saw that not having related, real-world genres constricted Renaldo in certain ways. On the other hand, since Renaldo talked more generally about different examples of the same genre, through his practical examples he showed the notion of generic *variation* and *flexibility* in ways that other students had not. In addition, in terms of engaging with research paper conventions, I found the fact that Renaldo did not have genres that worked in a sequence didn't make his writing choppy, or unorganized, as it had for many students. His case was valuable in showing me a different way for students to approach the project—one that built on a specific concept (variation within genre) that underlied my approach to teaching.

Allen, a spring international student from Mexico, showed similar traits to Renaldo in his final paper. Allen also wrote about the genres of engineering—technical reports, schematics, emails, and academic journal articles. Like Renaldo’s practice of discussing different types of examples across the same genre, Allen did this with technical reports and journal articles. These two genres constituted the bulk of his paper since he provided two examples from different contexts. Like Renaldo, much of his supporting evidence in these sections came from his interviewee. In this sense, although he talked about specific aspects of technical reports and how they would differ in different types of engineering contexts, he didn’t cite any specific language. From his works cited page, I realized that he had gathered his examples online; they were technical reports used for teaching purposes. In this sense, Allen showed an awareness of how technical reports operate, although he didn’t actually have one from a project that reflected a specific community.

In relation to journal articles, Allen also talked about multiple articles, and in this case, he got his genres from a journal that his interviewee led him to (I found this out in his interview). So although he wasn’t proficient with the content in the articles, through his interview and his own analysis of the language use, tone, and style, he made insights about both the way the articles were written and why they might be written this way. In his writing, he conveyed that he looked at all the articles and then invoked two specific articles in his paper. He noted the general format of all articles in his journal: “..an introduction, an abstract, experimental setup, data analysis, results and discussion, appendixes [sic], and conclusion.” He also showed differences in the articles—for example, he noted the presence of graphs in certain articles and how some articles had

simple, brief conclusions and others raised questions for future research. In this section, he quoted his interviewee who told him about audience. Allen writes: “According to Dr. F (my pseudonym), ‘Generally, journal papers are written to students, faculty, and researchers, in the same area that is being worked. If interacting with people from industries, the language would be less technical and more general.’” So through his interview analysis and own research into several articles, Allen described what types of variation took place in a single genre. This habit of thought, and therefore rhetorical practice, told me that his learning (like Renaldo’s) allowed him to see the flexibility and variation within a single generic category. In terms of his writing practices, Allen had trouble with topic sentences and organization, which like many of the students I’ve described in this section, seemed to reflect his general research. That is, his writing was a bit scattered, although in several sections he provided detailed analysis.

Tentative conclusions on how researching genre sets, disassociated genres, and variation within genre influenced students’ learning and writing practices

As I analyzed the above students’ learning experiences, I realized that students who talked about how real-world genres worked together were more apt to make larger claims about either how genres functioned together to get social tasks done or the discourse practices and/or values of their communities. These students also showed a stronger sense of organization, clear direction, and better flow through transitions in their writing. The second group of students demonstrated learning about the social workings of language, connecting specific communicative and writing practices to a community and

becoming more *aware* of writing on a meta level—which I believe has meaningful implications in terms of becoming critical of writing and language use they will encounter in their own lives. However, for the most part, these students weren't able to make larger level claims about their community's discourse practices or improve their own writing practices within the conventions of a research paper—as the first group was able to do. These specific connections have disciplinary connections in that they were born directly out of more open-ended questions in which I sought to find out what students learned by studying different fields. Later in this chapter I explain why these key findings have meaningful implications and raise new questions for genre scholars.

Other research paper conventions: how students' research into genre sets, disassociated genres, and variation influenced their engagement with *citations* and *thesis writing*

In this section, I build on the categories above to discuss how students within different categories engaged with citation practices and thesis writing. I start by considering how the habits of thought within groupings influenced students' engagement with citation practices—a focus area, like the ones above, I created after I began noticing how habits of thought were inextricably tied to writing practices. I then discuss how students' introductions and thesis statements led me to see that this type of research necessitates a more flexible approach to thesis statements—a focus area that I realized would be important even as I graded each semester of papers (across all of my students). Therefore, when I noticed this trend, I analyzed the Level II students whose work I chose to feature. These findings have had an immediate effect on my own teaching and how I

will approach the project in the future. I also hope by highlighting students' engagement with rhetorical conventions, readers will get a sense of different possibilities for students' presentation of research within this type of project.

Citations

In this section, I discuss the implications of students *talking generally* about a genre and its textual features and/or actually *citing a specific genre*. Like the above connection between students' habits of thought and practices of transitions and organization, students' habits of thought also directly influenced their use of citations—both citations of quoted language and parenthetical citations after talking generally or paraphrasing. There was an almost clear division (groups 1 and 2, above) in terms of how students engaged with topic sentences and organization. In this section, when considering citation conventions, some of the patterns/breakdowns were similar—and therefore, related—to the groupings in the first section. However, I saw variation across all students' work, which I will showcase in this section. Since establishing credibility through outside evidence is one of the primary conventions of any type of research writing—and therefore, an important element of students' engagement with the conventions of this FYW genre—I consider what questions their work within this type of project has raised for me.

To start, students who focused on how genres carried out social relationships and worked together (Nikki [music therapy], Thomas [agricultural business], John [police enforcement], Samar [engineering], and Rae [business/marketing]) focused less on

specific textual features. They talked about the general conventions of the genre and quoted actual language intermittently, but focused more on the uses/functions of the genres. *This habit of thought resulted in fewer in-text citations of documents/actual language and more citations of interview dialogue.* Within this group of five students, there was some difference: Nikki, Thomas, and John relied much more on their interview feedback to establish credibility, while Samar and Rae provided a more equal balance of interview and textual citations. However, Samar's and Rae's citations of text conventions always played somewhat of a supporting role in that these citations came after each student's primary analysis, which reflected function/users. In this sense, I saw a pattern across all five students.

A more detailed look into each student's citation practices corroborates the above claims. To start, in her research into music therapy, at times Nikki quoted an actual genre but often discussed generic features and cited her expert to provide a sense of credibility to her claims. For certain quoted analysis, I had to study her works cited page to gauge where something came from. One thing that was clear was that she cited her expert often. I could tell she had a quality interview from her writing, which she confirmed when I talked to her in our interview.

Thomas showed a similar pattern in that he always started his analysis of each genre by talking about the immediate purpose and then described who writes/uses the genres. In this sense, he provided parenthetical citations after general discussions of each genre's use and function—but in most cases didn't cite any specific language. For example, in his section on personal letters, Thomas wrote:

When a matter becomes personal in a business situation, a memo may not be the best choice for an owner/manager to use. A personal letter

may be a much better and more personal way of communication. A letter to an employee may inform them of a promotion, needed areas of improvement, or in some cases, termination (“Dear Rachel M.”, 5/4/2005).

In another paragraph, Thomas provided a similar habit of thought and form of presentation when he described a “summary of cost”:

In certain situations, two leaders from separate enterprises will enter a joint venture. They will usually agree on a certain amount of costs and risks, attempting the balance as much as possible (“Summary of Costs Incurred By Both Parties”). Both parties will review and confirm the information before this venture continues.

This format was common in Thomas’s writing. I was left with a feeling that he focused so much on “who” does the writing and “how it’s used” that he didn’t provide enough analysis of the actual language. In this sense I wasn’t sure if he’d become aware of the field’s specific language practices—and how these practices were connected to larger community values. However, when I interviewed Thomas, I learned that he had actually explored textual conventions a lot more than I thought he had. He told me that when his interviewee talked about a particular genre, he talked at length about specific language use, how managers learned to write that way, and the reasons why higher ups do most of the writing/communicating within this particular field. Thomas didn’t present these points of discussion in his paper. By comparing his interview to his paper, I learned that he didn’t lack thorough research/analysis but that he simply didn’t rhetorically represent all that he had learned.

John (police enforcement) kept a consistent focus on social uses, discussing who wrote the genres and how they learned to write them, and how his genres functioned. He learned much of this information from his interview, which he told me when I talked to

him. This made sense since the bulk of his parenthetical citations were from his expert. Even when John talked about specific textual conventions of a genre, including the use of narrative or elements of format, he seemed to use his interviewee to establish credibility instead of quoting an actual document. Although he showed a clear understanding of how the genres worked together, and although he collected many genres from his interviewee, I would have liked to see more of his own analysis. That is, he could have provided more detailed analysis—or at least explicit discussion—about how particular patterns of language use were directly tied to issues of legality (as he hinted at when he used the terminology “paper trail.”)

The next two students within this category showed a slightly different use of citations than the above students. Samar and Rae shared a pattern in that they provided equal balance between analysis of the generic uses/function and textual features. They both focused first and foremost on genres’ social functions, while textual analysis was secondary in that it appeared at the end of paragraphs. However, both elements of analysis—together—established credibility in a different, perhaps more balanced way than many students. By “more balanced,” I mean the writing clearly showed how some analysis came from the interview but that each student engaged in her own analysis by studying language in more detail. Like the above students, Samar and Rae showed a similar pattern of quoting their experts often, although both students quoted actual textual features more than Nikki, Thomas, and John. In addition, Samar’s and Rae’s in-text and parenthetical citations were very clear. In this sense both students’ balance of citations offered a more varied integration of sources.

