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**A THEME-BASED LEARNING COMMUNITY  
LINKING COMPOSITION AND HISTORY: AN ACTIVITY/GENRE THEORY  
ANALYSIS**

**VOLUME I**

**By**

**Julia Teresa Fogarty**

**A DISSERTATION**

**Submitted to  
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**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **A THEME-BASED LEARNING COMMUNITY LINKING COMPOSITION AND HISTORY: AN ACTIVITY/GENRE THEORY ANALYSIS**

**By**

**Julia Teresa Fogarty**

Theme-based learning communities often link a composition course and a disciplinary general education course. They aim to provide opportunities for students to “transfer” skills learned in composition to writing activities in another course. They also aim to provide students with disciplinary contexts for writing. Underpinning these two goals, however, are very different and epistemologically irreconcilable views of language. Cognitive views hold that language is a container for decontextualized knowledge and skills; in contrast, social and situated theories of language treat meaning, and learning, as a product of social activity, including disciplinary practice. This dissertation is an account of a case study using ethnographic research methods that examines the underlying assumptions about language mediating social practices, especially student writing, in a first-year college learning community linking history and composition. Using a synthesis of activity theory and genre theory as a theoretical frame, the study focuses on how language practices, including use of a theme, affect interdisciplinary activity and student motivation. The findings suggest, in part, that interdisciplinary practice and student engagement are dependent on the enactment of social practices mediated by sociocultural views of language that grant students agency and opportunities for situated practice.

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**For my mother, Edna McManus Fogarty**



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	ix
LIST OF FIGURES.....	x
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY	
Composition in Learning Communities & Interdisciplinary Language Practices.	11
History in Learning Communities & Interdisciplinary Writing Practices .....	19
The Theme.....	20
Brief Description of Research Site and Methodology .....	25
Significance of this Dissertation.....	29
CHAPTER ONE: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	
Learning Communities.....	33
Making Connections: Implications for WAC/WID.....	40
History Education .....	52
Conclusion.....	69
CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS	
Relationship of Activity Theory to Dialogism and Social Constructivism .....	73
Activity Theory .....	80
Activity Theory and Genre Theory.....	87
Activity Theory and Genre Systems Theory.....	92
Key Concepts in Activity/Genre Theory .....	95
Critiques of Activity Theory .....	101
CHAPTER THREE: DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTIVITY SETTING	
“The Power of the Past” Learning Community.....	106
Activity System Participants: Faculty and Student Configuration.....	111
The Theme.....	112
Course Boundaries.....	113
College Composition II (English 112).....	116
Classroom Genres.....	117
The Persuasive Essay .....	118
The Evaluation Essay.....	119
The Time and Place, or Analysis, Essay .....	120
Collaborative Preface and Afterward .....	121
The Listserve Symposium .....	122
Classroom Genres and Student Roles .....	122
Survey of Early Western Civilization (History 111).....	125
Exam I – The Greeks .....	128
Exam II – The Romans .....	129
Exam III – The Middle Ages and Renaissance .....	130

Quiz Preparation Packets and Quizzes .....	130
Lecture Notes .....	131
Classroom Genres and Student Roles .....	131
Conclusion.....	134

#### **CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY AND STUDY DESIGN**

Research Methodology .....	135
Ethnographic Research Methods .....	135
Research Site .....	137
Participants .....	140
Study Design .....	143
Participant Observation.....	146
Questionnaire.....	149
Interviews .....	149
Faculty Interviews .....	149
Student One-on-One Discourse-Based Interviews .....	152
Student Focus Group Interviews .....	155
Collection of Student and Teacher Produced Texts .....	158
Data Analysis .....	158
Data Managing, Reading, and Memoing .....	159
Describing Data .....	160
Classifying Data .....	163
Classifying Student Interviews.....	165
Classifying Student and Teacher Produced Texts .....	165
Classifying Faculty Interviews .....	166
Classifying Faculty Feedback .....	166
Classifying Field Notes.....	166
Interpreting .....	167
Conclusion.....	168

#### **CHAPTER FIVE: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS—STUDENTS WRITING IN HISTORY**

General Overview of Findings .....	171
Activity System Differences .....	172
The Theme.....	175
Students Writing in History in the Absence of a Coordinating Theme .....	178
Contradictions and Psychological Double-Binds .....	180
Perceived Activity System Contradictions Between History and Students' Future Activities .....	180
Contradictions Between Outcomes and Objects of Labor .....	181
Contradictions Between Communities .....	188
Contradictions Between Divisions of Labor and Rules and Values.....	195
Contradictions Between Mediating Artifacts.....	202
Exchange Value vs. Use Value .....	216
Interdisciplinary Connections in History Writing .....	221
Language and Learning in the History Course.....	225

## **CHAPTER SIX: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS—STUDENTS WRITING IN COMPOSITION**

Perceived Activity System Similarities Between Composition and Students' Future Activities .....	237
Lack of Contradictions Between Outcomes and Objects of Learning .....	238
Lack of Contradictions Between Communities.....	241
Lack of Contradictions Between Divisions of Labor and Rules and Values.....	245
Lack of Contradictions Between Mediating Artifacts .....	251
Exchange Value vs. Use Value .....	263
Interdisciplinary Connections in Composition Writing .....	265
Zone of Proximal Development .....	267
Language and Learning in Composition.....	268
 CONCLUSION .....	 274
 APPENDICES .....	 .....
Appendix A .....	285
Appendix B .....	288
Appendix C .....	295
Appendix D .....	302
Appendix E.....	314
Appendix F.....	318
Appendix G .....	336
Appendix H .....	338
Appendix I.....	340
Appendix J.....	344
Appendix K .....	349
Appendix L.....	356
Appendix M.....	360
Appendix N .....	362
Appendix O .....	364
Appendix P .....	366
Appendix Q .....	369
Appendix R .....	371
Appendix S.....	373
Appendix T.....	375
Appendix U .....	377
 BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	 380

## LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1. Representation of data collection (January 2006 through May 2006) .....	336
TABLE 2. Formal observations of English 112/English 112H and History 111/History 111WH during the Winter 2006 semester .....	338
TABLE 3. Student and Teacher Produced Texts Collected – Composition .....	360
TABLE 4. Student and Teacher Produced Texts Collected – History .....	362
TABLE 5. Activity System Differences .....	172
TABLE 6. Activity System Contradictions .....	180
TABLE 7. Activity System Similarities .....	238



**LIST OF FIGURES**

**FIGURE 1. Activity System ..... 81**

## INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

“This is the paper where I actually took Amelia and Doug and put them together...I felt I could really pull what she said and what Doug said and then my sources together and then what I thought and my voice and really held [sic] it all together” (Robin).

Robin is describing her experience writing the final paper in the Survey of Early Western Civilization and College Composition learning community that is the subject of this dissertation. In 1984, the Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education sponsored by the National Institute of Education issued a set of recommendations. Among them was a call to all colleges and universities to create learning communities, interdisciplinary courses focused around specific intellectual issues or themes. Today, learning communities are offered at over 500 institutions of higher education and have become a wide spread educational reform movement (Smith et al. 4).

This dissertation explores student literacy and learning in the history and composition learning community in which Robin and ten other students in my study participated during the Winter 2006 semester. Titled “The Power of the Past,” the course is open to any student who has met the first semester College Composition I prerequisite. The learning community follows a coordinated studies model, which means the two courses are taught together by both instructors during the same weekly block of time. Part of a fifteen-year-old learning community program at a Midwestern community college, which I’ll call MCC, “The Power of the Past,” is a well-established course; at the time of my study the same two instructors had taught it for nine consecutive winters.

College administrators see the course as successful for several reasons: it boasts higher course-completion rates than its stand-alone counterparts, it fills quickly and often has a waiting list of students, and, having taught the course together for so long, the instructors had presumably achieved a high degree of course integration. Achieving such integration or “interdisciplinary connections” is a benefit of learning communities frequently expressed in the literature (Smith et al., Gablenick et al., Tinto et al.). While Robin’s comments suggest that she experienced such a connection in the writing of her paper, what this phrase means exactly and its implications for student literacy and learning remain largely unexplored.

Institutions of higher learning have adopted learning communities as a strategy for improving undergraduate education on many fronts, chief among them creating greater curricular coherence and enhancing motivation and engagement for first-year students. A common practice in learning community programs is to link a first-year composition course to an introductory disciplinary general education course. Faculty often find that disciplinary courses can provide a context for student writing; students are more engaged in writing courses when they are asked to write about material and books they are studying for another class. Faculty also see these learning communities as opportunities to overcome students’ common perception that the writing they do in composition is unrelated to the writing required in other courses. Students, they feel, can experience in the discipline the writing skills and strategies they are learning in the composition course. However, a great deal of writing research has revealed the highly specialized nature of disciplinary and professional discourses. As a result, the extent to which first-year composition can effectively prepare students for writing in other contexts

has come under scrutiny. Many theorists and practitioners are asking: is there a generalizable *techné*, a set of writing skills and strategies applicable to most if not all writing situations? Or, are the specific kinds of writing that students undertake in academic and professional settings so differentiated as to render virtually useless most general advice about writing (Russell, McCarthy, Herrington, Bazerman)? Far from resolving the question, many composition faculty who teach in learning communities see linkages, like the one in my study, as a way to bridge the gap between these two positions. Zawacki and Williams cite such linkages as “the best arrangement” for teaching writing within the context of another discipline, while at the same time showing students how those skills “can transcend specific disciplinary discourses” (114).

The problem, however, is that these two positions, writing as a transportable skill and writing as disciplinary practice, represent very different views of language, that is, a cognitive view of language on the one hand and a social view of language on the other. Briefly (and simply), cognitive theories hold that language is a container for information and thus meaning is static and can be abstracted from social interaction. Learning, then, is a matter of acquiring a discrete body of abstract knowledge and set of skills, including, where writing is concerned, facility with pre-existing forms or genres, which can then be transported to other contexts. In contrast, social and situated theories of language, based on a growing body of work in cognitive studies, discourse analysis and sociolinguistics, treat meaning as the product of social activity and practice, not as the content of linguistic forms. Thus learning and understanding are processes that occur within social situations. Writing, seen in this light, is a form of social action (C. Miller) whose meaning constitutes and is constituted by a community of practice.

These learning community arrangements, then, raise important questions. What are the views of language and writing that are mediating learning community courses? This question, in turn, raises other questions since assumptions about language shape social practices that, in turn, affect learning. What social practices are being enacted in these learning community courses?

Generally, cognitive views of language lead to what Lave and Wenger refer to as a teaching curriculum (96). A teaching curriculum is developed to instruct novices, is mediated through the teacher's activities, and by its nature is prescriptive. Social views of language, on the other hand, typically generate what Lave and Wenger call a learning curriculum, that is, one that consists of opportunities for participation in a community of practice. In a learning curriculum, everyday practice is seen as a "field of learning resources" (97). As with apprentices, novices or students have on-going access to other participants and to "masters" or faculty as they gradually master or learn the community's practices, including activities involving technology such as writing. (See Chapters Five and Six for a more thorough discussion of teaching and learning curricula.)

Inasmuch as learning community practitioners inevitably enact views of language that mediate social practices, those practices raise yet additional questions, namely, how are they affording and constraining students' abilities to make interdisciplinary connections? How are they affording or constraining students' intellectual engagement and motivation? These questions pertain, of course, not just to issues related to the transfer of writing skills learned in composition but to issues involving writing in disciplinary general education courses as well. A teaching curriculum, because it typically enacts the transmission of knowledge and skill from teacher to student, can limit



student agency and participation to the writing out of acquired information and knowledge for display and evaluation. Thus it can constrain or even preempt interdisciplinary activity, including writing, and may adversely affect student motivation and intellectual engagement.

As one means of examining the views of language and the social practices they were mediating in “The Power of the Past” learning community, I chose to initially focus my research on the learning community theme. Often selected with an eye to attracting students, the theme is designed to foster “interdisciplinary connections” by bringing the disciplines into relationship with each other. Typically the theme expresses an idea or concept shared by the disciplinary discourses involved or it provides a conceptual lens through which the disciplines might be commonly viewed. “Insiders and Outsiders in American Culture” might, for example, be the theme connecting three courses: first-year composition, Introduction to American Literature and Introduction to Political Science. As a conceptual tool intended to facilitate interdisciplinary activity and student engagement, the theme, the ways it is or is not functioning, can be an indicator of how language practices are affording or constraining interdisciplinarity. The theme functions primarily as an improvisational tool, as a resource for learning. Lave equates learning with “improvisational development.” He notes, “Doing and learning...are open-ended processes of improvisation with the social, material, and experiential resources at hand” (13). The theme as a “resource at hand” fosters cognitive processes in which students experience an immediate circumstance and then think about it and beyond it in new terms, including interdisciplinary terms, interpreting, analyzing, and creating new meaning and understanding. In order for the theme to function, however, in order for

interdisciplinary activity to occur, students must be granted opportunities for open-ended improvisation. They must be granted the agency to participate in a community or communities of practice in which they, together with their peers and teachers, can create new forms of activity, including improvised interdisciplinary insights and understandings. Such social practices carry with them certain assumptions about language and language practices, as I've said, namely a conception of language in which meaning is understood to be mutually constituted by individuals acting through and within social relations.

To the degree that social practices in learning communities limit student agency and opportunities to engage in practice, the theme cannot function. If social practices enact a teaching curriculum as defined by Lave and Wenger, if learning is viewed as the transmission of pre-existing, decontextualized knowledge and skill from teacher to student, students have no space or agency to engage in improvisational activity, including interdisciplinary language practices. In situated learning terms, improvisational development, or learning, is constrained, even preempted.

Questions regarding the functionality of the theme are particularly salient in learning communities linking composition with a disciplinary general education course inasmuch as composition is typically not taught as a disciplinary course, one to some degree reflective of disciplinary practice, but as a "how to" course in which presumably transferable skills are taught. Disciplinary general education courses, on the other hand, typically are reflective of disciplinary practice, even if as David Russell points out, they operate at the far edge of disciplinary activity ("Rethinking"). What, then, is the view or views of language underpinning these linked courses? Are students experiencing both

cognitive and social perspectives on language, perspectives that are epistemologically irreconcilable? What social practices then, including writing, are those views mediating? What is the nature of the enacted disciplinary and interdisciplinary practice, again, including writing? How are these practices reflected in the functionality of the theme? These important issues, which emerged during the course of my initial data analysis, led me to expand my initial research questions beyond just a focus on the theme. Generally, the research in this dissertation addresses the following questions:

- 1) What are the assumptions about language underpinning general education learning communities, particularly those that include composition courses?
- 2) What are the social practices, particularly those involving writing, mediating learning in these courses?
- 3) What is the role of the theme in helping students make interdisciplinary or cross-course connections that contribute to their developing literacy and learning in the courses that comprise the learning community?
- 4) What is the role of the theme in enhancing student engagement and motivating students so that they appropriate the goals and subjectivities of the courses in the learning community?

In my original research design, I had planned to explore similar questions solely by examining student writing. However, I soon realized the student papers I was collecting were not providing me with a complete picture of student learning. As Lucille Parkinson McCarthy observes, language processes, including student writing, must be understood in terms of the contexts in which they occur (127-128). I then revised my research design to include class observations and student interviews as well as close

examination of student writing. And I looked to David Russell's work which combines activity theory with genre theory to examine how the theme is functioning. Classrooms are particularly complex social environments; learning community classrooms, because they involve the interaction of two or more such environments, even more so. Activity theory can provide a much more accurate picture of what is happening to a student in such a classroom because, as Russell and Yanez point out, it illuminates human activity within interacting social networks (336). In Cultural Historical Activity Theory, learning is seen as a social activity and so occurs within ever-fluid, ever-evolving cultural contexts or activity systems which are historically mediated. Human beings act together in these systems with each other and with tools to achieve the objects of the system. Churches, families, schools, and disciplines are all examples of activity systems in which people participate. For Russell and others, and this, too, is an over-simplification (see Chapter Two for a detailed description of activity/genre theory), courses, too, can be viewed as activity systems comprised of subjects who use tools to achieve objectives. In courses, the subjects are students, the tools are the written genres and concepts used to do the "knowledge work" (Jolliffe) of the course, and the objective is learning. As newcomers to a course, students must learn to use the primary tools needed to participate in the course, its written genres. Learning, the objective, is achieved through expanding participation in the work of the course using writing/genres. Activity systems are also dialectical. Change occurs through cooperation or conflict with others in the same or different systems. A subject may appropriate a concept or genre from another system and adjust it to her system's goals. For instance, an education student doing a teaching internship may appropriate a concept or genre from child psychology, such as a

psychological profile, to advance her expanding participation in the field of education. This appropriation inevitably renders changes in the concept or genre and in the activity system of the education course.

Learning in Russell's model is not then a matter of knowledge learned once and for all and then applied in another area. Rather learning is expanding involvement in an activity system using writing, involvement that includes dialectical interaction with other activity systems. Ideally, in a learning community, students can more easily appropriate concepts, such as the theme, and genres across course boundaries to advance and deepen their participation in each course, to make "interdisciplinary" connections.

Clearly my theoretical frame, activity theory in conjunction with genre theory, assumes a social view of language, and I acknowledge my bias in that direction. Using such a theory as a lens for examining language practices in learning communities which may or may not share these assumptions may seem problematic; however, no lens, no theory is value free. I would argue that activity/genre theory, because it illuminates tool use, including writing, both within and across activity system boundaries such as courses, provides a particularly powerful explanatory lens for examining student interdisciplinary activity and engagement in learning communities. It can help provide empirical evidence in the form of tool use, that is language practices including student writing, of students' ability to make interdisciplinary connections, evidence which, as I explain in Chapter One, learning community advocates are largely lacking.

One other study does utilize activity/genre theory to examine student activity in learning communities. Patricia Harms, in her dissertation "Writing-Across-the-Curriculum in a Linked Course Model for First-Year Students: An Activity Theory



Analysis,” examines student learning and literacy in a pre-professional learning community at Iowa State University. However, Harms’ research site, a linked course combining first-year composition and Introduction to Engineering Graphics and Design, differs from mine in several key ways. First, Harms’ site is a linked course, meaning the instructors coordinated assignments but did not team teach. I wanted to observe the language practices enabling or constraining students’ ability to make interdisciplinary connections in a fully integrated, team-taught course. Second, because learning communities were originally created to foster curricular coherence within general education programs, and because most learning communities continue to combine general education courses, I’m interested in exploring student literacy and learning within that milieu. Third, students in general education courses often lack the motivation a major can provide. As Russell and Yanez point out, students may not perceive the relevance of these courses to their future career goals (334). This may be particularly true of community college students, who often see education in more vocational terms than their four-year-school counterparts. Therefore, they may lack the motivation that Harms observed in engineering students to engage fully as participant-writers. The literature makes frequent mention of learning communities as a means of fostering meaningful engagement through increased curricular coherence. I wanted to examine the language practices, then, in *general education* learning communities that motivate students to engage more fully as writers and to make meaningful interdisciplinary connections. Particularly, I wanted to examine the functionality of the central theme as an indicator of those practices.

In the rest of this chapter, I discuss the problematic nature of “interdisciplinary” language practices in learning communities that include composition inasmuch as composition is not typically taught as a disciplinary course. (For this reason, I tend to use the term “cross-course connection” rather than “interdisciplinary connection.”) As I’ve noted, this situation has implications for the views of language mediating social practices in composition courses and thus for the functionality of the theme. My discussion will include a brief history of composition in order to contextualize current composition practice, including practice in “interdisciplinary” settings. I also include a brief note about interdisciplinary language practices in learning communities that include so-called “content” courses such as history. I discuss as well the history of the theme in learning communities as a means of further contextualizing my study. I include a brief discussion of my research site as an activity system and a brief description of my research methodology. Finally, I describe the significance of my research.

#### Composition in Learning Communities and Interdisciplinary Language Practices

While composition has recently attained disciplinary status, as I’ve noted it typically is not taught as a disciplinary course. Thus, the nature of language practices enacted in first-year composition and their relationship to the rest of the university has remained ambiguous. Indeed, ambiguity has long characterized the relationship between writing instruction and the rest of the academy. Many rich and complex histories of this relationship have recently been written. Among them are those proposing that composition’s relationship to the rest of the university has been largely determined by its relationship to literary studies (Berlin, Crowley, S. Miller). Berlin, for example, argues that English studies were founded on a pair of binary oppositions which elevated poetics

and the consumption of texts above textual production and rhetoric. Before the establishment of English departments in the late Nineteenth century, rhetoric had held sway in the college curriculum in the United States. Decision-making rested with elite citizens, that is, mostly white male property owners. Those in governing positions knew the importance of using rhetorical means to persuade voters and to conduct commerce. When their sons attended college, they, too, were schooled in the production of oral and written discourse needed to carry on the business of religion, government, and trade, the sources of their status and power. The ability to produce all sorts of rhetorical texts—legal, economic, political, ceremonial—was seen as far more important than the ability to interpret texts. As Berlin notes, “Learning to read literary texts [was] not necessary and sufficient preparation for writing any and all varieties of rhetorical texts” (“Rhetorics” xvi).

This changed, however, in part, as a result of the Enlightenment and its correspondence theory of language. If there exists a one-to-one correspondence between words and things where the word or sign represents the thing, then rhetoric, the study of linguistic practices and their influence on meaning, is at best useless. Those who spoke or wrote the truth had no need for rhetoric (Berlin, “Rhetorics” xvi). As Berlin notes, since the creation of English departments in the late Nineteenth Century, poetics and the consumption of literary texts has been the dominant paradigm (3). Citing Raymond William’s work, he chronicles how literature became not a source of learning but a source of taste and sensibility (5). This shift corresponded with the rise of the bourgeois class. The ability of this class to experience and appreciate literature’s qualities became a mark of their superiority (5). Robert Scholes concurs that textual consumption of texts

came to have higher status than production, “just as the larger culture privileges the consuming class over the producing class” (qtd. in Berlin, “Rhetorics” 13). Learning to read literary texts now *was* considered sufficient preparation for writing.

Rhetoric and the production of texts, then, was relegated to the level of the mundane, work-a-day world. Created in response to personal or commercial and legal exigencies, its very usefulness underscored its low status. In the university, composition came to be taught as a remedial course, first instituted at Harvard in 1885 in response to a perceived literacy crisis among entering Harvard first-year students, many of whom were returning Civil War veterans demanding access to higher education. By the turn of the century first-year composition was standard in almost every college in America (Berlin, “Rhetorics” 28). Thus, “illiterates” could enter higher education and toil in the lower reaches of English studies departments until they achieved the necessary reading and writing skills, and, as Sharon Crowley argues, the tastes and sensibilities expected of an “educated” person. At this point, students were deemed ready to begin academic work. Thus composition came to be viewed as providing a service to the rest of the university and to industry as well, once the German university model took hold as the producer and transmitter of increasingly specialized knowledge (Graff 129).

Until roughly the early 1970s, the formal teaching of writing in composition courses continued to be defined as low status work preparing students for writing in the academy and in their future professions. However, as disciplinary knowledge has grown more specialized and these specialized discourses have become increasingly differentiated from each other, this definition of composition has become more and more problematic. Moreover, because composition from its inception has remained located in

and informed by literary studies departments, writing pedagogy has continued to reflect literary communication practices and ideas of taste which have further isolated it from other disciplinary discourses (Bazerman and Russell xii).

Not only has increased disciplinary specialization called into question composition's relationship to the rest of the university, in recent decades so have radical changes within the field itself. Developments in cognitive psychology, together with the proliferation of postmodern theories of social construction, poststructuralism, antifoundationalism, and liberatory education, have transformed composition studies into a scholarly discipline in its own right and, for many practitioners, have altered the role of composition in the university. Enlightenment notions of knowledge and language held that good writing involved the careful arrangement and clear expression of pre-existing ideas for the benefit of one's reader. These new postmodern theories, in contrast, re-emphasized the social situatedness of the individual at the center of the writing process and the social construction of knowledge. In postmodern theory, which is informed by feminism and social theories of language, like those of Vygotsky, Bakhtin, and Geertz, truth arises out of the interaction of writer, language, reality, and audience. "The elements of the communication process thus do not simply provide a convenient way of talking about rhetoric. They form the elements that go into the very shaping of knowledge" (Berlin, "Contemporary" 242). According to John Paul Gee and others, this interaction of writer, language, reality and audience represents a "universe of discourse," within which accepted truths operate. Individuals are shaped by discourses but also participate in the shaping of discourses and therefore are potentially powerful forces for social change. In many respects, as Berlin states, these theories "can be seen as an effort

to recover the tools of rhetoric in discussing the material effects of language in the conduct of human affairs” (“Rhetorics” xvii).

This “social turn” in composition, as Richard Fulkerson notes in his recent overview of the field, has resulted in widespread disagreement over the goal of teaching writing in college (679). In his article, “Composition at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century,” Fulkerson observes four different perspectives on composition currently abroad in the field, each with its own aim or purpose: Current/Traditional Rhetoric, Expressivism, Critical/Cultural Studies, and Procedural Rhetoric. Current/Traditional Rhetoric continues to assume a positivist view of knowledge and language. From this perspective, college writing is concerned with communicating already arrived at truths using appropriate modes of discourse: exposition, narration, description, and argumentation (Berlin, “Contemporary” 239). Fulkerson points out that this approach no longer appears in lists of current composition pedagogies (657) and is rarely mentioned any more in journals or conference presentations. While considered passé among composition theorists, evidence suggests that this approach is still widely taught (Ohman, Mejia). Expressivism in comp studies originated as a reaction to Current/Traditional Rhetoric. Its focus is on the individual writer and assumes truth is found through internal apprehension more than empirical sensory evidence. Fulkerson, quoting Chris Burnham, notes that the aim is to “foster...aesthetic, cognitive, and moral development” rather than to improve writing or engage in critical thinking. Writing is a way to pursue personal development and self-knowledge (667).

Critical/Cultural Studies approaches, under which Fulkerson includes feminist and postcolonial composition, want to liberate students from dominant discourses.

Fulkerson quotes Ann George to show that the aim is not to improve student writing but to engage students in “analysis of the unequal power relations that produce and are produced by cultural practices and institutions...and it aims to challenge this inequity” (660). For many Critical/Cultural Studies theorists, academic writing itself is oppressive, rendering students’ own languages “incorrect” and perpetuating unequal systems of power and privilege by rewarding those whose cultural “ways with words” match the university’s white middle or upper class language practices (S. Miller, Crowley, Stuckey).

Lastly, Fulkerson divides Procedural Rhetoric into three subcategories: argumentation, genre-based composition, and composition as an introduction to an academic discourse community (671). Argumentation treats writing as an argument made to a reader; arguments are characterized by rhetorical moves that should be made explicit to students. Genre-based composition teaches genre as typified forms arising from a rhetorical exigence within a discourse community. In contrast to the old notion offered in Current/Traditional Rhetoric of genre as static form, here genre is seen as socially constructed and intertextual. Genre are “culturally determined patterns” (Fulkerson 675) that are nevertheless in constant flux as writers respond to on-going changes within their discourse communities. Finally, composition as an introduction to academic discourse assumes students are outsiders in relation to the academic community. The goal is to provide opportunities for students to read, write, and think as their college teachers will expect them to do. Thus they are to learn the rhetorical conventions that will help them be successful in college (678).

Fulkerson goes on to discuss how each of these four approaches merge and diverge along four axes: evaluative theory (what is good writing?), views of writing process, views of pedagogy, and epistemology. His four by four grid, far from reducing composition studies to a tidy typology, reveals an increasingly complex field within which there is serious disagreement over the goal of writing in college (679).

My use of the term “cross-course” rather than “interdisciplinary” connections in my study is not due, however, to the diverse views within the field. All disciplines by their very nature are sites of strongly contested ideas and values, many of which are imported from other disciplines. The common notion that disciplines are unified fails to acknowledge the variety of practices and on-going arguments over what constitutes the discipline. Any university discipline is a site of struggle over the criteria for legitimate membership and over the status of ideas and values (Klien, Elan, Paxon).

The difficulty with assessing “interdisciplinary” connections in learning communities that include composition lies in how composition is taught. First, as Fulkerson’s article shows, what faculty actually teach, and how, in any course labeled “first-year composition,” can vary widely. However, Joseph Petraglia claims that, regardless of approach, composition is unified by the idea that writing is a set of rhetorical skills that can be taught. He and others have recently labeled this instruction “general writing skills instruction” or GWSI (xi). To the degree that GWSI occurs then, composition is taught as a “how to” course rather than as a disciplinary course.

Second, calling first-year composition a “disciplinary” course is problematic because the course does not transmit disciplinary knowledge. Russell, Bawarshi and others have advocated making the course *about* writing, its purposes, and its influence in



various subcultures, including the media, workplace environments, and public institutions. It would use the research on writing conducted over the past 30 years to help students understand the uses of texts and how writing shapes human activities, including power relationships and social behavior (Russell, "Activity" 73). However, the idea of first-year composition as general writing skills instruction is so firmly rooted in higher education that transforming it into a liberal arts course whose purpose, like that of other disciplinary courses, is to transmit disciplinary knowledge, is unlikely.

Third, students in first-year composition are not introduced to disciplinary genres. Russell, C. Miller and others doing research in genre-based composition argue that disciplines are carried on through writing. The particular disciplinary work involved determines how the writing is used. The work, or activity, also changes the writing, its grammar, form, syntax, and so forth. These differences amount to genres, "historically constituted ways of forming and using...writing among the people who carry on an activity" (Russell, "Activity" 58). Often, in addition to genres designed to promote or exhibit learning, what students in an introductory disciplinary course are introduced to are the genres of the discipline, the forms of writing through which the work of the discipline is carried on: students learn to write lab reports in biology, patient charts in nursing, news articles in journalism, and so on. But students in first-year composition are not introduced to the forms of writing used to carry on the discipline of composition.

Finally, using the term "interdisciplinary" connections in my study is problematic because the course as general writing skills instruction has no disciplinary content of its own. As Russell and others have argued, the idea that writing is an autonomous skill that can be taught (as the content of a course called composition) and then applied to all

disciplines and professions that use writing is itself questionable. Many compositionists engaged in a critique of GWSI claim that writing does not exist apart from its use in a particular discourse community. Members in any given community use writing in any number of ways and in the process continually change it into innumerable and ever-evolving genres. Thus learning how to write "means learning to write in ways (genres) those in a [particular] activity write" (Russell, "Activity" 57). Even the writing process appears to be context specific (Freedman and Adam). Many then have concluded that the idea of an autonomous, generalizable literacy that can be taught as the content of first-year composition is a myth. This question of literacy as a generalizable skill has important ramifications for my study since the foundation of learning communities that include writing courses typically rests on the assumed applicability of skills learned in first-year composition to writing in other disciplines. Again, this situation raises important questions. What *are* the views of language underpinning composition courses in learning communities? If cognitive or transmission views are enacted, how are those effecting students' ability to make cross-course connections? What social practices, including interdisciplinary writing practices, are these views of language mediating? How is the theme functioning as an indicator of those practices?

#### History in Learning Communities and Interdisciplinary Writing Practices

As I've noted, these questions pertain as well to disciplinary general education courses in learning communities, like history, although issues related to "disciplinary practice" are somewhat less salient there; language practices in such courses typically do bear some relationship to disciplinary practice. Nevertheless, as I describe in detail in Chapter One, language practices in history education vary widely. Student writing

activities may involve practices akin to or even similar to “real” disciplinary work or they may involve practices located at the furthest boundary of disciplinary activity such as acquiring decontextualized “facts,” and writing and reading what Russell refers to as “highly commodified classroom genres” such as essay exams and textbooks. He notes, “Statements in these commodified genres constitute what is sometimes called the *material or content* of general/liberal education... These ‘facts’ are abstractions to most students most of the time, removed from the concrete life of the discipline...” (“Rethinking” 540). As I’ve noted as well, social practices that involve students in disciplinary activity or, conversely, that enact the transmission of abstract facts, reflect very different underlying assumptions about language. These assumptions and social practices, in turn, like those circulating in composition, affect the potential for interdisciplinary activity and the functionality of the theme.

### The Theme

The purpose of the theme, as stated in the learning community literature, is to provide an improvisational tool, a resource for learning with which students can make meaningful connections between the linked courses. “The point of the theme is to engender coherent interdisciplinarity... learning that is not easily attainable through enrollment in unrelated, stand-alone courses” (Tinto). Generally not theorized in terms of its relationship to language practices, it is widely considered to be *the* salient condition fostering interdisciplinary activity. In their widely used book Creating Learning Communities, Nancy Shapiro and Jodi Levine describe every model—linked courses, clusters, federated courses, coordinated studies, and so on—as typically being organized around a theme. While they make mention of a few courses “without stated themes,”

they note that “themes give students and faculty a head start in building connections between courses” (24). They include as a model the application form submitted by faculty at LaGuardia Community College when proposing new courses; the first question asks: “What central issues or themes will this cluster explore?” (26). MCC’s application form begins with a similar question.

The first reference to the idea of theme-based learning communities appeared in the 1927 introductory bulletin of The Experimental College created by Alexander Mielkejohn at the University of Wisconsin. The theme was “Democracy” and the two-year curriculum focused on fifth-century Athens and nineteenth and twentieth century America. Each was studied through a pedagogy of shared inquiry using “great books” including Plato’s Republic and The Education of Henry Adams (Smith et al. 31).

This theme, however, did not function to promote students’ ability to make interdisciplinary or cross-course connections. Mielkejohn’s program was a-disciplinary. He was convinced that the elective system of undergraduate courses adopted by most universities would lead to the neglect of a coherent general education. The solution to the social and intellectual fragmentation that was on the rise in American higher education, he felt, was to establish a two-year lower division liberal arts program that abolished courses altogether. The theme, democracy, was the basis for a discussion-centered pedagogy designed to encourage students’ capacities for critical thinking and self-direction. They were to learn not what to think but how to think. In this way, the theme contributed to the program’s overarching purpose: to educate students for responsible citizenship.

Joseph Tussman, a student of Mielke's, established a similar program at Berkeley in 1965. In his account of the experience in Experiment at Berkeley, Tussman elaborates on the role of the theme. The book list focused on democracy but it was students' readings that determined the direction of the course. Like Bartholomae and Petrosky's program for basic students, the theme functioned as the subject matter, as a subject of study about which students composed readings. In the process, they engaged in a social construction of knowledge, "inventing," or reading and writing, the course as they went along. "The readings develop[ed] persistent and recurring themes. We did not, however, attempt to organize the reading about these themes...the students respond[ed] differently to different works..." (81). Whereas the program at the University of Pittsburgh, led by Bartholomae and Petrosky, aimed to assimilate students into the culture of the university, the aim of the curriculum in these early learning communities was to assimilate students into the culture of democracy. Tussman wrote,

...democracy imposes on everyone...a political vocation....this vocation demands a special education....the curriculum must be concerned with central moral, political, or social problems, it must be concerned with initiation into the great, political vocation. (105,120)

Because this vocation was democratic, initiation was not to be confused with uncritical acceptance. "This initiation...is the precondition of genuine dissent. It provides the understanding without which 'dissent' cannot raise above mere opposition" (Tussman 102).

As learning communities spread to other institutions, the nature and function of the theme changed. A few reform efforts in the 1960s continued to structure programs around a-disciplinary, year-long courses designed to educate students for civic life. However, the power of disciplinary knowledge formation and of departmentalization to

organize faculty roles and rewards made interdisciplinary structures unworkable; even those early efforts at the University of Wisconsin and Berkeley proved to be short lived. Subsequent learning community advocates, such as Patrick Hill, focused less on students' "political vocation," although that remained an important goal for many, and more on the social and intellectual fragmentation students were experiencing. At SUNY-Stony Brook, Hill's federated learning community program "federated" existing courses around an integrating seminar and theme. Themes reflected important social and civic problems of the day (Smith 51). Throughout the 80s and 90s, as learning community programs were established in a variety of institutional environments, additional new interdisciplinary models developed. Today, for example, urban community colleges may link courses through team planning (not necessarily team teaching) and through themes related to working and living in contemporary American cities (Smith 52). In many institutions, themes are wholly utilitarian, creating potential connections only between courses, without reference to larger cultural issues. "The Developing Child," "Freud and Fiction," and "British Politics and Poetry" are a few examples.

At a 1994 conference, Tussman decried these contemporary themes, asking, "Where are the great moral questions?" (Smith 41). But claims for learning communities and their themes have always been predominantly instrumental in nature. As Julie Klein notes, most instrumental projects involve bridge-building, one of two metaphors for interdisciplinarity posited by the Nuffield Foundation, a multidisciplinary center for health education and research. Bridge-building projects are aimed at solving social and technical problems. Restructuring, the other metaphor, involves critique, "critical reflection on problem choice, the epistemology of the disciplines being used, or...the

prevailing structure of knowledge” (Klein 11). Writers like Diane Elan and Jeff Peck engage in this kind of critical interdisciplinarity, using deconstruction and feminism to reconfigure interdisciplinarity as a kind of connectedness that can help students see the representational nature of disciplinary texts and thus resist the often totalizing claims of disciplinary knowledge and world views. Similarly, Gerald Graff describes new programs at Syracuse University, Carnegie Mellon, and Queens College designed to foreground differences between disciplinary ways of knowing. Quoting the Syracuse program’s newsletter, he notes the aim there is “to make students aware of how knowledge is produced” so they can better “intervene in the dominant discourses of their culture” (186). Such restructuring efforts, however, remain at the margins of the learning community movement.

While the learning community movement is not monolithic, it is safe to say that Miekkeljohn, Tussman, Hill and its other leaders have been predominantly bridge-builders, concerned with solving the central problems of general education. For Miekkeljohn and Tussman, the theme of democracy served to bind together lower division education into an integrated, coherent program designed to liberate student minds and prepare them for responsible citizenship. Hill created federated courses as an antidote to curricular fragmentation, courses designed to help students see interdisciplinary connections and conflicts. (While students may become more aware of epistemological differences among disciplines, this not the same as epistemological or representational critique.) As Julie Klein notes, the current overarching climate of general education reform is pragmatic; she describes most current reforms as “renovative rather than radical” (34). Reformers are motivated by a desire to re-energize liberal arts by creating

greater curricular coherence and teaching higher-order thinking skills such as integration and synthesis (Klein 34). Klein accurately situates the center of the learning community movement when she describes those sandwiched between older positivisms and more radical postmodern views, those who “locate themselves in the middle ground of harmonious interaction” (Klein 15).

The instrumental claims of theme-based learning communities extend, of course, to those that link composition and introductory general education courses. The function of the theme is to facilitate “interdisciplinary connections” in order to: 1) help students perceive the relevance of composition to their writing in other courses, 2) improve student writing, in part by providing occasions and contexts for writing, and 3) foster students’ ability to see relationships and integrate material across course boundaries. The difficulty, as I’ve suggested, is that the theme as an improvisational tool for fostering interdisciplinary activity, is dependent on social practices mediated by views of language that grant students the agency required for improvisational development (Lave). To the degree that social practices are enacting cognitive models of language and learning, in either composition or disciplinary general education courses, interdisciplinary activity, including genred writing performances, are likely to be constrained. The theme, in and of itself, cannot build bridges across course boundaries, but its functionality can serve as an indicator of the language practices being performed or enacted.

Brief Description of Research Site and Methodology (See Chapter Four for a full description)

In order to examine the language practices, including the functionality of the theme, in general education learning communities that include composition, I conducted



a case study of the learning community “The Power of the Past,” using ethnographic research methods. As LeCompte and Preissle point out, ethnography is an emergent and fluid method of research with “as many approaches...in research in education as there are practitioners of the craft” (1). Generally, though, ethnographers enter a cultural scene—or activity system—as participant-observers in order to ask, as Clifford Geertz notes, “What’s going on here?” (qtd. in Woolvard and McCarthy 19). Using an ethnographic research design in my case study allowed me to enter into the two interacting activity systems that comprised the learning community and acquire a first-hand account of “what went on there,” in its real-world, natural setting. As a participant-observer, I was able to observe and study the “total phenomena” (LaCompte and Preissle 3), the rich context of the two integrated courses, or systems, their participants, tools (including genre), rules, values, objectives, goals, divisions of labor, conditions fostering zones of proximal development, conflicts and contradictions (see Chapter Two for a complete description of these elements of activity theory). While I focused mainly on writing, I did so within the “total phenomena” of the learning community. As Wendy Bishop notes, ethnographic writing research methods include the study of, not just student writing, but its larger context, how individuals “are asked to write and perceive those jobs or academic assignments and carry them out” (1).

In the tradition of educational ethnography, as it is typically conceived, I engaged in the following generally agreed-upon methods as I conducted my case study: participant-observation; data collection from multiple sources, including field notes; recursive analysis; and triangulation of findings. As I’ve noted, I selected “The Power of the Past” learning community as my research site because it is a well-established course

and because it links two general education courses, including composition, in a fully integrated learning community model. As a participant-observer, I attended all class sessions, taking down virtually word-for-word field notes using my lap top computer. My participation included taking detailed lecture notes along with the students, as well as limited participation in their small group activities. My aim was to gain an insider's view of the activity system of each course and of the learning community as a whole. Using activity/genre theory as an observational lens, I looked for evidence of underlying assumptions about language and the social practices they were mediating. I also looked for moments of expanding participation within and between courses, times when students were engaged or disengaged, times when the students were making cross-course connections with or without the theme, and times when students were failing to make connections and were experiencing conflicts.

In terms of data collection, I engaged in a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. I used an initial student survey to gather writing history and beginning course perceptions from the students. I also conducted audio-taped interviews with the two faculty members and with the eleven students who agreed to participate in my study. I conducted three interviews with the instructors, spaced out over the course of the semester. The interviews included questions about the degree and method of connectedness and separation between the courses, their rationale for designing genred performances, their approaches to teaching, how they viewed the students as writers, and how they saw the theme functioning in their courses and between the courses in the learning community. Later questions evolved from my observations and from the interviews I had conducted with the students. I also conducted two audio-

taped, one-on-one interviews and two audio-taped focus group interviews with the students in my study. The one-on-one interviews were largely text-based interviews. I collected all of the students' major writing assignments, including drafts, and essay exams and looked for evidence of the language practices enacted in the course and of the functionality of the theme. I also sought evidence of expanding participation in the two courses, of cross-course connections, and of student motives and subjectivities. The interviews included questions about their perceptions of their identities as writers, their rationale for writing decisions, their motivations, and their perceptions of how the theme was functioning. During the focus-group interviews, I used open-ended questions about the writing they were producing in the two courses, including whether they saw their writing connecting the courses and how they perceived the theme functioning. I wanted the students to take the lead and do most of the talking so that I might discover more than a list of prepared questions would reveal. My moderating questions evolved from themes and issues emerging in my observations and previous interviews. The instructors and students who agreed to participate signed permission and confidentiality forms stating that their participation was voluntary and that their identities would remain confidential.

I used these classroom observations, surveys, instructor interviews, student text-based interviews, student focus groups, and paper collection in order to fully observe the activity system of each course and how the activity systems interacted dialectically. Since, as Russell notes, such systems are characterized by the complex relations of subjects and tools (such as writing) as they are historically and dialectically mediated by the community and by other activity systems, I needed to be in a position to observe and record those complex relations. As Creswell notes, "Researchers make use of multiple

and different sources, methods, investigations, and theories to provide corroborating evidence... Typically this process involves corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective” (202).

Following Creswell’s description of phenomenological data analysis advanced by Moustakes, I proceeded with data analysis first by *describing* the data I had collected, looking for evidence related to my research questions. Next, I *classified* the data, “taking the text or qualitative information apart, looking for categories, themes, or dimensions of information” (Creswell 144). Specifically, I looked for emerging evidence of the social practices enacted and the views of language mediating those practices. I looked to see how the theme was functioning to foster appropriation of concepts or genres across course boundaries in student writing and to enhance student engagement. Emerging categories of evidence associated with concept and genre use and appropriation within and across course boundaries, in turn, indicated underlying assumptions about language and learning. The third stage of qualitative or ethnographic research described by Creswell is *interpretation* which “involves making sense of the data” (144). I used the lens of activity and genre theory to help determine what the data meant in relation to my questions and why those meanings mattered. Finally, I triangulated my findings by making sure I saw evidence for my interpretations in multiple sources of data.

#### Significance of this Dissertation

- 1) My study extends the work done by Patricia Harms in her dissertation, which examines a learning community linking first-year composition to a pre-professional engineering course, in several ways. My study, like Patricia Harms’, provides a model for more substantive assessment of student learning in learning

communities. To date, assessment has been limited to student retention rates, student GPAs, and student perceptions of curricular coherence. However, Russell's synthesis of activity theory and genre theory provides a useful lens for examining how the learning community structure does or does not facilitate students' ability to appropriate communication tools across course boundaries. My study also extends the empirical research provided in Harms' dissertation by examining student learning and literacy in a learning community that links two general education courses. Learning communities were originally created to foster curricular coherence within general education programs and most learning communities continue to combine general education courses. My study furnishes evidence of ways learning communities are and are not fulfilling their original purpose. Moreover, because the study looks at a fully integrated, team-taught learning community, known as a coordinated studies model, it provides evidence of the cross-course connections students are and are not able to achieve under that structure.

- 2) This study explores important questions regarding the underlying assumptions about language and learning mediating social practices in learning communities. It reveals the ways in which positivist or cognitive views of language may be prohibiting interdisciplinary practice as evidence in student writing, and may be negatively impacting student attitudes toward learning. It further sheds light on how social views of language can effect student agency and participation in ways that contribute to both interdisciplinary activity and student motivation.

- 3) Taken for granted as *the* condition enabling students to see relationships across course boundaries and to integrate course content, the theme is an integral part of learning communities (Smith et al., Tinto, Shapiro). The study sheds light on the specific conditions that foster students' ability to make cross-course connections by examining the role of the theme in learning communities. Specifically, the study investigates the functionality of the theme as an indicator of the underlying assumptions about language mediating social practices in learning communities and how those language practices are affecting students' ability to make cross-course connections.
- 4) The study examines the claim made in the literature that learning communities foster greater student engagement. Presumably, the intellectual stimulation afforded by the exchange of concepts and methods across course boundaries, typically through the use of theme as an improvisational tool, results in students investing more of themselves in their learning. Russell's activity theory provides a means of assessing this affective dimension of student experience. Through their expanding participation in an activity system, such as a course or a discipline, students may perceive their learning as having "use value" rather than merely "exchange value," important concepts in activity theory. They may see the knowledge work of the course as valuable to them personally or professionally rather than as just the means to a grade. This study, using the lens of activity theory, provides evidence of how the learning community structure, and the theme, effect student engagement.

- 5) This study contributes to the literature on WAC/WID, in this case by providing useful information about first-year students writing in two general education courses, first-year composition and Survey of Early Western Civilization. First-year students have not been featured in most WAC/WID studies so this study contributes further to that arena. Moreover, the study extends research on the effect that linking a first-year composition course to a general education course has on students' learning and literacy and on their motivation to learn.
- 6) Finally, the study helps to assess the explanatory power of activity/genre theory to describe both students' and teachers' experiences in interdisciplinary learning environments. As Russell points out, activity/genre theory can reveal contradictions within and between activity systems such as courses, contradictions which can include language practices. My study further investigates the difficulties or contradictions students may experience in applying writing skills learned in one class to writing in other venues. It also further explores contradictions in faculty approaches to teaching and assessing writing. Studies of learning communities have not examined how all of these contradictions may be resulting in student frustration or the effect of that frustration on students' developing literacy and learning.

In the next chapter, I provide a literature review of the three areas germane to my study: learning communities, WAC/WID, and history education.

## CHAPTER ONE: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

My exploration of student writing in Midwestern Community College's history and freshman composition learning community, "The Power of the Past," contributes to three areas of research: learning communities, Writing Across the Curriculum/Writing Across the Disciplines (WAC/WID), and history education. Below is a review of the literature in each area which is designed to foreground issues that pertain to my study and to locate my findings within the context of on-going research and scholarship in these arenas.

### Learning Communities:

Central to the cross-disciplinary goals of the learning community movement is writing. Typically developed as part of general education programs, the clustered or linked courses are frequently created with first-year students in mind and include a freshman composition course as an integral part of the learning community. Learning communities that link composition to general education aim to: 1) help students perceive the relationship of composition to their writing in other courses; 2) improve student writing, in part by providing occasions and contexts for writing; and 3) foster students' ability to see relationships and integrate material across course boundaries. The theme ostensibly aids this integrative process. Even if no composition course per se is included in the learning community, writing is central to displaying understanding, to connecting the disciplines, to meaning-making, and to constructing knowledge in these courses. As Tim McLaughlin point out, writing teachers often play central roles, "not only as learning



community organizers but as creators of connective tissue between courses” (qtd in Zawacki and Williams, 113).

Despite the central role of writing in learning community objectives, very little if any analysis of student writing has occurred, including underlying assumptions about language in learning communities that may be fostering or constraining interdisciplinary activity. While most, although not all, studies, seem to assume that writing is a transportable set of skills, such assumptions are never made explicit or examined. To date, student writing even as a measure of overall student success in learning communities has rarely been analyzed. Zawacki and Williams’ report of assessment at New Century College is typical. “We have rarely seen listed as criteria for measuring learning communities either growth in students’ writing abilities or faculty growth in using writing in their teaching” (128). Instead, success in learning communities is most often measured in terms of retention, grades, and self-perceived growth and satisfaction on the part of students. Traditional criteria for measuring “good writing” such as structure, organization, support, style, mechanics, etc., when it is used, tends to be inconclusive, often revealing little or no difference in student writing in learning communities compared to that produced in standard freshman composition. Mimi Bernard’s study of freshman at Abilene Christian University revealed that “learning community students did not differ significantly from non-learning-community students in pre/post scores of writing aptitude” (Taylor et al. 84). Typically, George Mason University’s Office of Institutional Planning and Research concluded that “the question of whether students in linked courses perform better in writing remained unanswered” (Zawacki and Williams 130).