Next, Renaldo and Allen comprise their own group in relation to citations. As I described earlier, both of these students described variation across examples of a single genre. Both students established credibility primarily by citing their interviewees, but unlike the above students they didn't necessarily show how genres work together in a real-world project. Both Renaldo and Allen demonstrated that they had a strong *awareness* of different types of genres—and different examples within a single generic category. As I mentioned, both students relied heavily on their interview knowledge, which they cited often throughout their papers. Renaldo's work showed me a unique case in that his habits of thought and writing showed variation across genres in ways that other students' work did not. When he showed different examples of the same genres, he often provided a general discussion of textual features. That is, he talked specifically about content and textual elements, but he didn't quote specific language from an actual example most of the time. In line with this practice, his citations were often parenthetical references to show that he had gotten the information from his interviewee. In this sense, he demonstrated credibility mostly through his expert, whereas some students had used the combination of an expert and their own detailed analysis to make persuasive claims about their genres.

Like Renaldo, Allen also used a recurring rhetorical practice of citing his interviewee to establish credibility and often used parenthetical citations instead of quoting specific language from a sample genre. For example, when he talked about academic journal articles, he provided a sort of survey of the different types of articles within one issue. His discussion was detailed and focused on specific textual features, elements of format, and content; however, Allen didn't provide citations of actual

language from the articles. He ended this section by quoting his interviewee who talked about the target audiences for journal articles. Again, this section had depth even though in-text citations of language to establish credibility were sparse. Both Renaldo and Allen used mostly parenthetical references to show where they had gotten an idea or paraphrased an idea from their interviewees.

Two students, Ron and Martin, showed similar traits to Renaldo's and Allen's citation practices. However, I categorized Ron's and Martin's work differently since, as I described in the beginning of the chapter, they spent the majority of their papers discussing the textual features and general purpose of their genres without talking much about the users/uses of the genre. These students became more aware of language, but both their analysis and presentation were choppy. Ron (computer science) had seven parenthetical citations, and the only time he quoted something specific was when he included the words of his interviewee and, once, when he quoted language from a memo. In general, though, his recurring practice was to talk generally about different genres and cite a specific genre in the parenthetical reference—although his discussions could have applied to other examples of each genre. Martin had a similar rhetorical practice, talking generally about features of his selected genres without quoting those genres specifically. The only time he quoted actual textual features from a sample genre was when he quoted the syllabus. In general, he cited his interviewee the most, and when he talked about his genres, he provided a parenthetical citation but no in-text citations of specific language.

Thesis statements

Even before I engaged in data analysis, as I graded both fall and spring students' final projects, I noticed that most students provided general introductions. Even within the group of students who provided introductions that outlined a clear purpose, the thesis statements were informative, not persuasive. While a *traditional, persuasive thesis statement* is a broad terms that many teachers use to signify a statement that is clear, relevant, and compelling, in many of my experiences writing research papers in college and graduate school, there was often an expectation to pick a side on an issue—that is, agree or disagree with a topic or “argue” for some new way of thinking. Therefore, when I use the term traditional thesis statement, I’m referring to those statements that show agreement or disagreement with a focused topic. Since the ethnographic research I assigned started off with open-ended, exploratory questions—combined with the fact that many students had little prior knowledge of their communities—I found that more open-ended thesis statements often reflected the dynamic nature of their research. In this sense, a traditionally persuasive thesis was not necessarily practical or rhetorically useful.

Here, I provide nine students' introductions and thesis statements to illustrate my point. I then explore the implications of the patterns I found. Out of the nine students, I classified all of the introduction sections as informative. Three students, however, seemed to provide more specific introductions, and two students provided introductions that seemed to fit their own category. Therefore, I have divided students into three groups. While grading and doing analysis, I considered how the introductions fit with the rest of students' papers. For the purposes of this chapter, I only present each student's

introduction or thesis. However, after having engaged with each student's paper in the above sections, I hope readers can situate the introductions within students' projects.

To start, John, Thomas, Allen, and Martin provided the most informative, general introductions.

John:

Most would not associate police officers with writing. But their work in the field and relations with civilians require specific types of specialized genres. The ultra organized process of law enforcement involves many genres that work together to get things accomplished. From an arrest to court, the writings in police enforcement provide a paper trail and document law interactions.

Thomas:

Personnel range from 18 to 100 years old, black to white, and from no-collar to blue-collar. Welcome to the field of Agricultural Business! Communication through writing is needed on a daily basis. Understanding the basic genres of writing in this field is crucial for the future employee. I've observed that most of the writing in the agricultural business field is done by middle management and executives. In some cases, the small business owner serves the same purpose as the large business executives. These are traditionally the people who are expected to make business decisions. In most cases, they are the most educated individuals in the given genre of work.

Allen:

Although engineering is a technical field in its majority, without writing there would be no efficient engineering. Used by everyone in this field, writing is extremely important since engineers need to communicate their ideas in an adequate, organized, concise, and elegant manner. By doing so, an efficient writing leads to an effective interaction among engineers.

Next, Martin's thesis read: "Therefore, the engineering writing explains how the engineers attempt to facilitate the contexts of engineering codes in a professional field." Clearly, all students noted the *importance of writing* in their chosen fields, especially the first three examples. None of these students introduced the genres they would talk about in their introductions. This wasn't a requirement, although I found that students who provided the clearest introductions that outlined their purpose for writing included the genres that comprised their analysis.

The next three students, Nikki, Samar, and Rae, also made general claims in their papers but provided more specific details about what was included in the rest of their papers. In this sense, their introductions were not necessarily *persuasive*, but they did make larger claims about their fields. In the first two examples, Nikki and Samar provided general background of their fields like the above students. However, they also included the genres they were going to talk about. In the third example, Rae doesn't list any specific genres, and while her introduction at first seemed general like the first group, her distinction between "internal" and "external" communication was the driving force in her paper.

Nikki:

The field of music therapy requires a lot of writing for various occasions. For example, professional music therapists who serve as members of teams of trained medical or educational professionals participate in the assessment, treatment, and progress evaluation of the clients served. During each of these processes, they are always involved in writing, and their compositions are treated as very important information for both communicating with other music therapists and their own future studies. Their major opportunities for writing are research papers, such as case studies, email messages, session evaluations, memos, and music compositions. In teams [sic] of writing style, from analyze [sic] of each genre, both formal and informal writing, and both typed and hand-written

styles are frequently found.

In Samar's introduction, after saying that "Civil engineering in the chain line between human needs and the alternation of geography to suppress transportation, hydraulics and construction deficiency," Samar provided a web definition of civil engineering. Then, in her thesis, she wrote:

The foundation of civil engineering is build [sic] upon the verbal, written and visual communication. In this field, memos, specifications, letters, visual aids, proposals and contracts, dominate the communication dialogue each with its own distinctiveness. These little genres come together to culminate each with its distinctive feature, which are mounted into a unique, final technical report.

Next, Rae's thesis statement read: "In this professional field, Artvan Travel uses a variety of marketing communication strategies to keep in touch with customers and prospects. Also, internally, Artvan Travel communicates with headquarters and other branches through the most common and efficient communication tools." The first time I read Rae's thesis, it seemed too general. However, as I reflected on the organization of her paper, I began to see that she was showing which genres reflected either external or internal communication—and how the audience affected the writing and function of the genres—which matched her overall purpose and organization.

The next two students provided more than one introductory paragraph. Therefore, I placed these two students in their own category, even though their introductions demonstrate some similarities to both groups of students above. Ron's introductory paragraphs read:

By writings, we gain some information, we feel emotions such as joy,

anger, sorrow, and pleasure, and we do communications without any regards to time and space. But the most important thing of writing might be the fact that it can possess a strong purpose and perform a powerful function that spoken language can never do, if it has been properly composed in a specific form and structure. It is why there exist many ways of constructing writings, which is called genre, and why they are chosen in appropriate frameworks. Then what and how does the writing contribute to the field of computers, which have already been absolute necessities of modern life?

I was intrigued by this introduction for several reasons. First, Ron provided a comparison between spoken and written communication and then noted how writing could exist without regards to time and space. Some of his words—i.e. *properly composed* and *appropriate frameworks*—reveal Ron's awareness that there are particular conventions that have designated values (he didn't explicitly address this in his paper, however). Ron evoked his field in the final sentence, although the first part of his introduction could be applied to any field.

Unexpectedly, though, later on (in the beginning of the third paragraph after providing more general info in the second paragraph), Ron provided a more specific thesis. He wrote:

Computer science....centers and depends on the pertinent application and effective diffusion towards people. The writings in this field therefore are characterized in two big features, a technological purpose and a successful communication purpose, which consist of memos, emails, flow charts, status reports, technical reports, journal articles, letters, and so on.

Here, Ron distinguished between two main purposes of the genres in his field: a technological purpose and a successful communication purpose. He also introduced the genres he had collected and would talk about in the rest of the paper. This thesis was

mainly informative, although Ron did distinguish that genres are different based on their different uses.

I asked Ron about his unique approach to introductory writing in his interview:

Meghan: ok, can we talk about your introduction to the paper a little bit....you say 'by writing we gain some information, we feel emotions such as joy, anger, sorrow, pleasure, and we do communications without any regard to time and space..' What did you mean by that?..'..without any regard to time and space'?

Ron: I think that's the most, that's the strongest point of writing rather than speaking something...cuz by writing something, we can see this paper right now, for example, we can see it anytime, and it's...that's a pretty general and broad idea...

Meghan: mmm, hmmm...

(long, long pause...I could tell he was thinking about more to say.)

Ron: ...well it's basically you can get information, or get an idea, from some other people's writing without any restriction of time and space...you can see it anytime if you want, anywhere that you want...

Meghan: ok, so they don't have to be physically present, but we still feel their words?

Ron: yeah...right.

Meghan: ooohh, that was pretty deep.