As part of the National Learning Communities Project, supported by the PEW Charitable Trusts, the American Association of Higher Education with the Washington Center recently published a series of fifteen monographs on learning communities. Two of the monographs are devoted to research and assessment and reveal that very little if any research has looked at the interdisciplinary nature of writing, at how the integrating theme is functioning in that writing as an improvisational tool to help students make interdisciplinary or cross-course connections, or at how such writing is constructing student literacy. In Learning Community Research and Assessment: What We Know Now (2004), four authors surveyed 32 formal dissertations, theses, and single-institution research studies, 8 multiple-institution research studies, and 119 single-institution assessment reports. Among the 40 dissertations, theses, and research studies, they noted “very little description was provided about the nature of curricular connections made among the classes...”(Taylor et al. 8). Moreover, few looked at student writing or any other specific learning outcomes: “...very few examined learning gains through student performance on standardized tests or demonstrations of knowledge and abilities through locally designed assignments” (Taylor et al. 9). Most focused on academic achievement as measured by grades and GPA’s, course completion and retention, and student perceptions (Taylor et al. 8). The monograph provides detailed annotated bibliographies for all 40 studies. Where writing in learning communities is mentioned, it is either in the context of students who self-reported improved writing abilities or in reference to comparative aptitude tests and student portfolios. In the latter cases, the results are either inconclusive or not included in the bibliography. More tellingly, interdisciplinarity and the role of the integrating theme are never discussed in the context of writing. When

curricular coherence is mentioned, in every case, it is reported as a student perception. Students interviewed by Pat Russo, for instance, indicated they “embraced new ideas about how knowledge is constructed” and “made connections...across disciplines” (Taylor et al. 80). Lori Walker-Guyer reports that students she interviewed claimed they had developed “a systematic world perspective (seeing the world as a system of interrelated connections)” (Taylor et al. 79).

Among the 119 single-institution assessment reports, very few looked at student writing, much less the role or functionality of the coordinating theme in that writing and what it might indicate about language practices. Students at Stony Brook University self-reported that “linking courses with the central theme improved their understanding of issues” (Taylor et al. 38). Students surveyed at Iowa State University were “more likely in learning communities than in regular courses to see connections among courses” (Taylor et al. 42). Students at the University of Northern Colorado, University of Massachusetts, Western Washington University, LaGuardia Community College, and many other institutions self-reported similar perceptions. But no one has looked for evidence of these connections in student writing. Only 18% “used measures other than self-report to assess learning gains or intellectual development” (Taylor et al.19). Among the 18% that did look at student work were Portland State University, which examined writing portfolios; College of the Desert, which analyzed reading and writing test scores; and California State University, Hayward, which looked at junior year writing exam results. Portland State used conventional measures of good writing such as correctness, sufficient development, clear organization and the like. They also measured factors such as “complexity of thought” and “critical judgment” in student portfolios but there was no

attempt to tie these aspects of writing to the interdisciplinary nature of the course or to interdisciplinary or theme-based aspects of student writing. Sally Murphy at Cal. State Hayward indicated their assessment “did not look at all at interdisciplinary learning” in student writing (email dated September, 2005). These were typical of the approaches to writing research among the 18% of institutions that looked at student writing. None examined student writing as constructed within a uniquely complex, multiple-course, context, one typically including a coordinating theme.

In the second monograph published by the American Association of Higher Ed, Doing Learning Community Assessment: Five Campus Stories, the same dearth of information is evident about how curricular connections and the functionality of the theme are revealed in student writing. Temple University reports student perceptions that “courses were related to each other” (Laufgraben 10). Iowa State, likewise, used student surveys to measure “connections among classes” (Huba et al. 34). At the University of South Florida a rubric called the Cognitive Level and Quality of Writing Assessment (CLAQWA) was developed for examining “higher-order thinking” in student writing, meaning analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Flateby 56). But there is no mention of how or why these elements might relate to the interdisciplinary nature of the writing site ([www.usf.edu/ugrads/CLAQWA](http://www.usf.edu/ugrads/CLAQWA)). Skagit Valley Community College, which requires that all students take a learning community that links composition with a disciplinary or other general education course, also used student retention and persistence to justify the degree requirement. Skagit made use of another assessment tool commonly used to examine student growth in learning communities, the Measure of Intellectual Development. This tool uses W.G. Perry’s work and measures students’ thinking on a

scale ranging from dualistic through contextual relativism to committed relativism ([www.evergreen.edu/washcenter/resources/acl/iid.html](http://www.evergreen.edu/washcenter/resources/acl/iid.html)). But no examination took place of how writing in these complex contexts influences students' intellectual development. Skagit's report concluded that "the studies were less clear with regard to the effects of learning communities and writing links on learning" (Dunlap and Stanwood 82). Finally, as I noted above, Portland State University makes extensive use of student portfolios to assess a number of learning community outcomes, one of which is writing (Paton et al. 99) ([www.pdx.edu/unst/goals.html](http://www.pdx.edu/unst/goals.html)). However, none of those outcomes is examined in the context of learning communities as multiple discursive rhetorical sites for learning and writing.

Without a doubt, the most notable and prolific researcher of learning communities has been Vincent Tinto, Professor of Education at Syracuse University. Together he and his research associates, Anne Goodsell-Love and Pat Russo, have published innumerable research articles, providing evidence of the benefits of learning communities. While Tinto, Love, and Russo's use of both quantitative and qualitative research methods has provided much of the available evidence for higher GPAs and increased retention among learning community students, they, too, have not examined how the model as a unique social and rhetorical site, including the role played by a connecting theme, has affected student writing or literacy. Typically, students in their studies self-report making cross-course connections. "CSP [learning community program] students reported that they learned concepts more effectively by seeing them presented from perspectives that crossed content areas... (Tinto et al. 20). Also typically, Tinto et al. note in a similar

study that “we did not obtain information about learning... either of content or of skills (e.g. critical thinking, etc.)...” (20).

In her survey of engineering education literature, Patricia Harms found several programs that linked composition to engineering courses but, again, no studies that examined students’ ability to make cross-course connections in their writing. Harms found writing to be an area of vital interest to engineering faculty and administration. In 2000, the Accreditation Board. for Engineering and Technology included the ability to communicate effectively in its outcomes criteria for students (31). As a result, many engineering programs have developed curricula that foreground writing, for both first-year and upper-level students, including learning community courses that link writing and engineering courses. Harms profiles two notable endeavors, one at MIT and one at Utah State, but found that, again, empirical evidence of students’ abilities to make cross-course connections is lacking. “Students’ abilities to transfer communication or writing skills to other settings were not addressed...” (28). Faculty and administrators at other institutions, including the Colorado School of Mines, West Virginia University, and Northwestern University report higher persistence and graduate rates for students in integrated programs and students self-reported positive perceptions (29-31) but no substantive assessment of students’ interdisciplinary activity as seen in their writing has occurred in these programs.

In their recent seminal book which provides the most comprehensive look at the learning community movement to date, Smith et al summarize J. Gaff’s review of important new reforms in general education, which include an emphasis on student writing (136). They go on to discuss, however, the paucity of research that examines

student writing in learning communities and the effect of interdisciplinary course work on student learning and literacy. They note that “at this point, learning community assessment has not identified what practices make a significant difference to students or to their demonstrated learning” (262). Interestingly enough, in a section of the book that offers assessment advice to beginners, a lengthy table titled “Strategies Used to Portray Learning Community Outcomes for Students” includes the usual types of evidence: GPAs, retention data, and student surveys. Under the subheading “Achievement and Demonstration of Learning Outcomes,” new learning community faculty and administrators are encouraged to gather the following: GPAs in learning communities, grade distribution patterns, GPAs in subsequent courses, rates of successful entry into majors, pass rates on proficiency exams, student self-evaluations, and portfolios of student work (254). How the latter, student portfolios, are to be used isn’t explained. Thus, even while the authors recognize the need for assessment that examines the specific kinds of learning students are experiencing and demonstrating in interdisciplinary courses, they continue to encourage assessment practices that, for the most part, focus on easily quantifiable measures of student progress but that say nothing about the nature of student learning and writing in complex, multiple-course settings. Such advice is useful as a starting point for justifying new learning community courses to stakeholders, but the lack of strategies for more substantive assessment, even in seminal books and articles, speaks to the need for models that can provide empirical evidence of cross-course connections in student learning and writing and the conditions including underlying assumptions about language that enable those connections.

Making Connections: Implications for WAC/WID

Both learning communities and WAC/WID are defined by their focus on pedagogy, on promoting active student engagement, largely through writing. Both movements also view writing as central to student learning. Learning communities that link freshman composition with a disciplinary course, like the one in my study, fall under the WAC/WID umbrella. As Zawacki and Williams argue, "...WAC may be most fully realized within the learning community movement..."(37).

One central issue in WAC/WID is students' abilities to perceive coherence between writing learned and practiced in one situation and writing in another situation. Since the early 1980s, as I've noted theorists and researchers have stressed the situational aspects of writing. It has become increasingly clear that each instance of writing is profoundly shaped and influenced by its socio-cultural context (Freedman, C. Miller, Freedman, etc.) This research has, in turn, raised important questions about the transferability of writing skills learned in one arena to writing performed in another. Many studies examine what happens to students as they transition from educational settings to workplace settings (Freedman, Adam and Smart; Dias and Pare, Anson and Forsberg, etc.). Studies also address students' abilities to apply writing experiences across courses, many of which focus on upper-level undergraduates and graduate students, like "Dave" in Lucille Parkinson McCarthy's study and "Nate" in Berkenkotter, Huckin, and Ackerman's study. Increasingly, researchers are examining the experiences of undergraduates as well as they negotiate writing demands across general education courses.

In "Stranger in Strange Lands," Lucille Parkinson McCarthy follows a Loyola student, Dave, as he negotiates writing tasks first in Freshman Composition in his



freshman year and then in Introduction to Poetry and Cell Biology in his sophomore year. Her findings contradict an earlier study by Odell, et al that reports “students perceived the same circumstances for writing regardless of the course they were writing for” (Herrington 121). McCarthy reports that although the writing tasks in each course were quite similar, Dave perceived them to be utterly different from each other and from any writing he had done previously (135). His primary concern in first-year composition was on coherence between thesis and paragraphs, within paragraphs, and within sentences. In Poetry, Dave’s focus was not on coherence but on the, for him, new ways of thinking and writing in the course—primarily interpretation and proper quoting. In Biology, he focused on the, again for him, new conventions of writing in that situation—learning new terms and mastering the conventions of the experimental report (137). McCarthy shows that in Poetry, Dave’s preoccupation with “correct” literary interpretation interfered with his ability to apply the thesis-subject analytical structure he had learned in composition and he was unable to move beyond summary. In Biology, Dave was unable to recognize the assigned task, an article summary, as one he had performed many times in composition. McCarthy concludes, “...skills mastered in one situation, such as the thesis-subpoint organization in Freshman Composition, did not...automatically transfer to new contexts...” (152).

Similarly, Anne Herrington’s research on writers in two chemical engineering courses reveals students experiencing the same difficulty applying writing conventions across courses, even within the same discipline. Her focus on seniors makes this finding even more striking since students at that level should be well acculturated within the academy and its discourse, especially within their major. Her study reveals, however,

that the two courses, even though they were in the same discipline, involved students in writing about different issues to different audiences within different forums using different lines of reasoning for different social purposes. Students writing within the school-dominated context of the Lab course had difficulty applying those writing experiences to the more professional-dominated context of the Design course. Herrington states, “The findings from this study lead us to rethink some of our assumptions about the monolithic nature of writing in academic settings” (119).

Unlike studies which focus on upper class students, in “Cross-Curricular Underlife,” Susan Miller, together with five student informant/researchers, describe how the students used language in first-year introductory general education courses, and how those uses differed from those that the students typically experienced in first-year composition. The researchers found that cultural differences between general education and courses in composition constrained students’ ability to apply learning across course boundaries. In the study, Miller’s five collaborators began as students in her first-year writing course. Subsequently, they enrolled in a wide range of introductory general education courses, including history. Although simultaneously doing research on literacy and learning, the students were principally students in the courses, selecting them because they fulfilled university requirements for general education or for their majors.

As researchers, the students engaged in close observation of in-class and class-related “language interactions” using as a guide a list of questions that included: ‘How do you use the time you spend in class? What does the teacher do during the class? What do the other students do? What do you do outside of class in relation to each course? (Worth 34). Miller and the students observed that the literacy practices they

engaged in composition were very different from those they encountered in other courses. “The ‘discourse community’ defined in composition was rarely reproduced later....” (Worth 11). In this case, however, the researchers concluded that differences in culture and values, more than differences in disciplinary writing conventions, hampered students’ efforts to apply what they had learned in composition. In composition, the students had participated in collaboration and sharing and felt they were competing only against themselves. In other lower-division general education courses, they perceived a very different ethos at work, one that valued private, independent, and competitive activity (Worth 17). Much of the writing students engaged in was for the purpose of displaying extant knowledge to the teacher for evaluation. They write, “These settings might be distinguished according to...values about participating in knowledge-making that differ from those modeled in English” (Worth 12). Miller notes that these two factors, the university requirement and the students’ intellectual isolation, led to a variety of reactions to the general education courses and their language practices: distance, anger, humor, cynicism, frustration, sleepiness, and strategic maneuvering (Worth 27). She concludes that her course, while useful to the students in some ways, failed to prepare them for the teaching and learning, the discourse communities, they encountered the following semester. Although the students reported that they did learn in their general education courses, Miller felt she failed to teach them to value those discourses as rhetorical situations. She notes that, “neither the content of Writing 210 nor the course conduct that contains it matches, in any essential way, the pedagogical/cultural values that shape and limit knowledge in other introductions to the academically literate workplace” (Worth 29).

McCarthy points to new contexts and Herrington to disparate discourse communities within disciplines as factors constraining students' ability to apply literacy concepts across general education course boundaries. Cheryl Geisler, like Miller's group, suggests that differing values related to knowledge-making are key barriers. Unlike Miller, however, who suggests that faculty in composition should help students understand and value as rhetorical situations the literacy activities typically practiced in general education courses, Geisler argues that such practices are not, for the most part, rhetorical in nature. She notes that the increasingly specialized nature of knowledge production has resulted in a schism or "Great Divide" between experts and laypeople (102) so that learning already-amassed knowledge is now the job of students while creating new knowledge is the purview of academic professionals (102). The purpose of general education, as a result, has become the transfer of knowledge (117). Hence students in general education courses typically write either to acquire existing knowledge or to display knowledge learned for a teacher to evaluate (103). Citing extensive research, Geisler demonstrates that students are most often asked to write the "school essay" which may involve summary, synthesis and/or research writing but which, for the most part, is constructed from already existing texts. Geisler states, "Interestingly, almost all of these student texts are based on other writers 'texts'" (104). This in turn leads students to engage in a very cursory writing process. "As studies have repeatedly shown, students tend to write quickly, attend to low-level details...and then turn the essay in" (107). Also citing extensive research, Geisler goes on to argue that the kind of process-rich, extended analytical writing often taught by writing instructors is a poor way to acquire the school knowledge required in most general education courses (111). If the

goal is higher level thinking, then extended, critical reflection is beneficial but, as Geisler points out, “reviews have begun to acknowledge more openly the inappropriateness of using extended writing for the kind of learning typically required in academic settings” (115).

At the heart of Geisler’s article is her distinction between learning information and writing as socially constituted practice. Writing, she points out, demands some learning but the passive transmission of information and values renders sterile the rhetorical exigence that motivates writing. “We write,” she notes, “both to contribute to and to counter the current trajectory of our culture” (116). If general education’s purpose is indeed the consumption of knowledge, then there’s no need to teach writing as rhetorical or knowledge-making. If, as some believe, the purpose of general education is to engage students in the language practices of professionals, writing instructors are unqualified to teach professional discourses (117-118). Geisler proposes a reinvention of general education as a site for “lay production” (118) or the education of public intellectuals. Writing and learning in general education then would include both the consumption and construction of knowledge and would serve to bridge the divide between experts and the general public.

Both Miller’s and Geisler’s views of current rights to knowledge-making in the academy have implications for learning communities that link composition to general education “content” courses. Are students in these learning communities experiencing a cultural divide between the two courses? Is an ethos of collaboration and sharing valued in one course while one of private, independent and perhaps competitive activity is assumed in the other? Are students asked to make knowledge by one teacher and asked

to display knowledge by the other? Is writing assigned in one course for epistemological and social/rhetorical purposes and assigned in the other for transmission and evaluation purposes? Are students reacting to the language practices in one course with interest and engagement and to the other, as did Miller's group, with distance and tactical maneuvering? If students are experiencing such a schism, and my study suggests they may be, how are these differing views of language mediating social practices enacted in the learning community, including use of the theme? Devised by Mickeljohn to alleviate the effects of the knowledge specialization Geisler describes, specifically curricular fragmentation and the lack of student interest in general education courses, theme-based learning communities claim to increase course integration and student engagement. To date, no studies have examined the literacy activities, especially writing, practiced in learning communities linking composition and general education courses and their underlying views of language. No one has looked at how those activities are or are not helping students make connections across course boundaries, boundaries that often delineate more than just genre conventions but whole cultures, including rights to knowledge-making, purposes for writing, and values toward collaboration and competition.

Aviva Freedman takes a related but different tack in her discussion of students' difficulties applying concepts learned in composition to other writing situations in the academy, one that also has implications for my study. She argues that students learn to write in lower and upper academic courses largely through immersion in the context-rich discourse community of the class and discipline, which immersion then facilitates the tacit assimilation of the community's complex rules for communication. She cites

extensive research and theory from various fields, including rhetoric, genre studies, situated learning and language acquisition. She refers to Burke's point that texts are "symbolic actions" that can be understood only in terms of the rhetorical milieu in which they arise, and to Bitzer's idea that texts answer rhetorical situations and imperatives (123). Carolyn Miller, Freedman adds, points to the compelling nature of genuinely rhetorical acts, how they originate in a felt sense of social exigence (124). Genre theorists including Bakhtin add to these theories the phenomenon of rhetorical recurrence of conventional forms. Thus, discourse acquisition, including genre conventions, Freedman argues, occurs when individuals are immersed in the context, in the "ambient social language," of the discourse community and then respond by "ventriloquating" the generic structures available to them in accordance with their own motives or exigencies (124). Citing situated learning and language acquisition research, Freedman adds that individuals, or students, learn, not through the transmission of concepts, but through participation and performance in the discourse, motivated by a compelling intention, and guided by a knowledgeable expert, the teacher. These performances provide opportunities for novices to apply the rules they have tacitly acquired through immersion in the local context, that is, the class and discipline.

James Paul Gee makes a similar argument when he distinguishes between Secondary Discourses and Primary Discourses. Primary Discourses are those through which we become participants of particular families and cultures and through which we form our first identity. Secondary Discourses are those through which we become participants of social institutions, including schools. In discussing how we attain Discourses, Gee separates acquisition from learning. Acquisition occurs through

exposure and practice; learning, on the other hand, involves a conscious reflection on concepts, or “conscious knowledge gained through teaching” (138). Discourses, including Secondary Discourses, he continues, are attained by acquisition, not learning. “If you have no access to the social practice, you don’t get in the Discourse” (139). Learning is a useful way to know about a Discourse but to master a Discourse, acquisition must come first. “Apprenticeship must precede overt teaching” (139). Similarly, Brian Street faults “autonomous” models of literacy which focus on the technical elements of language separate from its cultural context. Street advocates what he calls an “ideological” or sociocultural model which situates language, including its technical aspects, within social contexts, “within cultural wholes and within structures of power” (161). Both Gee and Street, like Freedman, see literacy as tacitly acquired.

In light of her comments on discourse acquisition, Freedman goes on to discuss the teaching/learning environment typical in composition classrooms. Drawing on her own vast research, she concludes that students in composition are typically not immersed in the rhetorically animated context necessary for tacitly-learned discourse acquisition because there is no such context available in composition courses. “The point is that the composition classroom rarely has any of the richly elaborated discursive context of the disciplinary classroom...the paucity of this discursive context is dramatic in comparison to that of the disciplinary class” (136). As a result, students will fall back on other familiar discourses whose conventions and language they will “ventriloquate” such as advertising or subject areas they’ve written or read about before (136). Also as a result, students don’t get the kind of guidance they get in disciplinary courses; there is no



specific, constant discursive or semiotic context within which the teacher can act as expert guide (137).

In contrast, Freedman claims, disciplinary courses provide a discourse-rich context, provided by lectures, reading, and seminars, within which the teacher schools the student. Even when much of the writing students produce in school courses is for display, Freedman argues that this display also involves participation and performance in the discourse inasmuch as students must perform particular ways of knowing deemed valid by the discipline. "...the goal in the school writing was...to provide students with the occasion for developing and demonstrating knowledge of the kinds of arguments (warrants, trains of reasoning) that would be counted as persuasive...within the relevant discourse community" (132).

Freedman recommends that students be provided the context-rich environment they need by disbanding GWSI, or general writing skills instruction, courses and instead teaching writing in conjunction with disciplinary courses. "My claim is that writing can be more effectively taught...by setting up contexts that are ancillary to, and supportive of, what is going on in the disciplinary class; for example...writing-intensive courses (co-taught with composition specialists)" (140). Clearly one solution Freedman is suggesting to the problems students have applying literacy skills learned in one context to activities in another is something akin to learning communities. And indeed, many composition teachers are motivated to link their course to a disciplinary general education course for the very reasons Freedman cites—the lack of an authentic, rhetorically animated context for writing, the ambiguous role this can create for the teacher, the way students then sometimes seek out other familiar discourses to "ventriloquate," a situation

which Freedman notes privileges mainstream students whose discourses are already similar to those used in school. Many composition faculty agree with Freedman that “you cannot write writing. You have to write something to somebody” (137). Indeed, the theme in learning communities sometimes functions to help create the very kind of local context Freedman describes, a context perhaps even more specific than that created by shared disciplinary content. For example, a history and composition learning community focused on the theme “The Human Condition in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century” would ostensibly provide a more delimited discursive frame than would the subject matter of the history course, “History of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.” However, as Miller and Geisler’s work suggests, even linking courses around a theme and infusing composition with disciplinary content may not ensure that students are immersed in a specific discursive context. Even when learning communities are fully coordinated and team taught with both courses sharing the same disciplinary focus, my study suggests that other disparate cultural factors, including underlying views of language, may still be at work causing students to experience a “Great Divide” between composition and disciplinary general education courses. Again, no studies have examined the social practices in theme-based learning communities to determine how they may or may not be creating opportunities for interdisciplinary practice, including writing. Specifically, studies have not examined the link between underlying assumptions about language and cultural differences that may exist between composition and general education courses, differences such as those brought to light by Miller and Geisler--rights to knowledge-making, purposes for writing, and values toward competition and collaboration, differences that may be affecting interdisciplinary activity.

## History Education

When in “Writing and Learning at Cross Purposes in the Academy,” Cheryl Geisler suggests that we can “better design the purposes for which we intend our writing instruction” (103), she is referring to the purposes of general education. Like many others, she notes that writing is inevitably tied to the assumptions and purposes of the culture in which it occurs; thus writing instruction, embedded as it is in general education, reflects the goals and values of general education. But, as is widely recognized, the function of general education in the academy is far from agreed upon and is often debated in either/or terms: students should be educated for informed citizenship or for the workplace; they should gain an understanding of specific disciplinary cultures or gain general knowledge for participation in a common culture; they should consume disciplinary knowledge or create new knowledge.

As a staple of the general education curriculum, undergraduate history education, and the writing therein, reflects this ambiguity of purpose. Just as Herrington concluded in her study of students writing in two chemistry courses, an overview of the literature in history education reveals that here, too, students are often writing about different issues to different audiences within different forums using different lines of reasoning for different social purposes, even in courses within the same discipline. As with Herrington’s study, this state of affairs underscores the difficulty students have applying literacy experiences in one context to the literacy demands in another.

In The Practice of University History Teaching, a collection of articles, editors Booth and Hyland point out how reward systems in higher education, in both Britain and the U.S., continue to privilege specialized history research and publishing over teaching.

As a result, teaching remains undervalued and the history curriculum is still designed primarily in terms of “coverage.” Moreover, excellence in research continues to be equated with excellence in teaching.

Nevertheless, they report, some history faculty have responded to scholarship in teaching that suggests learning should be more student-centered. Initiatives such as student-led seminars, self and peer assessments, and portfolios have made students more active and independent learners. Booth and Hyland point out, however, that often these are refinements to traditional teaching; they are activities that have “not displaced traditional assumptions and practices” (3). In fact, they note that in the U.S. there’s been a “backlash” among faculty reasserting the importance of knowing subject matter over skills development (e.g. analysis, critical thinking, collaboration, communication skills, etc.), reasserting the primacy of the teacher as expert, and of essays and essay exams as the most effective means of assessment (4). They, too, see this controversy as rooted in the ambiguous function of general education and the resulting either/or language. “All too often the dominant discourse posits a fundamental distinction between traditional ‘liberal’ notions of the subject (... aimed at the training of historians) and ‘vocational’ emphases (... oriented to preparing [under]graduates for the employment market)” (4).

In Chapter Four, in a move similar to Geisler’s, Tim Hitchcock, et al., in an effort to promote more student-centered learning in history, expand the notion of “skill” to include both knowledge consumption and knowledge-making. “Throughout we have defined skills as broadly as possible, in order to include the acquisition of specific bodies of knowledge, as well as the higher levels of analytical expertise...” (47). Subsequently, they elucidate the justification for these skills, giving special emphasis to citizenship:

Perhaps the most obvious...skills...relate to an individual's role as a citizen...At its most basic, a historical education provides students with a shared body of knowledge...and independence of mind in evaluating conflicting interpretations of politics, society, and culture. (48)

Not unlike Geisler, Hitchcock, et al call here, in part, for a conception of undergraduate history education that is “not for lay consumption or expert production, but for...lay production” (Geisler 118) or, in other words, for public intellectuals. “The justification for...history [education] needs to be related to the full life-experiences of our graduates” (47). It's interesting to note that among Geisler and these writers, activity-based “skills” like analysis, synthesis, collaboration and communication are given higher status in undergraduate education than acquiring bodies of knowledge, whereas among those holding more traditional views of history education, the reverse is true. This, again, points to cultural differences students are likely to experience as they move from composition to history and even from one history course to the next, differences in values and purposes for literacy activities similar to those experienced by Susan Miller's group.

Hitchcock et al also note that within higher education, there is typically a range of attitudes and assumptions about language acquisition and the relationship of writing instruction to history education. This range is reflected in the variety of curricular accommodations for “communication skills” within history programs. They note, for instance, that in many programs in Britain, which has no required freshman composition course, generic communication skills are taught in separate units “alongside” history-related skills such as analytical research (52). Similar to our required composition course, this arrangement assumes a transmission theory of generalizable skills. In other programs, generic skills are taught within content-based history courses, but, they note, here too these skills are taught explicitly: “...this aspect of first-year survey units is

becoming increasingly explicit with more time devoted to direct skills teaching” (52). On the other hand, in institutions that maintain tutorials, literacy skills are thought to be acquired “organically” (52) or, in other words, tacitly. These arrangements, too, mirror the state of affairs in the U.S. where history teachers might take time to teach writing or reading “skills” explicitly; more likely, however, they do not, either assuming students will transfer generalizable skills acquired elsewhere or will tacitly acquire the skills needed to be successful in their courses.

Differing assumptions within history education about the purposes for student writing and about language acquisition can likewise be seen in the chapter on the history essay. Dai Hounsell notes that, either as an assignment or as an exam, the essay has long been a staple of undergraduate history courses due principally to its dual role as a means of learning and as an assessment tool. Students write essays, in other words, to “enlarge their knowledge and understanding” (108) and to display knowledge for evaluation purposes. Citing research he conducted, however, Hounsell reports that students differed in their conceptions of the essay’s purpose. Responding to a choice of questions, some students saw the essay as argument, some as expressing a viewpoint (with less need for evidence), and some as arrangement of facts (183-185). Most students conceived of the essay as expressing a viewpoint or arrangement of facts, even when faculty expected them to write arguments. One conclusion that Hounsell draws is that faculty need to make the conventions and purposes of the essay explicit to students and teach those conventions and purposes. Once again, Hounsell’s findings and comments add to the wide range of views of writing in history education. Not only do faculty differ about the purposes for essay writing and whether history literacy is achieved through explicit

teaching or tacit acquisition of writing conventions, but students differ in their understanding of the goals of essay writing in history, despite faculty expectations.

The two studies I describe below, conducted in the U.S., underscore these cultural differences students are likely to experience among undergraduate history courses. One of the studies, authored by Barbara Walvoord and Lucille Parkinson McCarthy, suggests that student behavior and faculty expectations in general education courses, like history, can be seen in terms of roles or performed identities. The researchers observed and named three student “roles:” that of “professional-in-training” which refers to students acting as professionals in the teacher’s field or as professionals in another field, able to utilize knowledge learned in the discipline; these students focused on issues and problems raised in the assignment, presumably disciplinary issues, and employed disciplinary knowledge and methods to address them; “text-processor” which refers to students doing things with texts such as summarizing, synthesizing, etc., but without addressing issues or solving problems; and “layperson,” referring to students who address issues but don’t use the knowledge or methods of the discipline (Walvoord et al 9). These differing roles, interestingly, correspond to a large degree to the ways students were expected to act in the differing cultures that Miller, Geisler, Booth, Hyland and others have observed. Professionals-in-training, for instance, appear to construct knowledge and write for rhetorical purposes. Text-processors appear to consume knowledge and write for display and evaluation. Laypersons seem to produce texts such as book reviews that require, for instance, literary analysis but that don’t employ disciplinary knowledge. (See my discussion of Kathleen Tobin’s article later in this chapter.) Geisler, I suspect, might add

a fourth role, that of “public intellectual-in-training” which would refer to students using disciplinary knowledge and methods to address public, rather than disciplinary, problems.

In Walvoord and McCarthy’s study, they, like Miller and her student researchers, examine writing in introductory general education courses, including history. The six researchers, Walvoord and McCarthy, together with four faculty in different disciplines, posed five research questions, among them: What were the teachers’ expectations for good writing, thinking and learning? What difficulties arose as students tried to meet these expectations? and How did teachers’ and students’ methods and strategies contribute to or alleviate those difficulties? (4). Questions about how students’ writing experiences in composition may have affected the difficulties they faced and the strategies they used were not included although they addressed this issue in their conclusions. In fact, most of the students in the history course were not yet enrolled in freshman composition but planned to take it the following semester. Indeed, Walvoord et al observed that at times the history instructor, John Breihan, was assigning writing designed to prepare the students for composition. For instance, they note that he made frequent mention of the terms “thesis” and “subtheses” and included them on the primary trait analysis checklist for final student essays. “He was consciously relating his course to the required freshman composition course, which his students would take the following semester, in which “thesis” was heavily emphasized” (110). In observing the writing demanded of students in the history class, the researchers noted that Breihan expected the students to adopt a professional-in-training role. That is, even though these students would most likely not major in history, he nevertheless expected them to see history, not as a set of “facts,” but as an on-going process of debate over important issues,



a process that responsible citizens needed to understand and participate in. "...he expected them to use historical material as evidence to argue questions of concern to citizens involved in the public life of the nation" (100). (This sounds to me more like the "public intellectual-in-training" role that Geisler argues for.) Toward that end, Breihan, and the other faculty, valued student writing in six areas, areas in which the students struggled: gathering enough information, constructing an audience and a self in their writing, stating a point of view, using discipline-specific means of arriving at an opinion and supporting it, handling complexity, and organizing a paper (14). As I noted, no substantive examination of how students applied previous writing course experiences, even those in high school, to their writing in these courses, including history, occurred. The researchers point out that they did observe students transferring earlier experience with various writing models and genres, such as "the term paper," from one course to another, sometimes successfully and sometimes not. "Sometimes these models were either inappropriate or the student applied them in ways that were not helpful, but at times, too, the models did serve students well" (233). Unfortunately, in this study, these are cursory observations only. The writers conclude, however, that further study of how students apply writing course instruction to writing in other classes has merit. "It would also be interesting to study further any situation like Loyola where a single model is strongly taught in a freshman composition course, and trace how various students use that model over the years of their schooling, and perhaps afterward as well" (233). They note that McCarthy's study of Dave, also a Loyola student, is a start but that more research is needed to determine if first-year composition is fulfilling its ostensible purpose, preparing students to write in disciplinary courses and in professional settings.

Another study that looks at first-year writing in a general education history class, "Literacy Demands of the Undergraduate Curriculum," reveals students encountering a very different culture. Faculty demanded a very different set of writing tasks than Breihan did in the Walvoord study, writing tasks very similar to those asked of the students in my study. In this instance, students were asked to assume what Walvoord et al. call a text-processing role (9) rather than a professional-in-training role. In History 113, an undergraduate American history course at a major state university, students were asked to engage in a number of literacy skills, namely 1) reading the textbook and their own notes taken from class lectures; 2) writing extensive notes from their reading and from lectures, writing summaries and book reports, and writing answers to essay or short answer exam questions; 3) listening to faculty lectures and occasionally to questions asked by other students; and 4) speaking by participating in infrequent class discussions and by asking questions (Carson et al 32). As in the course I observed, the primary goal of these activities was to display knowledge through writing (Carson et al 34). The researchers found, however, that success in the course depended on a much more complex execution of these skills than might appear to be required. Students could not perform the skills in isolation but had to integrate them. "How and what students read is determined by the writing they will have to do to demonstrate control of course content. How and what students write is dependent on how and what they have read and understood from texts and lectures" (Carson et al 33). The authors concluded that traditional first-year composition courses in which students practice writing discrete rhetorical forms and/or write about personal experiences don't prepare students for other academic writing. Like Susan Miller's group, they state that more writing instruction

should be based on actual classroom requirements. They propose that composition adopt a content-based curriculum that requires students to integrate a range of literacy skills, reading, writing, speaking and listening. Writing instruction, they add, should include essay exams, short-answer questions, note-taking, summaries and the like. They state, “Instruction in writing a standard essay does not ensure that students will be able to generalize the instruction to other types of writing demands” (Carson et al. 38). But there is no evidence in the study that a content-based approach to writing instruction will ensure this transfer of skills to history or any other general education course either. The writers assume that as long as students practice the full range of literacy skills in composition and are asked to integrate them, they will then be familiar with any literacy task they encounter in history or elsewhere and thus will be able to transfer those skills. Interestingly, the authors cite McCarthy’s observations of Dave as an example of many studies that have failed to investigate the full spectrum of skills (Carson et al. 26). Dave did, however, learn summary writing in composition, which these researchers recommend, but was not able to transfer it to his other general education courses.

Seen in conjunction with Walvoord and McCarthy’s study, what’s most revealing here is, again, the very different assumptions and values at work in general education courses, even those within the same discipline. The first-year history course described in Walvoord and McCarthy’s study asked students to assume a professional-in-training role and to engage in argument and counterargument. The History 113 course described here required a text-processing role and writing to display knowledge. These differences underscore what Russell, Diaz, C. Miller and others have shown; the central assumption that literacy skills are transferable is faulty in part because learning and literacy are

highly contextual. Seen as a socially constituted act, writing and other literacy skills are shaped by the stated and unstated values, knowledge, attitudes, and actions of the members of the writer's discourse community. The "characteristics of any individual writer or piece of writing both determine and are determined by the characteristics of all the other writers and writings in the [socially constituted] system" (Cooper qtd. in Anson and Forsberg 203). This study, like many others, does reveal some of the language activities students will likely be asked to perform in first-year history courses. But it provides no evidence of how the skills they recommend students learn in first-year composition will transfer to these specific cultural activities or to other culturally-specific activities students will likely encounter even within the same discipline in general education courses. It only makes assumptions, assumptions which are themselves questionable.

The wide range of goals and values among history faculty, rooted in the ambiguous role of general education in higher education, can also be seen in the Statement of Excellent Classroom Teaching of History developed by the American Historical Association, created to guide faculty in teaching both majors and non-majors. Students are to learn a good deal of "factual material" but are also to engage in "analysis and interpretation." They are to write both "objective tests" to ensure they are reading assigned texts and written work that allows them "to develop and present their own analyses...on papers or group projects." With regard to pedagogy, "lecture sections must be accompanied by discussion sections." History education should produce "...thoughtful citizenry and provide individuals with the analytical skills suitable to a wide range of jobs." Students should also be given "multiple opportunities to do the

work of the historian” (2). Overall the statement promotes a student-centered pedagogy focused on analysis and interpretation but like many mission statements, it reflects a broad continuum of views about knowledge-making rights, purposes for writing, student and faculty roles, and values toward competition and collaboration. Such statements are of course ubiquitous in higher education because they allow institutions to avoid difficult questions about the purpose of general education and help ensure faculty autonomy. They also complicate the relationship of first-year composition to the rest of the curriculum.

A review of articles in the American History Association-sponsored journal The History Teacher underscores the wide range of faculty assumptions about writing transfer and a broad spectrum of expectations of student roles. At times, too, faculty appear to be expecting one role while designing assignments that will elicit a different role. As Berlin and others have pointed out, most teachers fail to teach from a coherent theoretical framework so this situation is not surprising. As Christopher Thaiss states, “Even within...the deliberations of a single teacher we can almost perceive definitions and goals of writing moving in opposite directions” (301). It does, however, further complicate and call into question the assumption that writing can be learned as a generalizable skill and then easily transferred to other writing situations.

Two articles are representative. One by Russell Olwell and Ronald Delph describe the Research and Writing Methods course (“History” 300) required of all majors at Eastern Michigan University and taught by history faculty. Interestingly, their description reveals different views of writing transfer on the part of faculty and students. Faculty found that students wrote fact-based thesis statements because they see history as

consisting of facts. "...they are still convinced that history essentially consists of names, dates, facts, and events" (24). Presumably, these same students learned in first-year composition that thesis statements are not statements of fact. On the one hand, faculty are correctly perceiving that this teaching is not transferring, but on the other, students appear to be aware that writing is contextual. They appear to be assuming that the context calls for facts and so they are writing facts.

The faculty also report that the process approach students are taught in composition does not transfer. "Unfortunately, many of our students practice a very abbreviated writing process..." (25). In order to "build upon studies done in English composition as well as scholarship from the WAC movement" (25), History 300 faculty break down the approach to researching and writing a paper into several discrete steps; students are required to submit multiple drafts to faculty for feedback. Notably, Olwell and Delph report that many students felt this process approach to be unfair; they complained that other courses didn't require it. They even went so far as to file a grievance. I'm speculating here, of course (no doubt the students' response had multiple sources), but it's possible that, in part, the students were responding to an unconsciously perceived inconsistency. Faculty view thesis construction as specific to history but view the process for writing a history research paper as generic, or generalizable from English or WAC studies. Much research has shown, however, that even the process used to produce writing is highly contextual (Freedman and Adam). Students here seem unable to see the value of the generic process they were taught in composition within the specific context of the history research paper they are to produce.

In “To Think on Paper: Using Writing Assessments in the World History Survey,” Kathleen Tobin describes four writing assignments she’s devised for students in her general education course at Purdue University Calumet. She, too, mentions the lack of skills transfer from first-year composition. “...rather than complain that...students lack reading comprehension and analytical and writing ability, I make them practice.” (498).

An analysis of her four assignments, which she describes in detail, in light of Walvoord and McCarthy’s roles, reveals inconsistencies. Although her expectation isn’t entirely clear, Tobin appears to expect students to act as professionals-in-training. She explains that she “fine-tune[s] the assignments to meet the demands of history scholars and to grade with more general criteria of analysis, argument, and evidence” (498). However, the assignments, at best, elicit layperson activities. Much of the work for each assignment involves text-processing (summary, providing background on the author, etc.). But each also asks for some analysis. Her Primary Source essay asks students to “reflect on how the selection [the primary source] serves history scholars” (500). The book review and website review each asks students to determine whether or not the purpose of the book or website is fulfilled (503). The Periodical Articles assignment asks students to “analyze the articles with an eye to explaining their different intentions and points of view” (507). But none of these activities involves employing disciplinary knowledge. Most seem instead to require literary or textual analysis.

Granted, I’m attempting to draw conclusions from articles intended to merely describe teaching and learning activities, not from formal studies. Nevertheless, these descriptions do reveal the sort of common inconsistencies in literacy activities that

students encounter, even within most classrooms. They point, not only to the range of literacy activities students are experiencing in history courses, but also to the circumstances that make applying skills presumably learned in first-year composition to these courses difficult for students.

Newell and Winograd, in a formal study, examine the relationship between writing assignments and kinds of learning in history. Somewhat similar to my conclusions about Tobin and Olwell and Delph, they observe that assignments may not be eliciting the desired learning. They found that analytical writing resulted in improved concept application but that study questions worked best when students needed to recall large amounts of information. They conclude that different writing activities result in different benefits (169) and teachers need to be sure they are assigning writing that will meet their instructional objectives. “The teacher’s craft is to select tasks that will benefit students relative to the goals of instruction” (160).

For me, the most powerful revelation of their study, however, is teachers’ anguish over their perceived need to both “cover the content” in history and engage students in critical thinking. As one teacher stated, “As students go through school, the stakes get higher and higher...Knowing information and writing about it go hand and hand...I feel pressure to make sure they know certain things...that is a big problem” (160). Cheryl Geisler, as I noted earlier in this chapter, locates this often deeply felt dilemma in knowledge-making arrangements in higher education. She notes that academics absorb information but then employ it in their own ways. But we often fear giving students the same free reign. “We fear that, given license to pick and choose among the knowledge they acquire and to rearrange and reconstruct that knowledge as they see fit, students will



get it wrong; they will misunderstand” (116). These dilemmas related to general education instructional goals and to designing literacy activities relevant to those goals, add to the difficulty students face when they attempt to apply “skills” learned in freshman composition to other general education courses.

To help clarify the relationship of composition to undergraduate general education, many institutions have created learning communities that link first-year composition to general education courses like history. Although a search of three data bases, as well as many prominent journals in education, composition, and history, revealed only one published article focusing on a learning community linking history and composition, the piece is instructive. The course at Lander University, “The 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Writing and Inquiry on the Human Condition,” described by Joel Cleland, links second semester composition and a course in 20<sup>th</sup> Century history. While, again, not a formal, detailed study, Cleland’s description depicts a highly-integrated, theme-based learning community in which both courses appear to share common values and purposes. There is, however, no empirical evidence about underlying views of language or social practices that may or may not be helping students make cross-course connections.

Notably in Lander’s course, both the composition and history faculty appear to expect students to take on the role of professional-in-training and to write in order to construct knowledge in response to rhetorical exigencies. Their assignments mirror many of the practices of working historians as reported by Gaea Leinhardt and Kathleen McCarthy Young.

Drawing on research in situated learning and language acquisition, Leinhardt and Young point out that students must engage in activities that go beyond just preparing to

do “real” disciplinary work. To learn disciplinary skills, students must participate in authentic disciplinary activity. “Through actively engaging in meaningful, problem-driven, intellectual activities, students will develop the component skills necessary for accomplishing disciplinary tasks” (479). In order to create a history curriculum that will enable students to do what historians do, Leinhardt and Young observed historians at work. Among their conclusions, they found that historians engage in both textual reading, which involves summary and an awareness of structure and evidence, and in historical reading, which entails interpretation through the particular lens of the historian’s sense of what history is for (to make a record, to give voice to the voiceless, etc.) and her theoretical interest (Marxism, feminism, etc.) (449). Historians read intertextually across many kinds of historical documents and sources, aware that each tells, or can tell, a different story or stories. They analyze and interpret given documents in order to construct a coherent account in light of their own theoretical and purposive lens (480-1).

Similarly, Cleland asks students to view the human condition throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century through a particular theoretical and purposive lens. Students read sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein, whose world-system paradigm views global developments in terms of worldwide capitalism as a system. Full-blown capitalist nations form the center of the system while fledgling capitalist countries remain on the margin, their labor contributing to the wealth of the core. Quasi-developed countries are in the middle. Students are then asked to collect and compare information on various countries and to use the world-system theory as an interpretive lens through which to place countries within the system, either at the center, at the margin, or in between. Students write

additional essays on questions arising socially and rhetorically from their use of Wallerstein's frame.

The composition and history teachers assign two texts jointly, Allende's *The House of Spirits* and a monograph on textile workers in Chile. Cleland again asks students to view these texts through Wallerstein's lens and his colleague asks students to consider them as constructed texts which give voice to marginalized histories and the human condition through a variety of representations.

In addition to these opportunities to "do history," to construct knowledge through intertextual critical reading across sources using a theoretical and purposive lens, the two faculty also encourage students to take on a professional-in-training role by giving a single grade for the course. Students appear to write in order to expand and extend their participation in history rather than to learn a generalizable skill called "writing." Interestingly enough, while the course seems to enact a "writing as expanding participation" view of composition, the faculty talk about it as a transferable skill. Cleland notes that "even when students...are concurrently receiving instruction on research papers in English classes, the skills are rarely transferred in full to a history research paper. The interdisciplinary course solves this problem nicely" (9).

Once again, however, we have no empirical evidence to back up this claim. As in so many articles of its ilk, Cleland describes a course not a study. He tantalizingly reports that he now teaches the writing process and refers to communication concepts such as audience and voice. Is Cleland's colleague also teaching these concepts? Are students appropriating these concepts across course boundaries? Is the learning community structure aiding that process? Is the theme? If so, how? What are the

underlying assumptions about language that are mediating social practices in the course?

These questions are not addressed.

### Conclusion

Many theorists (Russell, Bruffee, Miller, Freedman, Engestrom, Shryer, etc.) by way of explaining why this application of learning is so problematic, have called into question the assumption that writing is an autonomous, generalizable skill. As a much more thorough-going explanation of the difficulties student writers encounter as they move from course to course or from school to work, many now argue for a view of writing as sociocultural, a view that all writing is social and therefore bound to a particular discourse community. David Russell makes an analogy between games that require use of a ball and writing for particular discourse communities—or activity systems in his terms. In every game, a player uses the ball in very particular and nuanced ways. While there may be some similarities among games in how the ball is used to achieve objectives, there is no generalizable, autonomous ball-handling skill that can be acquired and then applied to all games. The same is true of writing. Russell notes, “The kind of activity [discipline or course]—its object(ive) and its history—changes the way the tool, writing, is used. The activity also changes the tool itself—the grammar, lexicon, format, and so on” (58).

McCarthy comes to the same conclusion based on Dave’s experiences. Her study, she states, adds to the existing research suggesting that school writing is not a global skill. “...all writing is context-dependent, and... successful writing requires the accurate assessment of and adaptation to the demands of particular writing situations” (153).

Herrington, too, concludes that even within the same discipline, different courses present

students with different contexts for writing. "...learning to participate in a new forum means learning the ways of that forum" (119), particularly its ways with words.

In this dissertation, I use David Russell's model of activity theory combined with genre theory as a means of examining students' "ways with words" in a general education learning community that links first-year composition and history. Activity theory conceives of learning, not as the acquisition and transfer of knowledge or skills, but as expanding participation in a given activity system, such as a course, using discursive tools. Because activity systems are situated within networks of other activity systems, expanding participation often includes borrowing discursive tools across system boundaries. This model of "borrowing" or "tool appropriation" offers an alternative to transfer models of education, one more in keeping with sociocultural conceptions of literacy acquisition. Using Russell's model can help illuminate student appropriation of writing in the complex social network of a general education learning community, a network comprised of two courses integrated by a central theme. Specifically, it can help reveal how tools, like language, are mediating activity. Activity/genre theory can also shed light on the social practices being enacted and how those are shaping student learning and literacy. Likewise, it can reveal how the theme is functioning. What is its role in helping students make cross-course connections that contribute to their developing literacy and learning in the courses that comprise the learning community? What is its role in fostering student engagement, in fostering students' ability to appropriate the goals and subjectivities of the courses in the learning community beyond writing for a grade, particularly when students in general education courses are typically not motivated by professional goals or identities?

In the following chapter, I will provide a detailed description of Russell's model, including recent critiques of activity theory and the relationship of activity systems to discourse communities.

## CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

As I've noted, the learning community literature makes frequent mention of the model as a means of helping students to make cross-course connections and to engage more fully in their learning. The theme ostensibly plays a central part in fostering these aims; however, no studies have been conducted that examine the role of the theme in learning community courses. Likewise no studies have looked at the underlying perceptions of language in learning communities that are mediating social practices and how those might be affecting interdisciplinary activity.

In this chapter, I describe David Russell's model of activity theory combined with genre theory which I use in my study to illuminate student appropriation of writing in the complex social network of a general education learning community, a network comprised of two courses linked by a stated theme. I also include a discussion of the distinctions between discourse communities and activity systems, as well as some recent critiques of activity theory.