Ron: it's not closely related to the purpose of the final project...but...

Meghan: yeah but it is. It's like theoretical....but it really does apply to the final project...it's like the underlying, kind of...foundation...that's why when you wrote this...

Ron: yeah, cuz I needed something to....to get to an idea of why...why I'm writing this project, and why I'm doing this....I need some kind of introduction to lead the readers, to follow me....to....get..to pay attention to what I'm saying...

Meghan: yeah, I saw that...it was good. Ok, what did you mean by "writing can perform powerful functions that spoken language can never do"?...."if it has been properly composed to specific form and structure..."

Ron: well that's what I think genre is....(pause)....

Meghan: so you think written genres can be more powerful than the spoken word?

Ron: yeah...for example, umm, some journal articles or something like that...it doesn't have a perfect formula, but it does have some rules, like intro...conclusion...but by forming, by using that kind of organization, then writing can have a more powerful, how can I say....maybe a formula, or the way you organize something, helps...the writer better express or better transmit their idea to readers...

As I re-read Ron's introductory paragraphs, I saw that although he may have spent too much space on general aspects of his field, his introductory writing provided an interesting theoretical lens. In his interview, he recognized that he would influence readers if he *showed* them why what he was writing was important, rather than just listing genres saying that writing is "important" like many students did. Another unique aspect is that he used language such as "properly composed in a specific form or structure" and "appropriate frameworks." He wrote that writing can be powerful when it is *appropriate*. Here, he seemed to designate a value to conventions, but when we talked in his interview, I realized that he meant that communities have particular, specified ways of communicating (e.g., academic journals).

Like Ron, Renaldo saw a need to provide two introductory paragraphs before talking about engineering genres. He started by saying: "Most people see engineers as people with pens in their pockets that do math all day long...". He then wrote:

What most people do not know is that with all the numbers and complicated math comes a vast variety of writings...Engineering involves lots of different genres, some very simple and some very complicated but all with the same purpose of explaining and sharing information in the engineering field.

His next paragraph provided a specific example of what engineers do on a job: "...to predict what will happen, for example how long and how much will [sic] cost to fabricate 100 cars or how long will it take for a metal alloy to be made." His rhetorical

strategy was to generally note that writing was important and provide the reader with a specific look into what happens in the field. There was no persuasive thesis, and Renaldo didn't introduce the specific genres that he went on to talk about in his paper. In this sense it didn't outline a specific purpose for the rest of his paper, although it showed depth and critical thinking. Next, I consider how Ron's and other students' thesis writing, as well as how their engagement with topic sentences, organization, and citations were related to the habits of thought that occurred within this type of literacy project—and more specifically, how this type of project challenged some common conventions of research paper writing.

Tentative conclusions about students' final project learning: the implications of how students both engaged with and challenged standard research paper conventions

Writing conventions

All of the rhetorical categories I've described in the previous sections—topic sentences and organization, citation conventions, and introductory writing—were related to students' habits of thought within the final project. To start, these areas of analysis also related to one main pattern that I saw in student writing: in terms of the *tone* of students' research papers and the way they wrote their introductions and thesis statements, this project challenged standard research paper conventions. For example, across most all of the nine students that I featured, I found that the *way* students talked about their research findings was more informal than standard research writing. The fact that this project was an ethnographic project made this conversational approach seem more appropriate. Since much of students' research depended on their interview with a field insider, I found that

students integrated dialogue from their interviews as the main way to establish credibility, especially freshman students who had never interacted with many of the genres they analyzed. This added an almost conversational tone to many of the final papers.

To start, in relation to analysis of the more specific rhetorical categories that my data yielded, clear transitions and organization are essential elements to academic writing. For the purposes of this type of assignment, revealing how students' habits of thought influenced their engagement with topic sentences and organization might help other genre scholars—and those interested in teaching genre—consider how and when students are most apt to excel in these areas when rhetorically representing research into disciplinary genres. Again, although I didn't set out to "measure" student writing, I couldn't ignore the correlation between students' habits of thought and engagement with these two writing conventions. In this sense, my data shed light on this issue in a way that I hadn't anticipated.

Next, studying how students established credibility through citations showed me that citation of actual language from genres played an almost secondary role to citations of interview feedback. In theory, the point of citations was to use interview feedback and samples genres that would show "language in action" and establish supporting evidence. While I established a five citation minimum, I didn't distinguish the extent to which students had to quote their genres and/or interviews—as I knew students' would have different experiences with their diverse fields and interviewees, and I wanted to give them the freedom to establish evidence in their own ways. However, I learned that citation of actual language from genres played an almost secondary role in this type of

research as compared to citations of interview feedback. The questions this raised for me are: *To what extent do I require citations of actual language in this type of project? Especially in relation to students who gather more separate genres within a field—for example, genres that don't culminate in a technical report or necessarily directly influence or relate to each other—to what extent do I even want them to cite general language within their collected documents if the content is unrelated?*

Finally, in relation to students' more informative thesis statements, my students challenged the boundaries of *persuasion* in ways that I hadn't anticipated. I didn't assign this project as a traditionally "argumentative" paper, although I encouraged students to make a clear case about their research findings. For example, I repeatedly asked students, "What can *you* say about your community's writing practices that an outsider could not?" I also reiterated that since every field has writing, it was not enough to write a thesis such as, "Writing is an important part of my field." However, I found that students often found so much information in their research and analyzed such disparate genres that may or not have worked together—or been related in content—that encapsulating everything they were going to present in their paper in an introduction proved challenging. More importantly, the pattern of writing more informative introductions across the board, even from students who provided the most thorough and organized papers, showed me that this type of project is unique in that it doesn't require students to make a traditional argument in their thesis statements.

For example, students who had more specific introductions that more clearly outlined the content of their paper (Nikki, Samar, and Rae) provided examples of clear, but not traditionally persuasive, introductions and thesis statements. These students had

strong analysis and organization throughout their papers, and I found that their introductions all were almost “open-ended” in a way that allowed them to categorize their genres and give a general direction for their writing but not try to “boil down” all that they had learned. On the other hand, some students who demonstrated thoughtful, detailed analysis lacked an element of specificity in their introductions; in this sense, these students didn’t outline any kind of specific purpose or do justice to the content in the rest of their papers (John and Allen). This could have been attributed to rushing through writing the introduction, or simply having a hard time writing an introduction.

In yet a third group, some students’ (Martin’s and Thomas’s) overly general introductions reflected the fact that they didn’t necessarily demonstrate a clear or unified purpose for writing in the rest of their papers. This last group didn’t necessarily engage with *any* research paper conventions, although they made some detailed insights in segments of their writing. Ron, who wrote several lengthy introductory type paragraphs, comprised his own group. After analyzing his work and reflection, I realized that he wasn’t “at ease” with the project. He explained that he had to write such a lengthy introduction to “...get an idea of why...why I’m writing this project...I need some kind of introduction to lead the readers, to follow me...” Again, his feedback taught me that the “space” of writing introductions was unique in this type of project, necessitating different thesis writing conventions and different instructional approaches.

After seeing that my own assumptions about thesis writing in this type of project were challenged, questions for further research are: What do I expect from the rhetorical space of introductions in this type of project, and more specifically, how can I create a dialogue that helps students address their own thesis writing and consider how this

project necessitates different conventions than other types of research-based writing?

Questions in relation to both thesis writing and citation conventions have both immediate applications to my teaching of this type of project, as well as more institutional implications. That is, an important goal would become to help students understand the boundaries of different rhetorical practices and why certain types of research necessitate different use of conventions.

Interview feedback: what students told me about engagement with writing conventions

Just as Ron's interview helped me understand his writing in more depth, all interviews were valuable in that I learned that some students had a hard time rhetorically representing all they had learned in the research process. That is, what I could gather from reading their papers was not necessarily "the whole story" of their learning within the project. For example, Thomas, who studied agricultural business, told me that he had spent ample time in his interview talking about textual features of genres, although he didn't cite many specific features in his paper. In her interview, Nikki talked about many larger level values of her field—i.e. *professionalism* and *confidentiality*—although she hardly mentioned them in her final paper. In addition, Martin, who studied engineering, told me that he was uncomfortable with writing a research paper. He, along with Rae (travel agency) and John (law enforcement) told me that since they were was analyzing so many different types of genres that it was hard to piece them together in a paper. As I mentioned before, students whose genres didn't reflect a real-world project or work together somehow seemed especially challenged when it came to providing a flow, or

sense of organization. In this sense, I see creating more explicit lessons as an important part of the final unit. Although we collaboratively analyzed models of past student work—exploring topic sentences, organization, thesis writing, and citations—*my analysis has shown me that, especially within this type of project, students need to more directly work on these areas in the context of their own final papers.*

Secondly, students' interview feedback taught me that the degree to which students had a quality interview had a direct effect on their projects. For example, students who told me they had engaging interviews (group 1: Nikki, Samar, John, and Rae) showed different traits than students who told me that their interviews were either short or that they had to find the genres themselves (most of group 2: Renaldo, Ron, and Thomas). Students who had shorter interviews and whose sources didn't provide actual genres often found sample genres online. Both the lack of discussion in some of the interviews, combined with the fact that these students often analyzed genres from a context they didn't know much about, provided obstacles in terms of both analysis and presentation. Students who used these general genres (i.e. that were posted online) often had *some* quality interview feedback that allowed them to talk about the use and general style of writing within the genres. However, students whose interviewee actually provided documents and talked about *those* genres specifically were more able to make larger claims about the field and provide deeper analysis.

There was not a completely clear separation between the two groups, but overall, *the presence of more detail and more confidence from students who had extensive interviews taught me that a quality interview where the source actually provided the documents helped students not only become aware of how genres reflected their*

communities of use but also helped them become more active writers within the parameters of academic research writing. Of course when teaching any project, it is impossible to gauge the extent to which students will have a quality interview, *but I learned that this type of project necessitates a rich interview.* Since many students at this level had no experience in their communities of study, the interview was central in terms of acquiring insider knowledge.

Implications for teaching

After considering specific ways my pedagogy fostered particular learning outcomes, in this section I complicate my own pedagogy and explore how I would add an even more critical element to certain practices. In this sense, this section helped me understand my own practice more deeply. However, I also consider ways in which we can make important theoretical concepts (e.g., *genre sets, variation, flexibility*) more tangible for our students—through a balance of practical examples and inclusion of metadiscourse. In this sense, I take some of the most foundational and important theoretical concepts from RGS—as I saw them appear in my students’ learning—and urge genre scholars to make these concepts more accessible to students. I also make a call for more published research describing what happens when students engage with diverse activities that provide a direct entrance into these ideas.

Situating my students' learning within larger genre theories and pedagogical discussions

“Genre sets” and “Variation”: what my students' learning can offer RGS

Although one of the main goals was for students to explore, generally, how genres helped users “get thing done” in their community, my analysis of the nine Level II students' final learning showed me the importance of more *explicitly focusing on how genres work together in my teaching*. In addition, students (Renaldo and Allen) who showed variation across genres showed a different way of approaching the project, and by looking at their papers, I saw how valuable it can be for students to discuss multiple examples of the same genre. *However, focusing on a sequence, or order of operation, seemed to most directly result in students being active writers within the conventions of the research paper*—that is, these students were more rhetorically aware and clear in their engagement with research paper conventions. Since students were writing about writing in this type of project—and studying the textual features of genres that didn't necessarily have similar content—it seemed that students found it easier to organize their research findings when they described what Bazerman (2004) calls “genre sets,” or “genre systems.” By relating the concept of genre sets directly to *practice and student learning outcomes*, I bring attention to this idea in a way that other scholars have yet to discuss it (I will also discuss the presence of *variation* in the second part of this section.)

As I described in Chapter 1, a large number of scholars (Bawarshi 2003; Devitt 2002; Devitt, Bawarshi, and Reiff 2003; Freedman & Medway 1994 GNR; Miller 1984; Swales 1990; Thaiss & Myers Zawicki 2002) have created a specific pedagogical link between genre and community *in theory*. Swales (1990) has provided an in-depth account

of the importance of linking genre to discourse communities, with much of his discussion providing specific pedagogical practices to help graduate students understand ways of writing and communicating within professional disciplines. But having FYW students situate genre within communities and wider activity systems is difficult *in practice* since many students have little or no experience with their communities of study. Regardless of students' grade levels, however, based on what I found reflecting on students' diverse learning during the final project, I found that Bazerman's (2004) theoretical framework provides the most useful avenue into approaching the idea of genres "working together." I propose translating this theoretical focus into scaffolded activities in which the teacher is explicit, or transparent, about this connection.

Bazerman explains a sequence of language in action: texts create social facts that are accomplished through speech acts. These acts are realized through genres; *genres work together forming genre sets and systems, which work in a particular order* (my emphasis); and finally, the working out of genre systems give us insight into larger systems of human activity (311). Again, *while this framework has been most useful to scholars who conceptualize the teaching of genre, creating an explicit focus on the concept of genre sets and systems after students have learned how to study both generic features and actions throughout the semester is a key component of students' research into disciplinary genres.*

While the idea of "genres working together" was part of Bawarshi's three part analysis that I used in the spring—in the 6-genres activity, the pharmaceutical mission statement activity, and final project assignment sheet—it wasn't a concept I had directly invoked in my fall teaching. However, depending on what field different students studied

and whether or not they had gathered genres that worked together, *both* fall students (Nikki, John) and spring students (Samar, Rae) addressed this concept in their final project learning. However, the other five Level II students whose work I analyzed didn't show genres working together, and in my experiences reading both semesters of papers, the majority of students didn't explicitly express this in their final project learning. Of course, students' past literacy experiences, English language abilities, and education all affected their engagement with writing a research paper in my classroom. But for the purposes of trying to use all nine students' final papers to assess patterns, *my data showed me without question that more detailed analysis and clear writing practices occurred when students approached their genres as part of a genre set.*

Theoretically, explicitly imparting Bazerman's notion of genre sets and systems in the classroom means that teachers must raise the critical questions that allow students to consider how writers perform social actions—and how genres work together to get things done. As Bazerman (2004) notes, if individuals see how genres function socially, they can exercise “social creativity” with language (as opposed to conforming or uncritically adopting language practices). While many RGS scholars (Devitt 2003; Bawarshi 2003; Swales 1990) have offered questions that provoke students to consider how genres work together, to date RGS scholars have not provided specific ways of addressing this concept of genre sets in relation to research into disciplinary genres. Therefore, after seeing the presence of this phenomenon in several students' learning, I looked back to both semesters of teaching to see if I could find traces of this type of learning. In this sense, reflection on my students' learning and my own pedagogy, which

built on many RGS scholars, offers RGS a specialized avenue into this aspect of teaching genre.

After looking back through fall activities, I couldn't find any traces of the notion of "genres working together." I then looked back at the specific language of the fall final project assignment sheet. I've bolded two sections that first indirectly and then directly get at the idea of genres working together in a "set" or "system."

But the goal for everyone is to see how the genres teach you the meaning of "community"—that is, what do the genres teach you about how the community "works." How are the writing practices an important part of **getting things done** in your community?

- (3) Make sense of the "context" (just like we did with other genres)
 - a. who wrote the document/for whom is it written?
 - b. what is the purpose of the document? What action does it perform in your field? What does it "do"?
 - c. what other things influence the way this genre functions?
(values of the field, language used in the field, the way you think it might work with other genres, anything that you can think of.....)**

Looking back, the assignment sheet could more clearly require students to consider how genres work together. In addition, although, I did include the idea of how a genre "might work with other genres..." I don't believe students were prepared enough to look for this in their research, which explains why many fall students didn't. Nikki and John, the two fall students who showed traces of this phenomenon were both senior students who had experience in their disciplinary communities. Nikki had completed two years of major courses and had actual experience in the field. John had taken all of his major courses and was preparing to graduate and go into the police academy. In addition, both students knew their interviewees on a personal level. Nikki interviewed her field instructor/mentor, and John interviewed a sergeant who had interacted with him before in

his preparations for police academy. In this sense, these students seemed to have a more immersive experience with their fields of study, which perhaps prepared allowed them to talk in more detail about how real-world genres in their fields worked together. However, an equal number (2) of spring students (Samar, Rae) whose work I analyzed also showed this phenomenon in their thinking and writing—despite their grade levels. For example, Samar who perhaps most clearly showed the phenomenon was a freshman with no experience in disciplinary courses/her field of study. Rae, who was a junior and did have experience with advertising and marketing courses, also showed genres working together. Again, since most students didn't demonstrate this habit of thought in their writing, I looked back at spring activities that showed traces of the phenomenon.

To start, the spring activity in which students explored a letter to the editor and a front page news story from the campus newspaper allowed for discussion of how genres work together. One question on the assignment sheet was, “What kinds of genres are located near this genre?,” which provoked the idea of genres at least interacting with other genres. In their discussion of a specific letter to the editor, students noted that letters to the editor, as genre, are “social conversations” in that when people write in to the newspaper, they often respond to recent newspaper articles or columns in which they disagree with what was written.

Next, in the “6 genres activity”, on Bawarshi's list of questions, the very first question read: “Where does the genre appear? With what other genres does this genre interact?” Here, students were *directly* invited to explore the concept. The group who analyzed a print advertisement noted that the health ad included the company's website; they also noted how the ad “worked” with other health magazine genres including articles

on weight loss and personal weight loss success stories (an interesting side note to show how the concept influenced individual learning: Rae was in this group, and in her final project, she similarly talked about how a newspaper ad contained a link to the company's website, where a press release appeared). In addition, another group in the "6 genres activity" talked about how comic strips often became the basis for movie scripts. Spring students used Bawarshi's questions when analyzing the mission statement, although the concept of how the mission statement worked with other genres didn't come up as clearly in our collaborative discussion.

Although the spring final assignment sheet was identical in form and purpose to the fall assignment sheet, I inserted Bawarshi's list of questions as the main analytical tool, whereas fall students had a similar but less in-depth list of analytic tools. In this sense, the spring project *more directly* encouraged students to consider the concept of genres working together. Still, it wasn't a requirement, and the fact that only two students engaged with this type of learning told me that it would have been helpful to explicitly focus on this idea during the final unit. For example, when providing the Power point lesson that showed what types of ideas past students had shown in their analysis, it would be important to explicitly note how particular genres worked together. Perhaps I could introduce the idea of genres "influencing each other" earlier in the semester as well. In the fall, I definitely didn't give students enough tools to engage in this type of analysis.

Since I didn't know the extent to which this idea would influence students' final project learning and writing until I completed my study, I didn't make this idea central to either version of my pedagogy—although it came out more obviously in my spring teaching. However, after completing my study, I realized that the concept of genre sets

had been instrumental to my own understanding of genre; therefore, I wanted to make this concept even more visible before students engaged with their final research. In addition, since exploring genre sets proved to be a large determinant in pushing students beyond language awareness to making more clear claims about how genres accomplished social tasks and depicted community discourse practices, I argue that it needs a more visible role in genre pedagogy so that all students have the tools to engage in this type of thinking—and perhaps more importantly—seek out genres that “work together” in the beginning stages of their research. Since I hadn’t planned on directly exploring the concept of genre sets in my research, a question for further research would be to explore what happens when students—as a result of engaging in explicit, scaffolded lessons related to genre sets—incorporate this idea into their final research and writing.