Language processes, including student writing, must be understood in terms of the contexts in which they occur. Learning communities are particularly complex social environments. Shared tool models, such as activity theory, provide a particularly accurate picture of what is happening to a student in a learning community classroom because such models illuminate human activity within interacting social networks. They present context as "a weaving together of people and their tools [like writing] in complex networks" where "the network *is* the context" (Russell and Yanez 336).

Before I describe activity theory per se, I want to discuss further this issue of context by summarizing David Russell's remarks on the relationship of social constructionism and Bakhtinian dialogism to activity theory. This summary will help to situate activity theory among these other seminal theories which are current in composition studies. It will also clarify some of the assumptions underpinning activity theory. Lastly, it will also illuminate the context within which interacting activity systems, such as courses in a learning community, operate. In conceiving this project, as I noted earlier, I began by examining just student writing produced in learning communities. I quickly concluded, however, that to explore how learning communities were affecting student learning and literacy, I needed to understand how the writing fit into the larger context, not only of the learning community but of each course and discipline as well. The following discussion of dialogism, in particular, clarifies the limitations I was experiencing and explains how activity theory provides the larger framework for analysis I was seeking.

#### Relationship of Activity Theory to Dialogism and Social Constructivism

Courses exist within a host of interrelating "contexts" such as disciplines, universities, professions and other "macro-level" social, political, and economic structures. As Russell points out, and as many of the studies in my literature review have suggested, the relationship between student writing practices in school and writing in other social arenas is an important focus of writing research ("Rethinking" 504). He argues that currently there is no overarching theory of writing that provides a way to analyze how these broader social spheres influence classroom literacy practices and vice versa. There's no comprehensive theory that can explain how literacy practices in school



and other social practices intersect through the mediation of writing, or that explain how individuals and collectives grow and develop as writers as they navigate various social milieu. A synthesis of North American genre theory and newer systems versions of Vygotskian cultural-historical activity theory, he suggests, can illuminate the relationship between student writing practices in school and writing in other social arenas (“Rethinking” 505). And I would add, between student writing in one course and student writing in another, such as occurs in learning communities.

A synthesis of genre theory and activity theory can help reveal relationships between writing in one context and writing in another by expanding what, in Russell’s view, is the most fully developed theory of context to date, dialogism. As Charles Schuster explains, Bakhtin’s dialogism can best be understood by starting with the rhetorical triangle in which communication consists of speaker, listener and subject, or subject matter. For Bakhtin, the subject, however, is not an inert, passive object to be talked or written about. Rather, Bakhtin conceives of the subject as a “hero,” with power to shape language, form, and meaning equal to that of the speaker and listener. By way of illustration, Schuster points out that as he himself writes about Bakhtin, his subject pushes him into certain structures and influences his choice of syntax, diction and style. Similarly, writers of fiction often speak of characters, their subjects, taking on a life of their own. Thus, for Bakhtin, all three elements of the triangle perform as speakers and listeners, influencing and shaping each other (Schuster 458).

Language itself is similarly interactive or dialogical. Bakhtin writes,

The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes ‘one’s own’ only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does

not exist in a neutral and impersonal language...but rather it exists in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own (qtd in Schuster 459).

Words are perpetually infused with multiple voices and multiple contexts. "The word enters the [speaker's] context from another context, permeated with the interpretation of others" (Bakhtin qtd. in Schuster 460). These contexts, Schuster explains, include not just the particular setting of the speaker or writer but the larger cultural milieu in which the utterance occurs. "These contexts include not only the syntactic structuring of the utterance and the localized setting of the speaker, but also the social, historical, ideological environments in which the utterance exists and participates" (Schuster 460).

Russell points out, though, that dialogism's conversational metaphors lead researchers to typically focus on pairs of communicants. He argues that activity theory, which focuses on interlocking networks of tool-using activity systems, such as courses in learning communities, provides a much wider unit of analysis and thus expands dialogism in three ways: 1) it offers a larger frame of analysis than just text-as-discourse because it examines how people, individually and collectively, use tools, including but not limited to texts, to achieve short and long-term objectives; 2) it offers more comprehensive arenas of analysis than the speaker-listener, again, because it looks beyond speaker-listener exchanges to include their relation to the group's long-term goals and to the wider social-cultural historical environment; and 3) it offers a wider-ranging theory of dialectic that encompasses the purposes and motivations of groups and their members by revealing how these motivations give rise to contradictions or oppositions ("Rethinking" 505). This expanded frame can better illuminate give-and-take encounters

between people through literacy practices, including students participating in interacting courses in a learning community.

Russell goes on to contrast dialogism, or the “heteroglossic interpenetration of social languages” (“Rethinking” 505), with social constructionism which also posits writing as practiced within social contexts. While he grants that social constructionism aims to explain the social aspects of writing, Russell agrees with many scholars who see these theories as reinscribing formalist, Cartesian views because they separate out some theoretical aspect, like ideology for instance, and argue that it is an underlying explanatory frame. He notes, “The theories have been based mainly on metaphors that suggest...something contained and its container, text and context, mind...and society, individual and community” (“Rethinking” 505). Dialogic theories based on Bakhtin’s work, on the other hand, explain discourse, not in relation to some underlying schema, but as an on--going, ever-evolving “intersubjective process” of mutual transaction among participants mediated by literacy practices (“Rethinking” 506). Again, for Bakhtin, words are perpetually infused with multiple voices and multiple contexts. The utterances that students (and faculty) perform in school settings are “permeated with the interpenetration of others.” They are “half someone else’s,” those others being the participants of the various social arenas that comprise the wider historical-cultural milieu within which school is situated. Dialogism’s more intersubjective or “ecological” view of writing, then, provides more explanatory power for examining the relationship between writing practices in school and those in other social arenas (Russell, “Rethinking” 506). And I would add between writing practiced in one course and writing practiced in another, such as occurs in learning communities. There, too, language is

intersubjective, reciprocally interpenetrated by the multiple voices and contexts that influence language use in each course. Russell notes, "Dialogism thus goes further than social constructionism toward solving the problems of the dynamic and interpenetrating relations among discourse, the individual, and the social; among language, knowledge, and action" ("Rethinking" 506).

Russell points out, however, that dialogism's conversational metaphors are also limiting. Hence, activity theory offers a broader framework for analysis. For one thing, these metaphors exclude non-discursive actions and the physical tools used to perform them, such as buildings, money, computers, etc. He argues that writing, a tool, is often employed to carry out actions and to activate and control the ongoing use of other material tools and that such activity occurs over long extended stretches of time and space, unlike conversation ("Rethinking" 507). For example, in the Survey of Western Civilization, one of the courses, or activity systems, in the learning community in my study, the teacher made frequent use of maps and slides depicting art objects which she had created over time and which she projected onto screens using a document camera. Whenever the document camera broke down or failed to work, she filled out repair request forms. Similarly, students in my study wrote papers and did research using college computers and did so in college buildings while sitting at desks, all of which functioned as material tools whose maintenance and control involve non-discursive as well as discursive activities.

Secondly, dialogism's conversation metaphor, Russell points out, leads analysts to typically examine only pairs of communicants, for instance in a classroom. Moreover, when it looks beyond the moment of reciprocal conversation to account for group

behavior and interrelationships, it does so only in terms of “the heteroglossic interpenetration of voices” from different socio-cultural languages in conversation (“Rethinking” 507). Russell notes, however, that most groups like disciplines, professions, universities, and so on have long-term goals and purposes beyond exchanging utterances and that the point of dialog is usually not dialog itself but the performance of those goals and purposes. Dialogism also does not account for the goals and purposes that lead to actions, including writing in certain genres and not others in classrooms, that stem from larger social practices outside the classroom, like those of various disciplines or professions (“Rethinking” 507). This was precisely the limitation I became aware of when I initially looked at student papers produced in learning communities. I could readily perceive a rich rhetorical context in which the “voices” of students and teachers, “speaking” within and across course and disciplinary boundaries could be discerned. But to what end? I needed a theoretical frame that included the participants’ goals and motivations and the relationship of those to larger disciplinary and educational practices. For instance, in College Composition II, the other course, or activity system, in my study, the teacher provided analytical essay assignments designed to foster critical thinking in students. This was not only one of his goals but reflects an oft-stated outcome of the larger discipline or field of composition studies.

Lastly, relationships between groups or collectives are not typically the subject of examination in dialogism, particularly the structural dialectical contradictions that continually arise between groups. Dialogism accounts for the interpenetration of *voices* from multiple contexts but not for the interconnecting global *activity* of groups which can give rise to these contradictions. Russell notes,

Collectives pursuing different objects and motives interact with one another in a host of ways over time, producing not only micro-level local conflicts but also deep, ongoing *dialectical contradictions* within and among social practices at the macro-level, in which collectives are at ‘cross purposes’” (“Rethinking” 508).

For example, HMOs, whose motive is to hold down costs, and physicians, whose motive is to heal patients, may be at cross purposes. Similarly students in a major, like most of those in my study, whose motive is to join a specialized profession, and universities, whose motive is to broadly educate students through general education requirements, might be at cross purposes.

Activity theory, then, uses metaphors of interacting, evolving systems of activity rather than metaphors of context or conversation (Russell, “Rethinking” 509). Stemming from Vygotsky’s psychological work, activity theory was first developed by his colleagues A. N. Leont’ev and Luria the late 1930s and has evolved into many versions. In the 1970s, researchers in psychology and education in other countries, among them Yrjo and Ritva Engestrom in Finland, worked with and expanded the theory. In the U.S. Scribner, Cole, and others have used it in their studies of literacy practices. Like dialogism, it begins with the social and moves to the individual, but unlike dialogism, activity theory focuses on the ongoing, interacting systems of activity in which human beings participate and use tools, including writing. This focus, Russell notes, allows researchers to track the interactivity among individuals and texts while accounting for their role in social intercourse over time. Russell states that activity theory can allow us to theorize these interactions

without separating either [people or texts] from collective, ongoing motivated action over time....It may be possible to...analyze a particular action or group of actions in both their synchronic and diachronic relations to other collective actions in systems or networks, especially those actions

relatively remote in time and place in which writing is often crucial (“Rethinking” 509-510).

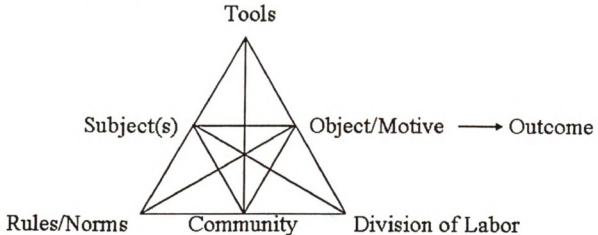
In learning communities, students act synchronically as participants in the two interacting activity systems or courses. But this issue of individuals or groups engaged in motivated actions remote in time and space also has ramifications for my study. Students frequently lack motivation to engage in writing practices, the benefit of which they will presumably only realize in some distant future. Theme-based learning communities ostensibly help to counteract this malaise and to foster student engagement and motivation, especially in general education courses not directly related to the student’s major where future benefits often seem intangible at best.

### Activity Theory

Describing M. Cole and Y. Engestrom’s systems version of activity theory, Russell explains that the basic unit of analysis is the activity system which he defines as “any ongoing, object-directed, historically conditioned, dialectically structured, tool-mediated human interaction” (“Rethinking” 570). Engestrom emphasizes that this basic unit of analysis, the activity system, is “seen in its network relations to other activity systems” (“Expansive” 136). Human beings participate in many activity systems simultaneously. Examples of activity systems include churches, families, schools, disciplines, and courses. These systems are reciprocally constructed and reconstructed by members over time using tools, including discursive tools (“Rethinking” 510).

Below is an illustration of an activity system.

Figure 1. Activity Theory



Before I continue, it's important to note that activity theory is a heuristic, not a means of scientific analysis, as Russell, Engestrom, and others are careful to note. It can, however, help to raise questions about how tools, such as writing, are mediating human activity, such as learning, and provide a perspective on how new tools or new uses of old tools might affect the system's object/motives, such as educating students (Russell and Yanez 335). I would add that activity theory can also help explore how established innovations, such as theme-based learning communities, are helping the system, the college, to fulfill its object/motives.

To return to the activity system triangle, activity theory examines the way people use tools to pursue the object of the system, which motivates the behavior and changes of people in it. The subject is the person(s) or group(s) whose activity, including discursive activity, is being examined (Russell, "Rethinking" 510). In my study, the subjects are eleven students/informants enrolled in the learning community.



The identity of individual participants and collectives is seen as the history of their participation with different activity systems (including non-discursive material conditions which distinguishes this conception of identity from the “subject” in cultural studies (Russell, “Rethinking” 547)) and unique characteristics such as genetic make-up (“Rethinking” 511). Students (and faculty) then, like those in my study, enter a course with complex identities, including their histories and views of the future which may affect whether or not they take on the identity or identities proffered by the course. As I noted in Chapter One, in Walvoord and Parkinson’s study, faculty asked students to take on a variety of roles, which informed and shaped their literacy practices and learning. These roles could also be seen as identities in activity theory terms and included professionals-in-training and text-processor. Because participant identities are so complex, they can give rise to contradictions. (I’ll say more about contradictions, a key aspect of activity theory, below.) For instance, a student in a general education learning community, who has a history as an artist and is majoring in graphic arts, may see no value in taking on, say, the identity of “historian-in-training” or “history-text processor.” Thus contradictions in identity constructions can arise and they can be further compounded if a student is asked to take on different roles or identities in different courses that comprise a learning community.

Tools, both discursive and material, are used by system participants to achieve some act that will have some result. Russell is careful to note that things must be “in use” in order to be tools. Courses, such as those in my study, as I’ve said, have a variety of tools. Material tools include chalkboards, chalk, computers, and so forth. Discursive tools, many of which are genres, include syllabi, essay exams, assignment descriptions,

textbooks, timelines, lectures, drop and add forms, and so on. Tools, both material and semiotic, have histories which have influenced their form and purpose. Discursive tools, in particular, such as words, as Bakhtin points out, mean something only in relation to the history of their use (Russell, “Activity” 55).

The object/motive of activity systems is the material or “problem space” that is the *raison d’être* toward which participants, in conjunction with others, employ tools. Engestrom makes a distinction between object/motive and goals, a goal being the hoped for end of a deliberate action. The object/motive, however, is “an enduring, constantly-reproduced purpose of a collective activity system that motivates and defines the horizon of possible goals and actions” (“Communication” 170). The object is acted upon and altered over time in accordance with a motive or overarching aim of the system in order to accomplish some outcome (Russell, “Rethinking” 511). Thus in pharmaceutical labs, cells are the object manipulated to produce drugs, the motive for which may be to improve human health. As Russell notes, participants or subjects bring with them many different motives as they interact with others and the division of labor itself implies different goals (“Rethinking” 511). In a learning community linking history and composition, such as the one in my study, the primary motive of the history teacher may be to transmit large amounts of historical information. The primary motive of the composition teacher may be to encourage good writing through new knowledge construction. For a student majoring in graphic arts, however, the motive may be to learn a few, but not too many, historical facts, to write only well enough to get through school and function in her profession, and to complete two general education requirements so she can transfer to a professional school. Once again, there may be a contradiction in

motives which has implications for student literacy and learning. As Russell notes, conflict, contention, opposition and deep contradictions are continually created in activity systems but resolving these can be a source of growth and development, if the right conditions exist (“Rethinking” 511). As I’ll explain later, theme-based learning communities aim to foster student growth and learning by creating conditions that help students resolve these contradictions within and between courses, or activity systems, in the learning community, contradictions such as those involving identity and motive. They also claim to “foster greater student engagement,” which implies they aim to create conditions that help students resolve other contradictions as well, such as those between the larger activity systems of general education and students’ specialized majors.

In activity systems, there is a division of labor. People perform different jobs and engage in different activities within the system. For instance, in Engestrom’s ethnographic study of a manufacturing plant viewed through the lens of activity theory, the machinists did one job and the expert engineers did another. In classrooms, teachers and students do different things. Engestrom notes that in complex systems, the division of labor may cause alienation. Participants may not be able to see how their activities relate to or further the object/motive of the collective (“Communication” 173). In Engestrom’s study, when a machine broke down, Teresa, a machine operator, suggested a possible cause but initially felt her suggestion had little validity and so had no effect on the company (she was not an expert engineer). This apparent contradiction between the participants’ object/motive—the purpose (or seeming purposelessness) of their activity—and the object/motive of the collective, can give rise to alienation. Students in general education courses, like those in my study, can experience alienation on two fronts. First,

the kind of mission statement that I described in Chapter One, put out by the American History Association, and by virtually every general education discipline, creates what Russell and Yanez call “strategic ambiguity” (343). Such statements allow faculty and administrators to divide up labor (each goes her own way) and thus avoid hard questions about the purpose of general education, as I discussed. Students, then, encounter a fragmented curriculum with widely divergent course goals and values. They, therefore, often can’t see how their course work in general education classes relates to any overarching educational or social purpose, or object/motive, let alone to their own future specialized majors.

Secondly, students often don’t see how the reading and writing they do in disciplinary general education courses relates to the work of the discipline. As both Giesler and Russell note, students in general education courses are not considered to be disciplinary insiders. Thus, in these courses, students are typically presented with information in textbooks, in what Russell calls “highly commodified classroom genres” that bear only a vague resemblance to the on-going, often contested, dialogic activity of the discipline. These statements are “stripped of the process of their construction within the activity system” and appear to be just abstract facts to be memorized (“Rethinking” 540). Again, students often can’t see any relationship between their work, their reading and producing of classroom genres, and the work or activity of the discipline, particularly its object/motive.

Learning communities claim, however, to reduce the alienation general education students often experience as a result of these divisions of labor and the contradictions they produce. Russell notes that commodified expressions are “waiting to be picked up”

(“Rethinking” 540) by students who want to expand their participation in the discipline because it’s their major, or, I would add, because they see an intellectual or civic purpose for doing so. Theme-based learning communities, again, claim to help provide such a motivation for non-majors. They claim to resolve or reduce the contradiction between the purpose (or seeming purposelessness) of student reading and writing in general education classrooms and the overarching purpose or object/motive of the discipline and/or general education curriculum. They claim to “enhance student intellectual engagement” and thus reduce alienation.

Finally, returning again to the activity system triangle, activity systems have rules. These are both explicit and implicit expectations for behavior and tool use. In classrooms, they include, for instance, conventions for writing, or genre, as well as rules of etiquette; for example, usually, students don’t converse while a teacher is talking. Rules often express collective beliefs and values. In the above example, respect for the teacher is a value. Newcomers to a system often encounter and must somehow learn its implicit rules or “norms.” As I noted in Chapter One, in school, how best to teach these rules, especially written genre conventions, to novice students is highly contested, as is their generalizability to other systems.

Before I move on to Russell’s synthesis of activity theory and genre theory, I want to complete this review of activity theory per se by summarizing two key characteristics of activity theory as described by Engeström. First, activity systems are multi-voiced; they are comprised of multiple perspectives, conventions, values and concerns. Because the activities are largely mediated by discursive tools, they are heteroglossic. To again quote Bakhtin, “The word enters the [speakers] context from

another context, permeated with the interpretation of others” (qtd in Schuster 460).

Participants also have their own histories and perform different roles or jobs which further provide them with different points of view. In classrooms, we can identify at least two broad “social languages” (Engstrom, “Communication” 178), that of the teacher(s) and that of the student(s). Each system moreover has its own layers of history which are expressed through its ways with words. This heteroglossia is magnified as activity systems interact with each other and is a source of both contradictions and innovations.

A second key principle of activity systems is that they develop and evolve over long stretches of time, and can only be fully comprehended in the context of their own history. As my history of composition in the Introduction and various aspects of my literature review exemplify, to fully understand a system, this history needs to be examined at both the local and global levels.

### Activity Theory and Genre Theory

Central to Russell’s version of activity theory is his synthesis of activity theory and genre theory. He theorizes how genre is *the* mediating tool in activity systems, and helps to both stabilize and mediate change in systems (“Rethinking” 512). First, using the North American version of genre theory, which posits genre not as static forms, but as dynamic, rhetorical responses to social situations, he defines genre as “typified ways of purposefully interacting, in and among some activity system(s)” (“Rethinking” 513).

Amy Devitt notes that most genre theorists concur “genre is typified action[. T]hat typification comes from recurring conditions and that those conditions involve a social context” (Devitt 13). However, following Carolyn Miller’s definition of genre as “social action,” typification stabilizes activity systems and genres only for the moment (Schryer,

Bazerman). Social contexts and responses to them, including genre, are ever-changing and influencing each other. For example, as Bazerman, in describing the genre of the experimental article in science, has shown, the typified features of the article help scientists to, as Russell says, “act together purposefully.” However, their actions continually shape the genre and the genre shapes their actions. Genre mediates their ongoing, evolving activity and identity as scientists together. Thus Russell reiterates, the context in which scientists conduct their activity is continually achieved; it is not a container for activity (“Rethinking” 513).

Continuing his synthesis of activity theory and genre theory, Russell, in addition to positing genre as social action within activity systems, points out that in such a synthesis, the concept of *genre* is widened because linguistic tools are just one kind of tool among many in activity systems. “The term *genre* in this synthesis may apply to the typified use of material tools of many types by an activity system [including] painting, music, clothing, architecture and so on” (“Rethinking” 513). As I noted above, the history teacher in my study made liberal use of maps, a non-discursive genre, and students were asked on their exams to locate historically important buildings on maps. Unlike other theories, including dialogism and deconstruction, activity theory does not elevate discursive tools over other tools (“Rethinking” 513).

Thirdly, Russell notes that within activity systems, discursive genres give rise to, to use Schryer’s term, “stabilized-for-now” frames for action and identity (“Rethinking” 514). For instance, if a member or group takes purposeful action, if say, a history professor writes a book, she has available a number of means or approaches. If she’s successful, she and others may use the same approach or format again. Thus, “typified

actions over time are routinized or operationalized—stabilized-for-now in ways that have proven useful to the activity system” (“Rethinking” 515). The first time the subject writes a book, such as, for example, an oral history, it requires a great deal of conscious action but over time will become less conscious. Moreover, routinized tool use or genre contributes to identity. For example, the history professor may become known as and may identify herself as an “oral historian.” Similarly, a history student may learn to write historical analysis and begin to take on the identity of professional-in-training.

Fourth, Russell discusses how genre within activity systems, conceived of as “operationalized social action,” gives rise to not only stability but also change. Change in activity theory terms occurs via “appropriation,” that is, when a subject or group learns to use some tool-in-use. For novices within a system, such as biology students learning to write a lab report, appropriation requires conscious action but through on-going interaction with others and participation in the system, tool use typically becomes automatic (“Rethinking” 516).

Russell notes that as a participant appropriates or takes up the discursive practices of an activity system, she may *or may not* also appropriate or take on the object/motive and subjectivity, or identity, of the group (“Rethinking” 516). Learning and change, then, occur as subjects expand their participation in activity systems by appropriating genres, and/or object/motives, and/or identities. Individuals participate, or expand their participation, in activity systems to varying degrees. I’ll take up this issue of expanding participation in more detail below.

Russell is careful to point out that what makes a genre a genre is not its formal features but how it is perceived by the participants who use it and how it operationalizes



social actions in an activity system. This has implications for students appropriating genres in school. Subjects may perceive texts with different physical features as belonging to the same genre. For instance, an advertisement in a newspaper encouraging the purchase of a product may be written in poetic form but still be perceived as an ad. A syllabus written in the form of a story may still be recognized as a syllabus. Conversely, texts with the same features—or the same text—can be seen by different activity systems as belonging to different genres (“Rethinking” 518). For instance, a story from the Bible might be literature to students majoring in English or divine revelation to devout Christians. Russell points out that this difference matters in school because students writing, or appropriating, the same assignment may be acting as participants in different activity systems with different object/motives and thus may view the same text differently. For instance, students analyzing a Sufi story may be doing school to get a grade, or may be doing theology for a future profession, or may be creating a speech for Toastmasters.

The relationship of genre appropriation to participants’ object/motives also encompasses contradictions. As Russell points out, because individuals are members of many activity systems and thus act out of different motives and perform different identities, they are often pulled in different or even opposing directions, even as they appropriate tools. For instance, a student doing an assignment for class, motivated by a future career, may go off in a direction outside the scope of the course and the conventions of the genre. From the perspective of the faculty, she may have failed to appropriate or learn the genre and thus receive a poor grade. From the student’s perspective, the writing may be a means of expanding her participation in her future

career and may have been valuable in light of her future goals. While Y. Engestrom first referred to these “dialectical pulls” as *contradictions* (Russell, “Rethinking” 519), Gregory Bateson refers to the conflicts they create in people as psychological *double binds* (Engestrom, “Learning” Ch 3).

As I mentioned above, finding solutions to double binds can be a source of growth and development because it can lead a subject to expand her participation in familiar or new activity systems. She may appropriate some tool-in-use, some genre or way of writing, from an unfamiliar or new activity system and use it in another system she is a member of, thus expanding her participation in that system. Again, the degree of learning or change may vary. A subject may appropriate a tool-in-use from a new system without ever appropriating the identity or object/motive of the new system. For instance, a student whose home community typically uses African American Vernacular English may appropriate Standard English and make effective use of it, say, working as a teacher’s aid in his local school. Appropriating Standard English may resolve a contradiction he’s experiencing between his home language and the language used and taught in the local school. However, he may choose not to appropriate the identity and object/motive of the group whose ways with words most closely resemble Standard English, the white middle class. In a learning community linking biology and chemistry, a biology major may appropriate chemistry symbols for use in biology (she may make a cross-course connection) but not appropriate the object/motive or identity of the discipline of chemistry.

As I’ve noted, students who have declared a major may experience or perceive contradictions in the ways with words, or identities, or object/motives of their future

professional specializations and those of general education courses. These contradictions may give rise to conflicts or psychological double binds as students feel they must choose between achieving good grades in general education and expanding their participation in professional activity systems.

### Activity Theory and Genre Systems Theory

Key to Russell's synthesis of genre theory and activity theory and his views of how genre both stabilize and mediate change in activity systems is, as he notes, Bazerman's theory of genre *systems*. Bazerman, Russell notes, defines genre systems as "interrelated genres that interact with each other in specific settings" (qtd. in Russell, "Rethinking" 520) and Russell views these "specific settings" as activity systems. Within an activity system, the genre system is delimited. The extent to which new genres can be developed, one from another, is contained by the circumstances giving rise to productive tool use, circumstances influenced by the activity system's history. Not all participants in an activity system must use or appropriate all the genre in the system because labor in an activity system is divided up ("Rethinking" 520). For instance, in school, teachers fill out grade forms; students fill out teacher evaluation forms. It is the circulation of genres within and among interacting sub-groups and groups, in other words, genre systems, that both perpetuates and propels forward the activity system, recreating its identity and object/motives ("Rethinking" 521). Genre systems then help maintain system boundaries and also mediate the intercourse between activity systems, which can lead to motivation and change. As cross-disciplinary research demonstrates, participants in activity systems appropriate ways of writing, ways of words, from other systems, often influencing the evolution of systems and their genres. For example,

composition studies has appropriated ethnographic research methods from anthropology and other disciplines, thus transforming the field in many ways. As Russell states,

Through the actions of individuals and groups with tools, interactions between and among activity systems may dialectically change those activity systems over time. Genres also are structured dialectically [and] ...may be transformed.... ("Rethinking" 522).

As Russell points out, appropriation of tools across system boundaries can result in changes to genre systems. These, too, typically involve contradictions and double binds. For instance, if several faculty in a history department who identified themselves as transmitters of historical knowledge began teaching in learning communities with composition faculty who viewed themselves as facilitators of new knowledge construction, over time one or more of the history faculty may be pulled toward the facilitator identity. They may appropriate assignments and classroom activities from their composition counterparts that they perceive result in improvements in student learning. Hence, they may be caught in a double bind between performing the identity and object/motive of their department, to transmit history information, and performing a facilitator role which they believe may achieve better results for students but which may render them outsiders among their own colleagues. This appropriation of genres from composition and the accompanying conflict may result in changes to just one history course, or to several, or, eventually, to the entire department. As Russell states, "The very object/motive of the activity system may change under the influence of newcomers [or interactions with other systems]" ("Rethinking" 523). In this hypothetical case, due to changes in the genre system, the object/motive of the history department may change from transmitting knowledge to facilitating new knowledge construction.

Russell goes on to point out that innovations in systems, like in my example above, indicate how genre and genre systems mediate agency and even power (“Rethinking” 534). A current issue in composition studies is how individual writers exert their own identity and point of view within hegemonic social structures and their ways with words. In activity theory terms, “individuals are active agents in their own development,” even if they do not “act in settings of their own choosing” (Cole qtd. in Russell and Yanez 338). Engestrom points out that while elements of everyday life appear to be beyond our control, they *are* constructed by human activities. “The pressing...problem of our time is the...hidden influence of individual actions on the creation and reproduction of activity systems” (“Developmental” 67). For Russell, agency lies in the appropriation of (or resistance to) the genres and the object/motive of an activity system which allows for expanding participation in the system. That participation, as I’ve said, can change a system although, as Russell notes, such change usually requires a lengthy history of participation (“Rethinking” 522). A particularly powerful participant(s) or tool, however, may alter a system more quickly. Russell argues that genres over time mediate human activity so that some individuals and groups, and some tools, because of their position and role in activity systems, have more power than others (“Rethinking” 524). In my example above, if a dominant member of the history department were to teach in a learning community with a compositionist and appropriate assignments and activities that facilitate new knowledge construction among students, rather than the transmission of historical knowledge, she might influence others to follow suit and thus more quickly impact the object/motive of the department.

Tools, too, can accrue power. As a tool of learning in history, the traditional use of commodified statements of information has long wielded a great deal of power. As Lave notes, such facts appear to be free from the vagaries of time and place and on-going human activity. As situated social practice, their use perpetuates the myth that a one-to-one correspondence exists between word and thing and that knowledge is objective. The power of such knowledge is then shared with the institutions that provide it. Lave points out, “Once the separate, inert, objective character of...knowledge [is assumed], it is entirely consistent to think of institutions in the same terms. From this, assumptions are derived about the privileged character of schools... “(24) and I would add disciplines. The power of (supposed) decontextualized knowledge, on the other hand, may adversely affect student agency and power. Recently, however, constructionism and situated learning theory and hence assignments and activities that reflect those theories, have garnered a great deal of power throughout the field of education. These have, in a fairly short period of time, changed pedagogical practices for many (although not all) teachers, even in disciplines that have traditionally been concerned with “covering the content,” such as history. This situation has been accompanied by contradictions in object/motive (and identity and tool use) within the discipline of history. Many teachers feel caught in a double bind between the felt need to transmit large amounts of “objective” information and the desire to facilitate critical thinking and collaborative learning. As I noted in Chapter One, this contradiction has led to an apparent backlash in the U.S. among history teachers against social constructionist views of learning.

#### Key Concepts in Activity Theory/Genre Theory

In discussing Russell's synthesis of activity theory and genre theory, including genre systems, I've mentioned or alluded to several key concepts of this version of activity theory which are important to my study and which I'd like to take up now in more detail. These concepts are: expanding participation or learning, contradictions and double-binds, zone of proximal development (or ZPD), and exchange value vs. use value.

As I've noted, learning in activity theory is not a matter of transmitting stable, typically "objective" information from a teacher to a student. Activity theory does not adhere to cognitive or transmission models of learning. Rather, it assumes that knowledge construction is an on-going, socially (re)created, intersubjective process. In activity theory, learning occurs through expanding involvement with others in activity systems, using tools or genre, including writing (Russell and Yanez 336). Learning can involve expanding activity into a new system, and/or expanding activity in a familiar system through the appropriation of new tools or genres, and/or sometimes, the production of new generations of activity.

In activity theory terms, expansive learning is triggered by contradictions and double-binds. Contradictions are tensions within and between systems. These tensions arise from the multi-voiced nature of activity systems; identities, motives, tools, rules, division of labor, and the nature of community are often perceived differently and thus are sources of discord. They are "resisted, contested, and/or negotiated—overtly or tacitly, consciously or unconsciously" (Russell and Yanez 341). Engestrom makes a distinction between contradictions and conflicts, as I've noted. Contradictions are deep and structural in nature. They are "historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems" ("Expansive" 137). The specialization of disciplines and

the broad scope of general education is an example of a deep dialectical contradiction in higher education, as I've also noted. Conflicts, on the other hand, arise in people, often as a result of contradictions, and, as Gregory Bateson and others have noted, can be experienced as psychological double-binds in which none of the available choices of action appears desirable. For example, a student entering college may encounter a contradiction between the activity systems of the academy and of her home life. She may experience a double-bind when faced with appropriating the academy's ways of being and ways with words. Doing so may cause her family and friends to see her as an outsider while not doing so may compromise her educational goals.

In activity theory, as I've alluded to above, contradictions and conflicts are presumed to be the primary source of change or transformation. As individuals or groups seek to resolve tensions, growth occurs as a new generation of activity evolves, a process mediated by tools or genres. As Russell and Yanez explain,

Contradictions also present a constant potential for change in people and tools (including writing)—for transforming—re-mediating—activity systems. Thus, there is always potential for learning, both individual and social, for becoming a changed person or changed people, with new identities, new possibilities—often opened up (or closed down) through writing in various genres (341).

For example, a student, Beth, in a study conducted by Russell and Yanez, experienced a contradiction between the writing in her major, journalism, and the writing in her Irish History course. She perceived that journalistic writing expressed objective facts and was frustrated when her Irish History teacher asked for interpretive writing. After struggling with the contradiction, she came to see that journalistic writing, too, involved the selection and interpretation of events. Thus, she achieved expansive learning; she expanded her participation in the activity system of journalism in, for her, new ways.



In activity theory, this “potential for learning” is conceived of as a zone of proximal development, a theoretical space through which one travels. Engestrom points out that this is not the same as Vygotsky’s original zone of proximal development, or ZPD, which is often discussed in education literature. That narrower term, which focuses on the individual learner, refers to the distance between what a student can achieve on her own and what she can achieve with expert guidance (“Learning” Ch. 3). That expert guidance, or scaffolding, Engestrom notes is likewise too narrowly conceived because it refers to the acquisition of the known and so does not account for expansive learning or new generations of activity (“Learning” Ch. 3). Engestrom thus expands Vygotsky’s term to mean “the distance between the present everyday actions of the individuals and the historically new form of the societal activity that [eventually] can be collectively generated as a solution to the double bind potentially embedded in the everyday actions” (“Learning” Ch. 3). In further clarifying his conception of the ZPD, Engestrom makes a key point as it applies to learning:

From the instructional point of view, my definition of the zone of proximal development means that teaching and learning are moving within the zone *only* [emphasis mine] when they aim to develop historically new forms of activity, not just at letting the learners acquire the societally existing or dominant forms as something individually new (“Learning” Ch. 3).

Engestrom here is alluding to Bateson’s three levels of learning, which Engestrom is careful to note do not constitute a fully blown theory but are merely “provocative” (“Expansive” 138). Briefly, Learning I, in part, refers to the kind of learning that often occurs in school, acquiring the right answers or “the responses deemed correct in the given context” (“Expansive” 138). In other words, in Learning I, students acquire the societally existing or dominant forms of knowledge. According to Bateson, wherever

Learning I is going on, so is Learning II. This refers, in part, to acquiring the underlying values, rules, and assumptions that characterize the context. In school, this means learning how to get along, how to make the grade, how to be a student, in short, learning the hidden curriculum. Sometimes this situation gives rise to contradictions or double-binds. A student may have to choose between pleasing the teacher and pleasing herself (“Expansive” 138). As Engestrom notes, students may start to question the entire enterprise and ask “What’s the meaning and sense of this problem in the first place? Why should I try to solve it?” (“Learning” Ch. 3). This questioning can lead to Learning III in which the participant or a group develops a new paradigm, or “constructs a wider alternative context” (“Expansive” 138). A student has traveled through a ZPD, has experienced “expansive learning activity,” if “culturally new patterns of activity” are produced (“Expansive” 139). In the case of Beth, her teacher, Corey, helped her to journey across a ZPD. At the start of her Irish History class, Beth saw no relevance in the analytical writing Corey was requiring to her future career as a journalist. She experienced alienation and frustration. However, once Corey realized Beth’s major was journalism, he began to point out the generic differences between interpretation and the “objective” who/what/where/when/why format of journalistic writing as Beth understood it (Russell and Yanez 354). Gradually, Beth came to question her earlier view that journalism is objective. In her final paper, she critiqued a New York Times article that covered an historic meeting between Gerry Adams and Tony Blair. Using her newly acquired historical knowledge, she perceived the “bias” of the U.S. journalist but also saw that this “bias” is rooted in the subjective nature of news reporting. In her paper, she also came to recognize the value of historical critique for her chosen profession. As

Russell and Yanez note, “She has used the double binds she experienced to transform her understanding of both activity systems through the mediation of a genre that combined both journalism and academic history” (354).

In her journey across this ZPD, Beth appropriated aspects of the activity system of academic history, its analytical language and its epistemological perspective, to explore elements of the Times news article and thus expanded her participation in the activity system of her chosen profession; she became a much more sophisticated participant, one who recognizes that covering the news is a subjective endeavor. As in Beth’s case, tool or genre appropriation requires the ability to use tools in new situations. Knowing about a tool is not sufficient; a participant must understand how it is used and be able to put it to use, including changing or altering the tool if need be. Russell and Yanez note that “Beth begins to use the analytical language of academic history, and for similar uses (*though not entirely*)” [emphasis mine] (354). Because Beth is using this tool, this language, in a different activity system, that of journalism, it will inevitably be changed; its use will inevitably be different. As Engestrom notes, “A newly acquired instrument never stays exactly the same as it was in the phases of its original acquisition and internalization. It will change and produce surprises, new qualities” (“Learning” Ch. 3).

Motivation is an important element in tool appropriation. Because it requires active engagement, the student must be motivated to make the tool her own, to internalize it. A lack of motivation can arise in school due to a contradiction in education between what Engestrom calls “use value” and “exchange value.” (“Learning” Ch 3). For Engestrom, this contradiction is present in every aspect of capitalist society. “In capitalism, the inherent contradiction functioning in every single object is the double

nature of commodities, being simultaneously abstract and concrete, exchange value and use value” (“Learning” Ch 3). Learning in educational contexts can have exchange value—it can be exchanged for a grade, a degree, and ultimately a job. It can also have use value, that is, it can prove to be personally meaningful or of use to the student, either in the present or in the future. It can help the student “orient [her]self to the world” (“Learning” Ch. 3). In Russell and Yanez’s study, the student Beth at first saw no use value in the writing she was required to do for Irish History. She believed that critical interpretation of events had no relevance to her future profession or to her present life, even though her teacher, Corey, talked repeatedly about its importance to responsible citizenship. Only later, with Corey’s guidance, did she begin to perceive that the specialist genres of history were of use value to her as a journalist and as a citizen. Thus she was motivated to overcome the conflicts she was experiencing and expand her participation in the activity system of journalism. Russell and Yanez note, “Through the writing, she was able to transform the activity of the class from ‘grade-making’ to ‘sense-making’ and find use value where she saw only exchange value” (357).

### Critiques of Activity Theory

While activity theory has garnered a great deal of interest among rhetoricians and especially genre theorists, it is not without its critics. I’ll mention two here whose views are relevant to the application of activity theory to educational settings, including theme-based learning communities.

Michael Young raises several important questions about Engeström’s work. Working with researchers in Vocational Education and Training (VET) through the Institute of Education at the University of London, Young points out that most of

Engestrom's research involves occupational settings, such as health care clinics and manufacturing plants, settings in which the primary goal is not learning. He notes that expansive learning theory was developed in contexts where the goal is better service or an improved product. Learning is certainly central to achieving these goals but is, finally, "incidental" to the main goals of the workplace. He writes,

The issue is the extent to which a model for enhancing incidental learning can be applied in a context where learning is the explicit organizational goal, not something instrumental to another goal, such as better healthcare or productivity (159).

Young's additional concerns about power and motivation are related to his first question. He notes that in expansive learning, when learners experience contradictions and raise questions, their questioning is highly valued and is indeed a catalyst for change and development. Young notes, however, that in many educational settings in which authority and power often accrue to the teacher and not the student, questioning can be seen as resistance or making trouble. Young also raises the issue of motivation. He points out that expansive learning theory assumes that contradictions will propel students into a new cycle of participation and learning but that may not be the case (160).

Russell and Yanez's study of students writing in an Irish History class, in which learning was the primary objective, provide some insights into Young's concerns. Student motivation was indeed an issue; the authors point out that while Beth was motivated enough to work through and resolve the contradictions she experienced, most of the other students were not:

Other students were not so research-competent, grade-driven, or career-motivated that they were willing to endure the double binds and alienation of the general education contradiction long enough to transform the activity from doing school to doing some new activity, one with use value (357).

My study, too, sheds light on this aspect of activity theory.

Beth did, however, have the advantage of a teacher who was not authoritarian and was accepting of her early questioning attitude. Through his guidance, in particular his ability to point out generic differences and similarities between writing history and writing journalism, Beth was able to see a connection between her future career and academic history and expand her participation in both her course and her profession (Russell and Yanez 357).

In response to Young's concerns, the extent of activity theory's explanatory power in educational settings remains to be seen as more researchers use it; however, as I've noted, it is a heuristic rather than a means of drawing incontrovertible conclusions. For example, as we can see from the study involving Beth, activity theory combined with genre theory and applied to educational settings can help raise useful questions about motivation and authority in the classroom. As Russell and Yanez note, activity theory raises questions "not to find any final answers but to give people working in some activity a useful perspective from which to develop new approaches, new mediational tools...to transform or 're-mediate' their activity" (355).

Like Young, Amy Devitt, too, raises concerns about activity theory. She agrees with Russell that it provides a wider framework for analysis than theories like dialogism which focus on linguistic interactions. She notes,

Activity systems have the benefit over rhetorical situations of encompassing much more than narrowly defined rhetorical exigencies, including even the nonlinguistic, and much more than the immediate situation, including cultural values and other, interacting activity systems (18).

However, Devitt disagrees with Russell's conception of genre. She argues that, despite his definition of genre as "operational social action," he does not view genre as social action but as merely a tool to be picked up, used, and set down again by activity system participants. Referring to Russell, she writes, "To include genres as 'choices of tools'...is to remove genre from the level of social action...It is not a far step from equating genre with the use of tools to equating genre of form..." (48). Here Devitt is using Russell, within the context of an argument that genres are neither tools used by participants nor agents capable of determining human action (43). Instead, human action and genre interact reciprocally. "It is instead the nature of genre both to be created by people and to influence people's action, to help people achieve their goals and to encourage people to act in certain ways, to be both-and" (48-49). But in my opinion, she is making more literal use of Russell's terms than he probably intended himself. Elsewhere Russell provides extended examples of activity systems, including genre, that indicate he views genre as more than a mere tool. Devitt herself makes use of one such example, the grocery store list. Rather than go into a lengthy analysis of Russell's depiction of his family's grocery shopping as mediated through the genre of the list, which could be done using the six principles of the social nature of genre set out by Devitt (63), I'll refer back briefly to Beth and to the activity system analysis of her experience. As Beth appropriated the two genre of the genre system of the Irish History course, analytical writing and interpretive epistemology, she acted within those genres to expand her participation in both the course and her future career as a journalist. These were not merely tools which she could chose to take up or lay aside; they mediated involvement in those systems. As Devitt, quoting Berkenkotter and Huckin, notes,

“social actors are the agents of change...but not through conditions of their own making” (49). Nor were these genre deterministic factors beyond her control. They were social actions through which she influenced both activity systems and through which they influenced her. Reciprocally, each influenced the identity, values, and purposes of the other. Through her discursive actions, Beth furthered the “reciprocal, constitutive relationship of people [academic historians and journalists, including herself] and their social structures, including genre” (Devitt 49).

In the following chapter, I describe my research site, The Power of the Past learning community, where I used Russell’s synthesis of activity and genre theory to unpack the underlying assumptions about language, a fundamental activity system tool, and the social practices they were mediating, including interdisciplinary genred performances.



### CHAPTER THREE: DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTIVITY SETTING

In this chapter, I describe the site of my research, “The Power of the Past” learning community. I also briefly describe the larger departmental and college contexts in which the learning community is situated, as well as the learning community program at Midwest Community College, since they constitute, in part, the “macro-level social and political structures (forces) that affect the micro-level actions of students and teachers writing in classrooms and vice versa” (Russell, “Rethinking” 505). Likewise, I include a discussion of the course objectives and the learning community program objectives which help guide the activities of the learning community participants in my study. Finally, I describe the two courses in the learning community, College Composition II and Survey of Early Western Civilization, including their major writing assignments, or classroom genres. I also discuss the roles students perform in each course, as defined by Walvoord and McCarthy, a conception which helps to illuminate my findings and conclusions in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven.

#### “The Power of the Past” Learning Community

My research project site is the learning community titled “The Power of the Past.” This activity site is comprised of two general education courses, or activity systems, College Composition II (Eng. 112 and 112H) and Survey of Early Western Civilization (His. 111W and 111HW). (I explain the “W” and “H” designations below.) The learning community is offered annually during the second semester, known as the Winter Semester, at Midwestern Community College. MCC is a high quality community college with a reputation for good teaching; it is a member of the League of Innovation, a

consortium of 19 community college districts nationwide devoted to improving student learning through experimentation with new practices and to sharing results. MCC enrolls approximately 10,000 students, the majority of whom are working class; the median student age is 27; approximately 83% of the students are white, 7% are African American, and 4% are Hispanic. The college serves three small nearby cities, as well as smaller outlying farm communities. It offers both transfer and vocational programs, including retraining and vocational programs for displaced automobile and manufacturing workers.

MCC has been offering learning communities since 1990. The college has been in close association with the Washington Center, the institutional home of the learning community movement, for fifteen years, participating in several national FIPSE and PEW grants aimed at disseminating and strengthening learning communities nationwide. MCC's well-established program makes it an advantageous site for my study.

The initial goals for learning communities at MCC were based on claims widely expressed in the learning community literature. These goals were: to foster student engagement and cognitive development, which includes "the ability to integrate...the knowledge and skills of different disciplines" (Hursh et al 43). In other words, to help students make interdisciplinary or cross-course connections.

- to reduce curricular fragmentation.
- to create a sense of community among MCC's commuter student population.
- to increase student retention and persistence toward a degree or certificate.
- to provide faculty development through team-teaching experiences.

Since the inception of MCC's learning community program, claims in the literature for learning communities have come under greater critical scrutiny (Talbert and Boyles).

Nevertheless, these goals continue to guide the program today. In activity system terms, the learning community movement can be seen as an activity system and these “program goals” as expressing the object/motive of the movement. They express its overarching purpose, its historically constituted aims, the seeds of which can be seen in Meikeljohn’s Experimental College, which is generally considered to be the first learning community. These goals also express the MCC learning community program’s object/motive which dialogically interacts with and shares in the object/motive of the movement in general.

The use of these program goals to guide formal, systematic course and learning program assessment at MCC is only just now getting underway. Sporadic assessments have shown high rates of student satisfaction and higher than normal course retention rates; faculty also report positively on the benefits of team-teaching for professional development. My study will contribute to MCC’s assessment efforts, particularly the assessment of student engagement and students’ ability to make cross-course connections by appropriating tools, or concepts and genres, across course boundaries in their writing. As I’ve noted, my study will provide empirical evidence of how underlying views of language mediating learning communities and the social practices they are enacting are affecting both motivation and interdisciplinary activity.

From the outset, as has occurred in most institutions, the majority of learning community courses at MCC have combined first-year composition with a disciplinary general education course. One such course is the site of my study. *The Power of the Past* was initiated by the two faculty members, Doug, a full-time English Division faculty member, and Amelia, a full-time History Division member. For the most part, learning community courses at MCC are initiated by faculty members who have an interest in

teaching together, rather than to meet program needs or to fulfill college objectives. Learning communities continue to be faculty initiated in part because the college recognizes that bottom-up innovations are more successful than top-down directives. The Power of the Past is both the course title and, as both faculty members indicated in interviews, its stated theme. From its inception in 1998, the class has been taught as a coordinated studies course, meaning the two courses have been combined into one block of time. Stand-alone History 111W courses meet for four hours a week and English 112 courses for three hours. The coordinated studies learning community, then, meets for seven hours a week, in two three-and-a-half hour blocks on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. Students who successfully complete the learning community earn four credits of history and three credits of composition. Doug and Amelia are both present in the classroom for the entire seven hours and are free to integrate their course materials and pedagogy to whatever degree they wish as long as they meet the goals and outcomes for their individual courses. They are also free to give one grade or separate grades, although the courses and grades are listed separately on student transcripts.

As I noted above, the MCC learning community program to date has not developed a formal list of course outcomes and objectives. However, informally, faculty teaching in learning communities that link composition and disciplinary courses, including Doug and Amelia, express the goals I articulated in the Introduction. Those are: 1) help students perceive the relationship of composition to their writing in other courses, 2) improve student writing, in part by providing occasions and contexts for writing, and 3) foster students' ability to see relationships and integrate material across

course boundaries. In activity theory terms, these goals can be seen as expressing the object/motive of the learning community.

Each semester a peer mentor is also part of the course, usually a student recruited by the faculty who has taken the learning community the previous year and been especially successful. Peer mentors are paid to attend class with the students and to facilitate after-class student study group meetings.