How the presence of “variation” in students’ final project learning influenced my thinking: how a balance between practical examples and genre metalanguage relates to explicit instruction

The idea of *variation* and *flexibility* within genres was something I had studied in my scholarship and was significant to my conceptualization of genre and genre pedagogy. Theoretically, I align with Bishop & Ostrom (1997) who stress that writers exert influence on genres each time they write. They describe a circular process: writers work on genres, genres work on writers, and therefore, genres change (x). I hadn’t considered specifically measuring the extent to which students discussed variation or flexibility in the final project. However, through the learning experiences of students (Renaldo and Allen, both spring students) who wrote about variation and flexibility, as

well as other students (Thomas [fall] and Ron [spring]) who showed variation intermittently, I wondered how my pedagogy and the final project encouraged (or didn't) this focus. Since most students didn't address this concept in their papers, and since three of the four students who did were spring students, I began to wonder if (and where) the idea directly showed up in either version of my pedagogy. If it did show up—either through my own instruction or through students' practical examples—did I explicitly help students understand the concept?

In this sense, my goal in re-tracing my pedagogy was to compare how a strong theoretical foundation for my pedagogy (stressing that writers do different *things* within generic conventions, which results in variation, flexibility and change) matched my actual practices. In addition, since the notion of variation is an important theoretical strand within the North American approach to teaching genre in that genre is defined as “stabilized for now,” focusing on my pedagogy is a way to add to disciplinary conversations by showing what how students approached the concept in their culminating research. Devitt (2004) has focused on the idea of variation, arguing that “variation is permitted to the degree that it does not negate either function or appropriateness” (149) and that scholars need to focus more on what types of value are associated with different types of variations within genres. Like my discussion of genre sets, making a direct connection between a foundational theoretical concept and the outcome of practice (how my students demonstrated knowledge of variation) allows me to enter the disciplinary conversation in an untapped way.

To start, as I mentioned, this theme occurred more with spring students, so I started looking for the idea of variation in both fall and spring activities as a comparative

practice. I consider variation in genre related to (1) issues of individuals' power to change genres through their own creative use of language; and (2) therefore, the power of generic conventions to evolve. In both semesters, we had defined genre in terms of both textual features *and* action. For example, we talked about common textual conventions, but at the same time, how writers inhabit and therefore change genres through their own creative use of language. So in theory, while my pedagogy may have encouraged more of a focus on the social, there was always an element of genres being flexible—of genres evolving because they are always worked on by individuals.

The design of some activities *directly* explored this idea. For example, in the fall, during the activity in which I presented a theoretical prompt in which I asked students if writers can break conventions, students provided practical examples that explored the tension between authors and convention. Through their examples, students talked about the flexibility and evolving nature of genres—two ideas connected theoretically to the notion of variation. Next, in the spring, when students analyzed newspaper articles, they talked about different examples and conventions of letters to the editor. In addition, the “6 genres activity” in the spring encouraged this type of learning through Bawarshi's extensive 3-part analysis. None of the questions specifically used the words *variation* or *flexibility* although the groups that studied greeting cards, print advertisements, comic strips, and front page news stories (four of six groups) all talked about other examples of the genre to add a comparative element to their analysis. In addition, in both semesters, I often showcased student work within classroom genres to show different ways students had engaged with the conventions of classroom genres (i.e. showcasing students' different styles of writing within personal narratives after I had returned their papers or

creating explicit modeling activities in both semester where I showed how past students had engaged with the conventions of the final project). In this sense, through practical examples, the idea of showing variation underlay many of my teaching practices.

However, as I look back on class activities from both semesters that asked students to *explore genres*—that is, analyze genres from different communities of use but not write them—I saw that some activities could have more *directly* focused on making the idea of variation more explicit, or transparent. For example, Nikki’s individual portrait, especially her interview, taught me that analyzing only one rap video may have essentialized both the generic features of the genre, as well as the values of the communities involved. Some students were able to invoke other similar or different examples of rap videos, but these were the students who had insider knowledge and experience with that community. For the students who were not insiders in that community, especially international students, analyzing and comparing different examples within the singular generic category would have been useful. In addition, when students analyzed the mission statement, it would have been useful to include mission statements from other business or professional settings. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, I hadn’t considered the different *uses* of mission statements in different settings, which would probably influence the written conventions of different examples.

The fact that the notion of variation came out so clearly in the “6 genres activity”—as a result of Bawarshi’s list of questions that were also used in the spring final assignment sheet—I saw that spring students were more likely to demonstrate this habit of thought in their final project learning. *My data has clearly shown me that if students are to see genres as evolving, they must see practical examples of variation*

across genres. In addition, the instructor must make explicit discussions and connections across practical examples. Teachers can also play an important role in helping students discursively talk about what it means when individuals deviate from norms, or when variation exists in a single generic category. To extend the discussion, teachers could focus on Devitt's (2003) idea that we must question the value in different types of variation and consider the extent to which a community exerts influence over an individual. In some aspects of Nikki's learning, for example the in-class activity where she talked about music therapists not being able to "break rules," she seemed to focus on static, social writing practices and not address how individuals might be creative within those practices.

In addition, within specific examples from both versions of my pedagogy, I saw spots where I could have raised even more pointed critical questions. For example, when describing the common features of genres within my field, as I had done in the Power Point, I could have simply asked students: "What would happen if a teacher decided to creatively make up her own rules for a letter of recommendation?" Or in the fall activity when students had described how rappers have re-invented the genre of rap music through their lyrics and beats, I could have asked: "Do you think this is possible to the same extent within academic genres. Why or why not?"

Many of my practices created the space for discussion of diverse examples—as well as allowed students to discuss genres from their own lives. In this sense students' explored the notion of variation without labeling it. For instance, through the diversity in practical examples in the "6 genres activity," Samar understood the concept that genres have a "social function"; however, during the semester, and even in their interviews,

many students told me they were confused by the terminology. In this sense, I see the practical examples giving students understanding of difficult theoretical concepts, which was instrumental in and of itself. However, at times, I could have been more explicit—or transparent—in terms of connecting theoretical concepts. Many scholars (Cope & Kalantzis 1993; Swales 1990) support the idea of explicit instruction but define explicit instruction as the teacher using her own expert knowledge to create systematic, sequenced genre activities that provide students with the tools to *explore* genres. I see most of my practices as effectively scaffolded; I also made a concerted effort to be transparent about the purposes of the activities. I found spots towards the end of my pedagogy (i.e. the spring modeling activity) where I would have been even more explicit, or transparent, about connecting theoretical concepts or raising critical questions that would encourage students to make connections to genres we had studied throughout the course of the semester.

The balance between having students acquire concepts through practical examples and requiring them to use particular, meta terms is something each teacher must negotiate. There is also the question of whether or not students become burdened with too much metalanguage (in any pedagogy). To be sure, there are times when students learn what we are asking of them even if they don't use the same language as we do. *In my pedagogy, in almost all of the activities, it was when students discussed or looked at practical examples that they often made the "deepest" insights about language and writing.* In this sense, although my meta-discourse on genre may have been more extensive with certain practices, my pedagogy encouraged them to understand these concepts in their own words—especially when it came to genres they engaged with in

their personal lives (e.g., the rap video activity, discussions of “everyday” genres students used, and the 6-genres activity). In addition, in the one prompt where I pointedly raised theoretical conventions about authors and conventions, students engaged more richly with the question that asked them to provide practical examples.

Overall, in relation to how much explicit instruction is necessary—in terms of making “meta” concepts transparent—I realized the importance of explicitly focusing on genre sets throughout my pedagogy—and helping students see genres working together through their own practical examples so that they might focus on genre sets in their final research. Also, in the final unit I would have raised more critical questions to help students explicitly connect concepts from the semester. Since the final paper modeling was so instrumental to students’ learning, I would also create some activities that asked them to consider their use of rhetorical conventions within their context of their own final project drafts.

Making these small changes throughout my pedagogy in order to be more explicit would add an even more critical element. While I don’t think a more explicit focus on metalanguage would dramatically alter the learning outcomes that occurred within my pedagogy, it is something I will continue to complicate in my future teaching. A balance between practical examples and metadiscourse is crucial. In addition, the “explicit” question in relation to metadiscourse also has disciplinary implications since as of yet, genre pedagogies aren’t used widely in the FYW classroom. Students aren’t accustomed to making the connection between genre and social action. *For this reason, research into the question, “how much metalanguage is necessary?” seems especially necessary to this approach to FYW writing.*

“Communities of use”: the implications of my students’ learning in relation to studying genres outside of their social contexts

While the first two teaching implications on genre sets and variation arose from the results my data yielded, one disciplinary question which relates to many types of genre pedagogies—and was on my mind even before I collected data was: “If we ask students to study how genres perform social actions, how do we account for the fact that they are not participants in the communities where the actions are taking place?” Since so much of my research focuses on students’ research into disciplinary genres, this question remained central as I developed my research questions and thought about what my students’ learning would teach me about the application of genre theory to practice.

In theory, Devitt, Bawarshi, and Reiff (2003) note how genres must be viewed as “rhetorical manifestations of a community’s actions” (554). Miller (1984) also claims that for students, “genres serve as keys to understanding how to participate in the actions of a community” (39). So the fact that linking genre to community is central in theory, combined with the fact that there is considerable disagreement as to how student can engage with this concept *in practice*, makes this question central to any discussion of genre pedagogy. More specifically, since the culmination of my pedagogy asked students to study disciplinary genres—when most students were not yet members of the community—my students’ learning can offer unique insight into this critical question. Much of the discussion here includes observations of student learning; however, in relation to this question, there is such a strong relationship between a teacher’s approach to genre and whether or not students can productively study genres in communities they

are not a part of. Therefore, reflection on my students' learning has many implications for teaching.

Ann Johns (2002) invokes Miller to raise an important question about students' studying genres within communities they are not a part of:

...if we choose to examine or write texts within our literacy classrooms from academic or professional genres created within communities of practice, we remove them from the authentic situations in which they have been employed and from the very individuals who are community insiders. Texts then become artifacts for study rather than tools for achieving 'repeated social action' (Miller). (239)

Johns' warning that texts "become artifacts for study rather than tools for achieving 'repeated social action'" relates to the reality that community discourse practices are constantly evolving. In this sense, studying genres from one point in time may oversimplify the active nature of the writing/communication that takes place in any evolving discipline. In addition, since there is a limit to how much research students can conduct in a FYW course—that is, they will not exhaust all of the genres within a particular field—students may only get a specific glimpse into a field. In addition, Freedman (1994, "Do as I say") cites the importance of experiential knowledge, warning that teaching specialized genres too long before students actually participate in discourse communities is ineffective because there is too much of a gap in experience. Since many of my students were freshmen, this was an important concern. In addition, even scholars (Devitt, Bawarshi & Reiff 2003) who have advocated pedagogies in which students connect genres to communities of use have noted that studying the materiality of language in genre doesn't always give insight into complex motives and relations, including ideology and power dynamics between people (559).

Since I taught students from different grade levels—some of whom were novice insiders in the disciplinary communities and some of whom who had no experience in their communities of study—my data provided me with an comparative element in regards to what happens when students study genres outside of their communities of use. That is, some of my students were somewhat immersed in the communities, and some were not. Since many basic writing courses are composed of international students from higher grade levels, and since in my experiences, many other older students enroll in the course as a result of postponing this required course, my students' learning experiences are not "representative" but instructive in the sense that other basic writing teachers work with similar groups of mixed students.

To start, my students' learning taught me that their quality of interviews, active engagement with analytic tools, and whether or-not collected genres related to a real-world project were more important determinants of students' success with talking critically about genres than whether or not they actually participated in those communities. For example, after studying the semester-long learning of Samar, I found that despite the fact that she was a freshman who had not yet entered her major, she talked about genres with more detail and sophistication than most students had. I attributed this to the fact that she was an active learner throughout the semester. In addition, the professor who she interviewed spent extensive time with her, provided her with an entire technical report, and talked to her about the genres within the report. So when she engaged with her own textual analysis, she already had a good idea as to how the genres worked together, why they were important, and how they functioned. In this

sense, what she learned in her interview built on the way she had talked about genre throughout the semester.

After studying Nikki's semester-long learning, I saw that she showed similar traits to Samar, although her case was different in that she was already a novice member in her field. As I mentioned before, when she talked about published genres in the field, she didn't provide nearly as much analysis as when she talked about genres that worked together in the field. When I first analyzed Nikki's work I attributed her strong analysis of "session genres" to the fact that she had engaged with these genres in her own music therapy sessions. Without a doubt, the fact that in her interview she told me that the project helped her "re-learn" what she did in practice, I knew that her experiential knowledge writing session genres had a strong influence on her ability to talk discursively about them. During first-round data analysis, I thought this insider knowledge had a direct link to Nikki's detailed analysis with these genres—especially since her discussion of published genres revealed little engagement or authoritative analysis, even though she was a novice insider. However, as Samar's learning has shown, Samar's quality interview allowed her to engage with her genres in a different but just as "in-depth" manner. Another case similar to Nikki's was John, who studied law enforcement. He was a fall student set to graduate in the spring, so he had taken many major courses. He had also applied to the police academy, although he didn't have any direct experience in the community. Unlike Nikki, he had no experiential knowledge of his community, although like Samar, he had an extensive interview with an insider which allowed him to talk about genre in a way that many students (who didn't have a quality interview or genres that related to a real-world project) could not.

On this note, a second thing my study taught me was that students who did treat their genres as “artifacts of study” rather than “tools for achieving repeated social action” (I classify these students as those that talked about their genres in isolation or focused intently on textual features without acknowledging the social use), involved complex sets of factors that weren’t necessarily the direct result of not having experiential knowledge or not. For example, Thomas, who studied beef export had taken major courses in agriculture, worked in the field in the summers and knew his interviewee on a personal level. As I mentioned before, Thomas didn’t demonstrate all that he had learned in his research in his writing. In addition, Thomas was putting himself through college. Since he had a demanding work schedule, he told me in his interview that he was not always “mentally there” in class. So I believe Thomas didn’t put as much time into his learning as he would’ve liked, which is why he may have missed points of discussion throughout the semester and why his project was somewhat incomplete.

When I interviewed him, I asked: “Ok, your business is very specialized. If you never go into beef export, do you still think the project was beneficial?” He said that, yes, the project helped his “thought process.” I asked him to elaborate, and he replied: “...you’d be more aware of who has to communicate to who to get things going...like *how* people share ideas...” Here, I saw Thomas showing how writing helps carry out the impetus to “get something done.” It seems that his research into genres translated to a more broad awareness of language as social mediator, which challenges scholars who warn that this type of learning results in students seeing genres as “artifacts of study.”

In fact, I found that students who were most likely to approach their genres as artifacts of study were those students who found their sample genres online, or those

students who collected seemingly unrelated genres. Again, these students were often those who didn't have a quality interview. *In this sense, the quality of the interview and relation of genres to each other seemed more of a determinant of students' habits of thought than the challenge of students studying genres outside of their communities of use. Some students did have success, even freshman, which tells me that students can approach the genres as tools for achieving repeated social action.*

It is important to note that a goal of my project was not for students to “acquire” the genres—that is, within the scope of the project, I did not expect them to be able to “master” the genres or become active writers of the genres they researched. My main goals were to show students how genres are “socially real,” (Coe 1994, 165), link genres to communities of use, and understand how writers within communities occupy genres. While students engaged with these ideas to varying degrees and through their own unique analysis, I wanted students to explore the messiness of genres, not necessarily “pinpoint” a community's discourse practices or be active members in that field, which I believe can only happen through experience—actually “writing” the genres. These goals had a particular North American slant; however, a teacher asking her students to acquire the genres—no matter what theoretical background—may have a valid argument that students can not acquire genres when they are not active members of disciplinary discourse communities. That is, the implications for teaching would be different based on the specificity of the expected outcome.

Since the link between genre and community is so central to RGS, discussions of the extent to which students can study genres outside of their communities of use is a multi-part, critical question when it comes to FYW pedagogy. The purpose of my study

was not to designate research into disciplinary genres as “good” or “bad,” and based on my students’ varied and complex learning within this assignment, I have tried to show what types of language learning are possible, as well as add a negotiated, student-centered dimension to relevant questions within pedagogical discussions within RGS. I align with scholars (Coe 1994; Bawarshi 2003; Devitt 2004) who argue that students must explore the messiness of genres, with no expected outcomes. This idea was foundational to both my own conceptualization of genre, as well as the teaching practices I used with students.

Since questions of students studying genres outside of their communities of use—and especially communities that they aren’t a part of—will continue to be a challenge with many types of North American approaches to pedagogy, one response to this obstacle is to become better at building on students’ knowledge and helping them understand the genres of communities that they *are* a part of. Students could be taught to view the FYW classroom a social space which influences the genres they write—and their rhetorical decisions within those genres. For example, I asked students to analyze classroom genres (e.g., the personal narratives) as well as compare these genres to similar genres “in the world.” Freedman (1994, “Do as I say”) has argued that “school writing” is not decontextualized—that the classroom is a real space (201). And despite the fact that Johns (2002) assesses the challenges of having students study genres outside of their communities of use, she does argue that we can emphasize the notion of *variation* and the destabilized nature of texts as a way to overcome the challenges of students treating texts as artifacts of study. Johns writes: “...our major responsibility is to help students to become genre theorists in the true sense: to destabilize their often simplistic and sterile

theories of texts and enrich their views of the complexity of text processing, negotiation, and production within communities of practice” (240). Freedman (1994) similarly claims that the success of teaching genre hinges on teachers creating a rich discursive context where students learn language is a form of cultural mediation and the degree to which the teacher can use directed practices to build on students’ knowledge (188). As I mentioned earlier, I learned specific ways in which I could emphasize the idea of *variation* to make this a more integral part of students’ final project learning. To add to this conversation, the next section discusses ways in which students’ interview feedback has shown me how I can use directed practices to help students make explicit what they already know about or *do* with genre.

When I interviewed Renaldo and Samar, I gained unique cultural perspectives in relation to genre. More importantly, the following practical suggestions from these students enriched my view of my own teaching. Since I have yet to read about similar practices with students—especially within a coherent, scaffolded account of genre pedagogy—I see my students’ ideas adding a new dimension to North American pedagogical conversations within RGS. Renaldo, from Brazil, and Samar, from Kuwait, both suggested that I have students bring in genres from their home countries early in the semester. Renaldo told me that magazine genres in Brazil are so different from magazine articles in the United States because, as he stated, the education level there is much “lower.” He said that Brazilian articles are “more simple and to the point,” which he noted resulted from the social climate and the fact that the general public didn’t have as advanced an education as many Americans do. He thought showing this comparison to the class would have been interesting and instructive.