Any student is free to enroll in the learning community as long as she has met the prerequisite for College Comp. II (Eng. 112) which is successfully completing College Comp. I (Eng. 111) or receiving a passing grade on a competency test. Students find their way into The Power of the Past through a variety of means: they hear about it from advisors, former teachers, or former students of the course; they have had and liked one or the other faculty member in a previous course; or they have taken a learning community in a previous semester and want to replicate the experience. The course capacity is 41 students. This number is a compromise between the capacity set for English 112, which is 20, and for History 111W, which is 25. All the students must enroll in both courses. The course counts as two sections for each faculty member. In the Winter 2006 Semester, the time of my study, 41 students enrolled and 32 completed the course; 9 withdrew before the end of the semester.

The learning community intersects with MCC's Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program, another activity system, inasmuch as History 111 is a WAC course. Students in degree and transfer programs are required to take six credits of "W" courses in which writing-to-learn activities are employed. College Composition I and II are not

considered to be “W” courses. All of the History 111 courses are designated “W” courses.

The Power of the Past learning community also intersects with another activity system, MCC’s Honors Program. Students are admitted to the Honors Program based on faculty recommendations and/or test scores. To earn an Honors Certificate, students must complete 12 credits of Honors or “H” courses. The Power of the Past learning community admits a mix of Honors and non-Honors students. Some students take the course for Honors credit who are not yet in the Honors Program but may aspire to be. Students taking the course for Honors credit are required to do extra work, which I’ll explain further below.

#### Activity System Participants: Faculty and Student Configuration

In Winter 2006, most of the students were second-semester first-year students in their late teens or early twenties. Thirty-nine students in the learning community were taking the course for Honors credit and two were not. With the exception of one Native American, all the students appeared to be white. (This is not surprising since a large number of MCC’s minority students elect to take courses at one of the satellite campuses rather than on the main campus.) Eighteen of the students were women and twenty-three men. I did not collect specific socio-economic information about the students, but as I suggested above, most students at MCC are working class. The two faculty members are also white and are middle class. One is female and one male. Both hold Masters Degrees in their fields and are tenured in their respective divisions, History and English. Interestingly, Doug also holds a Masters Degree in History and has taught

history courses at MCC, including Survey of Early Western Civilization. Both are in their 40s and have been in their positions at least five years.

I include this information about the makeup of the activity systems' participants because, while race, gender, and class considerations are not a focus of my study, the work of sociolinguists, including Heath, Gee, Stuckey, Delpit and others, have shown that these factors are always at play as students undertake writing in academic settings. When students write, they must negotiate the new "ways with words" they are being asked to learn in light of the familiar discourses they bring with them from other communities, or activity systems. As Bruffee notes, students "belong to many overlapping, mutually inclusive knowledge communities" (qtd. in Walvoord and McCarthy 21), or interacting activity systems. As I've noted in Chapter Two, these differing discourses can be a source of conflict and contradiction within and between activity systems.

### The Theme

In our interviews, both Doug and Amelia indicated to me that their course title and theme was The Power of the Past. Both their syllabi began with this phrase depicted in bold letters. Doug's syllabus included a paragraph explaining the theme. Because my research questions deal, in part, with the function of the theme and its role in helping students make cross-course connections, I include that text here:

"As the learning community title suggests, we will be exploring an idea throughout the semester. We will be thinking about and writing about how the past informs the present. In particular, we will explore the role of humanism in Western Civilization and its influence on our society. The American novelist William Faulkner

once wrote that ‘the past is never dead. It’s not even past.’ Faulkner was telling us that we cannot separate ourselves from the past, that the present—and all it encompasses—is merely an extension of the past. That idea will provide our reading, research, writing, and conversations with a common thread, and it should help give us a better understanding of who we are. In short, we will be writing about history not only to learn about the past, but to better understand the present.”

Amelia’s syllabus did not address the theme directly. However, in our interviews, she indicated that the significance of the past was profoundly important to her both professionally and personally. In her first interview, she stated, “That’s my life’s theme” and went on to explain that students, in order to understand who they are, need to understand the past.

On the first day of class, both instructors made reference to the theme as they took the students through their respective syllabi. Amelia stated, “Page one shows the theme we are covering... ‘The Power of the Past’ will all come together at the end of the semester”. Doug told the students they would be “reading, writing, and thinking about the past and [their] own lives today.”

### Course Boundaries

While some coordinated studies faculty opt to blur or even erase course boundaries, Doug and Amelia have maintained the conventional boundaries of their respective courses, despite employing the coordinated studies model for the learning community. The degree of course integration in coordinated studies’ models can be said to fall along a continuum. At one end are courses like The Power of the Past which resemble linked courses except that they are team-taught. At the other end are courses



like those taught at Seattle Central Community College in which traditional course boundaries are virtually nonexistent and students choose from a menu of courses they can earn credit for.

Doug and Amelia maintained course boundaries in a number of ways. Amelia teaches the History 111W course I observed in much the same way she teaches her stand-alone History 111W courses. She provides the same lectures and assigns students the same reading and writing or classroom genres. Doug utilizes the subject matter of Early Western Civilization in his reading and writing assignments, but the type of assignments, or, again, classroom genres, a research paper, a book review, etc., are similar to those he gives in his stand-alone English 112 courses and similar to those assigned by other English 112 faculty. For the most part, each faculty member takes control of the class at separate intervals while the other sits at the front of the room but off to the side. The “off stage” teacher may interject, but on the whole, observes. I define interjections as 1) providing information or knowledge current in the other teacher’s discipline, or 2) asking clarifying questions about information or knowledge current in the other’s discipline. On three occasions, Doug delivered a short, 15 to 20 minute history lecture and he interjected while Amelia was lecturing, supplying historical information or asking questions, six times more often than Amelia interjected. On one occasion Amelia led a short, five-minute question and answer session about the play Lysistrada which was assigned by Doug. However, Amelia never lectured about writing or helped to facilitate small group activities initiated by Doug and her interjections with information or clarifying questions about writing were few and far between. Doug’s interjections during the history part of the course are no doubt partly attributable to his holding a degree in history and being an

experienced teacher of history as well as of composition. However, in my own fifteen-year experience teaching in learning communities, such interjections are not uncommon, particularly among faculty who have taught together for many years and know each other's course material well. It's significant, however, as my findings in Chapter Five will show, that in this case, these interjections were almost entirely uni-directional. Doug often interjected information and questions into the history part of the course but Amelia very rarely interjected comments into the composition course.

In addition to taking control of the class at separate intervals, Doug and Amelia maintained course boundaries in additional ways. They gave separate grades, including from time to time, "microgrades" or separate lists of assignments completed in each course with each student's grade to date. They provided students with separate syllabi. Even though one assignment was ostensibly assigned jointly, it was described only on Doug's syllabus and listed only on Doug's micrograde list of assignments. Moreover, both faculty and students often referred to the two parts of the learning community as separate courses, or activity systems. Frequently during interviews, the students in my study would say, "In Doug's part of the class..." or "For Amelia, we...." One student in my study, Elicia (her pseudonym), in answer to a question during her second individual interview about whether she saw the learning community as one course or two, said, "It's not like they talked together. They talked separately. And he [Doug] didn't talk about the history at all." Her comment is particularly noteworthy since, as I've noted, Doug in actuality did talk "about the history" on many occasions. Even the faculty talked about the courses as separate entities. Comments like this one from Amelia spoken during the twenty-third class session, were commonplace: "This is Doug's part of the class, but...."

On a day when class was cancelled due to bad weather, students received an email saying, in part, “There is nothing assigned for the History part of the class...” and “For the English part....”

College Composition II (English 112):

College Composition II is the second-semester writing course in a two-semester sequence. It is taught within the larger activity system of the English Division which employs 34 full-time and 37 part-time faculty. The Division offers a sequence of developmental reading and writing courses, the College Composition I and II first-year sequence, and several technical and advanced writing courses. It also offers various courses in literature and creative writing. There is no separate composition department; as long as they are qualified, faculty can teach any course offered by the Division. A mandatory placement program determines which reading and writing courses students must enroll in depending on their admission test (COMPASS) scores. Most degree and transfer programs require successful completion of College Composition I and II.

College Composition II is required by nearly all students at MCC. The English Division offers approximately 60 sections of English 112 every Winter Semester, 30 every Fall, and 25 every Spring/Summer. The course is taught by both full-time and part-time faculty. During Winter 2006, three sections of English 112 were part of learning communities. According to the college catalogue, English 112 “expands students’ abilities and versatility in reading, language awareness, and composing for a range of purposes, audiences, and situations, including academic research writing.” Faculty are free to create their own course, their own syllabus, and to select their own reading

materials, as long as the students can meet the course outcomes, which are the same for all sections. Those course outcomes are listed in Appendix A.

Doug also had other goals for the students which he expressed during our interviews, most of which involved writing about history. He indicated his assignments were all designed to engage students in “historical reflective thinking.” He wanted students to be able to apply historical knowledge in the writing they did for his class. And he wanted them to become more aware of the “thinking processes” that writing involves, including those employed in history such as drawing conclusions from evidence. Moreover, in his syllabus (Appendix B), under “Course Goals,” Doug stated that students would be using writing and reading “to explore topics and themes in the history of Early Western Civilization.” Doug also expressed additional goals for the students. He wanted them to understand that even in academic writing, there was room for creativity through vehicles such as voice. He also wanted the students to use the context afforded by the history course to be, as he said in his first interview, “more reflective, more critical, more creative, and more analytical in their writing.” These additional goals are worth mentioning because they suggest discursive tools, in addition to those listed in the course goals, that students might appropriate across course boundaries.

#### Classroom Genres:

In addition to a few minor writing projects, the students in the College Composition II activity system wrote three major essays individually and one assignment in collaborative writing groups. Students taking the course for Honors credit, including all the students in my study, also participated in an online symposium.

Doug viewed the three major essays as forming a series in which each essay required more complex thinking and writing practices than the one before (Appendix C).

### The Persuasive Essay

This was the first major writing assignment the students produced for Doug. In the assignment description, Doug provided the rhetorical context for the essay (Appendix C). Each student was to take on the role of scribe in a particular ancient civilization, for example, the Minoans. They were to imagine that recently the king of a distant country had visited and remarked off the record that the people of that society were “a bunch of barbarians.” The scribe was to respond in writing by persuading the king and the world at large that his/her society was indeed civilized. Two class sessions prior to the students receiving this assignment, Amelia had given a lecture in which she described the three defining features of an ancient civilization. Thus, in order to successfully complete the essay for Doug, students had to apply the knowledge provided in the history course to the issue of whether or not their society was civilized. And they had to amass evidence, some of it gleaned through research, to support their claim and to persuade their audience. Doug encouraged the students to be creative in their use of voice and to focus their attention on structure and on their use of content. On the assignment sheet, he indicated he wanted students to be particularly conscious of these aspects of writing: content, structure, and voice. Before writing the essay, students were given an opportunity to practice the task Doug was requiring. Working in groups, they applied the elements of civilization to Stonehenge, which they had learned about in a brief lecture by Doug.

To complete the essay, students engaged in prewriting activities, wrote at least two drafts which they shared with Doug and with peers in writing groups, and edited their final copy. Complete essays ranged in length from three to five pages. Doug then assigned formal grades to the completed essays, along with providing written feedback on each of the following delineated areas: content, structure, style (voice), text preparation (editing and mechanics), and research and documentation.

#### The Evaluation Essay:

The second major essay the students wrote for Doug was an evaluation of the historical novel by Steven Saylor, The Arms of Nemesis, which is set in ancient Rome, a subject that Amelia lectured on at length. In their evaluation, students were asked to develop and use three criteria to evaluate the book as a work of fiction and as a work of history (Appendix C). In other words, two criteria could be used to evaluate the book as an historical source and one could be used to examine it as a work of fiction, or vice versa. Once again, the audience was provided by Doug: people who were interested in ancient Rome and knew something about it and were readers of fiction—curious, educated adults. The paper was to be at least three pages long. Students were required to do research to augment the knowledge of ancient Rome they had learned in the history course and to glean information about evaluating works of fiction. In his assignment description, Doug noted that the essay should include both the historical context in which the novel takes place and a plot and character summary. The central point of the essay, the thesis, needed to express the student's overall judgment of the novel as a piece of historical fiction.

Doug, in an interview, indicated that he felt this writing task was more complex than the persuasive essay. For the persuasive essay, students researched information about an ancient society and then examined that culture through the lens of the defining features of civilization. In this case, he said, in his second interview, students had to work with “a triangle...of knowledge and information,” their own knowledge and views of ancient Rome learned in the history course, Saylor’s text, and research conducted about both ancient Roman history and about fiction writing. As with the persuasive essay, to be successful, students had to apply their knowledge of history to a problem or issue, in this case, the evaluation of an historical novel.

To complete the paper, students again engaged in prewriting activities, wrote multiple drafts on which they received feedback from Doug and from peers in writing groups, and edited the final copy. Doug assigned formal grades and provided written feedback on the same specific areas: content, structure, style, text preparation, documentation and sources.

#### The Time and Place, or Analysis, Essay

This third essay required that students first select a specific place during a specific time in Early Western Civilization (Appendix C). Their task then was two fold: 1) to describe that place and 2) to draw a conclusion as to its historical significance and support that conclusion. In the assignment description, Doug wrote that their purpose was “both descriptive and expository.” Doug again supplied the audience: readers of a new magazine called The Historical Traveler. These readers were people interested in traveling to places of historical interest or significance. The audience, then, further limited the students’ topic selection to historical places that a modern traveler could visit.

The paper was to be at least four pages long and students were, again, required to do research to augment their knowledge of history acquired in Amelia's class.

In his final interview, Doug indicated he felt this was cognitively the most complex piece of writing he asked the students to produce. They had to "pull together...research and class notes and come to some judgment." Drawing conclusions about historical significance from historical information was a complex and sophisticated thinking task for students, he noted. As in the other assignments, to be successful, students had to apply their knowledge of history to a problem or issue, in this case analyzing the historical significance of a specific place during a specific time.

To complete the paper, students undertook the same process steps they had for the other papers: prewriting, drafting and editing. They received formal grades and the same kind of feedback from Doug as on their previous papers.

#### Collaborative Preface and Afterward

In addition to the three major individually-produced essays described above, students also collaborated in small groups of four to five to write a preface and an afterward to the play, Lysistrada, which they had been assigned to read. Contrary to the other assignments, students in this case were not to do any outside research but were to rely solely on the historical knowledge they had learned in Amelia's class. The Preface was to provide a modern reader of the play with the historical context within which the play is set. The Afterward was to explain what the reader could learn about ancient Greek society from reading the play. As the assignment description noted, student success would, again, depend on their "applying the knowledge and insight that [they] were gaining in both learning community courses." As with the other projects, students



engaged in prewriting, drafting and editing and received formal grades and written feedback from Doug.

### The Listserve Symposium

As I noted above, students who took the course for Honors credit, including all of the eleven students in my study, took part in the Listserve Symposium. Four listserv assignments were posted, one by Amelia and three by Doug. A description of the listserv requirement was included in Doug's syllabus but not in Amelia's. Grades for the listserv appeared on the micrograde lists provided by Doug but not on those provided by Amelia.

One of the listserv assignments posted by Doug asked students to discuss characters from the historical novel they had read, The Arms of Nemesis, through the lens of two concepts that Amelia had lectured on—Optimates and Populares. Similar to "Democrats" and "Republicans," these terms represented philosophical and political orientations to life held by many Romans. Once again, to be successful, students had to apply these concepts learned in history to the issue of which characters in the novel represented these points of view.

### Classroom Genres and Student Roles

Assignments like these represent what Russell defines as "classroom genres." He writes, "I call the genres that routinely mediate the dialogic interactions of a course *classroom genres* [including] research papers, essays, book reports...and so on" ("Rethinking" 531). Elsewhere, he and Yanez note that these genre pathways are the primary means by which students expand their involvement in the activity system, the course (352). Moreover, the classroom genres, the tools, of a particular course form a

genre system. The classroom genre system of any classroom is situated between two other systems, on the one hand, the genre system of the discipline or field, and on the other, the genre system of the college, Russell notes. (“Rethinking” 532). In this case, the genre system of Eng 112 is situated between the genre system of Composition Studies and that of MCC. As I pointed out earlier, Doug’s assignments reflect goals for student writing that are often sited in Composition Studies literature. And the papers students produce are eventually reduced to grades which appear on college transcripts. Thus, “the dialogic classroom interactions of teachers and students are linked intertextually, if indirectly, to other social practices” (Russell, “Rethinking” 530).

In this case, this linking is even more complex inasmuch as Doug’s course also interacts with Amelia’s history course and indirectly with the discipline of history. And the genre system of Doug’s English 112 course reflects this intertextual linking. In Chapter Two, I referred to a study conducted by B. Walvoord and L.P. McCarthy in which they, together with four teachers, examined writing in introductory general education courses, including a history course. They suggested that student behavior and faculty expectations in general education courses, like history, can be seen in terms of roles or performed identities. The researchers observed and named three student “roles,” among them that of professional-in-training which refers to students acting as professionals in the teacher’s field or as professionals in another field, able to utilize knowledge learned in the discipline; these students focus on issues and problems raised in the assignment, presumably disciplinary issues, and employ disciplinary knowledge and methods to address them. Another role is that of “text-processor” which refers to students doing things with texts such as summarizing, synthesizing, etc., but without

addressing issues or solving problems (Walvoord et al 9). Walvoord et al note that teachers who expect students to take on the “professional-in-training” role typically assign writing that calls for evaluation or problem-solving in the form of what they call good/better/best questions:

“Good: Is X good or bad?  
Better: Which is better, X or Y?  
Best: Which is best among the available options?” (7)

All of Doug’s assignments could be said to fall under the “Good” question category and to require students to be professionals-in-training. In the persuasive essay, he asked students to apply the elements of civilization learned in history to a particular society in order to argue the issue of whether or not it was a true or “good” civilization. In the evaluation essay, students had to make use of their knowledge of history to judge the merits, the “goodness,” of an historical novel. In the time and place, or analysis, paper, students analyzed the historical significant of a place in time—its “goodness” or “badness”—from evidence, thus employing their knowledge of history and history-based methods. Doug stated in his first interview that he expected students to apply discipline-based concepts, in other words, to take on a professional-in-training role, even if the problems or issues students addressed were not always disciplinary ones. He said,

Something that’s going on from the very beginning to the end of the semester is applied knowledge....Students are going to take that historical knowledge [taught by Amelia], they’re going to build on it, and they’re going to create a new set of knowledge...

The culture of Doug’s course also reflects those in which students are asked to take on a professional-in-training role. In Chapter Two, I pointed out that the roles conceived of by Walvoord et al correspond to a large degree to the ways students were expected to act in the differing classroom cultures that Susan Miller and Cheryl Geisler

observed. They discuss cultural differences students encounter among general education courses, including differences in knowledge-making rights, purposes for writing, and values related to collaboration and competition (Worth; Geisler). As I noted in Chapter Two, courses in which students are granted knowledge-making rights, write rhetorically, and engage in collaborative writing practices appear to reflect cultural values that also foster students taking on the role of professional-in-training. Doug's assignments granted students knowledge-making rights, albeit limited ones; students were asked to make evaluative judgments and to draw analytical conclusions. Doug also provided rhetorical, even if imagined, purposes for writing; in paper one, for instance, as I noted, students were asked to persuade an imaginary foreign king who had criticized their society that it was indeed a civilized culture. Lastly, through peer response groups and group writing projects, Doug signaled that he valued cooperation and collaboration among students. These cultural practices, together with Doug's assignments, comprise the genre system of the course which, as the professional-in-training role—or "historians-in-training" role--performed by students reflects, is intertextually linked to the discipline of history through The Power of the Past learning community.

#### Survey of Early Western Civilization (History 111)

The Survey of Early Western Civilization course at MCC is taught within the larger activity system of the History Discipline which is situated within the yet larger Social Sciences Division. The Social Sciences Division is comprised of the following Disciplines: Sociology, Psychology, History, Applied Behavioral Science, Child Development, Criminal Justice, Economics, and Political Science. The History Discipline employs three full-time and four part-time faculty. They offer a variety of

history courses all of which meet the Social Science general education requirements. Associate in Arts and Science degrees require that students take eight credits of Social Science courses, eight credits of Humanities courses, and eight credits of Natural Science courses. As I noted earlier, all the Survey of Early Western Civilization courses interact with MCC's WAC program; all are "W" courses. There are no prerequisites for History 111W and because students can choose from a variety of courses to meet their Social Science general education requirement; it is an elective, not a required, course. The Social Science Division offers approximately six sections of History 111W every Winter Semester, five every Fall, and three every Spring/Summer. The course is taught by both full and part-time faculty. During Winter 2006, two sections were part of a learning community. According to the college catalogue, students in History 111W "study political, social, economic, and cultural history of Europe from prehistoric times through the 1500s. [The course] gives particular attention to civilizations and their relevant contributions to the modern world." As in composition, faculty are free to create their own course, their own syllabus (See Amelia's syllabus, Appendix D), and to select their own reading materials, as long as students can meet the course outcomes, which are the same for all sections. Those outcomes are listed in Appendix E, and include:

Outcome: Perform writing tasks to promote learning of concepts.

Objectives:

Document attainment of skills learned.

Demonstrate knowledge of the subject.

Outcome: Demonstrate the learning of concepts through writing.

Objectives:

Analyze course content in written form.

Explain the subject matter in a coherent writing style.

Amelia also had other goals for the students which she described during our interviews.

An important goal for her, one which she reiterated many times in class and in our

conversations, was that students learn “the story” of Early Western Civilization and that they own the story. She stated in her second interview, “...the students who are acing the exams are the students who have truly made it [the story] their own, who aren’t regurgitating.” She further clarified this aim when she referred to a past student who had “turned it [the lecture material] into his story, with his language. He completely understood it all from his terminology and his point of view....It was no longer mine; it was his.” Another important goal for Amelia was that students be able to tell the story in a nuanced way, one that expresses the complexity of the events involved and their significance. In her third interview, she said she wanted them “to deal with complexity and all those shades of gray.” Amelia also hoped students would come to understand that the U.S. is a product of Western Civilization, that many of our beliefs, values, and behaviors have their roots in ancient Western European culture. She said in her second interview that she wanted students to realize that “we are who we are because of the past.” Significantly, when asked about writing-related goals, Amelia mentioned only that she expected the students to use MLA citation rules correctly when she required them to do so. This point is notable because while many of Doug’s goals, indeed all of his major assignments, involved students in writing to apply history, Amelia expressed only this one writing-related aim. This seems especially significant in light of the fact that Doug and Amelia have been teaching The Power of the Past learning community together for nine years.

Aside from a few minor writing activities, the students in the History 111W activity system wrote three major exams and four quiz-preparation “packets.” They also were instructed to take detailed lecture notes.

## Exam I – The Greeks

The exam contained four sections: an essay question, map identifications, phrase identifications, and chronology. Students were given a choice of two essay questions and asked to respond to one. The students had been given the questions as part of a study guide provided a week before the exam (Appendix F). It listed three questions the students might expect to see, among them the two that appeared on the exam. The questions were primarily how and why questions and contained multiple parts.

The identification section asked students to choose three of five phrases and to “identify and tell the story.” These too were included on the study guide among a total of 29 possible phrases that might appear on the exam. The study guide explained that students were to include relevant dates and the significance of the reference, in other words, where it fit into “the story.”

The chronology section listed five events and asked students to put them in chronological order. These too were on the study guide; they were events related in some way to five of the 29 possible identification phrases.

The map identifications asked students to identify thirteen places indicated by numbers on a map of ancient Athens. The study guide listed sixteen possible locations that might appear. It explained that the students were to identify the place and explain its function—how it was used or its historical context. Many times throughout the course, Amelia urged the students in their answer to “take me on a stroll” through the area covered on the map. On the study guide for the third exam, she wrote, “Take me on a stroll,” in bold letters. This is notable because students had an opportunity to use the rhetorical concept of voice which they were studying in Doug’s course.

The exam also included three quotations which students could identify for bonus points. They had to indicate who had said it and what it meant. They could get additional bonus points if they could incorporate the quotes into their essay or their map or phrase identifications.

Students took the exam in the testing center. They wrote in blue books using a pen or pencil. They had unlimited time within the operating hours of the center.

Amelia assigned formal grades to the completed exams. She also typed a one-page letter to each student providing general comments about the aptness and thoroughness of their answers. Amelia indicated in an interview that her purpose in writing the letter was to show students how they could do better on the next exam.

#### Exam II – The Romans

The second exam was similar to the first with one notable exception. On the study guide, the students were given the essay exam question (Appendix F). There was no list of possible questions to prepare for; students knew prior to the exam what the essay question would be. This is notable because students had an opportunity to use the writing process they were learning in Doug's course to draft and revise their essay before writing it on the exam.

Once again, students took the exam in the testing center, writing their answers by hand in blue books.

Again, Amelia assigned formal grades but this time did not provide feedback in the form of a typed letter. Rather, she wrote a few brief comments, by hand, on each exam next to relevant sections, and a two to three sentence summary comment on the students' overall performance at the end of the exam.



### Exam III – The Middle Ages and Renaissance

The last exam followed the same general format as the other two exams except that the essay portion this time was “take home” (Appendix F). Because a large portion of the question dealt with art, Amelia asked students to refer to art books obtained at the library while they wrote the essay. She asked the students not to treat the essay like a paper assignment but to write it the way they would if they were at the testing center. The difference, however, was that they could take more time, write in a more comfortable location, and use the art books. Toward this end, she required that the essay be handwritten. Again, this format is notable because students had an opportunity to use the writing process they were learning in English 112, despite Amelia’s instructions.

Students took the phrase identification and map identification portion of the exam in the testing center.

Amelia assigned formal grades to the completed exams and provided only brief sporadic comments on the answers because the course had ended. Students who wanted to see their final exams, again, had to pick them up and most did not. Amelia provided additional feedback, however, for those who requested it.

### Quiz Preparation Packets and Quizzes

In addition to writing the exams, students wrote quiz preparation “packets” on four different occasions over the course of the semester. The instructions included reading assignments from four textbook sources and a list of from nine to twelve questions on the reading. For each “packet,” students provided “rough” (handwritten) answers to the questions as a means of preparing for the upcoming quiz. Typically for two of the questions, students were to write “rough” answers and then type them. These

were to include quotations from the readings to support their points , using proper MLA in-text citation form, and were to include a Works Cited page, again using proper MLA style.

The quizzes themselves asked for information from the readings. The final question usually asked for information about writing from Doug’s lectures, although the quiz preparation did not mention Doug’s course. For example, “What is the difference between primary and secondary research sources?” was one such question.

### Lecture Notes

Students were repeatedly reminded throughout the course to take detailed notes on the history lectures. Frequently, Amelia would pause in her lecture to ask, “Are you getting this down?” She also repeatedly instructed the students to recopy their lecture notes shortly after each class session. She provided a letter from a former student describing the benefits of this means of learning the course material. The syllabus also stressed the importance of these two writing activities—note taking and recopying notes.

### Classroom Genres and Student Roles

Like Doug’s assignments in English 112, these writing activities constitute the classroom genre system of the History 111W activity system. As I noted following Russell, this system, like every classroom genre system, is situated between the genre system of the discipline, history, and that of the college, MCC. Thus it is “linked intertextually” to other social practices (Russell, “Rethinking” 530). Through The Power of the Past learning community, History 111W also interacts intertextually with Doug’s course, English 112, and with the field of composition. The degree of intertextuality among activity systems, of course, varies. As I’ve shown, the high degree of intextual

interaction between Doug's English 112 course and discipline of history is reflected in the genre system of his course which, for the most part, asks students to take on the role of professional-in-training. The degree of intertextual interaction between Amelia's History 111W and the field of composition, on the other hand, is quite low, as is also reflected in the genre system of her course and in Amelia's goals for the course. Several times in our interviews, Amelia reported that she did not attend to the students' writing in her course. She stated in a voicemail message that followed up her last interview, "I don't grade at all on writing. I totally grade on content....I don't put...any credit on their formulating, their writing style, any kind of conclusion or introduction or anything like that."

As Amelia indicated, the writing activities in her course ask students to provide "content," to tell "the story." Walvoord and McCarthy point to a study conducted by Nelson and Hayes which identified two "approaches" to writing assignments, a "content-approach" and an "issue-approach." They suggest a link between these approaches and the "text-processor" and "professional-in-training" roles they identified (11). The text-processor role requires that students "focus centrally on processing texts in some way (summarizing, synthesizing, reviewing, commenting)" as opposed to using knowledge to address issues or solve problems (Walvoord et al 9). As I noted in Chapter One, these differing roles also correspond to the ways students were expected to act in the differing classroom cultures that Miller, Geisler, and others have observed. Typically, as was the case in Amelia's class, text-processors are not granted knowledge-making rights, do not write in response to rhetorical situations, and are not invited to engage in collaborative or cooperative writing practices. Rather, text-processors consume knowledge and write for

display and evaluation. As Hounsell notes in his discussion of the history essay exam, its purpose is to allow students to increase their knowledge and display that knowledge for evaluating purposes (108). Cheryl Geisler, too, states that, because the purpose of general education has become the transfer of knowledge (117), students typically write to acquire existing knowledge or to display knowledge learned for a teacher to evaluate (103). Amelia confirmed that she expects students to write for these arhetorical purposes. On the study guide for her third exam, she indicates students should write the essay and “write to learn.” Moreover, on several occasions in our interviews, she stated she wanted students to write to display their knowledge and learning. In her first interview, she said, “In the case of the exams, it’s totally about them showing me what they know.” Walvoord and McCarthy, however, point out that text-processing activities can be sophisticated (10). As I noted in Chapter One, Aviva Freedman and Joan Carson, et al, agree. Freedman argues that even when students write for display, they must perform particular ways of knowing deemed valid by the discipline (132). In their study, Carson et al likewise found that such activities required a complex integration of reading and writing skills (33). On several occasions, Amelia indicated that she expected students to demonstrate not only a mastery of historical facts but a nuanced understanding of their significance. Nevertheless, arhetorical text-processing activities belong more to the culture of schooling than to the disciplinary culture of history. As Russell notes, “...courses in the activity system of schooling are only at the distant boundary of the activity system of the discipline” (“Rethinking” 539). I’ll discuss the significance of this culture of schooling and the text-processor role expected of students in the activity system of History 111W later in Chapters Five and Six.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have described the two activity systems, College Composition II (English 112/112H) and Survey of Early Western Civilization (History 111W/111HW) that make up The Power of the Past” learning community, the site of my research. I’ve described in particular detail the writing assignments or classroom genres of each system and the student roles or performed identities associated with those genres. In the following chapter, I describe my research methodology.

## CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY AND STUDY DESIGN

### Research Methodology

In this chapter, I describe the ethnographic research methods I used to conduct my case study of The Power of the Past learning community. I include additional brief information about my research site. I explain my case study design and include a description of my data collection, management, and analysis processes.

### Ethnographic Research Methods

As I noted in the Introduction, because activity theory examines human behavior and motivations in terms of activity systems, systems which are viewed as interacting social networks, I conducted a casestudy of the learning community, The Power of the Past, using ethnographic research methods. While, as LeCompte and Preissle point out, ethnography is not a precisely defined method of research, generally ethnographers enter and observe a cultural setting, or an activity system, in activity theory terms.

Ethnographic methods, as Ruth Ray notes, reflect “a research paradigm which attempts to account as fully as possible, for naturally occurring events in their social context” (55).

Thus using ethnographic research methods in my case study allowed me to enter into the two interacting activity systems that comprised the learning community, as a participant-observer, and to obtain a first-hand understanding of what took place. As a participant-observer, I was able to observe and study, albeit for just one semester, the “ways of living of a social group” (Heath), the rich context of the two integrated courses, or systems—their participants, tools (particularly genres), rules, values, objectives, goals, divisions of labor, conditions fostering zones of proximal development, conflicts and contradictions (see Chapter Two for a complete description of these elements of activity/genre theory).

Inasmuch as my study is a representation of an educational setting (studies using ethnographic methods are both product and process), it falls under the category of educational research. Educational research using ethnographic research methods typically aims to provide “rich, descriptive data about the contexts, activities, and beliefs of participants in education settings” (LeCompte and Preissle 8). More specifically, because I focused my study mainly on student writing and students’ perceptions of their activities, it can also be characterized as writing research using ethnographic methods. As Wendy Bishop notes, ethnographic writing research includes the study of student writing and the culture in which it is produced, how individuals “are asked to write and perceive those jobs or academic assignments and carry them out” (1).

That I have chosen an ethnographic research methods approach reflects my own grounding in a particular set of beliefs about empirical research. As Atkinson and Hammersely, Potter, Creswell, Bishop and others have noted, ethnography, despite its amorphous nature, does have some typical features which reflect these beliefs. Ethnographic methods, generally, are inductive vs. deductive. They interpret data and so data are not collected within a preconceived set of categories. I want to reiterate here, following Russell, that while I do use activity/genre theory as a lens, it is as an observational tool, more a heuristic than a scientific or positivist frame. Ethnographic methods also focus on a limited number of cases, closely observed. And, finally, they seek to understand and interpret the meanings of human activity, including language use (Bishop 6). Thus, researchers using an ethnographic approach, like myself, value the holistic, the naturalistic, even the subjective, and as rhetorical constructs, their written accounts, like this one, argue from those beliefs (following Bishop 5).

## Research Site

As I noted in the Introduction, I selected The Power of the Past learning community as the site of my research study because it fully integrated, in a coordinated studies model, a composition course and a disciplinary general education course, a common learning community pairing. The course has been taught by the same two faculty members for nine years and is considered to be a successful learning community. I wanted to explore the extent to which the fully coordinated learning community model, and specifically the theme, fosters first-year students' ability to make cross-course connections and increases student engagement, two claims made in the learning community literature. I especially wanted to observe a learning community comprised of general education courses since students often don't see the knowledge work of their required core courses as valuable to them personally or professionally. Thus they frequently feel alienated and unmotivated by the specialized writing they are asked to perform. I wanted to also observe the views of language and the social practices mediating a course combining composition and a disciplinary course. Most importantly, I wanted to examine how those underlying assumptions about language were affecting interdisciplinary activity.

I also selected the site because I was able to gain access to it. As the founder of the learning community program at MCC and the program coordinator from 1991 to 2000, I have been involved with learning community faculty and staff there for sixteen years. For the past seven years, I've served on the Learning Community Advisory Board and I have frequently taught in learning communities since the inception of its program. Doug, one of the teachers in my study, has been my colleague in the English Division.



Both Doug and Amelia, the other faculty member, have served with me on the Advisory Board. Moreover, as colleagues at the same institution involved in the same work, we have also been together at social functions.

When I asked Doug and Amelia if I could use their learning community as the basis of my study, they agreed. Wendy Bishop notes, “Quite a few ethnographic decisions rest on access” (65). Often researchers, such as Creswell (114), recommend against using sites with which the researcher already has some relationship. However, as qualitative research, and particularly teacher research, has gained credibility, the researcher with “insider” status has become more commonplace. Referring to Stenhouse, Ray advocates research that involves “*professional judgment*,” that is, “research done *in* education by those who are part of the learning environment,” or, “insider research” (51). Bishop, too, points out, that “it is legitimate and sometimes preferable to work with a friend, a peer, or a local contact person” (62), citing her own dissertation research as a case in point.

Regardless of whether the researcher’s relationship to a site is that of insider or outsider, researchers need to be aware of and reflect on their own subjectivities and viewpoints, particularly with regard to power relationships among involved individuals. LeCompte and Preissle note that “qualitative research is distinguished partly by its admission of the subjective perception and biases of both participants and researcher into the research frame” (92). No doubt any researcher’s “subjective perceptions,” including my own, are innumerable, and many remain unconscious. I stated my bias toward social conceptions of language in the Introduction. I’ll mention a few more here that are relevant to this chapter. First, as the founder of the Learning Community Program at

MCC, I am aware that I have a vested interest in the program and its courses appearing in a positive light. I have attempted, as many researcher theorists suggest, to be aware of this proclivity and, if possible, use it to become more conscious of issues that I may need to examine or analyze (LeCompte and Preissle 92). Secondly, while my professional relation with Amelia is largely unproblematic because she is in another Division, I am in a superior position to Doug within our English Division inasmuch as I am a Full Professor and he is an Assistant Professor. Rank at MCC is relatively unimportant but should Doug apply for promotion to Full Professor in the future, I, together with the entire Division membership, will vote on his application. In this regard, Doug had a possible future interest in agreeing to my request for access. On the other hand, collegiality for its own sake is highly valued at MCC and assisting colleagues is part of our culture, so it's difficult to determine how much of a factor our difference in rank played in Doug's participation. I suspect one benefit of our long association was that Doug felt he knew me and could trust me to be a fair observer and researcher.

The bulk of my research took place at MCC in the Fine Arts Building. In Room 125, I acted as participant-observer in the two courses that comprise the learning community, College Composition II (English 112) and Survey of Early Western Civilization (History 111W). Upstairs in a second-floor conference room, I held the bulk of my student and faculty interviews. Because MCC is located in a rural area at some distance from the cities it serves, there were occasions when it was more convenient for the students and faculty to conduct interviews in their home cities. Thus, the first one-on-one interview I conducted with Matt (a pseudonym) took place in a public library where he lived. Four of the second one-on-one interviews, those I conducted with Joe, Noah,

Brandy, and Scott (all pseudonyms), took place in an office in Noah's home. These four students were friends and lived near each other. The semester had ended and they had no other reason to make the thirty-minute drive to MCC. The office space was large with a door shutting it off from the rest of the house. It was well furnished with a large table in the middle where I conducted the four audio-taped interviews sequentially one afternoon. Lastly, because Doug and Amelia and I live in the same city, the first faculty interviews were conducted on a Saturday afternoon in an office in my home. The second set of faculty interviews were likewise conducted on a Saturday afternoon in our city in a colleague's home office; the three of us were scheduled to be there for another meeting and so arranged to arrive early to hold the interviews. All other one-on-one interviews and all focus group interviews took place on campus.

### Participants

In addition to the two faculty members, Doug and Amelia, whom I've described, the participants in my study were eleven first-year students, five men and six women. Two additional students were initially involved but dropped the course for reasons unrelated to the project.

The eleven students who agreed to participate did so after I invited them to be part of the study. I decided to personally invite students to join the project for a number of reasons related to the fact that community college students, typically, lead extremely stressful lives. They often work more than one job, in addition to attending school. They frequently contend with a myriad of family and other social demands on their time and energy. Financial concerns, among them paying for childcare, for car maintenance and for gas to get to and from school and work, loom large. Because their parents and other

adult role models probably have not attended college, they are typically in the process of becoming acculturated to academic life. Schoolwork, especially attention to details like staying organized, keeping a calendar, and remembering to show up for scheduled conferences with teachers, can be a low priority. Wendy Bishop describes the experience of Sandra Teichmann who also worked with community college students. “She found that her working-class students were often unable to keep intended appointments or that many indicated a willingness they really didn’t have, which resulted in a *mélange* of mysterious no shows” (85). After twenty years of teaching in a community college, I was well aware of these challenges and I knew I needed a method of selection that would help ensure my informants would be reliable enough to follow through the study so that I could complete it.

Moreover, the previous year, as I noted in the Introduction, I had contemplated using just student writing as a basis for my study, before I realized I needed to be immersed in the entire learning community context. I contacted several faculty members at MCC who agreed to let me speak to their learning community students to solicit copies of their work. Over 200 students signed an IRB approved permission form and agreed to print out on the computer an additional copy of their formal assignments for me to collect. As it turned out, very few students managed to remember to do this extra step despite timely reminders from faculty members. After that experience, I was even more concerned about finding access to reliable informants.

When I became aware that, of the 40 or so students registered for *The Power of the Past* learning community, seven were former students of mine, I decided to invite those six to participate in my study. I knew the students were, for the most part,

responsible and reliable. I also had a good rapport with all of them, even though they had received a wide range of final grades from me in the past, from barely passing to “A.”

The remaining four I invited at the recommendation of a colleague. She was aware of my fear that an open invitation to all 40 learning community students would result in either no responses or in students’ agreeing to participate and then dropping out. The four she recommended she had had the previous term and knew them also to be fairly reliable.

They too had attended class and done their homework regularly.

The challenge of informant selection is often discussed among qualitative research theorists. LeCompte and Preissle, for example, describe several categories of sampling under which my selection decisions fall. They mention “convenience sampling” or selection based on serendipitous factors such as “ease of access” and “convenience to the researcher” (70). In “criterion-based selection” the researcher creates a list of necessary informant characteristics (70). In my case, informants had to be reliable enough to both do the work assigned in the learning community and follow up with our scheduled interviews. “Quota-selection” involves selecting a representative subset of a larger population (72). The eleven students in my study were representative of those in the learning community. There was a nearly equal number of men and women. All were recent high school graduates and in their first year of college. All were white, except for one Native American student.

By coincidence, all but one of the students had taken a learning community in the past at MCC and four had also had a learning community course in high school. All indicated their previous experiences had been positive. I viewed this as a fortuitous turn of events because it meant these students had faced and successfully negotiated the

challenges that students new to learning communities often encounter. These can include being overwhelmed by the workload—students seem to forget that they are taking two or more courses—and dealing with faculty members who may have different teaching styles or points of view on issues. I felt these more experienced students would likely perceive these challenges more objectively than would students who were new to learning communities.

All the students had specific plans for their future careers. Significantly, one student, Joe (a pseudonym) intended to major in history and to teach history at the secondary or post-secondary level. I was particularly interested in his perceptions of the course. Presumably, the general education history course would have “use value” for him whereas most students, as I’ve noted, have difficulty seeing the relevance of writing specialized discourses in general education courses to their future lives as professionals or citizens.

All the students and faculty signed RIB approved consent forms. I have given all the participants pseudonyms in accordance with our confidentiality agreements.

### Study Design

As I’ve stated, because I wanted to observe first-hand the full context of the two integrated courses in The Power of the Past learning community, I designed a case study using ethnographic research methods as a means of obtaining empirical evidence of how the learning community model, the underlying views of language and social practices enacted, including the theme, did or did not facilitate students’ ability to make cross-course connections and foster student engagement and motivation. Like Wendy Bishop, I looked for models to follow. Because Patricia Harms also used activity/genre theory as a

lens to observe a linked learning community course, I used her study design as a model. In the Introduction, I described the differences in our studies. I examined an integrated rather than a linked course and one comprised of general education courses rather than pre-professional courses. My research questions also revolved around language practices and the course theme whereas hers did not. However, I deliberately modeled my research design after hers. Because very few, if any, other empirical studies of learning communities have been conducted, I wanted learning community scholars to be able to read our two studies in tandem and to readily discern the similarities and differences in our findings. Both of us observed learning community models that are being employed in hundreds of colleges across the country. How these models are affecting student learning and literacy differently and similarly is of import to those working in the learning community movement.

I also looked to other qualitative research studies, particularly those involving writing “skills transfer” across course boundaries. Like Freedman, et al, I took a “naturalistic” approach. I was interested in observing the participants’ perceptions of their literacy activities, a vantage point that activity theory as an observational lens readily provides. Like Freedman et al, my goal was “to elicit and value the participants’ own construction of the meaning of the discursive practices, and, on that basis, to point to patterns in the richly textured, socially constructed realities of each discursive context” (Suits 201). Along with Walvoord and MacCarthy, I understand the naturalistic inquiry paradigm to include a number of assumptions, among them: that reality is socially constructed and multiple; that research is not objective or value-free—researchers and informants influence each other; the aim, as with activity theory, is not to reach universal

conclusions but to develop “working hypotheses” that capture the intricacies of particular situations; and that research designs and decisions emerge as the process unfolds (19).

My study also reflects an adherence to a number of related assumptions about classrooms described by Walvoord and MacCarthy, assumptions that interestingly also underlie activity theory: writing occurs within speech communities, or activity systems, and carries out meaningful social action, including activity system object/motives; it is through writing that students are transformed from novices to members of academic communities, or activity systems; students belong to many discursive communities, or participate in many activity systems, which may result in conflicts among, say, values and identities; as readers, students construct meanings from texts and from other aspects of the social milieu, including purposes for reading; and, finally, teachers’ constructed readings of student texts are likewise influenced by a myriad of factors, among them their relationship to the class and the students, values and beliefs assigned to the text, and expectations for student roles (21-22).

But perhaps the most important element my study shares with that described by Walvoord and McCarthy is that, like them, I was careful to accord the faculty in my study the validity of their expectations (5). I didn’t judge whether or not their requirements were justified but looked instead at the student perceptions and performances that grew out of those expectations.

Like most qualitative researchers (McCarthy, Freedman et al, Miller, Ray, Creswell, Wolcott), I used a number of data collection methods to ensure triangulation of my findings. Ray, among others, notes that methodological triangulation—whereby a researcher uses several methods to collect data—can “strengthen the validity



of...findings” (64). Quoting Doheny-Farina and Odell, she also points out that “Triangulation tests emerging patterns by increasing the possibility of finding regular cases and countering the bias of any one approach” (64). Creswell further explains that triangulation affords the researcher a broader view of the research site, thereby facilitating negative case analysis, that is, the refining of her hypothesis or findings until all cases fit. “The researcher refines working hypotheses as the inquiry advances” (202). To help ensure the validity of my findings, I used three standard ethnographic data collection methods: participant-observation, interviews, and text analysis (see Appendix G).

### Participant Observation

During the Winter 2004 semester, I observed the students in the learning community classroom. I attended every class session, twenty-seven of twenty-seven meetings (see Appendix H). For the most part, I sat at the back of the room typing detailed notes using my lap top computer. Originally trained as a legal secretary, I am a rapid typist and so was able to obtain a nearly verbatim transcript of the course activities. When students formed small groups, I joined a group. Shortly after the start of the term, Doug created small, four to five-member student groups; he offered to put the students in my study together in the same groups and I accepted his offer. Thus, the groups I joined and observed were comprised of students in my study. In the groups, I again took notes but I also occasionally participated.

The issue of how much the researcher should participate in a research site—how much aids data gathering and how much is inappropriate because it may alter the field setting—is often debated among theorists. Wolcott and LeCompte and Preissle note the

distinctions made by Raymond Gold between complete participation, participants-as-observers, observers-as-participants, and complete observers (1955; 93), indicating the wide range of possible researcher roles. I place my own role within that of observer-as-participant, although my social interaction with the students in my study was not just focused on the interviews I conducted as Gold suggests (LeCompte and Preissle 1994). Occasionally, in the student groups, students sought my expertise as a writing teacher. They sometimes asked questions about sentence structure or style as they were collaboratively composing an assignment. At times, if I became aware that students had misunderstood instructions or an assignment, I offered clarifying advice or suggested that they ask Doug to repeat his requirements. On a couple of occasions, I took my observational notes by hand and loaned the group my laptop computer so that they could more easily compose. Later, I emailed the saved documents to the students in the group. But, again, for the most part, I sat in, observing and typing notes.

Bishop raises the issue of researcher participation in the context of compensating informants. She points out that Ellen Cushman, for instance, exchanged tutoring services for the time and information provided by the women in her study (1961). I felt that my participation in the student groups not only helped me to build rapport but also provided assistance to the students and was thus a form of compensation for their very generous participation in my project.

As Creswell, Wolcott, and others recommend, during each class session, I kept very detailed observation notes, including, as I said, a nearly verbatim transcript of the lectures delivered by Doug and Amelia and of class and group discussions. I also included reflective notes. I did not use a dual-column observational record log because

doing so on the computer was awkward. Rather I inserted my reflective notes into my observation data using bold or large-letter type face. My observation notes included descriptions of the classroom, technology used, body language, intonation, and class activities. My reflections focused on moments of course connections or overlap and times when I observed conflicts or contradictions experienced by the students. And I was especially aware of references or activities involving language assumptions and social practices, including use of the course theme and tool appropriation.. Overall, I sought to view and experience first-hand, the context within which the students experienced the course, the context that formed the basis of their writing decisions and the perceptions they and the faculty discussed with me in their interviews. I later re-read my notes, adding additional reflective points.

Perhaps more than the question of researcher participation, the concept of ethnographic observation raises many complex issues. The observer's role in the field setting, how to see the site through "fresh" eyes, the level of detail to include in observation notes, not observing too narrowly to avoid overlooking incongruous events that might help illuminate a setting, and acknowledging that while objectivity is an important goal, it can never be fully achieved, are all among them (Wolcott 155-157). As Wolcott notes, these concerns arise out of ethnography's broad scope and dedication to a holistic process. "The problem of 'what to look at,' although not necessarily dispelled for any observer in a professional role, is particularly vexing (as well as totally intriguing) for ethnographers..." (160).

I was aware as I observed The Power of the Past learning community that, as a teacher myself, there was no doubt much about the classroom context and culture that I

was missing. I'm simply too familiar with that environment not to take much about it for granted. I was also aware of Wolcott's view that "the better observers are those who do not reflexively make sense out of what they see and hear when they are engaging in formal observations... They distinguish between... what they sense [observe] and the sense they make of it" (169). In my particular case, because I was using activity/genre theory as an observational tool, a tool with which to bring to light aspects of the learning community context that usually go unseen, adhering completely to Wolcott's advice wasn't possible, and in this instance, may not have been preferable. But I tried to remain aware of the distinction he makes to help ensure I wasn't overlooking events that, in the observed moment, didn't appear pertinent to my study but may have been.