In a similar example from her interview, Samar compared magazine genres in her home country to those in the United States. She explained that Arab women's magazines were somewhat similar to the ones we have in the United States, but she said that our magazine articles are more "political" and "sexual." She said that Arab readers won't see "weird ads" in their magazine... "like women wouldn't be wearing bikinis and stuff like that, like looking too sexual....they wouldn't be positioned in a sexual type of way" because Arab women's roles are more traditional. Her examples showed how genres not only reflect the social climate but also reflect elements of women's identity that are, to a large extent, socially created. I wouldn't have gained this type of cultural knowledge unless I had interviewed students, and after their suggestions, my questions are: *How can I frame a question/activity early in the semester so that each student presents some piece of genre knowledge? How do I make this type of activity inclusive of international students and American students?* If such activities occurred early in the semester, students would play an active role in defining genre and exploring the implications of their own conceptualizations. Sharing the different cultural examples early in the semester would show how writing acts as a social mediator and how writing conventions, including content, reflect larger social systems and cultures. As was my goal throughout the semester, the goal wouldn't be for students to actually acquire the genres but to gain knowledge of how genres are tied to larger communities of use and activity systems. *Published accounts of how genre scholars build on (and help students make explicit through directed activities) their unique genre knowledge is an un-tapped area of research, which would add a rich dimension to discussions of practice.*

Reflections on the tension between rhetoric and genre

In this section, I begin by describing how studying the diverse aspects of students learning presented throughout this study encouraged me to challenge my own conceptualizations of genre and consider how my pedagogy created different spaces for fostering particular concepts of genre. Throughout my study I have explained how my exploratory approach to genre aligned with North American scholars. I clearly articulated how concepts of rhetoric and genre differed in theory. I also described tangible ways that demonstrated how a rhetorical approach to teaching writing differed from a genre approach.

However, after understanding my pedagogy more deeply I began to ask: How “loosely” will I define genre after having studied my students’ learning experiences and understanding how they conceptualized genre? This related to the question of *whether or not students were using ideas of rhetoric and genre interchangeably*—in their development of a genre metalanguage and final project learning. Some examples from students’ classroom learning (visible in certain activities) and final project learning illustrate this tension and overlap. In addition, after studying their post-semester interviews alongside email questions that I had sent later to follow up on how students were using “genre” in their lives, the interchangeability of the concepts became an important question. While providing direct answers to these questions is beyond the scope of this study, here I present ways in which my students’ learning has affected my thinking thus far.

Oddly enough, understanding my students’ learning helped me not only reconsider my conceptualization of genre, but it helped me *understand* my concept of

genre. First, in line with many North American scholars who emphasize the dynamic nature of genres, theoretically I defined genre first and foremost by its social function—stressing that even within conventions, the individual as active agent who uses language creatively is a central component of defining the movement present within any genre (and by the action it accomplishes). I considered my approach somewhat open-ended, which was deliberate in that I wanted students to explore generic conventions but also to consider how genres change and evolve—how genres are sites of movement.

This approach to genre expanded students' views of writing in important ways. In addition, this exploratory approach to genre challenged some students. For example, in his post-semester interview, Ron (spring student who studied computer science) told me:

Ron: I remember we did have many assignments about specific genres....but frankly I felt that there's no right answer about the assignments you gave us, cuz it depends on myself...so how can I say that? For me, I couldn't get the exact....how can I say it? ...like what the genre is all about....like I had to make a conclusion for me, for myself, I didn't really talk much about it with some other people, or with you...

Meghan: ok, so do you think it would've helped to talk about the individual assignments more?

Ron: yeah, cuz they really helped me *think* a lot about genre, but then that's it, there's no further chance to, for me to get, an exact shape, or an exact thing about what the genre is all about...

Here, Ron alluded to the fact that there was no “right answer” that encompassed the conventions and uses of genres we explored. In one sense, this reflected one of my goals—to have students complicate genres without necessarily being able to stabilize everything about the genres. In another sense, however, as I mentioned, I found that my approaches could have been even more direct at times. Critical questions about *why* exploring diverse genres from this perspective has no “answer” were central to my

pedagogy, and after reflecting, I found spaces where I could raise even more critical questions. Ron seemed somewhat confused, or at least needed more classroom time to actually “figure out” genres he studied on his own. Johns (2002) has asked an important question of North American pedagogical scholarship: “If we agree that genres aren’t fixed, then how do we teach them and keep pedagogy current? (237). When students explore the messiness of genres, while understanding *the reasons why* there aren’t always “answers” or “formulas,” teaching practices can remain adaptive and current. In this sense, as long as teachers ask the right critical questions and draw on multiple examples of genres, keeping pedagogy current is no more of an issue with this type of pedagogy than any other.

A second and related point to Ron’s concern that there was “no right answer” within the pedagogical framework I imparted is that some students interpreted genre a little more loosely than I had anticipated—both in classroom activities and in their final projects. In addition, since I was unfamiliar with many of the disciplines/fields that students studied, I came across genres that I had either never heard of or wasn’t sure I would consider them genres. So students had a degree of authority in terms of what they designated a “genre.” This open-endedness related to the question of *whether or not students were using ideas of rhetoric and genre interchangeably*—in their development of a genre metalanguage and final project learning. Some examples from students’ classroom and final project learning illustrate this tension and overlap.

First, analysis showed Samar’s learning was somewhat contradictory in that although the practical examples in her final project showed that she defined genres based on both social uses and textual features (an approach I had hoped my pedagogy would

foster), in aspects of her classroom learning and her post-semester interview, she operated with a very open-ended definition of genre, almost equating genre with *any classificatory device*. For instance, her discussion of sub-genres within the “6 genres activity” referred to smaller communicative devices within greeting cards, which she (and her group) considered sub-genres since they could “stand on their own” and still have meaning. Some of their examples of sub-genres were pictures and jokes, which I would classify as larger categories of rhetoric that made up the genre. Interestingly, though, when Samar transferred her idea of sub-genres to the technical report that she studied in the final project, she talked about genre in a more focused way (i.e., a way that reflected how genres were conventionalized types of communication that got particular actions accomplished). In this sense, the theoretical connection she made was valuable in her learning, although initially she seemed to have used the notion of *genre* very broadly. Renaldo also talked about the notion of “sub-genres” when he talked about variation within blueprints (from his field of study) and emails (from his personal experiences).

Both Renaldo’s and Samar’s references to “subgenres” encouraged me to reconsider how loosely I want to define genre within my scholarship, and therefore, my teaching. I had never taught with the idea of “sub-genres” in mind. In my literature review, I established a clear distinction (albeit with some overlap) between rhetorical and genre approaches to literacy instruction. However, my students’ learning showed me that at times my pedagogy may have encouraged an overlap—or overgeneralization of genre—in a way that I hadn’t anticipated. Questions for future research are: *how would focusing on “sub-genres” change my own approach to genre, and subsequently, my teaching? How do I make the distinction between rhetorical devices and genres, and*

therefore, how can I make this distinction clear to my students? How would my approach to this idea influence students' genre learning in my classroom? How would it influence how loosely I allowed students to classify genres?

Some students maintained broad conceptualizations of genre even after they left my class. When I emailed students after their post-semester interviews to find out how they might be using the conceptualizations of genre that they had learned in my class, Samar wrote:

Every time I do something I find out its [sic] related to genre. When I'm listening to music, every song is categorized into different genres, whether its pop or rap or rock. When I'm writing emails, that's a genre of writing, or when I'm writing a personal narrative or a research paper, those are all genres. Greeting cards themselves are classified as a type of genre let alone what kind of greeting card I give out, whether it's a birthday or a 'get well' card. A lot of things I do can be classified into different genres.

Once again, here it is evident that Samar operated with a very broad definition of genre. Her conceptualization here and throughout her learning wasn't necessarily consistent, although she showed very valuable learning development in terms of being able to analyze and articulate how language worked as social mediator. While I intended for students to explore genre and not necessarily contain the concept, I didn't intend for students to leave my class thinking that anything and everything was a genre.

Thomas, who studied a beef export business, provided a similar response to Samar's when I asked how his genre learning in my class was influencing his current thinking. He wrote:

I use my knowledge of genre all the time. It is the determining factor in deciding how I talk, write and dress. Recognizing the types of situations

that life can offer proves to be a never ending study. In my life, it is almost like taking on different identities several times each day based on the genre of the moment, like an alias. A person's open mindedness allows them to more easily adapt to different genres. People create genres in their minds. Therefore, they can be anything.

Thomas makes a thoughtful insight about how people enact different identities in response to different social situations. Like Samar, he seems to use rhetoric and genre interchangeably, which told me that he left my class conceptualizing genre broadly. These reflections, as well as the fact that other students studied "genres" in their fields such as instant messaging and email challenged my own boundaries of what I would classify as a genre and how my pedagogy contributed to the loose genre classification students developed. In addition, one spring Level II student that I didn't feature invoked the idea of "speech genres" in his final project since his field of study—car sales—relied so heavily on verbal communication. While researching speech genres was beyond the scope of students' final projects, I allowed him include speech genres because he made a compelling argument that the verbal communications played a more central role to his field than written genres did. *An interesting avenue for future research would be to understand how students could approach and analyze speech genres in disciplinary communities.*

In some students' conceptualizations of genres, what they stressed most was how their concept of genre expanded to include not just literary genres, but more everyday genres. In her interview, Rae said that before our class, she hadn't thought of more "everyday genres" as genres before. She cited things like posters/brochures, (which she had studied in her final project), saying that before she had viewed them as simply "types of communication," not genres. On this note, Rae said that in her introductory marketing

courses, she had studied what her instructor called “marketing strategies,” which included some of the genres she studied in her final project. Samar expressed similar sentiments in her interview “...I didn’t think of genres at first like that...I just thought genres were like books. Fiction. Nonfiction. Cuz that’s what we learned in high school.” As these diverse conceptualizations reveal, many students’ views of genres were expanded in valuable ways. In this sense, students developed a rich repertoire of how language is used in academic, disciplinary, and everyday genres. On the other hand, some students’ broad conceptualizations led me to question whether or not I defined genre “too loosely” in my pedagogy. As my students’ learning has shown, understanding the “boundaries” of genres as well as how students use concepts of genres in their lives after they leave our classrooms is a valuable avenue into understanding how theories of genre influence practice and literacy learning.

Closing: key findings and questions for future research

Through activities, assignments, and projects, students in my class constantly “worked on genres” (as Renaldo put it) that occurred at the intersection of individual language use and motive and larger social conventions. Since genre approaches to FYW instruction have yet to have an impact on an institutional level, questions and research into genre pedagogy continue to problematize the role of genre, as well consider what students learn about language—and themselves as writers—by studying genre. While situating my students’ diverse learning experiences into neat categories has been

impossible, the variation across their learning has both responded to current pedagogical questions as well as created valuable questions for future research.

Findings that have the most immediate influence my own teaching include how I will approach thesis writing, citation conventions, and modeling activities when students conduct ethnographic research into disciplinary genres. I hope this section of my work has also shown other teachers the importance of going “meta” on these conventions and helping students understand the intended boundaries of rhetorical practices across different types of research writing. I also saw how quality field interviews and modeling activities at the start of the final unit enhanced students’ understanding of conducting and rhetorically representing their research. This section provided readers with a direct entrance into practical ways of teaching a unit on disciplinary research.

My findings which raise the most compelling, untapped questions in the discipline relate to how we can translate North American foundational theories of *genre sets*, *variation*, and *flexibility* more clearly into practice. While many RGS scholars have provided student-focused research—raising important critical questions that practitioners can use with students, advocating research into disciplinary genres, and even publishing singular accounts of the outcomes of classroom practice, my reflection on a large group of students’ experiences researching diverse fields allowed me to see when and how discussion (and knowledge) of these concepts was most likely to appear in their research. My work also allowed me to compare how discussion of these concepts (or not) affected students’ ability to engage with research paper writing conventions. In this sense, my data pushed me to link specific learning outcomes to particular pedagogical practices in a way that I hadn’t anticipated—and in a way that RGS scholars have not yet done. While these

foundational concepts shape our *theories* of genre and discussions of practice, my extended study into how my students engaged with notions of genre sets, variation, and flexibility in different activities and final research provides a direct entrance into how classroom activities foster these concepts. As my work shows, considering how we can make these focus areas more explicit in practice will continue to be an important strand in pedagogical research.

My discussion of the balance between practical examples and inclusion of metadiscourse is also important in terms of showing how hybrid practices both shape and respond to students' learning. In this sense, my work has shown that the divisive pedagogical "split" is more theoretical than practical, especially at the FYW level. My study suggested that a combination of teaching approaches was important to students' development of a genre metalanguage. In addition, the responsiveness I showed through different activities in Chapter 3—and what happened when students had the freedom to discuss genres from their own lives—indicated the importance of building on students' knowledge, while at the same time, providing them with the analytic language to study genres rhetorically. I hope my work has shown how students at this level can adapt to a variety of practices. More specifically, the more open-ended activities I described reveal that students can engage with difficult "meta" concepts when teachers create the space for them to talk freely about genres they use outside of the classroom. When my students discussed their own practical examples, they often made the "deepest" insights about language and writing. Published accounts of how genres scholars build on students' unique genre knowledge (and help make explicit through *sequenced activities*) is an un-

tapped area of research which would add an extremely rich dimension to discussions of practice.

On this note, my work shows that at the FYW level, students can become well-equipped to study disciplinary genres if they are given the proper analytic tools throughout the semester and have a quality interview with a field insider. The concern within RGS that students can't productively study genres as tools for achieving social action in communities they're not a part of seems more relevant to secondary instruction—as many of my students excelled at approaching disciplinary genres rhetorically, whether they were members of the communities or not. Again, my discussion of final unit activities shows the need for hybrid teaching practices in which a teacher builds on her own expert genre knowledge and creates open spaces for inductive learning.

Studying my students' learning confirmed what I have for long known: a scholar's work is never done, and a teacher's "ideal" pedagogy is never ideal in practice. I am convinced more than ever that understanding genre pedagogy remains one of the most interesting, complex ways to expand disciplinary conversations, understand how our definitions of genre affect student learning, and improve practice for our students. I hope my work will be an inspiration to those teachers excited about discovering the multitude of layers that underlie what we see (or think we see) in our classrooms.

I would like to conclude with a quote that sums up one student's literacy experiences in my classroom. Adara, a spring international student from Kuwait, explained how my class was different than other English classes she had taken. She expressed: "In this class I was more engaged with the community around me. Interviews

and surveys and site seeing. I felt like it was an adventurous quest of writing where I observe and interpret in my own way.” In this quote, Adara addresses how the process of writing—*her* process of writing—is both an individual and social process. Genre has been the avenue into exploring this tension, and when Adara says that she interprets in her own way, I see that even with a pedagogy that emphasizes “the social” and how genres are connected to communities of use, that students can still act as active negotiators. I look forward to other situated accounts of genre learning that emphasize how we can make students even more active negotiators—in their explorations of genre within our classrooms and their *use* of genres within diverse communities of practice.

APPENDIX A

Interview questions

Part 1: Open ended, descriptive questions

What do you most remember about our class? What did you take away from our class that has helped you in your own writing process?

In what ways did your writing process change?

Have you used any of this knowledge in your other classes, or in your current writing class?

Part 2: More specific questions about genre

How would you define genre after having taken my class?

Which classroom activities and/or assignments have helped you understand the concept of genre? Why?

After being a student in this class, has your concept of genre changed? In what ways?

How has the focus on genre in this class affected your writing process? Has it helped you? Confused you? Changed the way you approach writing? Changed the way you view language?

In what ways did our focus on genre help you understand culture?

Part 3: Final project: exploring the genres of workplace/disciplinary structures

What did the final project teach you?

What was most difficult about the final project? What puzzled you?

How did the final project benefit you?

Did you think that class activities leading up to the final project adequately prepared you for the type of research and writing that I required in the final project? Can you provide specific examples? (i.e.: in-class group work, specific homework assignments)

What do you think was the most difficult aspect of the final project? What challenges did you face when you conducted your research for the final project?

What are some ways I can better prepare students for these challenges/problems?

Do you think the format of the final paper allowed you to demonstrate all that you learned in your research? Do you think a different final “product” might allow you to engage with your research better?

What was the most productive part of the final project? What did you learn that you think will help you in the future?

Do you think the final project will prepare you for the types of writing you’ll do in your future profession? Do you think the final project will make you a more active member of a work-related group?

Part 4: Contrast questions

In what ways was our writing class alike or different from writing classes you’ve had in the past?

When we talked about the social “function” of genres, were you confused? Were there other ways I could have introduced this idea or made it clearer?

Part 5: Overall Experiences in the Class

Has your attitude towards writing changed as a result of this class? If so, in what ways?

Did the class activities allow you to contribute your own ideas? In what ways? If not, why not?

Do you have any suggestions/other feedback regarding the class and/or your experience in the class?

APPENDIX B

Consent Form, Level I: Class-related research

Dear student,

As a student in WRAC 1004/0102, you are being asked to participate in a study that will explore the effectiveness of genre-focused teaching methods and practices in this classroom. Your participation is voluntary, and your instructor will not know whether or not you choose to participate until after grades have been submitted. The research will be based on normal in-class activities and projects. There is no outside work involved with this research, unless you choose to participate in interviews (see level II consent form) with the secondary investigator (Meghan Bacino) after the semester is over.

By agreeing to participate, you are allowing your instructor to make copies of some assignments and projects that you hand in. If you decide to be part of the study, you have the right to withdrawal your participation at any time. Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. Please note that the research will be used for educational purposes only, and if any of the work is published, your name will not be used.

If at any time during the semester you have questions regarding this study, or are dissatisfied with any aspect of the study, please contact (anonymously if you wish) Kathleen Geissler, primary investigator, by phone: (517) 353-3560, or by email: geissler@msu.edu. You can also contact Peter Vasilenko, Ph.D., Chair of the University Committee of Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS) by phone: (517) 355-2180, fax: (517) 432-4503, email: ucrihs@msu.edu, or regular mail: 202 Olds Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824. Questions about the study can be directed to the secondary investigator (Ms. Bacino) after final grades have been submitted.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that my instructor may use my written work for educational purposes.

Name

Date

Consent Form, Level II: Interviews with Ms. Bacino

Dear student,

If you have agreed to participate in class-related research, you are being asked whether or not you would be willing to participate in interviews with your instructor once the semester is over (in person, by phone, or via email). The purpose of this part of the research is to get your feedback on specific teaching methods and also to help Ms. Bacino understand your learning experiences in this class. Your participation in this level of the research is voluntary. You can still be part of class-related research without agreeing to participate in the interview process.

I understand that my research in this part of the research is voluntary and that my instructor may contact me for an interview once the semester is over and grades have been submitted.

If you agree to participate, please answer the following question:

Will you be staying in East Lansing once finals are over? If not, what is your departure date?

Name

Date

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