### Questionnaire

At the start of the semester, I also collected data in the form of a questionnaire (see Appendix I). The questionnaire was a quick and easy way to obtain general information including the students' career goals and their initial perceptions of the use-value of the two courses in the learning community. As Bishop notes, many ethnographic researchers begin with informal surveys "to assess general tendencies" (81) and/or to "set the scene" (110). I was able to refer back to the answers during our interviews and use them as a springboard for further questions related to my study.

### Interviews

I conducted both one-on-one and focus group interviews with eleven students and one-on-one interviews with the two faculty members who taught The Power of the Past learning community.

### Faculty Interviews

As I noted, I conducted three one-on-one interviews with each of the two faculty members who taught the learning community. These were spaced out over the course of the semester, with the final interview taking place after the term was over and final grades had been submitted. Also, as I noted, the interviews were located both on campus in a conference room and in faculty home offices, to accommodate both Doug and Amelia's and my own schedules. My questions (see Appendix J) focused on the course theme, on course goals and objectives, particularly with regard to student writing, and on faculty strategies for helping students achieve cross-course connections. My questions evolved and were influenced by my course observations, my reading of student texts, and my previous interviews. For example, in the first interview, I asked more informational questions such as:

"What is the course theme?"

"How do you see the theme functioning in the course?"

"What is your philosophy of teaching writing?"

"If learning communities are facilitating connections between courses, how are you defining those connections?"

"How do you see the two courses reinforcing or informing each other?"

In the second interview, I asked questions related to events unfolding in the learning community. For instance, I asked:

"How is it going so far?"

"What are your views of the writing students have done so far?"

"In terms of the writing assignments students have done so far, why did you choose those assignments or genres? What did you want them to achieve?"

“What evidence do you see of their work in Amelia’s/Doug’s part of the class in the writing that they have done so far in your part of the class?”

“What’s the purpose of the comments you’ve written on the students’ work?”

The last interview took place after the semester had ended so I posed questions about the teachers’ sense of the overall experience. I also asked questions about specific pieces of writing the students had produced, such as:

“Do you think the students’ experienced this class as “an experience” more than a class?” (Doug had stated in a previous interview that he hoped the students had “an experience” rather than just a class.)

“You (Doug) said in an earlier interview that you want students to take knowledge from history and turn it into something new in their writing for you, to build on it and create a new set of knowledge. Here are some of the students’ papers. Can you show me where you think that might be happening?”

“One of your (Amelia’s) course’s outcomes and objectives has to do with students performing coherent writing. How do you see yourself addressing that goal?”

“What are your goals for the students as writers?”

“Did you see the theme functioning in this course?”

To maintain consistency, I based the interviews with each faculty member on the same set of questions. I audio-taped the six interviews, using both a primary tape recorder and a second, back-up recorder. I also took handwritten notes. I hired a professional transcriptionist to transcribe some of the tapes. When I received the transcripts, I edited them while listening to the audio-tapes, making corrections and adding in words and phrases the transcriptionist was unable to make out. I also added in

to all of the transcripts, including those I transcribed, material from my handwritten notes about observations like body language or voice intonation. Each interview lasted from 60 to 90 minutes.

During the interviews, I maintained what many researchers (Denzin, Lofland, Patton, etc.) refer to as a “conversational style” as opposed to an empathetic, adversarial, or Socratic style. This approach is often used by qualitative researchers because it is comfortable and familiar to informants and is likely to facilitate more open and fully developed answers to questions. It encourages “the trust, confidence, and ease among respondents necessary for yielding elaborate, subtle, and valid data” (LeCompte and Preissle 179).

When the interview transcriptions were completed, I edited them while listening to the tapes and referring to my notes. I then re-read them, making first marginal notes and then writing more reflective notes about references to the course theme and about sections that shed light on contradictions or conflicts and on course connections. I re-read the interviews numerous times as I composed subsequent interview questions for both faculty and students. These re-readings also influenced and shaped the reflective notes I made during participant-observations. For example, if I observed in class a confirmation or a contradiction of a point made during a faculty interview about, say, the application of history concepts in student writing, I added a reflective note to that effect.

#### Student One-on-One Discourse-Based Interviews

The one-on-one interviews I conducted with students, as I’ve noted, were held in a conference room at MCC except for one which was conducted in a public library, and four others, which were conducted sequentially one afternoon in a student’s home office.

These alternative locations were more convenient for these students who live 30 miles or more from campus. All eleven of the students participated in the first one-on-one interview and ten of the eleven participated in the second individual interview. Following Harms, Herrington, McCarthy, and others, these were discourse-based interviews. (See Appendix K for interview questions.) Before each interview, I read carefully and annotated students' written texts, noting sections that showed evidence of assumptions about language and cross-course connections or evidence of other activity system participation. I also looked for evidence of the course theme or lack thereof. As Walvoord and McCarthy, referring to Tomlinson, note, student accounts of past writing activities are inevitably constrained by their memories, by the interpretative process for narrating the "story" of their writing, and by the student's awareness that she is speaking to a researcher (Walvoord and McCarthy 24). Thus during the discourse-based part of these interviews, I tried to keep the students focused on specific passages from their own texts. Tomlinson also points out that such accounts provided valuable insights into students' ideas and feelings about writing (Walvoord and McCarthy 24). So I also, as in the faculty interviews, used a friendly, conversational style to encourage students to articulate their perceptions, including their feelings of engagement or frustration.

To ensure consistency, I centered each interview around a similar set of questions (Appendix K). Roughly one-half of the time was spent talking about the student's texts. For example, in the first interview, with the text in front of us on the table, I asked questions such as:

"Can you describe for me step-by-step your thinking and writing process for the discovery draft for paper one? And the next draft? And the final?"



**“When you got your grade, what did you think?”**

**“How did you prepare for the history exam?”**

**“What is the theme of the learning community?”**

**“How do you see the theme functioning?”**

**“What work from the English course have you found to be useful to you in the history part of the class? What work in history have you found to be useful in the English part?”**

**In the second interview, I asked students to take me through the same process for their second paper. I asked:**

**“This is your second paper. Where did these terms come from?”**

**“You go on to discuss characters as being Optimates and Populares. Where did that concept come from?”**

**“Can you take me through your process as you moved from draft to draft? What were you thinking?”**

**“How do you see the theme functioning this semester?”**

**“How would you define the kind of thinking that went into the writing you did for the history part of the class? How would you define the kind of thinking that went into the writing you did for the English part? How might each of those be of use to you in the future?”**

**“How appropriate was the difficulty level of the English class? the history class?”**

**“Looking back now, do you feel the course was one big class or two separate classes?”**

**I audio-taped each session using two recording machines and kept notes. My transcriptionist transcribed all of the first set of interviews and roughly half of the second set. I then edited the transcriptions, using the audio-tapes and my notes. Due to financial**

considerations, I transcribed the remaining tapes. Each session lasted from 60 to 75 minutes. As with the faculty transcripts, I re-read them many times, creating first marginal then more extensive reflective notes on passages that revealed information about activity system participation, assumptions about language, social practices, cross-course connections, contradictions, and the course theme. These notes and re-readings influenced my reflective comments on subsequent class observation notes and on subsequent interview transcripts, as I described above in the faculty interview section.

### Student Focus Group Interviews

I held focus group interviews twice over the course of the semester; I originally scheduled the first set of three sessions to be conducted seven weeks into the semester. All three sessions were scheduled to occur on the same afternoon; however, the college closed at noon that day due to bad weather. I was able to conduct one of the sessions but had to postpone the other two. Because so many students were involved in the rescheduling, those did not take place until three weeks after the originally scheduled date. Each session included from three to five students.

As Creswell notes, focus group interviews are useful sources when interaction among participants will yield more information or different information than will individual interviews. He also recommends this method when the participants are relatively homogenous, as was the case with the students in my study, and likely to cooperate with each other (124).

I arranged for the first set of focus group interviews to follow the return of the students' first history exam and first major essay. At that point in the semester, the students had a good sense of the two courses and of the learning community as a whole.

More importantly, they had produced and received feedback, including grades, on major writing assignments in both courses.

The second set of focus group interviews took place two weeks before the end of the semester. The students had written and had had returned to them, again with feedback and grades, their second essay for Doug and their second exam for Amelia. They were in the midst of gearing up for their last exam and were finalizing their time and place, or analysis, essays.

All the focus group sessions were held in a second-floor conference room of the Fine Arts Building, upstairs from the learning community classroom. Appendix G provides a record of these sessions. I obtained the students' class and work schedules from them and using that information, I proposed possible times, usually just before or after the learning community class. As an incentive, I provided pizza and sandwiches. I communicated with the students both verbally and by written memos to schedule the sessions. I also gave them written reminder notes in class.

I audio-taped the interviews, using two recorders and kept notes. I prepared a list of questions (see Appendix L) which I drew from when the discussion lagged. For the most part, however, I let the students take the lead by responding to each other and expressing their perceptions of the learning community experience. I was aware, as Bishop notes, that any degree of structured interviewing limits data collection. "For those expecting to compare and contrast...informants' positions or points of view...we have to remember that, in doing this, we are already artificially (although usefully) reducing data and making the informants' opinions, as elicited, appear more similar than they might actually be" (102). In order to offset this inevitable reduction, I tried to avoid

asking leading questions and encouraged students to express both agreement and disagreement with one another's views. During the interviews, I also brought up themes and issues I saw arising in the data.

I began both sessions with very open-ended questions like "How is the learning community going at this point?" I balanced this approach with my desire and need for data collection consistency, making sure that I asked a few key questions about the course theme, cross-course connections, and contradictions. For example, in the first session, I asked,

"What is the theme for the course?"

"What do you think Amelia/Doug thinks is important?"

"When you were writing the exam for history, were you consciously aware of the concepts from Doug's part of the class? When you were writing the papers for English, were you consciously aware of concepts from Amelia's part of the class?"

In the second session, I asked,

"How do you feel about the learning community at this point? How's it going?"

"How is the theme functioning for you in the course?"

"Did you prepare differently for the second exam than for the first one?"

"How was writing the exam this time around?"

"Was anything from Doug's class helping you to write the exam?"

"How is your frustration level with course compared to the first time we talked?" (The students had indicated previously that they felt frustrated.)

The tapes were all transcribed by my professional transcriptionist and then edited by me as I listened to the tapes and referred to my notes. As with the other transcribed

interviews, I re-read them many times, charting comments that shed light on my research questions, and noting cross-references to other data.

### Collection of Student and Teacher Produced Texts

I collected all of the major writing assignments the students produced in the learning community. These included all of the history exams, including Amelia's feedback, and all of the quiz preparation questions, along with the quizzes themselves. For each of the three essays assigned by Doug, I collected prewriting, the discovery draft, the advanced draft, and the final. These included written feedback from Doug. I also collected, for each paper, memos written to peers about their drafts. I also collected copies of the Lysistrada Forwards and Afterwards and I printed out the entire Listserve Symposium. Appendices M and N provide a record of my collection of student texts.

I created folders for each assignment to ensure I had collected them all from each student. Then, I moved all the pieces written by each student into a student file for use in the discourse-based interviews. Next, I copied pieces or wrote memos and moved these into category-based folders as those categories emerged.

### Data Analysis

Creswell, referring to Huberman and Miles, notes that data analysis in qualitative research is "choreographed," a mix of art and accommodating traditional processes. The result is "custom built" inasmuch as researchers "learn by doing." Nevertheless, Creswell argues that the analysis process does follow a typical arc or trajectory (142). Indeed, most qualitative researchers describe the general core of the process as involving description of data, classifying or analyzing data and interpreting data (Wolcott, Bishop, LeCompte and Preissle). Lincoln and Guba point out that by these means, the researcher

reformulates the reported information provided by the data. “Data are, so to speak, the *constructions* offered by or in the sources; data analysis leads to *reconstruction* of those constructions” (332).

Creswell conceives of the data analysis as a spiral starting with data collection, circling through subsequent stages and ending with the written account of the study (143). His spiral is an apt metaphor since there is no clear demarcation line between each stage; rather they flow into each other and a researcher may be doing the work of multiple stages at once. Moreover, the stages are recursive and the researcher may be working up the spiral or back down the spiral at any given time. Creswell describes the intermediate stages as data managing; reading and memoing; describing, classifying, and interpreting; and visualizing and representing (143).

In analyzing the data for my study, I followed the process he describes.

#### Data Managing; Reading and Memoing

I used files to manage my data. The questionnaire and written assignments and exams I collected from the students were initially kept in files by assignments, then were moved into files organized by student in order to facilitate the discourse-based interviews. I kept faculty interview transcripts in three files labeled “Interview One,” “Interview Two,” and “Interview Three,” each containing a pair of transcripts, one for Doug and one for Amelia. I used this file method because, when I became aware early on of the many cultural differences between the two courses, I was tempted to separate Doug’s transcripts from Amelia’s. But I wanted a visual reminder that the courses were joined in a learning community. The one-on-one, student interview transcripts I kept in the student folders, together with each students’ writing. This arrangement facilitated my

reviewing the discourse-based transcripts while looking at the student texts. The focus group transcripts were kept in two files labeled “Focus Group I” and “Focus Group II,” with three transcripts in each file.

As I collected data, I re-read the pieces over and over. LeCompte and Preissle refer to this process as “scanning” (236). They also note the importance of recalling the original research questions as one scans. This recollection helped to facilitate one of the main purposes for scanning, which is to reconceive data collected earlier from the viewpoint of subsequent data (LeCompte and Preissle 236). Re-reading the data with the original questions in mind also helped me to formulate questions for interviews yet to be conducted. Creswell, too, refers to scanning and points to the importance of getting a sense of the whole of each interview and of the data base (143).

I made copies of documents or parts of documents that were related to emerging themes and categories and added notes and memos. Or I composed memos, referencing the data. These I organized into files by theme or category. For example, any time I saw a comment or reference to the learning community theme, “The Power of the Past,” I transferred that data to a file called “Course Theme.”

### Describing Data

Creswell portrays this stage as the beginning of category formation which in his view represents “the heart of qualitative data analysis” (144). Here the researcher looks at the data, describing in detail what she sees. As I re-read my field notes and interview transcripts, I wrote descriptive memos, trying to separate what I thought I saw from what I actually saw in the evidence. I kept Wolcott’s guiding question in mind, “Am I attending as carefully to what *is* going on as I am attending to what I *think* is going on?”

(21). Maintaining this “healthy skepticism” (Wolcott 21) is particularly important when a researcher is following an analytical framework or applying a theory, such as activity/genre theory, to a research site or situation. While, as Wolcott notes, all “data are tainted with an analytical or interpretive cast in the very process of becoming data,” he points out that using such an apriori framework can prevent a researcher from seeing clearly (16). Thus I tried to be aware of ways in which activity/genre theory as an observational lens may have its limitations. For example, in Chapter Two, I mentioned Young’s response to Engestrom’s description of activity theory. He took issue with Engestrom’s claim that conflicts or contradictions necessarily propel students into new cycles of learning, saying that may not always be the case. Therefore, I tried to observe the full range of student responses to conflicts, not just those instances that resulted in expanded participation or learning.

I also, of course, looked closely for and wrote descriptive memos about evidence related to my research questions. I described carefully data referring to underlying views of language, social practices including genres, the course theme, conflicts and contradictions perceived by the students, cross-course connections perceived by the students, their expanding participation in the courses, their use of tools, and their level of engagement, including whether or not they perceived literacy practices as having use value or exchange value. For example, in an interview, one student remarked that “the past is always important.” I looked closely at the context of that remark in order to describe accurately what he meant. Was this a reference to the course theme? Was this an idea the student had had before taking the learning community or one gleaned during



the course? Was there any indication that this idea was affecting the student's perception of the courses, of their relatedness or separateness, and so on.

While looking closely at my data, I became increasingly cognizant, as I said, of the cultural differences between the two courses in the learning community. These cultural differences were quite similar to those reported and discussed in several of the articles included in my literature review. Several researchers saw these differences as influencing students' ability to make cross-course connections by using writing practices learned in a composition course to expand their participation and learning in other disciplinary courses. Fully aware, again, of both the potential drawbacks and the benefits of applying a conceptual frame to a particular research site, I decided to describe these observations in terms of the faculty and student roles conceived of by Walvoord and McCarthy in their study, Thinking and Writing in College, as well as in activity/genre system terms. Based on my close observation of the data, I decided to describe the students' discursive role in Doug's course as that of professional-in-training, and the students' discursive role in Amelia's class as text-processor (see Chapter One and Site Description above for a detailed description of these roles). Again, as Creswell notes, description is the beginning of categorizing, and I would add, of interpretation. These descriptive frames helped to name and illuminate radical differences between the two courses. The concept of roles also fits well within the framework of activity/genre theory as it is described by Russell. Activity system participants enact complex identities, or roles, which are intricately shaped by and shape the values, tools, object/motives, division of labor, and rules of a given activity system, or course. Following this decision, I wrote memos describing the student roles required in the composition and history assignments.

I described the roles I saw enacted in the student texts and I described references made by students in their interviews to their roles as writers.

### Classifying Data

This process, which some researchers refer to as “analysis” involves pulling the texts apart and looking for patterns or categories (Creswell 144). LeCompte and Preissle liken the process to assembling a jigsaw puzzle. “Thus analysis can be viewed as a staged process by which a whole phenomenon is divided into its components and then reassembled under various new rubrics” (236). For Lincoln and Guba, if a study involves the application of a framework, like activity/genre theory, this part of the process can be relatively rote. “The problem of data processing thus becomes, from the naturalist’s point of view, relatively trivial, involving nothing more than the aggregation of (probably qualitative) information within the given categories” (336). While the activity/genre theory lens, including participant roles, and my research questions did provide me with broad categories such as “genres,” “conflicts,” “tools-in-use,” and “course theme,” I still had to look for student perceptions and evidence of what might be called subcategories within those broader themes. As LeCompte and Preissle suggest, following Becker, I began writing first from memory and later checked my material against the data. I also continued to expand and contract subcategories as I cross-referenced, compared, and contrasted sources. For example, I remembered most of the students expressing frustration with the level of detail and amount of material in the history course, both in their discourse-based and focus group interviews. When I checked this perception against the data, I initially found the frustration to be tied to their expectations for the course. I eventually expanded my analysis of this frustration to include other sources.

Similarly, the concept of “audience” came up frequently in the data. Initially, I created one “audience” file, or category, called “audience-rhetorical.” Eventually as I encountered more cases that didn’t fit, I expanded it into two files, adding an “audience-display” file.

With one exception, I did not engage in coding, a process typically used in quantitative research, in which events, or words or phrases in transcripts, are enumerated and counted. LeCompte and Preissle make a distinction between coding and analysis, explaining that because their “focus is on substance, not arithmetic, ...[on] eliciting meaning from data, not converting it to computable formulae,” their emphasis is on analysis. Wendy Bishop, too, discusses coding, pointing out that while it is standard practice in quantitative research, it is “not rigorously required or applied in most qualitative projects” (114). She argues that a disciplined, metacognitive process of data analysis—scanning, describing, categorizing, interpretation—is just as valid as coding. “A careful reading and note taking and rereading of transcripts...is no less useful or meaningful than...numerical tabulations and is often much more accessible to readers” (116). She quotes Thomas Huchin as well who points out that educational contexts are so complex that controlling for all possible variables, a standard quantitative research practice, is impossible. He notes, “Context-sensitive text analysis...cannot possibly be a highly formalized and testable scientific endeavor...It can only try to assemble enough evidence to make a strong case for a certain point of view” (Bishop 116).

The one place I did engage in coding was when I counted, in my field notes, the number of times the “on-stage” teacher in the learning community interjected while the other teacher was in control of the class (see Chapter Three). I wanted a way to verify

my perception that this phenomenon was almost entirely one-directional and I wanted a way to compare the students' perceptions of these interjections with what actually occurred.

### Classifying Student Interviews

In the one-on-one and focus group interview transcripts, I classified evidence showing students' perceptions of how the theme was functioning in the course, of course relatedness, and of course divisions. I also classified references to their roles as writers, to their level of engagement, as well as references to cross-course connections involving tool use such as concepts or genres. For example, when the students discussed their application of the three criteria for an ancient civilization to a given culture in their first essay for Doug, I noted whether or not they perceived the concept and definition of "ancient civilization" as belonging to the genre system of the composition course or that of the history course. Regarding student roles, students expressed frustration that Amelia wanted them to retell "the story" on the exams in her exact words. I classified those remarks as evidence that the students perceived their discursive role to be that of text-processor.

### Classifying Student and Teacher Produced Texts

The student texts—their drafts and final essays, exams, symposium contributions, quiz preparation work, and peer response memos—I analyzed and classified based on evidence of genres, of tool use and student roles. Specifically, I looked for evidence of expanding participation through interdisciplinary tool use. For instance, Doug spoke often about the rhetorical concept of "voice," and students mentioned it in interviews as being an important element of effective writing. Amelia, on her exams, in her map

identification instructions, asked students to take her “on a stroll,” the way a tour guide might, as they composed their responses, thus offering students an opportunity to use the concept of voice learned in Doug’s course. Therefore, I looked for and classified evidence of students’ use of voice in their writing for both courses. In terms of student roles, I looked for evidence in the texts of students’ applying material learned in the history course to problems or issues in the papers they wrote for Doug. The professional-in-training role enacted by students is characterized, in part, by the application of material learned in one context and applied to problems or issues in another context.

#### Classifying Faculty Interviews

Like the student interview transcriptions, I perused the faculty transcripts noting remarks related to genres, to social practices, to views of language, to course connections, to course boundaries, and to the course theme. I classified references to faculty and student roles and to concepts or genres. For instance, I asked Amelia to clarify her purpose in asking students to take her “on a stroll” as they composed their map identifications in the history exams. I placed memoires about her response in an “audience” file, a “voice” file, and a “text-processor” file.

#### Classifying Faculty Feedback

I also classified written faculty responses on student writing, looking for similarities and differences in faculty expectations and assumptions about discursive practices. I also classified responses that reflected faculty roles and expectations of student roles as a means of illuminating the cultural differences, including social practices, perceived by the students between the two classes.

#### Classifying Field Notes

In reviewing my field notes, I looked for evidence of similarities and differences in faculty expectations and assumptions about student discursive practices. I also classified comments and activities that reflected faculty and student roles. And I charted, as well, references to the course theme and evidence of course connections and course boundaries.

### Interpreting

In this stage, Creswell reports, researchers make sense of the data. Specifically in using ethnographic research methods, they “draw inferences from the data or turn to theory to provide structure for...[their] interpretations” (153). Wolcott points out that interpretation can easily turn into unwarranted speculation. “A pervasive problem...is the temptation to reach too far beyond the case itself...” (37). For this reason, he advises erring on the side of too much description and too little interpretation (36). I took Wolcott’s advice to be cautious and conservative in drawing conclusions. I also took to heart his reference to Sanjek who states, “The relationship between fieldnote evidence and ethnographic conclusions should be made specific” (qtd in Wolcott 37).

Working within the activity/genre theory frame, I was careful to connect my conclusions to its specific terms. The frame helped me to both structure my interpretations and to avoid unsupported speculation. I was careful to triangulate my findings, drawing conclusions based on evidence found in multiple sources of data. In my findings chapter, I include sections from interviews, student texts, and field notes to back up and support my conclusions.

As I noted above, I also remained cognizant of the limitations of activity/genre theory to fully explain what I observed. For example, there were instances when students

experienced psychological double-binds but these did not propel them into new cycles of learning, as Engestrom theorizes.

### Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described the ethnographic research methods I employed in conducting my case study of The Power of the Past learning community. In the next two chapters, I set out my research findings.





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**A THEME-BASED LEARNING COMMUNITY  
LINKING COMPOSITION AND HISTORY: AN ACTIVITY/GENRE THEORY  
ANALYSIS**

**VOLUME II**

**By**

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**A DISSERTATION**

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## CHAPTER FIVE: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS—STUDENTS WRITING IN HISTORY

This chapter describes the results of my research. As I noted in the previous chapter, activity theory is not a scientific or positivist frame but rather an observational tool. As Russell and Yanez point out, it “does not claim to provide a neat way to predict outcomes, but rather offers tentative explanations” (335). In my case study, I used Russell’s synthesis of genre theory and activity theory as a kind of flashlight to illuminate the literacy activities of the students in The Power of the Past learning community. Specifically, I wanted to look for evidence related to two claims often made for learning communities in the literature: 1) that learning communities foster greater student engagement, and 2) that they help students make “interdisciplinary connections,” or, in activity theory terms, to appropriate tools such as concepts or genres across course boundaries. Because the theme in learning communities is typically central to achieving both student intellectual engagement and curricular coherence, I initially set out to examine how the theme is functioning. My research expanded, however, to also include how the theme’s functionality can provide an indication of the assumptions about language underpinning learning community courses and the social practices they are mediating.

As I noted in the Introduction, typically the theme expresses an idea or concept shared by the disciplinary discourses involved or it provides a conceptual lens through which the disciplines might be commonly viewed. In activity theory terms, the theme is an improvisational tool, a concept, appropriated by student writers. It fosters what Lave calls “improvisational development,” or expansive learning or expanding participation, in

the knowledge work of the course or courses as students put the tool or concept to work. As I've said, knowing about the concept is not enough; a participant must understand how it is used and be able to put it to use, including changing or altering the tool if need be. For example, in a learning community linking political science with American literature through the theme "community," students must grapple with the various manifestations and meanings of the concept of "community" as it circulates in each course and as they apply it across course boundaries. As Bakhtin states, the word "exists in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions.... The word enters the [speaker's] context from another context, permeated with the interpretation of others" (293-4). To be successful, the student must, as Bakhtin notes, make the word her own, "adapting it to [her] own semantic and expressive intentions" (293-4). This latter point is crucial; students writing in a learning community, as in any school setting, enact a multitude of intentions but to make discursive interdisciplinary connections, they must appropriate the word, in this case the theme, making it their own, adopting and adapting it and other tools, including concepts and genres, across course boundaries. Tool appropriation, then, adapting the word to the students' own "semantic and expressive intentions," including improvisation, assumes some degree of agency; students must be granted the agency to participate expansively, to attain improvisational development (Lave), if they are to achieve the kind of interdisciplinary or cross course connections the learning community model aims to achieve.

I was particularly interested in examining the role played by the theme in a learning community course that linked composition with a single disciplinary course since composition, as I discussed in the Introduction, is typically not taught as a

disciplinary course but typically as a “how to” course. What then is the precise nature of the “disciplinary” and “interdisciplinary” writing in such courses? What views of language and literacy are enacted? How are those practices affecting student literacy? How is the central theme functioning in student writing and intellectual engagement? My specific research questions were:

- 1) What are the assumptions about language underpinning general education learning communities, particularly those that include composition courses?
- 2) What are the social practices, particularly those involving writing, mediating learning in these courses?
- 3) What is the role of the theme in helping students make interdisciplinary or cross-course connections that contribute to their developing literacy and learning in the courses that comprise the learning community?
- 4) What is the role of the theme in enhancing student engagement and motivating students so that they appropriate the goals and subjectivities of the courses in the learning community?

### General Overview of Findings

My findings indicate that students were often not able to perceive the relatedness of their linked courses and make cross-course connections. In my study, this was true despite the fully coordinated learning community model. My findings also show that theme-based learning communities, in and of themselves, do not prevent the alienation and passivity that students often experience in their general education courses, courses that typically enact specialized disciplinary discourses which students often see as irrelevant to their future lives. The students in my study experienced frustration and



alienation. These results are important since learning communities claim to foster greater student engagement and curricular coherence.

### Activity System Differences

My case study also revealed that students in learning communities can experience radically different course cultures, including views of language, like the students in Susan Miller's study, even in a coordinated studies course. The following table depicts the differing activity system elements of the two courses in The Power of the Past learning community.

Table 5.		
ACTIVITY SYSTEM DIFFERENCES		
	History	Composition
Outcome	Know history to be good citizen and good worker.	Be literate to be good writer and good worker.
Object of Labor	Learn specialized body of knowledge about Early Western Civilization and its historical significance.	Engage in writing process; improve writing.
Community	Midwest Community College	Midwest Community College and Future Profession
Division of Labor	Teacher as authority/evaluator Student as text-processor	Teacher as mentor/coach Student as professional-in-training
Rules/Values	1) Write to display knowledge 2) Knowledge-making rights not granted 3) Individual competition	1) Write to apply historical knowledge 2) Knowledge-making rights granted 3) Cooperation and collaboration
Mediating Artifacts	School genres: exams and quizzes	School genres: persuasive essay evaluation essay analytical essay

The students, in their interviews, indicated their awareness of these differences. As I noted earlier, all but one of the students had had at least one prior learning community experience and they expected this one to be similar. That Amelia's course, in their view, was so different from Doug's, seemed part of the source of their frustration. Jack, in answer to my question about how his previous learning community experience compared to this one, said in his second individual interview, "In this one, we...had to make the connection ourselves most of the time." In a focus group interview, I asked the students about their perceptions of faculty teaching styles.

*~transcript begins~*

Joe: I've had two other learning communities before this. And in both of those there's never been this type of things not matching up and teaching styles being that radically different.

Matt: And she is incorporating so much art that it seems like a separate class in that regard. It would be interesting to see how those two [connect] but...it's not really being taught like that."

*~transcript ends~*

In addition to the differences in course culture and views of language which I describe in more detail below, the particular culture of the history course, especially as expressed in its Division of Labor, its Rules and Values and its Mediating Artifacts, led students to experience alienation and frustration and prevented them from appropriating tools and concepts learned in the composition course for use in their writing for history. These cultural aspects of the history course, or activity system, resulted in the students perceiving the discursive practices of the course as belonging primarily to the genre

system of schooling; subsequently they performed those practices almost entirely for the purpose of getting the course grade and meeting their social science general education requirement. In Russell's terms, the writing they performed had exchange value but little use value. The students' frustrations suggest, as Russell and Yanez note, that they were experiencing contradictions between activity systems, in this case contradictions between institutional general education, as represented by the history course, and the students' majors, and this did appear to be the case. But that's not the full story. My study suggests that the instrumental view of writing underlying the discursive practices of the history course was the more salient factor in both the students' alienation and their difficulty appropriating tools across course boundaries.

In contrast to the students' experiences with writing in the history course, the culture of the composition course, specifically its Division of Labor, Rules and Values, and Mediating Artifacts, appeared to foster student motivation and engagement. It also provided students with the means to appropriate tools and concepts from the history course for use in their writing for composition. Significantly, even though the writing in composition involved the same subject matter, the application of history knowledge, the students expressed no frustration with their writing for the course and seemed to perceive it as belonging not only to the genre system of schooling but also to the genre system of their respective future professions. The writing they performed appeared to be meaningful and useful, as they indicated in their interviews and focus group sessions. This finding suggests, again, that the view of writing informing literacy practices, in this case the view that writing is socially constituted, that writers utilize knowledge and thought purposefully and intentionally in sociorhetorical situations, was a significant

factor in students' ability to make interdisciplinary connections and to see their writing as meaningful.

Furthermore, my study shows that, while there were some conditions that fostered students' ability to make cross-course connections, the theme was not one of them. In fact, the theme was mentioned only on the first and final days of the course; it played no role in fostering "coherent interdisciplinarity," a function ascribed to the theme by Vince Tinto and other learning community researchers. This finding is significant because it alters widely held, albeit largely unexamined, perceptions of the theme as the foremost condition enabling course integration in learning communities.

### The Theme

In the case of The Power of the Past learning community, the title of the course was also its theme. In Chapter Three, I described how the phrase "The Power of the Past" was prominently displayed on the cover page of the learning community coursepack (see Appendix O) and at the top of both Amelia and Doug's syllabi (see Appendixes B and D). Amelia's syllabus made no other mention of the theme; Doug's syllabus included a paragraph, which I replicated in Chapter Three as part of the research site description, explaining the theme and its ostensible significance to the course.

In my interviews with the faculty I specifically asked what the theme was. In answer to my question, "What is the theme?" Doug responded, "'The Power of the Past.' The power of the past on a larger historical level... The power of the past informing their [students'] personal lives today." In an interview with Amelia, I asked, "Is the theme 'The Power of the Past?' I know that's your title." Amelia answered, "It's the title. It's my theme. That's my life theme, is the power of the past... The theme is

‘The Power of the Past.’” Significantly, despite having a theme, Doug and Amelia did not use it to foster cross-course connections. In her final interview, I asked Amelia, “Do you feel you and Doug used the theme consciously to create connections between the courses?” Amelia explained,

The only connections between the two courses is our commitment to the power of the past, so, no, Doug and I never sit down and say, ‘Okay, this is entitled ‘The Power of the Past.’ How are we going to connect our courses?’ It’s not like that. It’s just that we believe in that, and Doug’s as committed to it as I am, and we proceed to do as much as we can to have what he’s doing and have what I do, to send home to them the magnificence of this story.

In the course itself, both faculty mentioned the theme on the first day as they introduced the students to their respective syllabi. Except as a title on a few course documents, the theme didn’t appear again until the fourteenth week of the fifteen-week semester. During the second-to-last class session, Amelia announced that she would be showing a video production called “The Power of the Past,” featuring journalist Bill Moyers and various Renaissance scholars as they strolled through Florence, Italy. Moyers and his guests talk throughout the film about the ways past events in the Western world have and continue to influence the present. From time to time, Amelia stopped the film to elaborate on its content, using it as a teaching tool. During the final class session, she employed the video again in the same way.

The students, when asked, all exhibited confusion about the theme. They could recall the theme or themes in previous learning communities they had taken but none correctly named “The Power of the Past.” They all said they didn’t know what the theme was; some guessed that it was “Humanism.” The following exchange occurred in one focus group interview:

*~transcript begins~*

Julia: How is the theme functioning for you in the course? Are you thinking about it?

All (Jennifer, Elicia, Shannon): No, not at all. We didn't even know what it was.

*~transcript ends~*

In her second discourse-based interview, Mandy also indicated the theme was not clearly functioning in the course:

*~transcript begins~*

Julia: How is the theme functioning?

Mandy: Last semester the theme was definitely day-by-day very obvious. In this learning community it was...not so much 'The Power of the Past.' I think it was Robin said in a focus group that [she thought] we were to talk about amazing things that affected history in such a way that got us where we are today [but] it was pretty much facts.

*~transcript ends~*

Joe's comment, too, in his second interview, was representative.

*~transcript begins~*

Julia: How did you think the theme was functioning?

Joe: That title insinuates all sorts of things about who we are, where we're going, where we've been. They didn't touch on that.

*~transcript ends~*

In the following sections of this chapter, I use Russell's synthesis of activity theory and genre theory to examine the workings of the two courses in The Power of the Past learning community in the absence of a functioning coordinating or connecting

theme. As Russell and Yanez point out, activity theory can help both students and teachers understand the discursive workings of their own courses and their relationship to the discursive workings of other activity systems with which they interact. Teachers, they note, “might be able [then] to help students see genre pathways for expanding into a discipline, or, using a discipline’s critical tools, expanding into other systems of activity [whether] civic, personal, or professional” (358). To the degree that the presence of a coordinating theme can provide the kind of “genre pathway” Russell is referring to, and help students expand their participation within courses and across course boundaries, it’s useful to discover to what degree this expansive learning is occurring in the absence of a functioning theme. What does the absence of a functioning theme indicate about the underlying views of language mediating the courses and the learning community as a whole? In the absence of a connecting theme, to what degree were students able to see the courses as related? Were they able nevertheless to make cross disciplinary connections? If so, what was enabling or fostering those connections? Is the theme indeed the foremost condition, or genre pathway, enabling course integration in learning communities? In the following sections of this chapter, I use my research findings to explore these questions.

### Students Writing in History in the Absence of a Coordinating Theme

Although I did not conduct my first student interviews until week seven of the semester, from what I observed in class, the students entered the course eager and curious to learn more about Early Western Civilization and feeling optimistic and confident about the work they were about to undertake. As I noted in Chapter Four, I had taught some of the students in a previous course and found them to be bright, hard working, articulate

and inquisitive. The students I met for the first time as participants in my study struck me as similarly inclined. They all appeared to value education, including general education; many of their parents were teachers. Two who were my former students were siblings and had been home schooled; from conversations we had had the previous semester and from my own experience of them in class, their parents appeared to have provided them with a broad and thorough education. However, by week seven, all the students were expressing feelings of frustration and disaffection. As I noted above, my study suggests that the view of writing underlying the discursive practices of the history course was an important source of the students' difficulty, both their feelings of alienation and their inability to appropriate tools across course boundaries. I'll discuss this finding at length later on.

The students' frustration also suggests that they were experiencing the fundamental contradiction inherent in the institutional position of general education courses as it is described by Russell and Yanez and elaborated on by Cheryl Geisler. As Russell and Yanez note, in the United States, higher education faculty and students are pulled in opposing directions "toward one discipline specialization," that of the student's major, and "toward 'general' or broad education for civic life..." (332). Typically, faculty in disciplinary general education courses use their specialized discourses yet students don't perceive the need or use for these discourses or genres in their future lives, including their professional lives—"with alienation often resulting" (Russell and Yanez 332). In my study, despite their initial optimism and curiosity, and despite the learning community model, the students found the writing they performed in history to be largely unrelated to their own future lives. As the course progressed, the students I observed



increasingly saw the writing assigned in history as belonging predominantly to the activity system of schooling with little or no relevance for them beyond meeting their college general education requirement.

### Contradictions and Psychological Double-Binds

All eleven students in my study expressed frustration with their experience in the history part of the learning community. Their frustration focused on two issues, the amount of material they were required to know on the exams and their perception that Amelia wanted them to write verbatim from her lectures. In activity system terms, these frustrations signal the experience of psychological double-binds, of students feeling pulled in opposite directions or “damned if they do; damned if they don’t.” Such double-binds, as I’ve noted, typically stem from contradictions between activity systems, in this case, specialized education in the students’ respective majors, on the one hand, and broad, general education on the other. As 6 illustrates, the students experienced contradictions between every aspect of the history activity system and that of their majors, most notably between the Object of Labor, the Rules and Values, and the Division of Labor. These contradictions, which I’ll discuss below, explain some of the students’ disaffection but my findings suggest they were not its sole, or even its primary, source.

### Perceived Activity System Contradictions Between History and Students’ Future Activities

Table 6. ACTIVITY SYSTEM CONTRADICTIONS		
	History	Students’ Majors

Outcome	Know history to be good citizen and good worker.	Know specialized body of knowledge and specialized discourse to participate in and advance discipline.
Object of Labor	Learn specialized body of knowledge about Early Western Civilization and its historical significance.	Learn specialized body of knowledge and specialized discourse. Learn discursive strategies to participate in and advance the discipline.
Community	Midwest Community College	Midwest Community College and Discipline of Major
Division of Labor	Teacher as authority/evaluator Student as text-processor	Teacher as initiator Student as professional-in-training
Rules/Values	1) Write to display history knowledge 2) Knowledge-making rights not granted 3) Individual competition	1) Write to learn, apply and interpret specialized knowledge 2) Knowledge-making rights granted 3) Cooperation and collaboration
Mediating Artifacts	School genres: exams and quizzes	School genres: Various

### Contradictions Between Outcomes and Objects of Labor

My study revealed that the students felt alienated by the writing they performed in the history course due to contradictions in activity system Outcomes, knowing history on the one hand, and knowing their major discipline on the other. They also experienced contradictions between the Object of Labor of the history course and that of their respective majors, learning historical facts and their significance and learning the specialized discourse and knowledge of their major. Geisler, as I've noted, frames the students' frustrations as the divide between expert and non-expert. Students typically remain non-experts in relation to the activity systems of the general courses they take. As Russell points out, students as writers must make tough decisions about identity. They are frequently caught in a double-bind and must decide between merely consuming a

discipline's (often) commodified tools and concepts (decontextualized facts) and remain on the margin of its activity system, or becoming seriously involved as a full-fledged participant, "throw[ing] themselves into it through the reading/writing of its genres." He adds that the evolution of identity and agency requires expanding participation in an activity system by appropriating its object/motive, which also requires appropriating its genres ("Rethinking" 535). Typically students in general education courses, like those in my study, do not become involved as full participants. As a result, they have little interest in appropriating their discourses. Russell also notes that a disciplinary general education course is on the far boundary of a disciplinary activity system. There, the richly interpretive, intersubjective, daily workings of the professional activity system are "commodified" into classroom genres such as textbooks and lectures. These statements and concepts are routinized tacit assumptions for professionals but not for students. Students experience them as abstract, seemingly objective facts to be memorized and whose use value is unclear. Students, he notes, encounter these

facts whose immediate use may be viewed by students in terms of a grade...but also, potentially as tools for some unspecified further interaction with some social practice outside school. However, because students have not sufficiently specialized—appropriated the motive of a professional activity system—those potential uses remain vague" ("Rethinking" 540).

Indeed, the students in my study felt disengaged, unmotivated, and at times, even hostile, in relation to the Early Western Civilization writing requirements, despite the learning community model which is supposed to foster greater student engagement. In activity system terms, the students remained outsiders in relation to the history course, never expanding their learning or engaging in the evolution of identity and agency described by Russell. All eleven students in my study had indicated on the written survey

form they filled out that they were pursuing a specific major. These ranged from music therapist to dentist to insurance actuary. All eleven planned to have professional careers. Like Beth in Russell and Yanez's study, they had little or no experience of the specialized discourses of their respective majors. (Beth mistakenly thought that her major, journalism, involved reporting objective facts completely free from any bias or slant.) Despite their ignorance of the professional discourses they would be participating in, these students perceived that the specialized writing they were asked to do in the Early Western Civilization history course would be of little or no use to them in the future. They saw the Outcomes and Objects of Labor of the Early Western Civilization course as contradictory to those of their respective future careers. Their comments suggest that potential use of the tools, or concepts and genres, they were writing in history was at best indeterminate, both for their future professions and for other social practices.

When I asked the students their perceptions of the kind of writing they were doing in history, Elicia in her first individual interview said, "When you get all this information at one time, it's hard to get every single little detail down...I'm not really that interested in it...I don't see how I'm going to need this later on." In their second individual interviews, Robin, Jack and Shannon also indicated they could not see the value of learning or knowing the information presented in the history course.

*~transcript begins~*

Julia: How do you think the kind of writing and thinking that was required in history will be useful in the future?

Robin: Well, I'm not really sure those things will be useful in the future.

*~transcript ends~*

*~transcript begins~*

Julia: What about the kind of writing and thinking you've done in the history part of the class? How will that be useful to you down the road?

Jack: Her writing wasn't very helpful because it was so confined.

*~transcript ends~*

*~transcript begins~*

Julia: How do you think the writing and thinking in the history class will benefit you?

Shannon: Well, I kind of know how to handle a lot of information now (her tone of voice here suggesting this was the best answer she could come up with).

*~transcript ends~*

As Russell and Yanez point out, when students don't perceive use value in performing specialist general education discourses, making writing activities worthwhile can be a formidable challenge. "The historic contradiction [in general education]...makes it difficult for instructors to make writing meaningful for non-specialists...." (333).

Because the students didn't see the discursive practices of the history course as worthwhile, they opted not to become serious participants which, in turn, perpetuated their naïve perceptions of the activity system of the history course. As Russell and Yanez and Geisler point out, as outsiders in relation to the disciplines they are participating in, students have little or no sense of the discipline's object and motive. They are unaware of the history of the discipline and of the reasons behind disciplinary conventions or ways

of doing things, particularly writing. The students perceived the history course as too rigorous, in part, due to their naïve understanding of history as a discipline and its discursive practices. They felt Amelia asked them to learn too many details. But as David Welton points out, factual details do matter in history because they communicate important information about significance and meaning. That Hannibal's army contained 90,000 foot soldiers, for instance, is itself just a fact, but it expresses the magnitude of his project which is important for students of history to grasp (348).

At the start of the term, Amelia took pains to explain to the students that they would be expected to learn a great deal of information but that this expectation was in keeping with a 100-level college history course. She included in her coursepack a letter from a former student who had gone on to be successful at a prestigious university, telling the students that the work load in Amelia's course was indeed typical and would prepare them for subsequent college coursework. Nevertheless, the students felt the historical information taught in the course was too extensive for a survey course. In a focus group session, I asked the students if they felt they were getting better at writing the history exams. As we talked, their frustrations emerged:

*~transcript begins~*

Brandy: Even the people that I've talked to that are at other universities, they say, 'I don't have to do anything like this. Like, I did that in grad school.'

Scott: Maybe when you're working on your Masters or something, you have to do something like that... It's probably not even this bad as for us.

Noah: ...Essays that I've written on exams, they've been able to flow... With this, it's just list, list, list, list down [facts].

*~transcript ends~*

Even Joe, the future history teacher, felt the workload was inappropriate. In his second individual interview, he said, “Her level for a survey class was extremely difficult. For a normal class it would have been a little hard...Survey is a brief overview.” The students’ identity as non-experts, as students taking a general education course, led them to view the class as inappropriately demanding.

The students’ somewhat naïve view that the history course was too rigorous also led them to personalize professional decisions made by faculty. Russell and Yanez describe this phenomenon, pointing out that students will often ascribe requirements for writing to the teacher’s idiosyncratic demands because they are unfamiliar with the conventions and collective practices of the academic discipline. They refer to one student in their study who attributed the expectation that students acquire a body of historical information to pickiness on the part of the history teacher. They note, “She had no map of the activity system of academic history, no sense of its object and motive, that would allow her to...engage in expansive learning, rather than making a grade by doing ‘picky’ things” (351). All the students in my study, at one point or other, indicated they saw Amelia’s expectations for writing as unique to her. Scott’s second individual interview was typical:

*~transcript begins~*

Julia: Can you characterize the kind of thinking you did in history?

Scott: Suicidal? She didn’t make it fun.

*~transcript ends~*

In a focus group session, a similar exchange occurred.

*~transcript begins~*

Julia: How did the writing go for you?

Jack: It was kind of weird the stuff she has [on the exam]. I don't know. I think some of her expectations are unreasonable.

*~transcript ends~*

Robin indicated similar perceptions in her final interview.

*~transcript begins~*

Julia: How are you feeling about the overall learning community experience?

Robin: She [Amelia] said what to do...but she's too strict.

*~transcript ends~*

These students, as is typical of students in general education courses, did not become involved in history as full participants. They were in college to become experts in other specialized fields and saw the Outcomes and Objects of Labor of the Early Western Civilization activity system as contradictory to those of their future careers. The contradiction students experienced between the Outcomes and Objects of Labor of the history course and their respective majors often led to frustration with the writing they were asked to perform in history. In her second individual interview, I asked Brandy about her level of motivation going into the third exam, she replied, "I was so tired of everything by that point I didn't want to do anything." Joe as well as Brandy expressed dislike for the class during a focus group interview.

*~transcript begins~*

Julia: How is your frustration level with the course, compared to last time we talked?

Brandy: Just as high.



Joe: I hate this class. I like the Greeks and the Romans. But the details are just unbelievable.

*~transcript ends~*

Again, Joe's alienation is significant since he planned to teach history in the future. The tension experienced by the students, in activity terms, can be attributed to a psychological double-bind. Here the students felt if they performed the specialized discourse of history, they were marking time, writing about "details" that were unrelated to their majors rather than making real progress toward learning the specialized knowledge and discourses of their future careers, the reason they were in college. Yet if they did not perform the specialized discourse of history, they would fail the class and fail to meet their graduation requirements.

As I suggested earlier, however, students being pulled in opposite directions between the specialist discourses of their majors and those of disciplinary general education courses was only part of the problem. The underlying assumptions about language that shaped the history course in my study seemed to be at the heart of the students' frustration.

### Contradictions Between Communities

The students also felt alienated by the writing they performed in history due to a contradiction between writing for school and writing as members of their respective future professions. The students appeared to perceive that in writing for History 111W, they were doing school, they were performing their identity as students and as participants of the larger activity system of the college, MCC. The students in my study typically saw the writing they enacted in the history course as unconnected to the activity

system or community of their respective majors and saw it only as vaguely relevant to other social practices. Noah's comment was typical:

*~transcript begins~*

Julia: Do you think it will help you knowing the history at all in your career?

Noah: Not necessarily in my career but...maybe just from watching a T.V. show, you could say, 'Hey, I recognize that...' or just being able to bring up something in a conversation..."

*~transcript ends~*

As I noted in Chapter Two, in activity theory terms, it is the activity system participants who define their activity, including the system or community it is part of. There I used the example of a student analyzing a Sufi story. For that student, the activity might entail doing school and/or doing theology for a future profession, and/or preparing a speech for Toastmasters. Dias notes that it is participants who define their activity in activity systems; "the object/motive is conceived [of] by the [participant] and, it follows, the activity is defined by the [participant]" (17). Russell and Yanez further note that if students see themselves as participants in the activity system of the university, with its terms and conditions, including general education requirements and earning passing grades, then the discursive practices, or genres, they perform, like exams, are viewed in that light. "They are tools for recalling information and algorithmic procedures that will result in a grade (and perhaps a diploma)" (345).

At the start of the semester, the students appeared to perceive the activity of learning history as belonging to activity systems or communities beyond just school. Significantly, in their questionnaires, five, or nearly half, of the students indicated they

would have taken the history course even if the college had not required them to take general education social science courses. This suggests that prior to the course getting underway, these students felt the coursework would have meaning for them beyond school, even if personally rather than professionally; it suggests that they perceived its tools could aid their participation in social practices outside of school even if they were not sure what that participation might actually consist of. Indeed, in answer to a question about how they felt the history course would help them in the future, they indicated it would make them more well-rounded, help them to have a better understanding of Western culture, and make them better informed travelers. Joe, the future history teacher, also cited professional reasons for taking the course in his first individual interview. Referring to his own future students, he stated in his first individual interview, “I want to become a teacher; I need to learn how to use the past as an example for these students’ futures.”

After engaging in the writing assignments for the history course, specifically the exams and quizzes, all the students indicated in their individual and focus group interviews that they now saw these discursive practices as belonging to the activity system of schooling and their primary motivation for performing them was to get a grade. The students, following the first exam, indicated that they now saw their writing in history as a vehicle for, as Russell noted above, “recall[ing] information.” In response to my question about similarities and differences between the writing for the two courses in the learning community during one of the focus groups, the following exchange occurred:

*~transcript begins~*

Robin: "With Amelia I worry about making sure I have the dates...and all the information in there and that assumes you have the history."

Jack: "I really agree with Robin... With Amelia, there again she wants what she has said and so...I have to think what she wants and make sure I get it in there."

*~transcript ends~*

The students were also seemed increasingly cognizant of writing for the teacher. In a focus group session, in response to my question about how they felt about their grades, students replied as follows:

*~transcript begins~*

Joe: I think after the first exam, I just kind of followed what she wanted to kind of hear. Even if the words weren't there, I knew the lingo. I think that helped my grade....

Matt: Yeah, I mean, once you know what she wants, it's not a surprise that you get that grade.

All (Brandy, Noah, Scott, Joe): I agree with that.

*~transcript ends~*

The students also typically wrote in a detached, objective voice, devoid of idiosyncrasies. Farr and others have referred to this as "essayist literacy" which is characterized by the "remov[al] of all apparent traces of authorship...and a preference for plain style, one unadorned by figurative or emotive language" (Freedman, et al 215). Doug lectured on the rhetorical concept of voice throughout the semester, encouraging the students to "try on" a variety of kinds of voices in their writing. When Amelia instructed the students to take her "on a stroll" in the map portion of each exam, students

had an opportunity to employ the concept of “voice” but did not take it. I asked the students about this in a focus group interview:

*~transcript begins~*

Julia: What from Doug’s class...influenced you as you wrote the exams?

Elicia: I wasn’t really thinking about Doug’s class.

Jennifer: All the voice and all that stuff went out the window....

Julia: Did any of you do anything like that [use voice] on the map, or did you basically just kind of lay out the information?

Shannon: Well, the first three [map items] I did...but after that I just did the history stuff, and that’s all.

*~transcript ends~*

An excerpt from Shannon’s second exam is typical of the plain style the students employed. She wrote in her map identification section:

Senate House: This is where the meetings of the Senate were held. They sat here to participate in the government and form/discuss laws...The Temple of Caesar was built during Augustus’ time (by him) as an honor to him...

That the students saw the activity system of history as situated within the larger activity system or community of “school” is partly apparent as well in the way their high school experiences shaped their expectations of the course. As Russell notes, students performing within the activity system of “school” expect that all school-going experiences will be more or less similar. The students’ in my study experienced the MCC history course as radically different from their high school history courses. Their frustration with this difference indicates that they were participating in the activity system of “school” and saw the course as situated within that community, albeit at the university

or college level. In a focus group session, the following conversation reveals the students' expectations.

*~transcript begins~*

Julia: How are you feeling about the teachers' expectations?

Matt: I had a history teacher in high school who was just absolutely feared... There was a huge focus on concepts and everything. I was kind of expecting the same thing here... and there's more on detail which doesn't make a whole lot of sense to me.

Joe: I think that's a very valid point because on the quiz we had today, it was, what were these dates and what was this guy's specific thoughts."

*~transcript ends~*

In a second focus group meeting, I asked how these courses compared to other courses they had taken. Noah replied, "[My class] was really really hard for a high school class... it was run really well... There weren't any blue [books]... There were really heavily weighted tests... and two exams... There's got to be a way to break it [Amelia's testing] down into anything other than three final exams."

The students expected the history course, even though it was college level, to be similar in general outline to those they had experienced in high school, suggesting that, once in the course, they perceived the activity system of History 111W as belonging to the larger community of "school."

Not surprisingly, because students perceived the writing they performed in the history course as "doing school," their main motive appeared to be to earn a passing grade. Interestingly, this was true even for Joe, the future history major. In his first individual interview, I had asked him if he felt the writing he was asked to perform was

typical of writing for the discipline of history as he understood it. He described two high school history courses he had taken, saying, “They were doing all they could to make you understand it in the terms that you could use, whereas this is just more of a reciting to get the grade.”

The contradiction students experienced between writing for school and writing to prepare to join the communities of their respective professions led to feelings of frustration. When I asked Mandy in her second individual interview about how the writing she did in the history course might benefit her in the future, she said, “I don’t think it’s anything I’m going to use, that’s going to really be necessary.” Shannon, too, in her second interview replied, “It could be useful but I don’t think it will be. Because I don’t think I’ll need it.” Both indicated the class was a “trying” experience, one they were glad was over. Jack remarked in his second meeting with me, “The effort is not worth it. I spent hours on this [final exam]. This is really frustrating.” Joe echoed these sentiments in his second interview: “I don’t really see how this is going to help us in the future.” Jack’s point suggests the underlying double-bind the students faced. They didn’t perceive the need to learn the specialized discourse of history in order to participate in their future professional communities or in other important social practices beyond watching television or engaging in casual conversation. Yet they had to expend a great deal of time and effort to do so; they had to “do school” sufficiently well to meet the graduation requirement that would, in turn, grant them entry into those communities.

Once again, despite the learning community model which purports to make learning more engaging and meaningful for students, which purports to transcend the ennui students often experience in school settings, these students while writing for the

history course defined themselves as students and their discursive practices as “doing school.” The students’ inability to see the history writing as related to future activities they hoped to participate in was one source of their frustration. But, again, my study suggests that the real culprit was the conception of language that shaped the literacy practices the students performed.

### Contradictions Between Divisions of Labor and Rules and Values

The students also experienced contradictions in the Divisions of Labor and Rules and Values between the activity system of the history course and those of their respective majors. As Geisler and others note, students taking courses in their major are in essence professionals-in-training. Typically, faculty are in the role of expert initiators. Students as novices are guided into the ways of knowing and acting that define their professions, their disciplines. As Table 6 indicates, both faculty and students in the history course performed very different roles than those typically performed by faculty and students in professional programs. In the history course, students experienced Amelia as authoritarian, as judge and evaluator rather than initiator or mentor. Moreover, again as I explained in Chapter Three, the classroom genres students performed in history conferred on them the role of text-processor. In other words, students were expected to process texts—to paraphrase, summarize, report, etc.—rather than use knowledge to address problems or issues.

All the students saw Amelia as authoritarian, as judge and evaluator. This focus group exchange is representative:

*~transcript begins~*



Julia: Do you think that these differences [in the courses] are history is history and English is English?

Mandy: She's standing up there dictating and she knows her history, she's really good and you can tell it's something she's really interested in. She knows what she's talking about.

Shannon: She thinks we're all history majors. She rattles off all this information because she's so excited. She knows everything, which is good, but...

*~transcript ends~*

Jack in answer to my question about what kind of writing and thinking he was doing in the history class, said, in part in his second individual interview, "She's an authority, she's the teacher."

Brandy responded to my question about differences she saw in the two courses in her first interview as follows: "Amelia just goes through like...this is what it is, and this is what happened, and this is what they were doing and, but she never stops to ask like what do you think of this; it kind of bothered me."

The students' perception of Amelia as judge and evaluator rather than coach and mentor was also expressed in their answers to interview questions about her comments on their exams. Noah felt Amelia's comments on his exams, compared to Doug's were "harsh." Similarly, Jack, in his second interview, referred to Amelia taking a quarter of a point off an exam question because "she didn't like the way I stated something." He explained that she had written, "every other reliable source" next to his statement "one source." He concluded that his answer was not wrong, it just wasn't written the way Amelia wanted it written.

These comments indicate students saw Amelia, not as a guide initiating novices into the discipline, but almost solely as expert, as authority, delivering information for the students to write down and learn. The students frequently noted that they perceived her comments on their exams and quizzes to be more evaluative than constructive.

In terms of the roles the students played, they perceived their primary role in history to be that of text-processor. In her first discourse-based interview, I asked Jennifer, “You said you liked the creativity in English. What about history?” She replied, “Well, there’s more of a right and wrong. Like in English you can add in your views...But in history, if you mess up a date, or get your facts wrong, then it’s wrong.”

In Jack’s final individual interview, I asked if he was able to interpret facts in the history course. He replied, “In Amelia’s class, almost never...your interpretation was a negative factor.”

In a similar vein, in a focus group interview, the students described how in the past they had taken multiple-choice exams. For them, writing an essay was a new experience. I then asked: “Do you feel like you’re having to learn a whole new way of writing?” Shannon replied, “Pretty much. Just so you memorize the facts.”

And in yet another focus group session, I asked the students if they felt they were able to put to use the information they were learning in history when they wrote the exams.

*~transcript begins~*

Joe: It’s not taking our ideas on reflection, so we’re not really mulling over it or deciding anything for ourselves...it isn’t really going through your brain. It’s just going in, and getting organized. Then it’s just putting it back out.”

Mike: Well, it seems like by certain assignments they give, they kind of force us to interpret it...you're applying it with the book review and things like that.

Julia: It sounds like [you're referring to] Doug's assignments?

Mike: Mostly Doug's, yeah.

*~transcript ends~*

The frustration underlying these comments suggests that the role of text-processor was contradictory to work or "labor" the students wanted to be doing. They appeared to want to decide things for themselves and to be able to interpret the history they were learning. In short, they wanted to be doing the discursive work of professionals-in-training. These contradictions in the division of labor between the activity system of the history course and that of the students' respective majors led all the students to feel frustrated. Jack expressed the underlying psychological double-bind when he commented about the assignments for the history course in his second individual interview. "I wasn't able to do a lot of thinking on my own and what I did I just couldn't put into the writing so I just had to deal with it." He appears to feel he'll be damned (graded down) for expressing his own thoughts and damned if he doesn't, performing writing tasks that, in his view, are not meaningful, thought-provoking, or useful to his future life or career goals.

In addition to the contradiction in the Division of Labor between the history course and courses in the students' majors, as they understood them, an awareness of contradictions between the Rules and Values in Early Western Civilization and the students' future professional activity systems seemed to also cause disaffection. In activity system terms, rules are norms or expectations. In classrooms, these include

conventions for using writing, in other words, genres. The genres in the history course required students to display knowledge for judgment and evaluation. In Chapter Three, I pointed out that these conventions reflect underlying activity system values. Typically, as Geisler, Miller and others have observed, professionals-in-training are granted knowledge-making rights, they write in response to rhetorical situations, and they are invited to engage in collaborative or cooperative writing practices. In contrast, text-processors are not granted knowledge-making rights, write rhetorically to consume and display knowledge, and usually work independently, competing with themselves or, in the case of a bell-curve grading system, their classmates. Despite their not having had experiences with discursive practices in their majors, the students' comments indicated that they expected to work with others and to engage in knowledge-making activities, in short to participate in the rules and values of professional activity systems.

In her first discourse-based interview, Brandy expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of collaboration built into the history part of the course. "[In English], you can bounce ideas off others. Whereas in History, it's just every man for himself...if you don't have those notes, you're screwed."

The perceived contradiction between knowledge-making rights was also frequently expressed by all the students in my study and seemed to engender in them the greatest tension. In Noah's second interview, I asked about the history course.

*~transcript begins~*

Julia: How would you define or characterize the thinking...as you were writing the exams?

Noah: The only type of thinking in that class is how to get so many little details straight and organized in your head and put down on paper....so it was pretty much not us learning and figuring it out but us spitting back what she told us in class.

*~transcript ends~*

In a focus group session, he added, "...She's got her history and it's not about history, it's more of her story. And when you get things wrong, you're ruining her story..."

The frustration students encountered in enacting the Rules and Values of the history course suggests the students were experiencing psychological double-binds. This was expressed during a focus group session as we discussed the concept of audience:

*~transcript begins~*

Julia: It's interesting to think about that kind of audience in that writing situation [the exams]...

Jack: You're writing an essay about history to a history professor.

Robin:....it would be a lot easier if we kind of had in mind, like, write this essay as a story you're telling to a group of high school students.

Mandy: Yeah! Something like that!

*~transcript ends~*

The students appeared to feel damned if they didn't write to display the knowledge they had consumed in class because they would receive poor grades but damned if they did because they saw little real point in communicating information to a reader who knew the history far better than they ever would. Freedman et al in "Wearing Suits to Class" point out that the social action performed through student writing in school is inevitably epistemic. When school-going is the defined context for writing,

“students are expected to spell out explicitly...knowledge that they know to be already shared with their readers.” They go on to describe a study which found that detail in writing was paramount. “...the best prediction of grade [or success] was the degree of substantiating detail” (206). As I discuss later, the students were also school-going in the composition course and the social action performed through their writing then was likewise largely epistemic. Doug expected them, not only to apply knowledge, but like Amelia, to also provide substantiating detail. It appears, however, that the granting of knowledge-making rights helped the students to perceive use value in their literary activities in Doug’s course whereas the students saw little or no use value in displaying consumed knowledge for an already expert audience.

The contradiction in displaying knowledge and making knowledge appeared to foster another double-bind in the students as well. The students’ had been well schooled in one of the cardinal rules of school-going—never plagiarize. To preclude what they believed to be possible plagiarism in writing the exams, they avoided using Amelia’s exact words from their lecture notes. Many were dismayed to find that in her comments, she appeared to be marking them down for failing to use her terms. In a focus group session, this discussion occurred:

*~transcript begins~*

Julia: You alluded to the fact that you had more of a sense of what she wanted this time....

Robin: You had to write...down exactly what she said or it wasn’t good enough.

Mandy: That was very annoying. On some of my exams, she circled the word and like she didn’t like it, and it’s the same thing!

Robin: That's what she wants is to tell her a story but at the same time you can't tell it in your own words. Sometimes the way she says it, doesn't necessarily make sense to me, but the way I can processes it in my mind when I'm writing my notes, I can make it make sense to me, and it's not worth saying her exact words.

Mandy: I think sometimes it's like her story in history rather than "the" story in history.

Jack: It's weird because you know in Doug's class, if you plagiarize you'll be kicked out. And in Amelia's class, if you don't plagiarize, you'll get it. (laughter).

*~transcript ends~*

Jack's final comment expresses well the contradiction students experienced in the Rules and Values between the two activity systems, particularly as they related to knowledge-making rights.

That the contradictions involving the Division of Labor and Rules and Values of the history activity system appeared to engender in the students greater degrees of frustration than did other contradictions suggests that more was at stake than the push-pull between the specialist discourses of their majors and that of the history course. The perspective on language underpinning the history course appeared to be a key factor shaping the students' experiences.

### Contradictions Between Mediating Artifacts

As I described in Chapter Two, genres are often key mediating artifacts in an activity system. It is often the circulation of genres within and among interacting sub-groups and groups, in other words, genre systems, that both constitute and propel forward the activity system, (re)creating its identity and object/motives (Russell, "Rethinking" 521). Thus, the genre systems of any activity system shape and are shaped by every other

aspect of the system: by the Outcome, Object of Labor, Community, Division of Labor and Rules and Values. That the students in my study experienced contradictions involving every facet of the history course inevitably means they were also experiencing contradictions involving its genre system.

Genres in school settings establish expectations of knowledge and thought and each text in a given genre must fulfill those expectations if it is to be effective (Bazerman, “What” 463). In the history course, these expectations were established by the genre set produced by Amelia—her syllabus, assignment sheets, lectures, grades, and so forth—in patterned and sequenced relationship to the genre set produced by the students, their notes on her lectures, quiz and exam answers, etc. Together these typified forms formed the bulk of the genre system of the course which shaped the social and cultural activities of the class, including the expectations for discursive activity. As Bazerman points out, keeping an eye on the activity system in addition to the genre system, or texts, helps to focus attention on what students and teachers are doing and how texts help them do it. “In educational settings, activity puts the focus on questions such as how students build concepts and knowledge...[and] how instructional activities make knowledge and opportunities for learning available...” (“What” 465). A focus on activity and genre can help reveal the character of the discursive practices students perform and thus reveal as well how deeply engaged students are with those practices.

In History 112W Amelia created a genre set that included a rich mix of textual and visual artifacts. Typically while she lectured, two projection systems simultaneously projected images onto the front wall. These images included time lines, one- and three-dimensional maps of cities and countries, such as ancient Athens and the geographic



reach of the Roman empire; photographs of art objects ranging from Egyptian Ka statues to Michelangelo's David, video footage of places the students were studying which had been shot during Amelia's extensive travels, places such as the Acropolis and Pompeii; and clips from media productions including I-Claudius and the building of medieval castles as shown on PBS. She also provided students with an extensive website where they could review images shown in class and access additional history information. As Amelia noted in her first interview, her use of visual as well as textual tools was designed to engage and motivate the students. She wanted them to view the course as an "experience," not a class. She said in her first interview, "In Western Civ. there's so much visual, so much emotional. They're going to live with Augustus and Livia [in I-Claudius]... This is not a class; this is an experience." Amelia also wanted the students to have a multi-dimensional perspective on what she referred to as "the story," meaning the historical narrative she presented in her lectures, which was also reinforced by the students' reading. She noted, "My whole point is, I want them to think everything is part of the story."

Amelia's genre set also included, of course, textual forms, the main one being her oral lectures, the delivery of which took up nearly all of the history course class time, that is, roughly four hours each week. She also created assignment sheets, mostly in the form of quiz preparation assignments and exam study guides. Samples are included in Appendix F. The quiz preparation sheets included reading assignments and web site references which were designed to provide the students with context so that the lectures would be more understandable and meaningful. Both in class and in her interviews, Amelia used the metaphor of a damp sponge; absorbing the website and reading material

enabled the students to more readily “soak up” the information presented in the lectures. Referring to one student, she explained, “She’d gone to the website, and then done the reading assignment, and now she was a sponge.” The students, then, were to use the lecture material as their primary source when answering the exam questions.

For the students’ part, as Amelia lectured, they wrote copious lecture notes. Writing notes by hand (only one student in my study brought a lap top computer with him to class) was the discursive practice, the activity, that absorbed the majority of the students’ time while in class. The other primary genres in their genre set were the exams and to a lesser extent the quiz preparation assignments and quizzes.

These seemingly student-produced genres were actually collaboratively produced with Amelia in the sense that most of the words in the students’ notes came from her lectures and the final quiz and exam pages typically included her words, that is, the quiz and exam questions she had written. On the exams, Amelia instructed the students to recopy the essay questions into their blue books before answering them. Thus, Amelia produced the topics, concepts, facts and questions that were the focus of the students’ discursive activities; these genres were strongly shaped by the teacher’s decisions of what should be written and how. The students’ recognition of the teacher’s assignments shaped their further actions in fulfilling the assignments; similarly the teacher’s further assignments were dependent on her recognition of the students’ completion of prior acts (Bazerman, “What” 470). For example, from the character of the lectures and the quiz preparation assignments, the students understood how to write the exams; Amelia’s setting each exam was dependent on her recognizing the character of the students’ work on the quiz preparation assignments as appropriate, as meeting her expectations. The

genre of the exams (which constituted the majority of the grade), the character of the performance they elicited, the quality of the learning they provided, was reinforced and supported by the other activities that occurred in the course, including how class time was utilized.

The character of the performance that students produced, as shaped by the genre system, the mediating artifacts, of the course, was limited to a retelling of the story presented by Amelia. In her second interview, Amelia confirmed that this was her intention:

I'm a hard core fundamentalist when it comes to my belief in the need to test... They've got to show what they know without anything involved... There's such a thing as having knowledge in your being, and to the point that you can go without any notes and all the rest and write it out... I am about [the students] knowing the story... I want it to be of [their] being.

The story Amelia told was complex and nuanced and included broad social, political, and economic developments supported by relevant detail used effectively in context, not as isolated trivia. Nevertheless, the genre set produced by the students did not go beyond identifying and organizing information; it did not elicit evaluation, analysis or discussion.

The following examples depict elements of the genre system. Below is an excerpt from my nearly verbatim notes on Amelia's oral lecture from the fourth class session, January 24, 2006. (The lecture included a couple of brief interjections by Doug; see Chapter Three for a discussion of those.) Following my observation transcript are the opening paragraphs of Shannon's essay exam covering the material presented in the January 24 lecture. And next are the comments Amelia wrote in response to the exam, on which Shannon received a grade of A-.

Excerpt from nearly verbatim notes of class lecture, January 24, 2006, during which Doug and Amelia have been taking turns reading parts from the Iliad (edited to insert pseudonyms and for clarification purposes only):

Amelia: "Overtly, what stops Achilles? Athena! Without the gods in there, he thought it through and decided not to kill Agamemnon. So there's a literal and a figurative reading."

Doug: "When Homer tells the story to his audience, what is in their mind in 800-700? Athena stopped him. That's the overt message. But over time...."

Amelia: "Write down this analogy. Choose a garlic or a tulip bulb. Write this in your notes. Understanding humanism developing. It's analogous to a tulip or garlic bulb. When do you plant either? Fall. The Geometric Age is the fall. The bulb is religion as figurative. The Age of Colonization is December to March. Then in March, can you see the bulb? No, it's still underground. This is the covert message of human responsibility. If you take the gods out, humans drive the same events. But somewhere in the Age of Colonization, in the ground, is sprouting humanism. 660 BC, it breaks out of the ground. We see early signs of humanism and its effects. The Archaic Age, the shoot is growing. We can see it taking effect on society through art. 500 BC, society is showing lots of humanism. Creates democracy. Then the Greek Classical Age. 500 BC, the tulip is in nearly full bloom. We see increasing humanism. And individualism and secularism came out of that."

Amelia projects onto the front wall various photographs depicting art objects such as vases and statues. She also projects a video clip of a trip to Greece made with students; in the clip they are visiting the Parthenon. Showing a photograph of a vase, she

states: "The vase is geometric. The bulb is still in the ground here." She shows a photograph of a statue, stating: "This is the true Archaic, 600 BC." She shows the next photograph: "Here is 'Mr. New York.' 600-500 BC. The bulb is just peeking out of the ground. The Archaic Age. We see the archaic smile early on, 570. Mr. Archaic smile." She shows a picture of Anivysos, a statue from 550. She continues to show photographs and video footage from a visit to the archeology museum in Athens. She shows another photograph of a statue: "Here is Ptoon, still stiff kouros regarding his stance. The foot is forward that way but he would fall down in reality. Not very humanistic. But more cheeks, more rounded muscles. The arms are now bent more and away from the body. The artist is thinking more about things. He's been commissioned. They want a kouros to mark a grave. But now the artist is thinking more about humanness and the human being. Not individualism yet; we still see the same kinky hair."

She shows more film and photographs of the Acropolis Museum, stating: "The Acropolis is the religious center of the city. Poli is city states. There are 700 or so of these. Each one has an acropolis, religious center. It is devoted to the patron god or goddess. There are symbols on the Acropolis. We are focused on Athens. Athena is the patron goddess. Sparta has Ares, god of war." She shows a picture of the Calf-Bearer statue stating it is from the Acropolis. She continues: "He is doing something. This is 530. His hair is displaced. There are eye sockets with eyes vs. conceptualized stylized forms or just an idea of a figure. Now he's like a real human being. Artists are at different levels of humanism. The Calf-Bearer is ten years before Ptoon." She shows a photograph of "Mr. Aristokles," saying, "This is 500. He's in the archeology museum in the same room as Ptoon. He's from Attica, hear Athens. But he's too broken to see his

face. But we see more human anatomy. Still see the left foot forward but now it's a realistic stance!"

Doug interjects: "Why isn't this THE big breakthrough?"

Amelia continues: "We can't see his face. It's around 500. First democracy, comedy/tragedy in drama, soon events written about in first histories. Now we are into the Early Classical Age regarding art. No kouros here." She shows a picture of Kritios Boy, saying, "Kritios Boy, has a realistic stance now. We don't know the year exactly, around 490. First truly human-like sculpture. A contrapposto position, standing with the left foot forward but now is realistic."

Doug: "What's the big deal about Kritios Boy?"

Amelia: "His realistic stance."

Doug: "Okay, Keep going with your prewriting and make progress for Thursday."

[The class session ends here.]

See Appendix P for a facsimile of Shannon's essay exam, answering a question about the material covered in the lecture above. Below is a more readable retyped version of her answer. Both show how Shannon recopied Amelia's question into her blue book before adding her own answer.

Retyped version of Shannon's (a student's) exam answer:

Essay #2: One can see a correlation between changes over time in Greek religious beliefs, the changes in the type of government that they have, and the changes in Greek art and architecture. Begin your essay in 800BC by discussing the overt vs. the covert messages found in Greek religion and the role of the covert message in the development

of humanism, individualism, secularism, and questioning over next 300 yrs. that lead to desire for democracy. Then [missing text lost in Xeroxing: discuss how art is changing at the same time. By 500 B.C., we see the dawn of democracy. Now, discuss] how artistic forms (sculpture, architecture) reflected the changes the Greeks were going through through the Classical Age (Early Golden and Late) and then the Hellenistic Age.

[Shannon's answer begins here.] In 800BC (Geometric Age) Homer's the Iliad and Odyssey were introduced. During the Iliad, the main scene is when Achilles (hero) is about to kill Agamemnon (king). Just as Achilles is about to draw his sword, Athena comes down from the heavens and stops Achilles from Agamemnon. They say if it weren't for her, Achilles would have killed him. This is the overt message that rules throughout the 700's and 600's. At this time the Greeks strictly believe in the gods and feel as though everything happens because of the gods.

This overt message is displayed throughout their art during the Archaic Age (800BC – 500BC). Kouros is sculpted. Represents a boy at his ideal height (18). Arms straight at the side, fists clenched, giant almond eyes, left foot slightly forward, not much muscle definition. Not very humanistic at this point. The Greeks are not very humanistic people at all at this point. They show no sign of humanism whatsoever during the Archaic Age. It isn't until 500BC when we finally see that idea of humanism increase, along with individualism, secularism, and questioning.

By 500BC, the covert message of the Iliad is ruling. The covert message is that Achilles could have consciously decided not to kill Agamemnon on his own without Athena. The outcome would have been the same no matter what. This idea shows how the Greeks are becoming more humanistic. They are finally valuing the human being and

what it is capable of doing. This idea is also reflected in their art. Throughout the Early Classical Age, the art is much more humanistic. The Kritios Boy is sculpted around 490BC showing great strides towards humanism. The artist has finally figured out how to sculpt a real human being. He is in a contra postal stance with his weight shifted onto one leg like a real human stands. He's very relaxed with a clearly defined facial figure. No more creepy Archaic smile! He has normal hair now rather than the earlier shock absorber hair. Kritios Boy also has a clearly defined muscular figure. He's absolutely gorgeous! A huge breakthrough in Greek art. [Shannon's answer ends here.]

See Appendix Q for a facsimile of Amelia's letter to Shannon, providing feedback in her essay exam. Below is a version retyped for readability:

Shannon:

Overall, a lot of good material This is a super first exam. First and foremost understand that you did very well.

My comments, though, will mostly focus on what you could have done better, with a mind to Exam 2 and the A level grade that I want to see.

Essay: A lot of excellent material. To a certain extent, your essay got into stride once you got to the Golden Age. But, you never explained why democracy developed. You just all of a sudden had it there in the Golden Age. In the later years of the Archaic age democracy developed as people became more individualist and said "I want a say in m government. I want political liberty." Then, with the Persian wars they realized how special their government was. That's a pretty big omission.



At the core of this story was the issue of government and the changing nature of individualism. Your essay had government sort of as an aside. So, for Exam 2, whenever we cover ideas and concepts, that's when to really work.

Bonus: missed huge opportunity. You could have incorporated them into the essay, into the map. You could have put them at Pnyx since that is where the lawmaking took place and where Pericles made his speeches. You could have put them in your essay when you were talking about the Golden Age....

The Map: A lot of good work here! Here's one quibble: at times it seems memorized. Think about the story as we are covering the Rome map. Don't need to memorize when you are preparing for the exam. A case in point: the treatment of Orestes. Orestes is a fictional character of Greek mythology who was written about in a play by Aeschylus. You wrote about him as a real person who really was tried. That seems to be the product of trying to make the most of notes that you don't really know.

IDs: You've got good material here. A super ID 1, but as in the map I see signs of memorization in 2 and 3. Know the story.

Your exam is very good on dates. Keep up the good work.

Now, for the next exam, work on getting to the core, work on depth. [Amelia's letter ends here.]

These figures illustrate the intimate relationship between the teacher's and students' genre sets, each shaping and being shaped by the other to constitute the genre system of the course and, in turn, its social and cultural activities, including the character and quality of the opportunities available for learning. Amelia's oral lecture, part of her genre set, presented information about the rise of humanism in Greek culture and how

this was depicted in Greek literature. Similarly, the nondiscursive tools she employed, the photographs and video excerpts, communicated visual information which the students also absorbed. Like me, they sat writing notes during the lecture which included viewing the visual materials. Shannon, in writing her exam, part of her genre set, understood that she was to retell the information presented, for which she received a good grade and praise in the feedback she received from Amelia. Amelia's feedback letter, another element of her genre set, further communicated and reinforced the text-processing nature of the genres she was asking the students to write. From time to time during her lectures, Amelia would call upon the students to "think" by which she meant she wanted them to consider what made logical sense within the confines of "the story." She also indicated in her third interview that she wanted the students to engage in complex thinking and spatial thinking, meaning she wanted the students to understand the complexity of the historical characters she was drawing and she wanted them to have a spatial understanding of the maps she employed. Her admonition typically, though, did not refer to thinking beyond the confines of the story, either evaluatively or analytically. Again, by these oral cues, part of her genre set, Amelia was communicating her expectations to the students.

As the many excerpts I have included above from student interviews show, the students understood the primary genres of their genre set and the learning they elicited to involve text-processing, to involve organizing and reporting information, or retelling "the story." Interestingly, despite the complex and nuanced nature of the story, the students referred over and over to their activity as writing "facts." The text-processing nature of this discursive practice appeared to alter the students' perception of what was in reality a

dramatic and sweeping narrative, reducing it to a series of “facts.” As Matt, like the others, commented in his first interview when I asked about his view of the faculty members’ teaching styles, “You’re just learning these facts...”

The students’ interview comments above also show they experienced frustration and alienation over writing these genres. Again, while the students had little or no experience with the genre set(s) they would be performing in their future careers, they seemed to view the history genre set as contradictory to them, as having little or no relevance to those future genre sets, including those involved in other social practices. In her first individual interview, Jennifer noted, “I’m not sure I’m going to be using the history material because I’m learning psychology for my career and it’s not based on that.” Mandy too noted in her second discourse-based interview, “I’m sure there will be times when I’ve had conversations with people and yeah, I knew that, I learned that in history class way back when, but I don’t think it’s anything that I’m going to, that’s going to really be necessary, I guess. It’s useful and it’s good information to know, but it’s not necessary for my day-to-day life.”

Later in discussing the writing she did for the exams, she added, “When it comes time for an exam and [Amelia] wants exactly what she said to be conveyed back to her, that becomes not too valid...” Here we see the double-bind in which the contradiction between activity system Mediating Artifacts placed her. If she engaged in the text-processing activities elicited by the genre system of the history course, she was doing writing that was “not too valid.” But if she did not, she would not fulfill the course requirement she needed to graduate.

The students' sense of producing the genres in the history genre set as frustrating and even futile raises an interesting and important question. Why didn't the application of that knowledge in Doug's course relieve or at least mitigate the disaffection they experienced in the history part of the learning community? In Bazerman's article, "What is Not Institutionally Visible Does not Count," he describes a similar setting. Although he does not use these terms, in Bazerman's study, as part of a six-week unit on the Maya, sixth grade students engaged in text-processing activities and then, subsequently, in professional-in-training performances:

The unit was built around two sets of activities organized by the teacher—one individual, informational, and reporting; the other creative, inquiry-based, and collaborative. Each set had its own supportive and assigned genres that developed and rehearsed the assignments' orientation..." ("What" 472).

He goes on to analyze and describe the final results as seen in the students' final exam and final reflection paper. There students demonstrated their ability to build on knowledge, develop cognitive complexity, and become engaged in learning:

"...these activities gave the students the opportunity to think about and use the factual content, and thus to develop significant meanings from content." He notes and this is key here, that the students felt positive about the entire unit; in their reflective comments, they indicated the unit overall contained activities which "they found fun" ("What" 472).

Why didn't this occur as well in The Power of the Past learning community where, likewise, the wider activity system of the learning community allowed for not just the absorption of information in the history course but its application and use in the composition course? If the contradictions students were experiencing between the aspects of the activity system of the history course and those of their majors were mitigated within the genre system of the learning community as a whole (as I'll discuss

below), why did the students remain so frustrated and disaffected? Again, the conception of language underlying the history course offers some explanation.

#### Exchange Value vs. Use Value

In activity system terms, the contradictions students experienced between the activity system of the history course and those of their respective majors, and their resulting alienation, in large part grew out of the value students placed on the discursive practices they performed. As I noted in Chapter Two, and have alluded to here, a lack of engagement can arise in school due to a contradiction in education between what Engestrom calls “use value” and “exchange value” (“Learning” Ch. 3). Learning in educational contexts can have exchange value—it can be exchanged for a grade, a degree, and ultimately a job. It can also have use value, that is, it can prove to be personally meaningful or of use to the student, either in the present or in the future. It can help the student “orient [her]self to the world;” it can “enter into life [and] have a vital sense for the learner” (Engestrom “Learning” Ch. 3). As I also noted, students enter a course with complex identities and may see no value in taking on the identity of, in this instance, “historian-in-training” much less “history text-processor.” Students, too, enter courses with myriad motives which may not correspond with those of the teacher or with the object/motive of the course. A teacher’s motive may be to transmit a dramatic and compelling historical narrative while a student may have enrolled to do the minimum necessary to obtain her general education credits. Likewise, due to the “strategic ambiguity” of most educational mission statements, students may see no overarching educational or social purpose to their work in a course, much less its relevance to their future majors. As a result, students may write the genres of a course and may do so

successfully but that does not mean they have appropriated its identity or object/motive; it doesn't mean the course has value for them beyond exchange value; it doesn't mean they have gone beyond being "grade-makers" to being "sense-makers" (Engestrom "Learning" Ch. 3).

As the interview comments above suggest, all of the students in my study saw the history course as having primarily "exchange value" and very little if any use value. As a result, they never appropriated the identity or object/motive of the course. In addition to their statements about the writing having no future use, this value perspective was evident as well in the students' comments about grades which they offered on several occasions despite my not having posed a question about grades. In his first interview, for example, I asked Matt how he felt going into the first exam. In his reply, he brought up the issue of grades, saying, "... a B is just what I have to shoot for." Similarly, Shannon told me in her second interview, "I really want to pass this class with an A."

Although the students did see the course primarily as having exchange value and their primary motive was to earn a passing grade, they nevertheless did persevere; all their frustrations notwithstanding, they continued to do the work, to study, and to try to do well. This finding suggests that the notions of "use value" and "exchange value" may be more complex and nuanced than they appear to be in the work of Russell and others.

Students may indeed do school merely to earn grades they can then exchange for a diploma. But diplomas carry with them a great deal of symbolic and cultural capital. As Bourdieu points out, academic credentials have the power to transform individuals:

The process of investiture, for example, exercises a symbolic efficacy that is quite real in that it really transforms the person consecrated... because it transforms the representations others have of him and above all the behavior they adopt toward him (the most visible changes being the fact

that he is given titles of respect and the respect actually associated with those enunciations)...Credentials...increase the value of their bearer... (119)

Similarly, educational qualifications bestow authority on individuals quite apart from that obtained through the work they might perform:

The professional or academic title is a sort of legal rule of social perception...it functions like a great name (the name of some great family or a proper name) one which procures all sorts of symbolic profit...The qualification is in itself an institution that is more durable than the intrinsic characteristics of the work...(241)

While students such as those in my study are certainly not aware of how, as Bourdieu suggests, those who enjoy this symbolic power help to reproduce the existing social order (166), they are certainly aware of the symbolic capital, the prestige, that comes with having a professional degree. As I noted, all the students in my study planned to become professionals of one sort or another, to earn Bachelor's degrees; nine out of the eleven indicated they planned to pursue Master's degrees and two saw a doctorate in their future. Since these advanced degrees are not essential to granting entry to a profession, and since the students as first-year novices had very little understanding of the specific nature of the work involved in obtaining those degrees, one can reasonably conclude that the prestige associated with having such degrees was a significant factor in their wish to obtain them.

Similarly, the concept of "use value" may also be more complex than it appears. Russell often refers to "use value" as the practical, instrumental ways students imagine (or fail to imagine) using knowledge in their future careers. Engestrom complicates the concept when he uses it to refer to knowledge or practices that have genuine meaning for students' lives. However, both meanings, but particularly the more instrumental one, like "exchange value," seem to ignore the wider cultural and symbolic values attached to

knowledge. While, as I've shown, the students in my study frequently stated their view that the discursive practices in the history course had little or no use value, they also from time to time indicated that knowing history might be useful for having conversations and for expanding into other non-professional activities. While on one level these may not appear to be of great consequence, in fact, appearing to be knowledgeable and using knowledge, in short, being broadly educated, carries significant cultural capital beyond the purely instrumental value of the information. David Paul Nord describes a similar phenomenon in his article tracing the religious reading habits of Antebellum America. People purchased Bibles, he reports, not to read them, not to use them, but because they carried all sorts of cultural and symbolic value, including a sense of being a part of an emerging consumer-oriented American society (260). He comments, "...a book could have meaning for a person, including a nonreader, purely as a physical object" (254). Likewise, Andrew Feenberg points out how a purely instrumental view of technology, such as discursive practices, ignores important cultural implications. By way of example, he notes how the instrumental view of eating assumed by fast-food technologies ignores the fact that eating is more than just ingesting calories; it reaffirms a myriad of social and familial traditions and values (7-8). At times, the students' comments reflected the cultural capital that obtains from having knowledge. As Mandy commented in her second interview, "I'm sure there will be times when I've had conversations with people and yeah, I knew that, I learned that in history class way back when." And Jennifer noted during her second focus group interview, referring to the history course, "My main goal is to get a good grade, but this knowledge is kind of interesting...I was reading a sociology article...I knew what they were talking about now, as opposed to if I hadn't



taken the class. As a means of expanding participation into activity systems, knowledge acquisition can provide belonging, respect, and social and intellectual standing, as well as more instrumental benefits such as fostering a better understanding of sociology. In their first interviews, before they began to feel worn down and really frustrated by the writing in the history course, several students indicated their understanding of the cultural value that accrues from knowledge. When I asked about the usefulness of the history course in her first interview, Robin answered, in part, “It’s culture. It’s what the world sees as being education... We’re getting cultured.”

Similarly, in his first focus group session, Jack stated, in answer to the same question: I think history is useful because [of] ... cultural literacy, like she said. There’s certain things that people should have to know because, as far as the culture.”

The way educational credentials carry with them symbolic and cultural capital, and the students’ perseverance in the face of pretty strong feelings of alienation and disaffection, together paint a complex picture of student motivation and of the value students assign to discursive practices in educational settings. Certainly they paint a more nuanced picture than either the learning community literature or activity theory literature typically admit. Part of the problem may be, as Young suggests, the limitations of activity theory when applied to educational settings. As I mentioned in Ch. Two, he points out that activity theory assumes that contradictions and their ensuing frustrations will motivate students, will propel them into new cycles of participation and learning, but that may not be the case (160). And in fact, in Russell and Yanez’s study, many students did remain alienated, as did the students in my study. My students, again, persevered,

probably due to the larger cultural and social benefits of doing so, but they did not overcome their alienation.

In activity theory terms, students can overcome alienation if they are afforded a zone of proximal development, a set of conditions that enables them to overcome activity system contradictions. That the students in my study were afforded no such condition and did not cycle into more expansive learning is due, in large part, my findings suggest to the underlying assumptions about language mediating the history course.

### Interdisciplinary Connections in History Writing

In addition to experiencing frustration and alienation, I also found that students were unable to make interdisciplinary connections, to appropriate tools from composition across course boundaries for use in their writing in history. While the students were aware of using information gleaned in the history class in their writing for composition, which I'll discuss in a later section of this chapter, they did not perceive that either the writing process or the aspects of writing taught by Doug had any applicability to their writing for Amelia. This finding is significant since fostering this kind of "transfer" or tool appropriation is one of the main rationales for combining composition with disciplinary content courses in learning communities.

In describing the writing processes they utilized in the history course, the students indicated they did not engage in prewriting or in drafting. As I described in Chapter Three, students knew ahead of time the essay questions they were required to answer on the second and third exams. Moreover, they wrote the third essay exam at home. Thus students had an opportunity to create multiple drafts of both essays, to employ the writing process they were learning and practicing in Doug's course. However, none of the

students engaged in the process of drafting when they wrote for the history course. Even for the take home essay, students described using the computer and merely adding in material from their notes. They concentrated on displaying information but did not consider how they were communicating it. Notably, Amelia had told the students not to think of the exam essay as a paper although none of the students cited her instruction as their reason for not using the writing process taught by Doug. The difficulty they had in transferring the skills they were learning in composition had more to do with the type of writing the exams called for. In her second individual interview, Brandy's response to my question was typical.

*~transcript begins~*

Julia: I was wondering what your process was for getting ready to write that exam [the take home history exam]. Did you do drafts at home of that essay?

Brandy:: Not really on that because there was so much to cover that I just did like bullet points so I could remember to talk about them.

*~transcript ends~*

In her second interview, Mandy, too, indicated: "I didn't go through things in that process; it was a learning process that I went through, but it wasn't the same that I studied in Drew's class..."

Similarly, Jessica, in her second interview, described her process writing the final exam as follows: "I took a lot of breaks. I wrote a little bit. Did something else and came back to it. It took a long time but if I sat there and tried to write it all, by the end of it I'd be so tired and sick of it that I'd just write whatever. So I took a lot of breaks."

Joe, in his second interview, described his process as follows: I just took it more like a math test. I saw exactly what questions she asked and answered it exactly straight out.” For the essay on the second exam, he explained, “I know I didn’t do any drafting.”

As I explained in the section above on mediating artifacts, the students saw their task, their genre set, as text-processing, as identifying, organizing, and displaying information. They had no reason, no rhetorical exigency that called upon them to engage in any kind of writing process beyond simply answering the questions posed on the exam. Geisler points out that when students perceive their task to be reproducing knowledge, their writing process is very cursory. This is true even in composition courses that require planning and drafting, again, if the students understand the purpose to be knowledge display. Geisler notes, “...Students appear to be remarkably unengaged in the process of reproducing knowledge” (“Writing” 108).

The appropriation of writing concepts such as use of voice, awareness of audience, and creation of structure, all taught by Doug, likewise did not occur.

In a focus group session, I asked the students if rhetorical concepts like voice, audience, or structure were in their minds as they wrote the essays for Amelia.

*~transcript begins~*

Robin: Ahh, no. ...the exam is more so just what she wanted me to know... The English didn’t help me on the history. ...

Mandy: It’s like I was writing all these little separate essays instead of one big essay.

Jack: Yeah.

*~transcript ends~*

Earlier, in her first interview, Mandy had likewise noted with regard to the first exam: "Writing the exam was just so hurried. It was writing any facts that you could think of that pertained to that...it wasn't something where I was thinking, now I need to start another paragraph and I need to include this in this paragraph. ...it wasn't something that I really could think about."

As I noted, students were urged while writing the map portion of the exams to take Amelia "on a stroll." I asked students if they had thought about using the concept of voice there, which Doug had taught them. Brandy responded in her second interview: "Oh no. I was just getting the information down. No strolling for me." Similarly, I asked Shannon during her second meeting with me: "On the second exam, were you thinking at all of any of the information for Doug's part of the class. Like audience, voice, structure?" She replied, "No. Just Amelia. Because I know what she's looking for. And hopefully I can get it. So it's Amelia. She wants exactly what she told us." Jack answered the same question during his second interview as follows: "I don't think there was any at all, outside of thinking about a little bit of voice. I couldn't really use a lot of Doug's because...she wants you to quote her in the exam and you can't really put in your own stuff."

Interestingly, Jack's and the other students' perceptions contradict Amelia's view of her intentions as she expressed them during her second interview:

That's what they are ultimately showing me when I'm grading their exams. Did all of that become part of your story, or did you just try to memorize it for me? All of that's about writing, whether the initial taking of the notes, the copying of the notes, and then the reviewing, and the adding to, and ultimately, it's becoming yours.

Ironically, the students' felt that the writing they did for history precluded them from making the story their own, although they understood somehow that the kind of writing they performed in Doug's course allowed them to "put in [their] own stuff." And as my findings show, the students were correct. Both the students' frustrations and their inability to make interdisciplinary connections, to appropriate tools from composition, suggest the real problem was the instrumental view of writing underpinning the history course. Amelia urged the students to make the history their own but the writing afforded them no possibility, no cultural space or rhetorical exigency, for doing so. Had language been viewed as more than a container for information the students might have had the means of overcoming their frustration and the contradictions they experienced between the activity system of the history course and those of their majors. They might have had the means of expanding into new cycles of participation and learning, which might have (no doubt would have) involved appropriating tools from composition.

#### Language and Learning in the History Course

The students in The Power of the Past history course encountered a conception of language as an inert container for the transmission of information and meaning. This conception assumes the possibility and existence of decontextualized knowledge and of decontextualized learning in which knowing and meaning are real, objective entities that can be transmitted from one individual to another. As Jean Lave notes, prerequisite to this conception of language, knowing, and learning is a formalist view of context in which, like soup contained in a bowl, language, or text, and context, are separable and can be examined and treated separately. Decontextualization then is a process of formalizing or abstracting knowledge so that it can be generalized across contexts (23).

Lave goes on to describe three claims associated with conceptions of decontextualization, claims that have implications for the students' experiences in my study. One claim is that general, abstract knowledge is free from the particularities of human activity and is therefore neutral and detached. It's presumed objectivity imbues it with power and thus it holds a privileged position, one that likewise devolves to schools as sites where knowledge is produced and learning occurs (23-24). The assumed power and privileging of decontextualized knowledge also devolves to its transmitters, to teachers whose authority is derived from it. This authority helped to shape and characterize the Division of Labor in the Power of the Past history course activity system. That the students perceived Amelia to be an authority figure and that she enacted that role was due in part to the power and privileged status afforded to the (assumed) decontextualized knowledge she imparted. Lave and Wegner point out that the division of labor likewise has implications for student agency and participation which I'll take up in more detail further on. "...the form in which legitimate access is secured for apprentices depends on the characteristics of the division of labor in the social milieu in which the community of practice is located" (92).

A second claim that devolves from the assumption that language is a transmitter of decontextualized knowledge is the claim that language contains and can communicate literal meaning. A closely related third claim is that the world we live in is objective and monistic (Lave 23). Norris Minick refers to these as "myths," noting that the myth of literal meaning assumes that language somehow has meaning apart from local concerns and viewpoints, and the myth of the monistic, objective world assumes the world can be described and understood apart from those local interests and perspectives. In his study

of teachers' use of "representational speech," speech believed to carry unambiguous, clear meaning, Minick reveals how students' responses are inevitably situational and situated. In one episode, the teacher directed students to put their pencils down as a signal that they had completed their worksheet. She did not tell them they would be doing a second worksheet. Some students, however, reached over and put their pencils away in a nearby mug, believing the completed worksheet was the only one they would be working on. As Minick notes, this is a legitimate interpretation of the teacher's instructions since putting down their pencils was to signal the completion of their work (353). For the students, putting their pencils in their mugs signified the same meaning. While they did not follow the teacher's explicit instructions, their responses were legitimate; they made situational sense. Minick goes on to describe how the students' situational response to the activity as she had structured it, resulted in the teacher using increasingly directive speech. "In fact, the way this teacher organizes this activity makes it necessary to bracket situational sense in the interpretation of directives" (364).

This same underlying belief in monistic realism, in addition to the power and privileging of (assumed) decontextualized knowledge, also affected the students' agency and participation in my study. In the history course, Amelia used what she believed to be representational speech when she directed the students to take copious notes as she lectured. In her first individual interview Elicia indicated she read that directive situationally to mean Amelia wanted them to pay attention and be engaged. She therefore made an effort, she said, to maintain eye contact with Amelia but was disconcerted when Amelia seemed to read eye contact as a sign that students were not taking proper notes. Elicia commented on this difficulty in her first interview. "I thought teachers liked that.



Don't they like to see eye contact? So they know they're [students are] listening? Like what they're saying? She's not that way... That's why I never look up any more." Later, in her first focus group, Elicia added, "She'll say 'You should be writing this down'."

From my observations in the class, Elicia's description of Amelia's comment is accurate and show how, like the teacher in Minick's study, she created a situation that required more directive speech. As Lave points out, because understanding and meaning are always derived situationally, communicating purely objective literal meaning is problematic. "Attempts to decontextualize—to achieve self-contained precision and thereby both generality and literalness of meaning—create ambiguity in the process of stripping away meaning" (26). This ambiguity, in turn, often leads to effects unintended by the speaker. In this case, the students became less engaged with the teacher, concentrating on just one task, taking notes. In addition to the ambiguity over how to be engaged in the class, ambiguity arose as well over Amelia's directive to "know the story." The students in their interviews indicated that they read Amelia's statement to mean they should memorize the story and in light of other situational cues as I've described above, this was a valid interpretation. Elicia in her first interview said, "I don't understand how she could say that she doesn't want us to memorize, she wants us to just know it. It's easy for her because she's studied this forever, but sometimes I don't think she understands that." Shannon, too, in her second interview noted, "...she says don't memorize but at the same time she wants everything that she told us." This ambiguity too resulted in an unintended effect. Amelia stated on several occasions that she did not want the students to memorize the history material. The students however perceived that this is what they must do.

Learning practices predicated on the notion of decontextualized language have important implications for student participation and agency. Lave notes that the effect of such language, even if unintended, is deligitimation and control. “The effect...is to bracket and deligitimize the situated understanding of other participants...[it] is a common source of power and authority...” (26). This deligitimizing and controlling effect helps to explain the students’ frustration in the Power of the Past learning community and why opportunities to apply history knowledge and to think interpretively in the composition course did not appear to mitigate their disaffection. The language used in the history course was not a simple container for delivering information to the students which they could then apply and use in their writing for composition. Language is never just that. Rather, it mediated a set of social practices. In the history course, decontextualization occurred as situated practice. Underpinning the course were language practices that enacted contextual dualism, the myths of literal meaning and of a monistic real world that can be depicted independent of local sociocultural milieu. From the point of view of situated activity which locates learning in expanding participation in interacting activity systems, decontextualization is a social practice. As Lave notes, “...decontextualization and appeals to it are active, interested denials of contextual interconnections (i.e. they are processes of erasure, collusion, and domination)” (27). Similarly, Paulo Freire comments on educational practices involving decontextualization in his familiar description of banking models of education. “Narration (with the teacher as narrator) leads the students to memorize mechanically the narrated content. Worse yet, it turns them into ‘containers,’ into ‘receptacles’ to be ‘filled’ by the teacher...The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they

are..."(53). For Freire, such models amount to oppression of students, through oppression of agency and participation. While no teacher aims to intentionally oppress students, Freire points out that, "Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowing as processes of inquiry" (53).

Related to the deligitimation and controlling effects of the language practices underpinning the history course were the circumscribed opportunities for student participation and agency. As I demonstrate in the next chapter, the students appeared to want to enact professional-in-training-roles. They wanted opportunities to think independently, to interpret, to make new knowledge, and to work collaborative and cooperatively with others. For instance, in a focus group session, I asked the students what they thought Doug felt was important.

*~transcript begins~*

Mandy: He doesn't tell you exactly what to do. He gives you suggestions to better it.

Jennifer: Or he will kind of make you think about your own writing. He'll say, 'Does this make sense?' or 'Do you need this here?'

Mandy: He will ask you questions so you can think about what you are doing and not like dictating and telling you what to do. I think that makes it better, too, because that makes me understand it a lot more."

*~transcript ends~*

Similarly, in his first interview, Jack noted, when I asked about differences he saw in the two courses, "They are far removed from each other...with Doug, he's really making the information yours...you're making the information yours, you write, and you

evaluate this really....With Amelia, it's tell me what I've told you. Plus the writing is different."

Likewise, Noah commented in his final interview, "There was no discussion in Amelia's class...it was pretty much not us learning and figuring it out but [putting] back what she told us in class....[With Doug] we got to draw our own conclusions so that was good but there should have been a bit more of that in Amelia's. Doug was pretty much very open ended and figuring out stuff for ourselves."

The students' desires in many ways mirror the description of "legitimate peripheral participation" which Lave and Wenger posit as a way of understanding learning. Based on studies of apprenticeship practices, which for Lave and Wenger constitute more fully realized contexts for learning than schools, legitimate peripheral participation locates learning, not in the heads of individuals, but in the processes of participation with others in goal-directed, tool-mediated activity. On-going learning then depends on increased access to participating roles in "professional" or expert activities. In fully realized contexts for learning, such as apprenticeship practices, "masters" don't inculcate students; Minick demonstrates the impossibility of such a project. Rather peripheral participation leads to full participation (37).

Legitimate peripheral participation is not a matter of "adding on" to a cognitive approach to learning participatory activities. Theories of situated learning and cognitive learning are fundamentally incompatible. They are epistemologically different and separate conceptions of knowing. Theories of situated learning have roots in Bourdieu's critique of structural and phenomenological theory and in Giddens's theories granting human agency a more central role in the shaping of social structures (Lave and Wenger

50). Theories of social practice articulate the interdependency of individual and world and the mutually constitutive character of meaning, learning and knowing. They reveal the socially negotiated or constructed nature of meaning which shapes and is shaped by individuals through their relations with each other and with the world. "...learning, thinking, and knowing are relations among people in activity in, with, and arising from the socially and culturally structured world" (Lave and Wegner 51).

Learning viewed in this light is dependent upon opportunities for participation in communities of practice, opportunities that were narrowly circumscribed in the history course. And for Lave and Wegner, this participation must consist of legitimate peripheral participation. Elaborating on this notion, they note that each element is indispensable and the concept must be viewed as a whole. "Legitimacy" has to do with belonging, with being a participating member of a community of practice. "Peripherality" connotes how belonging participants engage in varied and multiple participatory acts across a field of activity. Lave and Wegner further note that legitimate peripherality can be empowering in the sense that it connotes movement toward full participation but it can be disempowering if one is kept from such movement (36).

Legitimate peripheral participation then shines an explanatory light on, and as Lave and Wegner note, places the explanatory burden on, the cultural practices in which learning is occurring (104). In their examination of learning in apprenticeship practices, two key and related features are illuminated: access to legitimate peripheral participation and transparency. By transparency, Lave and Wegner mean the learner's understanding of the meaning and significance of the activity's tools. Knowing how the technology or artifacts are meant to function, they point out, is not a feature of the tool

itself but requires participation. “Obviously the transparency of any technology...[is] a process that involves specific forms of participation, in which the technology fulfills a mediating function” (102). In the case of the history course, as I’ve shown, the main tools were the genre set. While the students did understand that the function of the genres they wrote was to display knowledge for evaluation, they did not perceive their significance and meaning for future activity systems which the history course was preparing them to participate in and presumably interacted with. The students seemed to see the genre set purely in light of content, content they believed they had little future use for. Yet, as I describe below, when writing about the same content in Doug’s course, the students found the writing meaningful and significant—it had transparency. Ironically, the students, like Amelia, seemed to see language as instrumental, as a container for content but the differences in their sense of transparency between the writing they engaged in for history and the writing they engaged in for composition suggests they were reacting against something else. It suggests they were reacting against the social practices underpinning the history course and the instrumental conception of language that mediated those practices. It suggests they were chafing under the circumscribed opportunities for agency and participation.

Lave and Wenger further help to illuminate the students’ experiences regarding agency through the distinction they make between a learning curriculum and a teaching curriculum. A learning curriculum consists of opportunities for practice that empower a learner to move from legitimate peripherality to legitimate full participation in a community of practice. “A learning curriculum is a field of learning resources in everyday practice viewed from the perspective of learners” (97). By contrast, a teaching

curriculum is developed to instruct novices, is mediated through the teacher's activities, and by its nature limits opportunities for learning. "...directive teaching in the form of prescriptions about proper practice generates one circumscribed form of participation, preempting participation in ongoing practice as the legitimate source of learning opportunities..." (96-97). The history course enacted a teaching curriculum and thus "preempted" the students' participation in on-going practices, including appropriating tools and concepts across course boundaries in the learning community. As Lave and Wenger point out, within a teaching curriculum, legitimate peripheral participation still takes place; from the students' perspective, a learning curriculum is always enacted but the question is what kind of situated opportunities for learning are present? In a highly didactic situation like the history course, those opportunities are narrowly circumscribed. The students' experienced little legitimation, little sense of belonging to a community of practice. Students did not work together; there was very little class discussion. Interaction between teacher and student mainly involved lecturing and evaluating on the one hand and note-taking and test-taking on the other. Lave and Wenger note that,

where the relationship of apprenticeship to master is specific and explicit, it is not this relationship, but rather the apprentices relationships to other apprentices and to other masters that organize opportunities to learn; an apprentice's own master is too distant, an object of too much respect, to engage with in awkward attempts at a new activity (92).

While communities of practice in the process of reproduction in school differ in important ways from those in the lived-in world (Lave and Wenger 99), in mediating the history course through her activities, Amelia could have, like Doug, created opportunities for students to interact. Perhaps more importantly, she could have acted as "another master" for the students as participants in Doug's course, structuring opportunities in her

course for drafting and revision, for explicit practice with voice, for writing to different audiences. In short, she could have modeled, as I show below that Doug did, the appropriation of tools across course boundaries from Doug's genre set. She could have created opportunities for meaningful practice of those tools in her course and mentored students in that practice.

The students also retained their peripherality in the history course. They did not engage in various and multiple acts within a field of activity. Moreover, they did not move from peripheral to full participation in an activity system. Rather they engaged in the same activity set, wrote the same genres involving note-taking and test-taking, over and over. Lave and Wegner note that peripherality is "a way of gaining access to sources for understanding through growing involvement" (37). In the history course, these sources were limited and hence there was little if any "growing involvement."

As a result, little or no "improvisational development" occurred, including tool appropriation across course boundaries. Again, Lave equates learning with improvisation: "Doing and knowing...are open-ended processes of improvisation with the social, material, and experiential resources at hand" (13). Students were given little leeway in which to improvise, to change, to grow, in short to participate or, in situated learning terms, to learn. In activity system terms, as Engestrom notes, improvisational learning entails the appropriation of tools for use in new contexts; tool appropriation, especially discursive tool appropriation, is a key element of generative social practice. In the history course, students encountered opportunities to acquire pre-existing, decontextualized information but not opportunities for appropriating tools, including the them, within and across courses, in the creation of new knowledge, new understanding



and insight, which could then be contributed to the next learning situation. In other words, they were not afforded a zone of proximal development. Again, as Engestrom notes,

From the instructional point of view, my defining of the zone of proximal development means that teaching and learning are moving within the zone only when they aim to develop historically new forms of activity, not just at letting the learners acquire the societally existing or dominant forms as something individually new ("Learning" Ch. 3)

The teaching curriculum enacted by Amelia created a set of conditions which precluded students from performing "new forms of activity," including interdisciplinary activity.

These findings suggest that in courses where social practices enact a teaching curriculum and are mediated by a view of language as a container for decontextualized knowledge, students' ability to make interdisciplinary connections in learning communities is impeded, even paralyzed, as is the model's potential to engage and motivate students.

## CHAPTER SIX: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS—STUDENTS WRITING IN COMPOSITION

In this chapter, I discuss the students' experiences with writing in the composition course. There, a very different view of language prevailed than in the history course, that is, one in which writing is seen as social activity that takes place within discourse communities and that accomplishes meaningful social functions. There the students saw few if any contradictions between the activity system of Doug's course and those of their majors, they did not experience frustration or alienation, and they made interdisciplinary connections of the kind learning community advocates want to see.

### Perceived Activity System Similarities Between Composition and Students' Future Activities

As the table below illustrates, the potential existed for the students in my study to experience contradictions between the activity system outcomes and objects of labor of the composition course and those of their respective majors. As I described in the Introduction, the way composition is taught varies and students often experience frustration and a sense of futility when writing in general education composition courses. Even if students assume that writing is a set of transferable skills, often, as in the case of Dave in MacCarthy's study, they don't perceive the applicability of those skills either to their other courses or to their future majors. The students in my study, however, expressed little or no frustration or alienation while engaged in the discursive practices of the composition course. The lack of frustration in activity system terms indicates these students were not experiencing activity system contradictions.

Table 7 ACTIVITY SYSTEM SIMILARITIES		
	Composition	Students' Majors
Outcome	Be literate to be good citizen and good worker.	Know specialized body of knowledge and specialized discourse to participate in and advance discipline.
Object of Labor	Engage in writing process; improve writing.	Learn specialized body of knowledge and specialized discourse. Learn discursive strategies to participate in and advance the discipline.
Community	Midwest Community College and Discipline of Major	Midwest Community College and Discipline of Major
Division of Labor	Teacher as mentor/coach Student as professional-in-training	Teacher as initiator Student as professional-in-training
Rules/Values	1) Write to apply historical knowledge 2) Knowledge-making rights granted 3) Cooperation and cooperation	1) Write to learn, apply and interpret specialized knowledge 2) Knowledge-making rights granted 3) Cooperation and collaboration
Mediating Artifacts	School genres: persuasive essay evaluation essay analysis essay	School genres: various

#### Lack of Contradictions Between Outcomes and Objects of Learning

All the students indicated on the questionnaire they filled out at the start of the course that they would have enrolled in English 112 even if it had not been required. Eight of the eleven students felt the course would have use value for them as future students and professionals. Unlike in the history course, their early positive view of the class did not change but remained consistent throughout the semester. Significantly, the students tended to focus their responses on the value of writing genres such as persuasion, evaluation, and analysis. Joe, in his second individual interview, speaking

about the value of writing the persuasive essay stated, “Learning... how to force people to think along that path, that’s a pretty useful tool.” I asked Mandy, in her second individual interview, “What did you get out of the experience of the course?” She replied, “He [Doug] talks about purpose, and time and place, and thesis, and exposition and all the things like that. That’s definitely something that I would... be able to use in the future.” Similarly, I asked Shannon during her second interview: “If you think about... the kinds of writing and thinking in the English class, [do you see] any correlation or use in the future?” She replied, “Definitely for getting into dental school. I have to be persuasive and I have to think about audience because they are probably really highly educated people that are going to be really focusing on why I’m writing this and my words... They don’t want just some... random thing.”

As my description of the composition course in Chapter Three illustrates, Doug’s course was not a typical composition course. It did not fall into the range of approaches described by Fulkerson, for instance (see Introduction), but could be described instead as a writing-about-history course. Nevertheless, the students perceived their writing primarily in terms of standard rhetorical forms which suggests they saw it as instrumental, as a set of transferable skills. These particular students appeared to believe that learning and practicing the skills of persuasion, evaluation and analysis was useful because these were skills they would need in their future professions or in other activities. These appeared to be genres they were familiar with, had encountered in previous writing courses, and had been told would transfer to future writing situations. Thus the students did not perceive the course outcome, “be literate” and its Object of Labor, “improve writing,” as contradictory to knowing and learning the specialized discourses of their

majors, or to other discourses they might participate in, even though they had no real knowledge of those discourses. Comments made by Robin and Jack were typical. I asked Robin during her second interview, “How do you think the kind of writing and thinking that you did in English will be useful to you?” She replied, “I think it will be useful to every aspect of my life really.” To the same question, asked in his second interview, Jack answered, “Even if you’re in Special Forces military, that’s mostly having to write reports and clearly describe what happened. So I really think that English is useful for everything.”

Interestingly, unlike in the history course, students did not perceive themselves to be outsiders in relation to the activity system of the composition course. In fact, somewhat naively, they considered themselves to be already fairly expert writers and viewed the composition course as undemanding. They noted it was “easy” and “enjoyable.” They felt that, because they had taken writing courses in the past and wrote often as part of school-going, they were already experts. In Brandy’s second interview, I reviewed many of the major writing concepts Doug had taught and asked which she felt were the most important. She said, jokingly, “Apostrophes,” then referring to my list, continued on. “I knew all that already so it was just kind of boring to sit through that because I had those classes in high school and so on. I feel bad saying that.” Shannon in her second interview, said similarly, “We touched on some things in like 6<sup>th</sup> grade.” They also felt that they knew “English” already. Elicia, during her first individual interview, stated, “Everyone knows English...so it was a lot easier to write...papers....I’m not really learning anything new...so it comes very easily.” These comments suggest the students, to some degree, had already appropriated the identity and object/motive of the

course; they saw themselves as insiders, experts who really did not need much further instruction.

Despite using somewhat negative terms like “boring,” none of the students expressed frustration or disaffection with the course. In her second individual interview, when I asked about the overall experience of the learning community, Robin said, “The English class was really fun and I love learning all the little things about English...”.

Similarly, when I asked Brandy, also in her second interview, about her motivation at the end of the English class, she noted, “I liked it [Paper 3] because I picked my own topic...so I liked that and I already knew a little about it so that was a lot easier.” Again, the universal absence of disaffection indicates the students did not perceive contradictions between the activity system of the composition course and those of their majors.

#### Lack of Contradictions Between Communities

As the comments above indicate, the students appeared to perceive that their writing for composition involved both doing school and participating in discourses related to their future careers and activities.

While the students found use value in their writing activities for Doug, they nevertheless still saw those practices at times as belonging to the activity system of schooling. As in the students’ writing for the history course, this perception was apparent in their use of plain style, in their writing to the teacher, and in their writing to achieve a grade. Despite Doug’s continual reference to voice and his creating assignments that encouraged students to take on different voices, the majority of the time students wrote in the objective tone of academic discourse or “essayist literacy.” The

eleven students in my study wrote a total of thirty-three essays in the composition course. On only three occasions did students create and sustain a recognizable “voice” or persona. For example, in her Time and Place, or analysis, essay, Robin wrote in the voice of “Hannah,” a pilgrim traveling to Canterbury Cathedral. On four other occasions, students started essays with a recognizable voice but lapsed back into “essayist literacy” after a few paragraphs. The other twenty-six essays employed a plain, unadorned style. In Noah’s first discourse-based interview, I asked, “Doug talked to you about an option in terms of voice. What were your thoughts about that?” His reply was typical of many others. He explained, “I thought it would be kind of neat to use voice...but I just decided to stick with the standard voice because I just felt like making it a bit stronger.” Even though he would likely have received more points for using voice as a rhetorical strategy in keeping with the writing situation Doug had created, Noah seemed to equate “stronger” with plain or “standard voice,” suggesting he had been rewarded in past academic writing for using plain text and he defined his current activity as belonging to the same activity system.

Students also typically wrote their essays in composition for the teacher despite Doug’s assignments describing a specific, other audience. In discussing the drafting process for her second essay, Shannon, in her second individual interview, mentioned cutting out a paragraph to please Doug. “I wanted to keep it but he said, how does this relate to my evaluation. But it was basically a continuation of the other...paragraph but I just took it out.” Freedman et al point out that even when teachers attempt to simulate other contexts for writing, the true context, schooling, typically shapes students’ rhetorical practices. “Despite the simulation intended by the assignment, the students’

sense of the nature of their audience [is] clearly shaped by the university context... The real audience...[is] always the professor” (Freedman et al 203).

Lastly, despite seeing use value in their writing projects, students frequently indicated that they were grade makers. In answer to my question about their motivation level while writing the third essay, Matt, in his second interview, said, “I knew I didn’t have to do too much to pass.” And, similarly, Joe commented also in his second interview, “I was just thinking I need a C to get credit and it would be nice to get higher than that so I’d have a better GPA.” Focus group sessions, too, revealed students doing the work in English to meet the requirement, to make the grade:

*~transcript begins~*

Jack: I think there is a difference between enforced writing and writing on your own... Inside the class...it’s things I have to do.

Robin: I think that way about reading too... I want to be doing something that I want to be doing, not something that somebody’s telling me to do.”

*~transcript ends~*

As with the history course, the students’ expectation that the composition course be similar to past writing courses they had taken also suggests they saw the course as situated within the larger activity system of “school.” In this case, the course was similar to others they had experienced. When I asked about teaching styles, Matt, in his first interview, indicated, “Doug is like most English teachers and most English teachers that I’ve ever known... He’s very thorough.” In their first focus group session, Brandy stated, “This is kind of like a big review for me,” to which Jim replied, “This is like back in high school, you can’t get away from that.”



While the students defined their activity in the composition course as school going inasmuch as they perceived themselves to be participants of the larger activity of MCC and performed student identities, they also viewed themselves as participating in future activity systems. I asked about the value of writing in the English course and Noah replied during his first interview, "That's for your every day when you're working and stuff. Like, I've already had to do a couple of write ups [at work] for different reasons. It's nice to be able to apply it. And my dad even said he does a lot of writing for work...." Likewise, in her first individual interview, Jennifer noted, "You use English all the time... It's important to school, I think, but I can see now how it will help me outside of here. I think that the more you learn English, the more articulate you become, the more you are able to get across what you are saying." Similarly, I asked Scott in his second interview, "How do you think that kind of writing and thinking [in English] is going to be helpful to you in the future? ... Tell me again your future goals?" He replied, "I'd like to be a choral conductor. So...quite helpful. Maybe writing exams, some sort of theory and stuff. I'm sure my degree will involve writing some kind of paper about theory, explaining it and stuff."

Because the students saw the writing they did the composition class as similar to the writing they imagined they would be doing in their future majors and in other activity systems, they did not perceive contradictions between activity system communities. They thus experienced little or no frustration or alienation. In their first focus group session, I asked the students how they felt about the writing in each course. Robin noted, "It [English] was for me a lot more enjoyable. I even enjoyed his [Doug's] lecture."

Scott similarly replied, “For Doug, it was a lot more enjoyable, I mean as far as writing papers goes. I don’t know if it seemed easier, but it seemed more enjoyable.”

The students appeared to perceive that their writing for Doug involved both doing school and participating in discourses related to their future careers and activities. They appeared to find their writing useful and did not experience disaffection.

#### Lack of Contradictions Between Divisions of Labor and Rules and Values

As with the other aspects of the composition activity system, the students did not experience contradictions involving Divisions of Labor. As I noted, for students taking courses in their major, faculty are in the role of expert initiator, guiding students into professional ways of being, thinking and writing. They are mentors. Students also write as professionals-in-training, writing to learn, interpret, and apply specialized knowledge. In English 112, students perceived Doug to be a writing tutor or mentor, a coach. And, as I described in Chapter Three, the classroom genres that mediated the course cast students into the role of professional-in-training. That is, in their writing, Doug expected the students to put the knowledge they gleaned in history to some use, he expected them to apply knowledge to issues or problems.

The students experienced Doug as a coach primarily through his teaching style and his comments on their writing. All of the students in their individual and focus groups spoke positively and warmly about Doug’s pedagogical practices. In their first focus group session, I asked the students what Doug thought was important. The following exchange ensued:

*~transcript begins~*

Shannon: ...that we understand it...on the essays, he tells us exactly what we need...

Mandy: He doesn't tell you to put this sentence right here. He guides you in that direction.

Jennifer: Where Amelia says, 'You need to reword this'...

Mandy: He will ask you questions so you can think about what you are doing.

*~transcript ends~*

In his last individual interview, Joe waxed metaphorical on Doug's mentoring teaching style. I had asked at the end of the interview if Joe wanted to add anything. He replied, "Doug's teaching style. Looking back on it, he looks like that western gun slinger, walking into town with dust trailing off his boots and right when the townspeople hit the problem, he gives us the paper, that's the problem, write for an audience, this gunslinger walks into town, I'll teach you to write for an audience. He's just always there. He gives us these assignments, we're all freaking out, the next day he tells us exactly how to do it. I thought that was an interesting way to do it."

In addition to my concluding that the classroom genres in Doug's course cast students in the role of professional-in-training, the students too perceived that they were being asked to apply knowledge. During a focus group interview, this exchange took place:

*~transcript begins~*

Julia: Okay. A minute ago, you said some phrase like with Doug, it's like real writing. As if for Amelia, you wouldn't necessarily call it writing that she's asking for. That seems to be the implication. I guess I wanted to follow up on that a little bit.

Jack: Let me explain some of it...It's like Amelia wants us to regurgitate what she's told us, where Doug wants us to process the information and present it from our perspective."

*~transcript ends~*

In Noah's first individual interview, in response to my question, "What was helpful from history in writing [the preface and afterward to *Lysistrada*]?", he replied, "With dealing with the culture itself, and the society in order to understand what was going on. By having that knowledge, you could tie it in and say what the impact of it was."

Similarly in his first individual interview, Joe commented, "It almost seems like he's [Doug] in a writing course using history to back up the writing to teach us...you can make inferences from what you are learning from the other course. "

As these comments indicate, the students appreciated Doug as a mentor and coach and they appreciated having opportunities to write as professionals-in-training. As a result they did not appear to experience contradictions involving Divisions of Labor between the activity system of the composition course and those of their future majors.

As I noted, in activity system terms, Rules are norms or expectations. In classrooms, these include conventions for using writing, in other words, genres. As I've noted, the genres in the composition course required students to apply knowledge to an issue or problem whereas the genres in the history course required students to display knowledge for judgment and evaluation. In Chapter Three, I pointed out that these conventions, which confer on students the roles of professional-in-training and text-processing, respectively, reflect underlying activity system Values. Typically, as Geisler, Miller and others have observed, professionals-in-training are granted knowledge-making

rights, they write in response to rhetorical situations, and they are invited to engage in collaborative or cooperative writing practices.

The students did not experience a contradiction in the Rules and Values between the activity system of the composition course and those of their future professions. That students felt able to construct knowledge in Doug's course is expressed in this first focus group exchange.

*~transcript begins~*

Julia: What do you think Doug thinks is important?

Shannon: That you're creative and using it [the writing] in your own way and you kind of go above and beyond him...

Elicia: Like, put our own ideas into what he's saying. Like, take his but add our own as well.

Mandy: I think he thinks that makes better writing...

*~transcript ends~*

The students also indicated they felt free to express their own ideas in their writing for composition which they also viewed as useful. In Robin's second discourse-based interview, I asked whether or not she felt the learning community had encouraged complex thinking, a goal Doug had stated he had for the course. Robin, in describing her third essay, said, "I could put me in it... It kind of got me to thinking about what I believe."

In the composition course the students also wrote in response to rhetorical situations; they did not write to display information. The following excerpt from Jack's second discourse-based interview is typical. The assignment asked the students' to write

for a travel magazine, describing a specific place during a specific time period and analyzing its historical significance. Here he is explaining his process for drafting his final essay for Doug:

On the next draft, I got more into it. I was really concentrating on the context and the description not so much exposition on this one just because this is my advanced one so I was better able to tie things together here. Sometimes I actually had a little too much information like in my introduction paragraph, like I have a page. But yeah this was a lot better, I got more information down. I tied it together better. I still had some things that were kind of floating around like this last paragraph here but I had the information that I want. And I still don't have a conclusion because there's still a little bit. With the paragraph outline it kind of threw me off for a little while so I still have some of that stuff just floating out. So that's where it was. I had a lot more information down for this one. For my final, I spent a lot of time on this one. This is where I cut it up and rearranged some of the things. I ended up moving a paragraph to a totally different place just to try to get it to flow together better and so everything is being supported in some kind of order. That really helped me also. I didn't have anything floating around any more, out of place. I just made sure I finished up my context, and that the context was right for what I was trying to support. I had a lot of description so I was fine with that. So what I really concentrated on in this one was the actual exposition. Why was it important? What did it do? Why was it built? I added in a few quotes I think in this final one. There's actually a lot I added in. You can see it's a few pages longer. So you know most of that was making sure my exposition was there because that's kind of the whole point of this paper. I also read through, because of his comments on the advanced draft which were very helpful, because I was really worried because of the way things were floating around that it would be bad. He said that I was making excellent progress so that was really encouraging. That's good. I'm on the right track. So here I went through and made sure that all the points I had that I was supporting them and developing them and they wouldn't be just sitting there. So in my final draft, that's basically what I did. I looked at the point, supported those and made sure my exposition was good.

We can see in this excerpt how Jack imagined his audience's needs and thought about both his central idea and his overall purpose for writing the article. He tried to be sure he provided sufficient description and context since he could assume his reader probably had not visited the Coliseum. He wanted to be sure, too, that he met the

reader's expectations for organization and structure. He asks a series of "why" questions as a means of ensuring he's fulfilling his purpose and he kept the point of the article in mind, making sure he supported it.

Finally, the students worked collaboratively all through the composition course, critiquing and offering suggestions on each other's drafts in writing group sessions. When I asked the students about differences they observed in the two courses, Brandy noted in her first interview, "In English...in groups...you can bounce ideas off each other. Similarly, when I asked in a first focus group session how the students felt about writing the Preface and Afterward to Lysistrada collaboratively in groups, Jack said, "We were getting everybody's ideas, so we were getting it not only from our own perspective, not getting [just] Doug's perspective, but getting everybody's perspective." Robin added, "I thought it was creative and fun."

The students in my study, even though they didn't have specific knowledge of the future discourses they might participate in, did not experience frustration and alienation which indicates they did not experience contradictions between activity system Divisions of Labor and Rules and Values. They appeared to value and enjoy applying history concepts, making new knowledge, and collaborating with their peers. In their first individual interviews, when I asked the students how they were feeling about the experience thus far, Scott, Noah, and Jack replied as follows:

Scott stated, "Well, you're reading books and reading plays and having these provoking discussions during class, making people think more and asking questions, and he's [Doug] trying to get the students involved. That's where Amelia is just talking and talking." Noah similarly replied, "Doug is kind of playing the naïve person, trying to

bounce ideas off us and get us thinking...it's kind of fun." Jack noted, "English is incomparable to History. The English, it's writing that's worth it. I'm writing and I enjoy getting my ideas out there."

### Lack of Contradictions Between Mediating Artifacts

As I noted in Chapter Five, genres are important mediating artifacts in an activity system. It is often the genre system that both constitutes and reconstitutes the activity system. Thus, the genre system shapes and is shaped by every other facet of the system. That the students in the composition course did not experience contradictions in the other aspects of the course means they also did not experience contradictions involving its genre system.

As I noted, genres in school settings establish expectations of knowledge and thought and each text in a given genre must fulfill those expectations if it is to be effective. In the composition course, these expectations were established by the genre set produced by Doug—his syllabus, assignment sheets, lectures, discussions, grades, and so forth—also in patterned and sequenced relationship to the genre set produced by the students—their drafts, their peer comments, their final papers, etc. Together, as in the history course, these typified forms constituted the genre system of the course which structured the social and cultural activities of the class, including the expectations for discursive activity.

Doug's genre set, like Amelia's, took both oral and textual forms. During class time, Doug conducted whole-class discussions, sometimes augmented by notes projected onto the front wall, or students worked together in groups. Doug's class discussions tended to focus on two areas: the topic of whatever essay the students were working on



at the time and various aspects of writing and research. Significantly, throughout the semester, Doug embedded the informational content from Amelia's genre set into his own and into the classroom activities he managed. For example, on the twelfth day of the learning community, Amelia lectured on the history concept or tool, "Optimate and Popular." As I noted in Chapter Three, these terms denote opposing but complex perspectives on politics and culture that were abroad during the late Roman Republic, similar to the terms "Democrat" and "Republican." Three class sessions later, the concept was raised during a class discussion conducted by Doug designed to prepare students to write their evaluation essay on the novel Arms of Nemesis. Doug didn't define the concepts since they were already part of the genre system of the wider learning community but rather he posed questions.

The following excerpt illustrates how Doug appropriated tools or concepts from Amelia's genre set and provided students with an opportunity to think about and use the factual content from the history course to develop significant meanings from them in their writing for composition. It also illustrates another central orientation of Doug's genre set, granting students knowledge-making rights. Here he's encouraging the students to draw their own conclusions about the characters in the novel (the excerpt has been edited for confidentiality and clarity purposes only):

Doug: Simple people aren't good fictional characters. So why did we talk about types?

What type of character is Mumius?

Unknown Student: Mumius knows he needs slaves.

Doug: So Optimates don't believe in slavery?

Unknown Student: They believe in them but don't see them as necessary.

Doug: So he's Optimate due to his attitude toward slaves?

Noah: People can fall into types but not just that.

Doug: So part of him leans toward Populare and part Optimate?

Below is another excerpt from the fourth class session illustrating how Doug also conducted discussions, rather than presenting material, when teaching aspects of writing and research. In this class session, students were preparing to write their first paper, the persuasion essay, in which they were to write as a member of a specific ancient civilization and persuade an official from a distant land that their society was indeed civilized. Students were to include information gleaned from research. Doug began the class by asking the students to work in groups to determine what they already knew about their civilization and what questions they needed to find answers to. Then the following discussion (which has been edited for confidentiality and clarity only) ensued:

Doug: "So, start with what you know. A good place to get started. But lots of you said you know nothing about your group. But you did know about civilization. You knew civilization requires writing, city/states and government. Did most of you write that down? How do the first and second [prewriting] lists connect?"

Unknown Student: "What kind of government?"

Doug: "There's a correlation between what you knew and questions. Keep working on that list. You did know some things. Then what? answer questions. Find sources that can answer questions. If you got the Minoans, questions? Why were they important? Where did they live? Then find sources. I asked you to bring in a general source."

Doug displayed a list of procedures on the overhead. The overhead read:

Have materials and a strategy  
Start with general sources

Evaluate the value and use of sources

Doug: "What does that mean?"

Unknown Student: "Just because it's in print doesn't mean it's true."

Doug: "The value is it's credibility?"

Unknown Student: "Evidence—is it logical."

Doug: "So uses evidence?"

Unknown Student: "Who the source is."

Doug: "Yes, the author."

Unknown Student: "Where the evidence was found."

Unknown Student: "Date."

Doug: "How does the date matter? Whether we've learned this recently? What's the most important factor regarding credibility?"

Unknown Studentt: "Use of evidence."

Unknown Student: "What the sources are and where you got them."

Unknown Student: "If it's consistently found and fits into the big picture."

Doug: "So the more I read, the more I can evaluate? How do you evaluate?"

Unknown Student: "Does it apply to my interest? Does it answer my question?"

Doug: "I'd be looking at my questions. Does the source answer my questions? Use the time well. Evaluate as you go. Is it credible? Is it of value to you? These will save time. Look at the source you have. Is it credible? Is it valuable?"

Doug displayed more advice on the overhead. The overhead read:

Read sources as you get them. [The excerpt ends here.]

This excerpt, like the one above, illustrates again how Doug embedded tools from Amelia's genre set; she had lectured previously on the three defining features of civilization which Doug repeated here. It also illustrates how he encouraged the students to think and draw their own conclusions about the research process.

The textual forms of Doug's genre set included his paper assignments and his comments on students' drafts. His paper assignments are included in Appendix C. In his written assignments, interestingly, he never directs the students to apply concepts or tools they've learned in the history course. Instead, he creates a use for that knowledge and so creates opportunities that encourage them to use those tools. Similarly, in his comments on student drafts, Doug, more often than not, poses questions and offers suggestions, again offering students opportunities to think, discover, and solve problems on their own.

See Appendix R for a facsimile of Doug's letter to Jennifer providing feedback on the advanced draft of her second essay. Below is a retyped version for readability:

Hi Jennifer. You are making excellent progress on your essay. You have very specific, interesting criteria, a lot of good background, and a thesis that is nicely developing. Much of your essay is also very well crafted in terms of style.

My first main suggestion is to concentrate more on your purpose throughout your essay. There are places where you clearly are evaluating aspects of the book, or the book overall. Those instances work well. But there are also some fairly long stretches in which you describe aspects of the book in good detail, but it isn't clear what your purpose is. At times, it seems like you keep trying to show that the book is a historical novel, rather than evaluating its effectiveness as a historical novel. Does that make sense?

As you revise your criteria, work on developing a single, overall useful thesis that encompasses your main opinions and recommendations about the book.

You include a lot of very specific detail in your summary of the novel, but I wonder if you have too much information. You may include some detail that the reader might enjoy discovering and more than you need to set up your evaluation.

While I thought most of your points were nicely stated, I wonder if you did overstate some ideas. For example, you say that “each character portrays the time as correctly as possible.” Can you know if Saylor has done that? Would a more qualified statement still work to support your main points but be more easily supported in your essay? As your[sic] revise your statements, think carefully about how your[sic] word those points so you say exactly what you want to.

My last suggestion in terms of content is to look for any statement that needs some context or explanation to be fully clear to your reader, such as reference to Esquiline Hill at the bottom of page one.

You have done really good work so far, Jennifer. I look forward to reading your final, polished version of this essay. Be sure to contact me if you have any questions.  
[Doug’s letter ends here.]

In this example, Doug is acting here as mentor and guide, noting his observations as a peer reader and suggesting avenues of thought, but never telling her what exactly she should do.

The students’ genre set consisted mainly of peer comments on others’ drafts, their own drafts and final essays, and oral performances enacted during class discussions. The following excerpt illustrates how the students’ recognition of Doug’s orientation toward

knowledge making and history tool appropriation shaped their oral performances.

Significantly, it was not Doug but a student who first mentioned “Optimate and Populare” during the discussion. Again, Doug’s assignment for the essay evaluating the historical novel Arms of Nemesis never specifies the application of particular history concepts, merely that the students must establish specific criteria for evaluating the novel as a piece of fiction and as an instance of historical fiction.

The class discussion focused on a myriad of approaches to evaluating an historical novel. The following excerpt has been edited for confidentiality and clarity only:

Doug: “So people even if they didn’t exist, can reflect a sense of reality? Is that it?...How they are reacting to events around them has to do with historical accuracy?”

Noah: “...How they shared characteristics of people at the time, their values, and what we talk about in class. It’s portraying them.”

Doug: “Show characteristics through characters? Accuracy?...So if Saylor is creating characters that seem like twenty-first century, they wouldn’t be believable?”

Unknown Student: “But we can take turns about Optimate or Populare and some of them fit so well into the terms we have, we’ve described, people that have existed.”

Doug: “So for a person with knowledge of Roman history, we can plus those people into those types?”

The conversation goes on for several minutes still without Doug yet mentioning “Optimate and Populare.”

Unknown Student: “Most people have heard about Spartacus—Pepsi commercials. It helps if its familiar.”

Doug: “What’s familiar to you that the general reader is not [familiar with]?”

Unknown Student: “The whole thing about Populare and Optimate. We can find characteristics of both in the characters.”

Doug: “So let’s focus on characters here.”

[The excerpt ends here.]

Noteably, this exchange illustrates that the students have appropriated the historical tool of Optimate and Populare across course boundaries to this new context. The students are bringing the tool forward, without Doug ever mentioning it; indeed, he seems to make a point of not using it himself in this sequence. The students employ the tool here as a means of establishing criteria for evaluating historical fiction, the accuracy of the Roman characters in Saylor’s novel. Moreover, they are drawing their own conclusions about the characters, developing significant meanings from the history concepts.

That Doug’s genre set shaped the students’ discursive practices as well is evident in their essays. The students appropriated a wide range of historical concepts and information across course boundaries in writing their essays for Doug. Five of the eleven students in my study appropriated the concept of “Optimate and Popular” in writing their evaluation essay, for example. Jennifer is representative. In her second discourse-based interview, I asked, “Was having all that Roman history, if you think about the whole thing, useful to writing that evaluation of Arms of Nemesis?” Jennifer replied, “Yeah, I would never have known about the Optimate and Populare.”

See Appendix S for a facsimile of her evaluation essay which illustrates her use of the tool in a new context, in a new way, to evaluate the realism of Saylor’s characters.

Below it is a retyped version for readability.

Jennifer's, a student's, essay excerpt, retyped:

Important to the realism of the book, many of the characters were quite complex and couldn't be characterized as either Optimate or Populare... A character expressing more Optimate traits had said to Gordianus, when talking about the food, "Too rich for me. I prefer a skin of watery wine and a hard crust of bread" (Saylor 23). Optimates idealized the simplicity of the Early Republic... Of course, they never actually gave up these amenities, just talked about doing so. On and on throughout the course of the book, they would protest art and the baths. [excerpt ends here.]

Here Jennifer understood the concept of Optimate and Populare, learned in history, and used it in a new milieu. Again, use of this tool in composition was not assigned; Jennifer chose to employ it. She established the evaluation criteria of "realism" and then employed the notion of Optimate across course boundaries in a nuanced fashion to assess the realistic nature of Saylor's characters and hence the value of his book as a work of historical fiction.

Doug also required the students to read each other's drafts and to write feedback memos which constituted two percent of the final paper grade. This activity underscored another rule/value of the composition activity system, in addition to knowledge-making rights, that is, collaboration and cooperation. For instance, in his memo to Jennifer about her first essay, among other comments, Noah encouraged her to explain more fully her application of government to her culture or society. See Appendix T for a facsimile of Noah's text. Noah appropriated the history tool, an element of civilization, for use in a new context, this time as peer advisor. Below is a version retyped for readability.



Noah's, a student's, comments retyped:

I really enjoy your creative use of voice in the piece; it definitely helps strengthen it overall. In your next draft, I recommend using more parenthetical documentation throughout. The content in the draft does a good job backing up the statement saying that they are civilized although I think that you need to focus a bit more on the government.

Like I mentioned earlier, I find the voice choice very refreshing. I like the line "dedicated my life's work."

The structure of the piece is good, but the conclusion needs a bit of work and shouldn't throw in any new information.

Lastly, I like the Appendix, but you are lacking a works cited.

[memo ends here.]

The peer memos also document Noah's expanding participation in the composition class using the tools Doug had provided. When in advising Jennifer, he tells her "I really enjoyed your creative use of voice in the piece; it definitely helps strengthen it overall... I recommend using more parenthetical documentation throughout... The conclusion needs work and shouldn't throw in any new information," Noah is taking up the writing concepts Doug had been discussing in class and uses them explicitly in a cooperative way to aid Jennifer in her writing.

Here, again, the students' recognition of the teacher's genre set shaped their further actions in fulfilling the assignments; similarly, Doug's further assignments were

dependent on his recognition of the students' completion of prior acts. In his second interview, Doug explained how each essay assignment was carefully designed to elicit increasingly complex thinking and application of history information. He stated, referring to the first essay, "They have background that provides the basis for developing their argument, which is, the elements of civilization. So the research they have to do is to show how these people met those requirements..." About the second essay, he explained,

They have a lot of [history] knowledge they can bring to this paper...but they have to incorporate the book itself...and make decisions about...some basic literary analysis, but also the historical dimensions of the book. But then they have to go out and also find outside sources to supplement their knowledge.

In the class, from the character of Doug's class discussions, together with his assignments and comments on their drafts, the students understood that the situational frame encouraged them to appropriate tools, information and concepts, from history for use in their writing for Doug. Their having successfully recognized and responded to that situational frame, Doug went on to assign the next, more complex discursive task. The genres of the assignments, the character of the performance they elicited, the quality of the learning they provided, were reinforced and supported by the other activities that occurred in the course.

In this instance, the character of the performances the students produced, as shaped by the genre system, the mediating artifacts, of the course, reflected complex thinking and understanding of both history material and writing/research methods. Each activity provided structured opportunities for learning, using typified textual genres that encouraged the appropriation of history tools in the service of making knowledge and

solving problems, all accomplished in a cooperative context. In appropriating these tools from history, the concepts of civilization and Optimate and Populare, the students achieved what Russell and Engestrom refer to as “expansive learning.” As I discussed in Chapter Two, learning in activity theory is not a matter of transmitting stable, typically “objective” information from a teacher to a student. Activity theory does not adhere to cognitive or transmission models of learning. Rather, it assumes that knowledge construction is an on-going, socially (re)created, intersubjective process. In activity theory, learning occurs through expanding involvement with others in activity systems, using tools or genres. Learning can involve expanding participation into a new system and/or a familiar system. Engestrom makes an important point about this learning when he states that it “aim[s] to develop historically new forms of activity, not just at letting the learners acquire the societally existing or dominant forms as something individually new” (“Learning” Ch 3). Referring to Bateson’s three levels of learning, he argues that expanding learning is not about acquiring the right answers “deemed correct in the given context.” (“Expansive” 138). In this case, the students appropriated the tools, the concepts of history, and used them to expand their participation in the activity system of the composition course. In the history course, they acquired them as “something individually new” but then went on to apply them in a different context. They used the tools to engage in new forms of activity, written persuasion, evaluation, and analysis, in the process of applying historical information, forms belonging to the genre system of the composition course.

As the many excerpts I have included above from student interviews show, the students understood the primary genres of their genre set and the learning they elicited to

include opportunities for knowledge-making, for writing rhetorically (even if in simulated contexts), and for working cooperatively and collaboratively with others. The professional-in-training roles they performed evoked motivated engagement and even enjoyment. The absence of frustration and disaffection indicate the students did not perceive contradictions between the mediating artifacts of the composition course and those of their future activities, even though they had little real knowledge of what those future activities might involve.

The students' engagement with this genre set is particularly notable since it involved primarily the appropriation of history tools. This raises a key question. Why did the students experience so much frustration learning history in the history course, knowledge they saw as having little or no use value beyond the cultural and symbolic capital that it might accrue, while in the composition course, learning that same material on a deeper level elicited little or no apparent frustration or alienation? In both courses, the students were learning the specialized discourse of history yet in one course, this was a motivating and engaging process. Again, this suggests that the source of students' alienation in general education courses may stem from more than a perceived contradiction between the specialized discourses of those disciplines and those of students' majors. My study suggests that the character of the discursive practices enacted in those courses and their underlying assumptions about language might be the more salient problem, as I'll discuss below.

#### Exchange Value vs. Use Value

In activity system terms, the students' perceived correlation between the activity system elements in the composition course and those of their future activities, as they

imagined them, was due in large part to the value students placed on the discursive practices they performed. Interestingly, the students spoke of finding use value in writing traditional genre forms such as persuasion, evaluation and analysis. While they indicated they enjoyed the writing they did for Doug, which was essentially applied history, the students never mentioned that they found writing about history concepts to be useful. This suggests, as I noted earlier, that the students had an instrumental view of language. They viewed writing as a matter of employing pre-existing forms or genres in appropriate situations. My study indicates, though, that that was not the view of language underpinning the composition course. Ironically, it was the instrumental nature of the writing in the history course that elicited the students' frustration and dislike; it was the more social view of writing employed in the composition course that motivated the students and created opportunities for agency and deeper learning.

As I noted earlier, the terms "use value" and "exchange value" suggest more complex and nuanced meanings than those often employed by Russell and others. Although the students spoke of their writing for composition as having future instrumental value, they were aware, as I've said, of the cultural and symbolic capital that literacy as it taught in schools and that having a college degree carry. Interestingly, at one point in his first individual interview, Matt commented, "The only reason I'm in college isn't to get a great job; it's to learn something." Bourdieu describes a similar attitude when he recalls the mayor who used a local dialect rather than official French when speaking on an official town occasion, to the delight of his local listeners (19). Exploiting the unwritten law that says French is the only acceptable language in such situations, the mayor profits from negating the hierarchical power relationship between

the two languages. He, of course, can speak French fluently but here uses a local “substandard” dialect in order to appear to be of the people. In negating the symbolic power of official French, the mayor reaffirms the hierarchy. Matt, here reaffirms the capital that accrues to credentialing at the same time he negates it. He is, after all, in college pursuing a degree and can afford to appear condescending toward the cultural power that a degree will afford him. Like the mayor, his comment suggests he’s aware that a diploma has more than just instrumental value and carries with it significant cultural and symbolic capital.

### Interdisciplinary Connections in Composition Writing

As I’ve shown in the section above on Mediating Artifacts, the students in the composition course were able to make the kind of interdisciplinary connections that learning community advocates are looking for. During their focus group and discourse-based interviews, all of the students indicated they perceived the relevance of concepts learned in history class to their writing in composition. The following focus group exchange is typical and provides evidence that the students saw the history tool or concept of civilization, which Amelia lectured on, as pertinent to their writing in composition:

*~transcript begins~*

Julia: How are you feeling about the learning community?

Jack: I agree with Robin. I like how the learning community takes information you have from history class... because you’re writing about it.

Julia: Can you give a specific example?

Jack: The first essay we did was the three pillars of civilization. We learned about that in history and we had to write a paper on it in English...If I'm writing about it, I have to think about it, I have to research it, and then I learn more about it.

*~transcript ends~*

Jack's comment indicates he appropriated the tool and used it in two new situations. He understood the concept well enough to conduct further research on it and then to apply both the research and the concept to a specific society in his writing for Doug. As he states, he "learned...it."

Noah, similarly, in his discourse-based interview and in his persuasive essay, illustrates that he, too, appropriated the concept:

*~transcript begins~*

Julia: What kinds of things were you trying to think about?

Noah: ...I had to cover the different requirements for civilization, so I had to look up all that stuff...I found it [their writing] was Linear B. Then I started researching what is Linear B.

*~transcript ends~*

In his essay, Noah went beyond merely reporting that the Myceneans had developed a form of writing. He pointed out that it is a written language that allows historians to create a history. He wrote, "Not only does a written language promote a continuation of the culture over generations, it also aids historians' insight into a culture's way of life... Written records [in Linear B] have also been found... which contain information such as tax records, agricultural stores, and various other lists of inventories." Moreover, Noah incorporated a visual depiction of Linear B into his text.

(See Appendix U). Here Noah demonstrated his use of the concept, or tool, of civilization across course boundaries and into a new context, persuasive writing. In order to persuade his audience that the Mycenaeans are indeed civilized, he not only provided evidence that they developed writing; he went on to explain why that is an important development and provided indisputable proof of the Mycenaean language. Noah indicated in his first interview that he was conscious of the new context, the new purpose for writing. He said, “At the end [of the drafting process], I also went through and said why it [each element] was important, so that it seemed to be more focused.”

In activity theory terms, the achievement of this expansive learning suggests the presence of a zone of proximal development, a condition or set of conditions that fosters tool appropriation within or across activity system boundaries.

### Zone of Proximal Development

As I described in Chapter Two, in activity theory, a zone of proximal development, or ZPD, is defined by Engestrom as “the distance between the present everyday actions of the individuals and the...new form of societal activity...” (“Learning” Ch 3). This is not the same as Vygotsky’s original zone of proximal development which focuses on the individual learner and refers to the distance between what a student can achieve on her own and what she can achieve with expert guidance. For Engstrom, Vygotsky’s notion is too narrowly conceived because it refers to the acquisition of the known and so does not account for expansive learning or new generations of activity (“Learning”, Ch. 3). In school settings, a ZPD, as Engstrom defines it, is a set of conditions



that allow students to appropriate tools and engage in expansive learning activity.

Engestrom notes, "...teaching and learning are moving within the zone only when they aim to develop historically new forms of activity, not just at letting the learners acquire the societally existing or dominant forms as something individually new" ("Learning" Ch. 3). These "historically new forms of activity" can be new for the individual student or for a group; in the latter case, a whole new paradigm may evolve.

As I've noted, in the composition course, a very different view of language prevailed, one in which writing was seen as social activity that takes place within discourse communities and that accomplishes meaningful social functions. There the students did not experience frustration or alienation, and they made interdisciplinary connections. More importantly, they engaged in "historically new forms of activity," appropriating tools across course boundaries for use in writing that involved building on knowledge to achieve cognitively complex aims such as persuasion, evaluation, and analysis. The students achieved expansive learning and my study indicates that the zone of proximal development, the conditions or condition that elicited that learning was the sociocultural view of language that mediated the course activities.

#### Language and Learning in Composition

In Doug's course, the students encountered a very different set of underlying assumptions about language and thus a different set of social practices than in the history course. Social practices in the composition course were mediated by a conception of language in which meaning is understood to be mutually constituted by individuals acting through and within social relations. In this view, structural and phenomenological theories of language do not apply. Language has no "literal" meaning apart from local

socially constituted, historically mediated interests and perspectives. Language does not describe and posit, through a one-to-one correspondence between thing and world, a monistic “real” world independent of local shared human viewpoints and concerns. Inherent in this socially situated view of language is a conception of learning as indistinguishable from human activity, from socially constituted meaning. Theoretical positions on the issue of context are important here. In activity theory and situated learning theory terms, the shaping effects of social structures are seen as nondeterminate. As Lave notes, “Differences of power, interests, and possibilities for action are ubiquitous. Any particular action is socially constituted, given meaning by its location in societally historically generated systems of activity” (18). As Engstrom points out, contexts are activity systems (“Learning” Ch. 3). Hence zones of proximal development or conditions for expansive learning are collective, not individual (Lave 13). Learning and understanding occur through and within relations between individuals. As William Hanks notes, “Learning is a way of being in the social world, not a way of coming to know about it” (qtd. in Lave and Wegner 24).

In the composition course, this situated view of language mediated a set of social practices characteristic of a learning curriculum as described by Lave and Wegner, that is a curriculum in which students engage in opportunities for legitimate peripheral participation (which I summarized in Chapter Four). While they point out that schools inherently structure educational practices in ways that move away from the principle of legitimate peripheral participation, legitimate peripheral participation still takes place (97). In a learning curriculum students engage in expansive learning as opposed to a teaching curriculum which provides pedagogical structures for learning and thus limits

expansive opportunities. “A learning curriculum consists of situated opportunities for improvisational development of new practice. A learning curriculum is a field of learning resources in everyday practice...” (97). Moreover, participation occurs, necessarily, within a community of practice. As Lave and Wegner note, “The social structure of this [community of] practice, its power relations, and its conditions for legitimacy define possibilities for learning (i.e. for legitimate peripheral participation)” (98).

In Doug’s composition course, students engaged in a community of practice, albeit a simulated one and thus one not fully constitutive of legitimate peripheral participation. Nevertheless, two key related characteristics were evident, transparency and access to opportunities for participation. Again, as I noted in Chapter Five, Lave and Wegner define transparency as participants’ ability to understand the full significance of the technology or tools involved in the practice. Interestingly the students in their interviews indicated they felt writing the genres, the tools, in Doug’s course was meaningful and significant. The students appeared to view language and genres as instrumental, as containers for carrying information or knowledge and they perceived that knowing how to write the genres of persuasion, evaluation, and analysis had use value for their participation in future activity systems. Ironically, in Amelia’s course where this same view mediated social practices and structures for learning, the students experienced frustration and alienation. They saw little or no value in writing about the content of history for display and evaluation. In Doug’s course, however, the students enjoyed and found value in writing about history using the, for them, instrumental tools/genres of persuasion, evaluation, and analysis. They experienced transparency. Again, this

difference suggests that students were responding to the sociocultural assumptions about language that mediated the social practices in Doug's course. There, as opposed to in the history course, students had access to opportunities for legitimate peripheral participation.

Doug's course shared several characteristics of apprenticeship practices, situations where Lave and Wegner found legitimate peripheral participation, and hence learning, most fully realized. The Division of Labor in the course afforded students legitimacy. With Doug as mentor and guide, the students were granted legitimate belonging and, as the excerpts of class discussions and peer memos above demonstrate, they played an integral role in the generative social practices of the course. Students were also granted legitimate peripherality; they were empowered through social practices, including their writing, to progress, to change in the direction of growth and development. As Doug noted in his interviews, each paper assignment was designed to elicit increasingly complex cognitive thinking and writing. Inasmuch as peripherality also refers to multiple and varied modes of participation, students engaged in discussion, in peer writing workshops, in collaborative writing projects, and in writing a variety of essays, including drafting and revising. Notably, these were not just activities added in to a pedagogy based on a cognitive model of learning but typically were generative, constitutive practices in which students applied history to issues or problems, creating new knowledge, new understanding and meaning, which then contributed to the next learning situation. For instance, as the excerpted mediating artifacts above show, the class discussion about Optimates and Populares helped lay the groundwork for thinking about and writing the evaluation essay. As in apprenticeship situations, students also had access to each other. Again, as Lave and Wagner note, it is apprentices' relations to other

apprentices and to other masters that organize opportunities to learn (92). Interestingly, Doug functioned as another “master” for the students as participants in the history course. His interjections during Amelia’s lectures helped to clarify history concepts and his mentoring comments and feedback provided opportunities for the students to “try out” their knowledge of history in circumstances less stressful than the testing center.

The learning curriculum enacted in Doug’s course, which afforded students opportunities for legitimate peripheral participation, of course, included and was mediated by the genre set. Although the students appeared to see the essay genres as instrumental, as pre-existing forms for containing certain kinds of information, in actuality they reflected the assumptions about language that mediated the social practices of the course. As Lave and Wenger note, “The activity system and social world of which an artifact is part are reflected in multiple ways in its design and use...” (102). That the students found writing these genres to be meaningful and enjoyable suggests they were responding to the agency they afforded them, opportunities to think independently, to interpret, to analyze, to create new meaning and understanding. The “social world” of Doug’s course included as well opportunities for “improvisational development” particularly in his inclusion of Amelia’s genre set as a resource for learning. By devising writing assignments that created a use, a need, for the information students were learning in history, Doug fostered participation in a dialectical process in which students experienced an immediate circumstance and then engaged in thinking beyond and about the situation in more general terms. For instance, the students read and thought about The Arms of Nemesis as a piece of historical fiction and then considered how the concepts of Optimate and Populare, gleaned from the history course, might illuminate

Saylor's conception. Similarly, the students considered aspects of an ancient culture like the Myceneans and then explored how the defining aspects of a civilization, which they learned in history, were or were not evident. As Lave notes about these cognitive processes, crediting critical psychologists of the Berlin school with this insight, "together...each helps to generate the other [and] they produce new understanding" (13).

Inasmuch as the social practices in Doug's course provided students with opportunities for legitimate peripheral participation, they and the assumptions about language underpinning them afforded students a zone of proximal development, a set of conditions through which they could collectively journey to engage in "new forms of societal activity." This "new form of activity" included the appropriation of tools, of concepts across course boundaries which is precisely the kind of interdisciplinary activity that learning community advocates are looking for.

In the next chapter, I'll discuss the implications of these findings, in particular the finding that one set of social practices and assumptions about language fostered students' ability to make interdisciplinary connections and another set constrained, even preempted, interdisciplinary activity.

## CONCLUSION

The learning community literature typically refers to the theme as the foremost condition engendering “coherent interdisciplinary” (Tinto) and greater student engagement. However, my findings suggest that students’ ability to make interdisciplinary connections and to engage in learning they find valuable depends upon social practices mediated by a conception of language in which meaning is understood to be mutually constituted by individuals acting through and within social relations. My findings likewise suggest that when students encounter social practices predicated on views of language as a container for decontextualized information, the possibilities for making interdisciplinary connections are constrained, even closed down. Language practices, including genres, based on a belief on monistic realism limit students to writing for display and evaluation and foreclose opportunities for improvisation, for thinking beyond the situation at hand, and for appropriating tools within and across activity system boundaries. In short, such practices make legitimate peripheral participation, or learning, as it is defined by Lave and Wenger all but impossible. Moreover, while such practices are often believed to involve a straightforward process of absorbing a body of knowledge and then writing it out for display, my study, along with Minick’s, suggests that ambiguity and confusion, as well as undesirable unintended pedagogical consequences often result. It is also often thought that students prefer the (supposed) cut and dried work of amassing information to the work of persuasion, evaluation, and analysis, which require more independent thinking, more meaning making, and more rhetorical acumen inasmuch as criteria and meaning are more obviously socially constituted. But for the

students in my study this was not the case. They found the practices characteristic of a teaching curriculum (Lave and Wenger), in which activities are mediated through the teacher and designed to instruct novices, to be tedious and to have little value or meaning. They wanted opportunities such as those they were afforded in Doug's course, opportunities to engage in practices characteristic of a learning curriculum and of apprenticeship situations (Lave and Wenger), in which they were empowered as legitimate participants to engage in "openended processes of improvisation with the social, material, and experiential resources at hand" (Lave 13), including tool appropriation within and across course boundaries.

These findings suggest that learning community practitioners need to be aware of the assumptions about language that underlie and mediate the social practices, including genres, they are enacting. While students do need factual tools, learning community faculty need to be cognizant of the context in which they are provided. In activity system and situated learning terms, if students, in the course of amassing information, are deprived of legitimate participation, of empowering peripherality, of access to other participants and other "masters" or faculty, little if any of the improvisational development that is central to learning can occur, including tool appropriation within and across course boundaries. Moreover, when decontextualization occurs as prolonged situated practice, students can become frustrated and alienated. They can experience a felt sense of what Lave, Freire, and others have described as processes of "erasure, collusion, and domination" (Lave 27), even oppression (Freire).

These findings also suggest that to the degree learning community practitioners can design social practices, including genres, that grant students legitimate peripheral



participation, they may mitigate or even alleviate the alienation students can feel when writing specialized general education discourses other than those of their majors. In my study, the students' disaffection and frustration in the history course may have resulted, in part, as Russell notes, from writing the specialized discourse of history, a discourse they perceived to have little or no value, beyond the cultural capital attached to completing a degree. However, because they enjoyed writing about history in Doug's course and found that writing valuable, it appears that what made the difference was access to opportunities for legitimate peripheral participation. Learning communities claim to enhance student engagement but my study suggests that linking courses, in and of itself, does not achieve this aim. Motivated engagement results when students are empowered to participate in a community of practice, or activity system, and to make meaning as part of interpretive activities they find valuable. To achieve the goal of meaningful student engagement, learning community practitioners must ensure students have regular access to coparticipants, including "masters" or faculty, and to emergent processes they can shape as well as be shaped by. Such practices, including the writing of genres, may help make general education courses more palatable to students, even if the students themselves tend to see language in purely instrumental terms. Opportunities to use history concepts or tools, to participate as professionals-in-training, even within genres the students viewed as pre-shaped instrumental forms, appeared to imbue the disciplinary discourse of history with use value rather than just exchange value.

Just as merely linking courses does not automatically ensure students will be motivated and engaged, neither does it automatically ensure that students will make interdisciplinary or cross-course connections. As I've said, my study shows that tool

appropriation, as it is defined by Engstrom, both within and across course boundaries, requires access to practice as a learning resource, not just to instruction. Not just knowing about tools, including concepts and genres, but being able to put tools to use in various, different milieu, requires opportunities for participation and practice. Lave and Wegner point out that the more successful apprenticeship situations involve novices in an extended period of legitimate peripherality:

An extended period of legitimate peripherality provides learners with opportunities to make the culture of practice theirs. From a broadly peripheral perspective, apprentices gradually assemble a general idea of what constitutes the practice of the community. (95)

Inasmuch as learning communities restructure the curriculum into longer blocks of time, they are well suited to immersing students in prolonged practice and to moving them toward disciplinary mastery which as I've discussed in the Introduction, inevitably involves interdisciplinary activity. Schools by nature limit the structuring resources for learning but to the degree learning community faculty can enact apprenticeship practices, they can exploit this key aspect of the model, providing students with extended, emergent processes that enable them to experience to some degree what disciplinary life is like, including tool appropriation within and across disciplinary boundaries.

A second major implication of this study involves the careful, conscious arrangement of social practices, both within courses and across the wider system of activity that constitutes the learning community. Learning community faculty need to consider, not only how the genre sets in each course are mediating the social practices there and what kind of learning they are enacting, but they also need to consider whether or not, and how, those genre sets are providing opportunities for interdisciplinary connections. Activity and genre theory can provide a framework for helping faculty to

coordinate discursive activities in a mutually supported, sequential system. Through careful, mutually constructed activities and writing assignments, learning community faculty can anticipate the kinds of intellectual challenges, including tool appropriation across course boundaries, that students will perform. For instance, as I have shown, Doug created genres that gave motive and purpose to the information students were amassing in Amelia's class. Students thought about and applied the history material as they engaged in persuasion, evaluation, and analysis, genred performances that required understanding and elicited engagement. Learning community faculty, through judicious selection, combination, and sequencing of genres can provide opportunities for students to demonstrate knowledge but also to develop cognitive complexity, within and across course boundaries, building on skill sets, knowledge, and "genred understandings" (Bazerman "What" 475).

Learning community faculty can also choreograph genred performances across the wider learning community activity system in order to create what Lave and Wenger refer to as "productive viewpoints" on disciplinary and interdisciplinary practices. For instance, they point out that tailors' apprentices in West Africa begin by learning both the initial preparations for producing a garment and the finishing details. In this way, apprentices are afforded a view of the entire process and seemingly trivial activities take on new meaning and significance. Lave and Wenger note that activity sequencing for apprentices often must differ from that of the normal production process if they are to learn [emphasis mine] less complex and vital tasks first. "Things learned, and various and changing viewpoints, can be arranged and interrelated in ways that gradually transform that [initial] skeletal understanding" (96). Here, Lave and Wenger are referring

to learning, not as acquiring decontextualized skills or information, but as participatory activity. This suggests that learning community faculty, in designing a course like *The Power of the Past*, orchestrate discursive activities across the learning community activity system in ways that, as Leinhardt and Young recommend, move students beyond just preparing to do real disciplinary work. As I noted in Chapter One, their research into what historians actually do indicates that they read intertextually across many kinds of historical documents and sources, analyzing and interpreting in light of their own theoretical and purposive lens. Rather than immerse students in the amassing of decontextualized information as prolonged situated practice (in *The Power of the Past* learning community, Amelia lectured four out of seven hours each week, or the majority of the time), students are afforded increasingly productive viewpoints on disciplinary activity, including the contextualized appropriation of tools within and across course boundaries. The theme in such a course might function as the kind of theoretical or purposive lens historians utilize. Students might, for instance, participate in a well-designed sequence of ever more complex and varied discursive activities inquiring into the power of democracy in ancient Athens to shape American democracy today. Such inquiry would involve acquiring historical facts at advantageous junctures for use in rhetorically motivated genres which called for students to also apply and practice tools studied in composition, including voice, audience, and purpose. Participation in such a sequence, as in apprenticeship situations, would include access to both “masters” or faculty and the performance of professional-in-training identities or perhaps, as I noted in Chapter One, public-intellectual-in-training identities, which involve the application of disciplinary knowledge to public issues or problems. Such careful sequencing designed

across the entire learning community activity system could provide students with increasingly productive perspectives on both disciplinary and interdisciplinary activity, perspectives that would render historical facts not just information to be tested on but the subject and material of students' own inquiry.

As I've alluded to above, and as my research questions indicate, a third major implication of this study involves the theme. Not all learning communities utilize a theme as a conceptual lens or tool for facilitating interdisciplinary practice, although most do. In my study, both faculty members stated in interviews that "The Power of the Past" was the course theme; they also stated that, unlike most faculty, they did not plan the course around it. They didn't use the theme to focus student inquiry or to facilitate interdisciplinary activity. While neither Doug nor Amelia offered a specific reason for this, I suspect that decontextualization as prolonged situated practice in Amelia's course rendered effective use of a theme all but impossible. As a means of making interdisciplinary connections, a functional theme depends on a view of language and a set of social practices that make interdisciplinarity possible. A functional theme depends on a learning curriculum, that is, on "situated opportunities...for the improvisational development of new practice" (Lave and Wenger 97). The theme is essentially an improvisational tool. In Chapter Five, I described a learning community linking a political science course and an American literature course, focused on the theme of "community." I noted that students have to grapple with the various manifestations and meanings of "community" as the concept circulates in each course and as they apply it across course boundaries. The term "community," strictly speaking, is neither a literary nor a political term. These manifestations and meanings, then, are improvisational; they

are unforeseen and improvised perspectives and ideas, ways of seeing, that arise from the students' expanding participation in communities of practice, participation that includes both disciplinary and interdisciplinary activity and that elicits "new practice." To the degree students encounter a teaching curriculum, one designed to instruct novices through didactic practices, a theme cannot function. A functional theme is a tool in use, a resource for learning, not subject matter to be imparted. My study suggests, then, that learning community faculty consider the role of the theme as they design and sequence genred performances within courses and across the learning community activity system. Inasmuch as learning itself is an improvised practice (Lave and Wenger 93), the theme, as an improvisational tool utilized within a carefully designed learning curriculum, can facilitate "new practice" in the form of more complex thinking, deeper understanding, and new insights, including, of course, interdisciplinary connections. As William Hanks points out, mastery also involves the ability to improvise, a portable skill that careful utilization of a theme might help to develop (Lave and Wenger).

A fourth implication of my study involves learning community course and program assessment using activity and genre theory. While activity theory, as I've noted, has its limitations, it can, in conjunction with genre theory, be a means of illuminating and thus assessing social practices and views of language enacted in learning communities. Activity/genre theory can shed light on the kind and quality of learning that is taking place. As Bazerman points out in discussing his study,

The analysis in characterizing the genres the students worked in and how they deployed factual material to accomplish those genres...identifies exactly what students are doing and what knowledge and thought they are displaying. It also identifies the appropriate implicit criteria by which each assignment might be assessed, given the logic of the genre and activity—that is, the identification of task appropriate skills and resources

deployed in the completion of each of the genres suggests specifically what might appropriately be evaluated in each of the tasks (“What” 476).

Moreover, activity/genre theory can help unpack and describe how genred assignments are designed and sequenced both within courses and across the learning community activity system. For faculty teaching in learning communities, assessing student performances based on “the logic of the genre” can reveal the nature of the disciplinary work being enacted, as well as the nature of interdisciplinary activity. It can also reveal how genres are or are not providing opportunities for interdisciplinary activity.

Activity/genre theory can also provide a framework for designing activities that are plannable and assessable across an entire learning community program. Currently, in most learning community programs, curriculum design, including genred writing assignments, is left entirely up to individual faculty members and/or teams. As Zawacki and Williams note, some writing assignments are explicitly disciplinary while others are created to cross or even “transcend” disciplinary boundaries. At times, teachers create new experimental forms for which there are no models (131). However, making genred performances of disciplinary and interdisciplinary activity transparent offers the possibility of program-wide coordination. As Bazerman notes, “Making the learning logic of the assignments and their sequence accessible, suggests the possibility of coordinating the work of different classrooms, and comparison of the accomplishments of students in these classrooms...” (“What” 476). Perhaps most importantly, such program-wide assessment could measure student performances as they participate in communities of practice rather than measuring isolated basic tasks. Bazerman, again, makes an analogy to measuring the abilities of a great singer. Doing so would require a performance situation that engaged her interest and stretched her limits as opposed to one

that involved, say, vocalizing scales. He notes that “there is an...important phenomenon of learning to the test, to the scene of assessment. If the scene of assessment engages attention and calls on complex resources to produce exciting performances, students grow” (“What” 477). Activity/genre theory offers the possibility of a framework for program-wide learning community assessment that could measure and compare students’ genred performances while they are engaged in improvisational disciplinary and interdisciplinary activity, thus producing a full picture of their capabilities. It could also measure the kind and quality of learning curriculum (Lave and Wenger) students are afforded, including regular opportunities for legitimate peripheral participation which my study suggests are essential if learning communities are to fulfill their claims for both enhanced student engagement and interdisciplinary practices.



## **APPENDICES**

## **APPENDIX A**

### **English 112/112H Course Outcomes and Objectives**

## **English 112 Course Outcomes and Objectives**

### **Outcome One: Write effective college compositions**

#### **Objectives:**

- Consider audience and purpose
- Plan writing processes, using effective strategies and techniques
- Include a clear articulation of the important ideas
- Select organize, and present details to support a main idea.
- Demonstrate the ability to move between generalization and detail
- Write effective introductions and conclusions
- Employ the appropriate writing conventions.

### **Outcome Two: Use writing tasks that involve both reading and writing**

#### **Objectives:**

- Demonstrate the ability to derive meaning from a piece of writing.
- Demonstrate the ability to distinguish between the meaning one makes of a text and the author's intended meaning.
- Interpret reading and writing task in such a way as to invest them with personal significance, thereby creating ways to make reading and writing vital activities in a lifetime of learning.
- Demonstrate critical thinking skills.
- Understand the relationship among language, knowledge, and power.

### **Outcome Three: Work with others, both in and out of the classroom.**

#### **Objectives:**

- Reflect upon and assess one's own work as well as the work of others.
- Show willingness to work with others, seeking help where necessary and offering help where it is sought.

**Outcome Four: Write an academic research composition**

**Objectives:**

- Locate information using a variety of search tools and methods, including library sources.
- Select source material appropriate to the writing context.
- Integrate their own opinions with various source points of view.
- Quote, paraphrase and summarize accurately.
- Document sources in conventional style with parenthetical references in text.

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## **APPENDIX B**

### **English 112/112H Syllabus**

## *The Power of the Past*

### Syllabus and Course Outline for English Composition 112 and 112H

Please don't ever hesitate to contact me with questions, concerns, or if you just want to talk. Here are ways to reach me:

#### Office:

My office hours this semester are:

I will also be available most days before and after our learning community meets and most of the time during our mid class break.

If you cannot see me during my scheduled office hours or on class day, please contact me to set up an appointment. You are always free to stop by my office to see if I am available.

**E-Mail:** This is a good way to reach me outside of regular school hours, especially on the weekends. I cannot guarantee that I will check my e-mail every day or in the evenings, but I will respond to you as quickly as I can.

**Office Phone:** You can call me any time, but this is a particularly good way to reach me Monday through Thursday. If I'm not in, leave a message, with a phone number and a time I should call you back at that number. I am usually not at my office on weekends, so if you leave a message then I probably won't be able to return your call until Monday.

#### Required Books:

Coursepack for this learning community: Bring to class every day.

You must have college level handbook with instructions on MLA documentation of sources. If you are not sure if one you have

will work, please show it to me.

Everyone will need to purchase the following two books:

Saylor, Steven. *Arms of Nemesis*

Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*

**Required Materials:**

Access to a reliable computer with Internet access and a printer

Backup and storage system for work done on computer

One loose leaf folder, with pockets, for journal (not for Honors)

Packet of 4" x 6" notecards

**Course Goals:**

One purpose of this course is to develop advanced skills in non-fiction composition. We will gain experience in rhetorical techniques in descriptive, analytical, and expository writing and in the methodology of research and source use and documentation. Using a workshop approach, we will seek to develop editing skills. Finally, we will be reading extensively to develop critical reading skills and a deeper understanding of the techniques of fiction and prose style.

Another goal of this course, as part of a learning community, is to use writing and reading to explore topics and themes in the history of Early Western Civilization.

**Course Title: The Power of the Past**

As the learning community title suggests, we will be exploring an idea throughout the semester. We will be thinking about and writing about how the past informs the present. In particular, we will explore the role of humanism in Western Civilization and its influence on our society.

The American novelist William Faulkner once wrote that "the past is never dead. It's not even past." Faulkner was telling us that we cannot separate ourselves from the past, that the present—and all it encompasses—is merely an extension of the past. That idea will provide our reading, research, writing, and conversations with a common thread, and it should help give us a better understanding of who we are. In short, we will be writing about history not only to learn about the past, but to better understand the present.

## **Course Requirements**

### **Class Participation, Preparation, and Attendance**

**Class Participation:** Regular attendance, punctuality, and active participation are absolutely essential to successfully complete this learning community. Because this is a lecture and workshop course, much of the course content is experienced in class. All students are required to come to class with assignments completed and to be actively engaged in all class activities. If you do miss class, you are responsible for any missed work and assignments that are due. It is your responsibility to learn what you missed and to pick up or drop off any assignments.

As explained below and under “Grading Information” later in this course description, final grades will reflect class preparation and participation.

**Class Preparation Grade:** You will receive 2 points for each day that you come to class fully prepared and engaged throughout the class period, with your coursepack and with assignments for that day completed. If you are late, leave early, or come to class without your coursepack or assigned work completed, you will receive reduced or no points for that day.

**Attendance and Late Policy:** Please note that arriving late or leaving class early will be counted as an absence, unless you have a legitimate reason that you communicate to the instructors.

**Excessive Absence and Drop Policy:** At the third absence, your Class Preparation grade will drop 50%. At the fourth absence, you would receive a zero for that grade. Students missing 3 consecutive class meetings or 5 class meetings total will be unable to continue in the class. You are responsible for completing a drop slip from Registration.

**Group Participation Grade:** You will often be working collaboratively with fellow students during the semester. Group assignments will be turned in for assigned points. Everyone who participates fully in the group work will receive credit for that assignment. Absence or lack of participation will result in no credit for an assignment.



## **Course Assignments**

**Reading Assignments:** Specific reading assignments from the required books and outside sources will be given throughout the semester. In addition to assigned reading, you will be doing supplemental reading and research for course writing projects.

**Written Assignments:** Much of the work involved in this course will be in writing, revising, and editing prose. Written work will involve a variety of formal and informal writing, including formal essays, a journal, and writing logs. Note that late final drafts of formal essays will not be accepted for a grade. (This does not apply in the case of severe illness or emergency, but you must provide a doctor's note or contact me in advance of the due date.)

**Specific guidelines for this written work are as follows:**

**Formal Essays:** These essays comprise the main writing of the course. Formal essays will be graded on content, structure, style, and text preparation. The specific requirements for each essay will be given in class, but all essays must conform to the following format:

- 1) All essays must be typed, double-spaced, stapled, and printed in dark ink.
- 2) Type your name, the date, and the status of the paper (first draft, second draft, final draft, final draft rewrite) in the upper left or right hand corner of the first page, above the title, one line to an item, single-spaced.
- 3) All drafts should have a title. Center the title two lines (double-spaced) below the above information and begin the text two lines below the title. Do not use a separate title page.
- 4) Margins should be one inch all the way around the text.
- 5) Make the appropriate number of photocopies for class.

### **Formal Essay Draft Policies**

**Late Final Drafts:** Late Final Drafts will not be accepted for credit, unless there is a documentable emergency and you contacted the instructor in advance of the due date.

**Draft Stages:** You must complete and turn in every assigned stage of the formal essay drafts or the Final Draft will not be accepted. Please note that every draft must meet the format guidelines for formal essays. This policy may be waived for a documentable emergency for which the instructor was notified in advance.

## **Journal and Symposium Assignments**

**Journals for Non-Honors:** We will use journal writing as part of the development of formal essays, to reflect on reading, to keep a personal, informal record of writing principles and practices, and to explore course topics and themes. You will be given assigned journal entries throughout the semester. Be sure to stay caught up on your journal. While entries may vary in length, each should thoughtfully and thoroughly developed. Grades will reflect the effort that you put into the entries.

### **Journal Guidelines:**

- 1) Be sure to complete assignments on time. Late work will be reduced by 10% for each class period turned in late.
- 2) Make sure that you completely address the issues raised in the journal assignment.
- 3) Use standard size notebook paper, and keep your journal entries neatly in sequence with the journal number noted at the top under your name.

**Symposium for Honors:** Students who enrolled for Honors credit will participate in an Internet symposium instead of doing the journal above. We will use an online discussion group to discuss class topics and ideas and to explore the Internet to enhance the course experience. If you did not sign up for the Honors sections, but would like to, please contact us no later than the third meeting of the semester.

### **Symposium Guidelines:**

- 1) Be sure to complete assignments on time. Late work will be reduced by 10% for each 24 hours period posted late.

- 2) Address the assignments directly and write thorough responses. Your responses are graded primarily on care, thought, and effort.

**Writing Logs:** At the end of some class sessions you will be asked to complete a brief description of work-in-progress or workshop or other activities. Your log entry should be written legibly on a 4 x 6" index card. Be sure to turn in your logs, because they are used to take attendance.

**Grading Information:** I will use the following formula to calculate your course grade:

Essay One:	20%
Essay Two:	20%
Essay Three:	30%
Symposium or Journal:	15%
Class Preparation:	10%
Group Participation:	5%

I encourage you to see me at any point during the semester if you have any questions about your grades.

**Plagiarism:** Please note that plagiarism or any kind of academic dishonesty will result in automatic failure of the course. We will be discussing how to avoid plagiarism and your handbook includes information on using and documenting sources correctly, but always feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns about this issue.

## **APPENDIX C**

### **English 112/112H Essay Assignments**

## **Guidelines for a Persuasive Essay: Who Says We're Uncivilized?**

The first true student of writing, Aristotle, gave us the term rhetoric, which he defined as the art of persuasion. In this essay, we'll be following Aristotle's example of this art by writing a persuasive essay. In this assignment, we'll be looking into and using the elements that make for a convincing argument. We'll also introduce some basic research because, after all, it takes evidence to be persuasive. And, since we'll be doing research, we'll be using the principles and practices of documentation of outside sources.

Here's some background to get us started. You belong to a society from the period of Early Western Civilization.

Specifically, you are a \_\_\_\_\_. More specifically, you, individually, are a scribe, a member of a select group of literate workers in your society. You and your fellow scribes have been given an assignment. A king from a far off culture, along with his huge retinue, had recently been visiting your land. As he departed, one of your neighbors heard the king mutter, "these people are a bunch of uncivilized barbarians." Now, your people are horribly offended, because you believe that you live in a highly civilized society. Instead of thrashing the king, your leaders have wisely decided to assign the scribes the job of writing documents that prove your society is civilized.

Your **purpose** is to write a persuasive essay that convinces others that your society is, indeed, civilized. Your **subject** of writing is your society and the elements that you believe prove it to be a civilization. Your **audience** is fairly broad; it's the outside world that you are trying to convince. More specifically, think of your audience as any educated person, in the present or future, who wants to learn about your society. You can, if you like, address a more specific audience in your voice.

**Content, Structure, and Voice:** While the purpose, subject, and audience guidelines above are designed to focus your research and writing, how you fulfill those is up to you. I urge you to be creative in regard to content, structure, and voice, in particular. You will want to make conscious decisions as you develop those aspects of your essay.

**Research Requirements:** You are required to use at least three published sources in your essay, one of which may not be a textbook required for this course. Your essay must correctly use MLA style for both in-text documentation of sources and for a Works Cited. Your Works Cited need not be on a separate page. It can begin four spaces below the end of your text.

**Group Research:** Your group may share research in any manner that you find effective. However, each person's essay must be individual and clearly distinct in all aspects. Of course, you will probably use similar information, but you must develop your essay individually. Misuse of sources or using a classmate's text as a basis for your own both constitute plagiarism. Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns about this.

**Textual Requirements:** Your final draft should be 3-4 pages long, follow the conventions of Standard English, and the format must conform to the guidelines for Formal Essays explained in the syllabus.

**Essay Schedule:** Every draft due in class must be typed, double-spaced and stapled. Each draft should also include complete in-text documentation and a Works Cited.

- : Bring research materials and completed prewriting to class.
- : Discovery Draft due. Bring 5 copies to class.
- : Bring working draft and handbook to class.
- : Advanced Draft due. Bring 3 copies to class.
- : Bring working draft to class.
- : Final Draft due, along with prewriting, revision comments from classmates, and Text Preparation Record.

**Research Assistance:** We will be discussing aspects of research in class, and your handbook discusses research and documentation. Please also contact me any time you need help or have questions.

## Evaluation Essay Guidelines

In this section of the course, we are going to be reading and evaluating a historical novel, *Arms of Nemesis*, by Steven Saylor. Our reading will help us understand how fiction can help enliven the past. In our writing, we will be evaluating the book in order to share with our audience our perception of the book's value as a novel and as a historical source.

### Subject:

The **subject** of this evaluation essay is *Arms of Nemesis*, as a historical novel. That description of the book suggests that your subject really has two somewhat distinct parts: as a work of fiction and as a work of history. You will want to develop and use a minimum of three criteria, reflecting both fiction and history, in your evaluation of this book. Let me explain further. You can include two criteria that evaluate the book as fiction and one that evaluates it as a historical source. Or you can have two criteria that evaluate it as history and one as fiction. Your criteria must, however, cover both aspects of the book.

### Purpose:

Your main **purpose** is to provide for your audience a complex, useful evaluation of the novel as both a work of fiction and as a historical source. When I say complex and useful, I am suggesting that this is not like a thumbs up or thumbs down movie review. A book like this is multi-faceted and deserves a complex judgment as to its overall effectiveness and value. So don't simply argue that it is good or bad; instead, discuss its strengths and weaknesses as both fiction and history. You also want an evaluation that is useful to your reader. Again, don't simply say read it or don't read it. Explain to your reader what they will get from reading about it. How will they or won't they appreciate it as a work of fiction? What kind of historical insight or knowledge will they or won't they gain from reading this book?

### Audience:

Your **audience** is the educated adult public, people who enjoy reading fiction and who are curious about the subject of the novel—ancient Rome. As college graduates, they will have some knowledge about Roman history and they have studied other works of fiction. Consider your audience carefully as you decide how much background information and explanation you will need to include in your evaluation.

**Research and Documentation:** You are required to support your evaluation through researching specific sources and to thoroughly and correctly document those sources using MLA documentation, including in-text citation and a Works Cited. At minimum, you must include at least three sources in your text and Works Cited. To explain further, your evaluation will discuss at least one historical aspect of Roman life in *Arms of Nemesis*. To give you the background and information needed to evaluate the book, you will need to research that historical topic and use (and document) your research in your evaluation. The same is true of your evaluation of the book as a work of fiction. You

will want to find and use sources that discuss aspects of historical fiction or fiction overall.

**Other Content Considerations:** In addition to the aspects of evaluation already discussed in these guidelines, a complex and useful evaluation should include the elements listed below, though how you develop and organize them is up to you.

**Thesis Statement:** Somewhere in your essay you will want to express your overall evaluation of *Arms of Nemesis* as a work of historical fiction.

**General Background Information:** You will need to provide at least two kinds of background for your reader, so your evaluation makes sense. First, you will need some description of the novel, including characters, plot, and any other elements you think the reader needs to understand your evaluation. Don't reveal the ending! Second, you will need some background on the historical context of the novel.

**Textual Concerns:** Your Final Draft should be at least three pages long, plus your Works Cited (on a separate page or at the end of your text).

**Essay Schedule:** Remember that all drafts must include complete documentation and follow the format guidelines explained in the syllabus.

- : Completed prewriting, parts one and two, due.
- : Have finished reading *Arms of Nemesis* and Discovery Draft due. Bring 4 copies to class.
- : Bring working draft to class.
- : Advanced Draft due. Bring 3 copies to class.
- : Bring working draft to class with *Writing Essentials*.
- : Final Draft, Revision Memos, and Text Preparation Record due.



## Essay Guidelines for: Of Time and Place....

and well, meaning. Because, after all, writing is ultimately about making meaning. And that's where we're going in this essay. We want to find a time and place from the past that's meaningful to us and convey that to our audience.

Your **subject** in this essay is a genuine place at a specific time from Early Western Civilization. The place can be somewhat general, such as a small city or landmark. Or it can be highly specific, such as the Colosseum or the Circus Maximus. You want a subject big enough in scope to discuss thoroughly, but small enough that you can discuss it adequately. You also need to discuss that place in the context of a specific time. Your definition of time and place, then, are crucial to have a subject with a workable and clear focus.

Let me go back to the qualifier "genuine." By genuine, I mean the place must have actually existed and you must be able to do credible, accurate research about that place. But aspects of your discussion may be hypothetical. By that, you may discuss a certain kind of place that is still historically accurate and realistic. By specific time, I mean that you will establish an accurate sense of time as context for your discussion. That sense of time can be a year, perhaps only a day, or an era. You may also choose to talk about changes in that place over time, but make sure that your subject doesn't get too big and out of control.

Your **purpose** is both descriptive and expository. By descriptive, I mean that you want to describe the place (and time) to make it vivid for your reader. Descriptive elements should comprise a significant aspect of your essay. When I say expository, I'm referring to your discussion of historical meaning. When we talk about a place in the past, we want to emphasize why it was particularly interesting and, more important, why it was significant. What, in other words, does that place tell us about the past that's worth knowing? Your thesis should explain the significance of the place at the time you are focusing on.

Your **audience** is the readers of a brand new magazine: *Historical Traveler*. This magazine publishes interesting academic articles about places of historical significance that an educated adult audience might want to visit. Your subject, therefore, must be a place that can be visited in some way by a modern traveler.

*Historical Traveler* also solicits, but does not require, illustrations to go with its articles. Illustrations can include photographs, maps, charts, diagrams, drawings, anything that can enhance the text. All illustrations should connect directly to the text of the article and make sense for the reader. Illustrations can be built into the text of the article or added as appendices but need to be documented as sources.

As a new magazine, *Historical Traveler* cannot pay for submissions, but writers maintain full copyright for their submissions and will be recognized appropriately.

**Perspective and Point of View:** This magazine encourages a creative approach to discussing subjects. Articles can be written in the first or third person and authors may employ fictional approaches that are effective.

**Research and Documentation:** As an academically-oriented magazine, *Historical Traveler* requires complete and accurate documentation of all sources used in the text of the article. As noted, illustrations must also be documented. Fortunately, this magazine uses MLA documentation.

Like any publication concerned with quality, *Historical Traveler* wants articles that it publishes to reflect a range and variety of credible research. Range means that the author has used both primary and secondary sources to give breadth to the subject. Variety means that the author has searched all available sources, including books, articles, the Internet, film and video, interviews with experts, and whatever sources are out there.

The editors at *Historical Traveler* don't really like to count the number of sources used, but they can't imagine a well-researched article that doesn't use at least four sources.

**Essay Depth and Length:** Of course, the editors are looking for an in-depth article, one which would be a minimum of four double-spaced pages, not including your Works Cited.

**Conference Requirement:** Everyone is required to have at least one formal conference with your English instructor to discuss progress on the essay and get help as needed. Pick a time that will help you the most, but conferences must be held no later than Thursday, April 21.

**Schedule:** Please note that all drafts must conform to the format guidelines in the syllabus (which *Historical Traveler* also uses) and include complete documentation.

- : Prewriting due.
- : Bring at least one source to class.
- : Discovery Draft due. Bring four copies to class.
- : Bring working draft to class.
- : Advanced Draft due. Bring three copies to class, along with *Writing Essentials* handbook.
- : Bring working draft to class and handbook.
- : Final Draft, Revision Comments, and Text Preparation Record due.

## **APPENDIX D**

### **History 111W/111WH Syllabus (Facsimile and Retyped Version for Readability)**

# The Power of the Past Learning Community

e-mail:  
webpage:  
Hours:

Please note: You can also make an  
a different time. The worst time to come see  
me is right before class.

\*\* If you call or come by and I'm not in my office,  
leave a message. I will try to call you back. But, you  
also need to keep trying. If you do not hear from me  
within a day.

\*\* E-mail: I love it. BUT I will sometimes go for a day  
with out going online. If it is something urgent, call AND  
e-mail.

## History 111 and 111-H: Early Western Civilization Syllabus

During the next 3 months we will examine the development of Western Civilization from its source--the Middle East--and the earliest civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt to the rise of Early Modern Europe.

It is an almost 5,000 year story--a massive topic, complete with diverse peoples and cultures. We, in a survey course, can only briefly touch upon the major topics of this glorious story of human achievement.

There are many themes we could choose as we follow the story of western man. In this course we choose to emphasize the development of one of the major defining elements of modern Western Civilization: humanism.

The magnificent early civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt were collective societies. Man almost completely concentrated on and was motivated by otherworldly, spiritual concerns. He and his society believed in the need to cooperate as a whole in order to accomplish these spiritual goals.

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## TESTS AND GRADES

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**CONFUCIUS**

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EXAM 2:	30%
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ATTENDANCE AND CLASS PREPARATION:	10%
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Multicolored post-it pads!! Colors of your choice.

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## The Power of the Past Learning Community

**Please note: You can also make a different time. The worst time to come see me is right before class.**

**\*\* If you call or come by and I'm not in my office, leave a message. I will try to call you back. But, you also need to keep trying, if you do not hear from me within a day.**

**\*\*E-mail: I love it. BUT I will sometimes go away for a day with out going online. If it is something urgent, call AND e-mail.**

### History 111 and 111-H: Early Western Civilization Syllabus

During the next 3 months we will examine the development of Western Civilization from its source—the Middle East—and the earliest civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt to the rise of Early Modern Europe.

It is an almost 5,000 year story—a massive topic, complete with diverse peoples and cultures. We, in a survey course, can only briefly touch upon the major topics of this glorious story of human achievement.

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## **APPENDIX E**

### **History 111W/111WH Course Outcomes and Objectives**

## **Survey of Early Western Civilization Course Outcomes and Objectives:**

**Outcome One: Demonstrate an understanding of the historical development and significance of the first civilizations of Mesopotamia, Ancient Egypt, and Ancient Greece.**

### **Objectives:**

- Explain the rise of the first civilization from prehistoric origins.
- Explain the meaning of the term “civilization” in relation to the history of the west.
- Explain the spread of the earliest civilizations to other Near-East regions.
- Explain the development of Egyptian Civilization from the Old Kingdom through the New Kingdom and into the Post-Empire period.
- Discuss the basic tenets of the Hebrew religion and culture and its legacy.
- Trace the stages of development of Greek Civilization including the political, cultural, and social development of the Greeks from the Myceneans through the Greek Dark Age, the Greek Archaic Age, the Greek Classical Age into the Hellenistic Age.

**Outcome Two: Demonstrate an understanding of the rise and political, cultural and social development of Ancient Roman Civilizations.**

### **Objectives:**

- Explain the origins and rise of the city of Rome.
- Explain the political and social developments of the Roman Republic.
- Discuss the expansion of Rome from city to empire.



- Explain the failure of the Roman Republic and its transition to the rule of the emperors.
- Discuss the rise of Christianity and its legacy.
- Explain the decline and fall of the Roman Empire and the legacy of Rome for Western Civilization.

**Outcome Three: Demonstrate an understanding of the political, cultural, and social developments of the Early, High, and Late Middle Ages.**

**Objectives:**

- Discuss the continuation of Rome in the east with the Byzantine Empire.
- Discuss the rise of Islam and its legacy.
- Discuss the development of monasticism.
- Explain the development of manorialism.
- Trace the development of feudalism.
- Discuss the transition from the Early Middle Ages to the High Middle Ages.
- Discuss the changes within the Christian Church in the west during the Middle Ages.
- Discuss the rise of centralized government.
- Discuss the major changes of the Late Middle Ages and their legacy.

**Outcome Four: Demonstrate an understanding of the Renaissance and the Reformation.**

**Objectives:**

- Explain the political, social, cultural origins of the Renaissance.
- Discuss significant cultural achievements during the Renaissance.

- Explain the political, social and cultural legacy of the Renaissance.
- Trace the political, social and cultural origins of the Reformation.
- Discuss the legacy of the Reformation.

**Outcome Five: Perform writing tasks to promote learning of concepts.**

**Objectives:**

- Document attainment of skills learned.
- Demonstrate knowledge of the subject.

**Outcome Six: Demonstrate the learning of concepts through writing.**

**Objectives:**

- Analyze course content in written form.
- Explain the subject matter in a coherent writing style.

**DissHis1110Os**

## **APPENDIX F**

**History 111W/111WH Exam Study Guides (Facsimile and Retyped Version  
for Readability)**

**IDENTIFICATIONS  
AND ESSAY STUDY GUIDE FOR EXAM 1**

**You must bring a bluebook to class with you by Tuesday, February 14. (Valentine's gift!)**

**The Testing Window: The Exam is TO BE TAKEN IN THE TESTING CENTER during the following period: Wednesday, February 15-Sunday, February 19. You may not take the exam after that date unless you have made arrangements with me well in advance of the testing window opening day.**

**WHEN YOU GO TO THE TESTING CENTER, BE SURE TO HAVE WITH YOU YOUR STUDENT IDENTIFICATION CARD. Do not try to wear a hat while taking the exam.**

Testing Center location: The library

Testing Center phone number:

Testing center hours: NOTE: Take advantage of quiet morning times.

Friday: 7:30 a.m.-2:45 p.m.

Saturday: 10:00 a.m.-1:45 p.m.

Sunday: 1:00 p.m.-5:15 p.m.

Monday-Thursdays: 7:30 a.m.-8:45 p.m.

Note: There will be different exams.

**THE EXAM WILL BE A COMBINATION OF IDENTIFICATIONS (30%)  
CHRONOLOGY (10%) ESSAY (45%) and Map(15%)**

-The list of terms on the next page is a guide for you when studying for the Exam 1. As you study, remember that we are telling a story. Think in terms of the STORY as you are contemplating the significance of each of the following figures or events.

**-DO NOT SIMPLY MEMORIZE.** That is worthless. Place these identifications in the story. Make each come alive in your mind. In the process, you will prepare yourself for both the essay and the identification portions of the exam. If you know the story around each of the following identifications you can answer both the Identification portion of the test and the essays with flying colors!!

**-Understand:** When you are studying for the IDs you're studying for the essays and when you are studying for the essays you are studying for the IDs!

**Bonus:** there will be bonus quotes on the exam. If you can explain who said it and what it means, you can get 1 point per quote. If you can incorporate the quotes into the essay or the identifications or the map at the appropriate place, you can get 3 points per bonus quote.

### IDENTIFICATIONS and Chronology: 40%

**30%** of the exam is identifications:

**\*\*ON YOUR EXAM, I WILL CHOOSE 5 OF THE IDENTIFICATIONS LISTED BELOW. YOU WILL CHOOSE 3 TO ANSWER.**

This is the portion of the test where you must give specific data such as dates.

Remember, An identification is a **paragraph** telling when, who, or what, and the significance of the historical figure or event.

SO, ON THE EXAM, FOR EACH IDENTIFICATION THAT YOU CHOOSE, YOU WILL

WRITE A PARAGRAPH EXPLAINING :

1. WHEN, (I SIMPLY ASK YOU TO KNOW THE DATES FOR THE AGES, FOR EXAMPLE, OLD KINGDOM: 2700-2200)

2. WHO OR WHAT

3. AND THE **SIGNIFICANCE** OF THE CHOSEN ITEM.

Here is a sample identification paragraph for the ID "Ziggurat"

Ziggurat: The Sumerians, who developed the first civilization in Mesopotamia at around 3,000 B.C., built these temples called Ziggurats. The climate of Mesopotamia was very unpredictable. The Sumerian religion developed around the nature of their climate. Their cultural achievements, such as their architecture, developed around their religion. The Sumerians believed that they must appease their gods in order to have a chance of decent planting conditions in the following year. They appeased their gods by offering as much surplus to the gods as possible each year. The primary function of these Ziggurats was to hold the Sumerian surplus that they offered to the gods. The more surplus in these Ziggurats, the greater the chance of good planting conditions the following year.

**\*\*REMEMBER THE STORY** when working out the significance of the event.

BY SIGNIFICANCE WE MEAN WHERE IT FITS INTO THE THEME. (THE STORY)

**10%** is a CHRONOLOGY QUESTION. I will choose five of these identifications at a certain point in time, and you will place them in order. For example, below you see Alcibiades. On the exam, 1 of the five that you put in order might be Alcibiades when he convinces the Athenians to attack Syracuse.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| *Cuneiform/mummification   | *Ziggurats/Pyramids                           |
| *Old Kingdom/Middle Kingdom/New Kingdom  | *Egyptian Art                                 |
| *conceptual, stylized art  |   |
| *The overt versus covert message of Greek Religion as seen through the Iliad         |   |
| *humanism, individualism, secularism, great questioning                              |   |
| *GREEK ARCHAIC AGE: Geometric, Colonization, True Archaic                            |   |
| *GREEK CLASSICAL AGE: Early, Golden, Late  |   |
| *Kouroi (specific examples) / Kritios Boy.   |   |
| *THE SIGNIFICANCE of the Persian Wars FOR ATHENS                                     | *The Athenian Assembly and the Council of 500 |
| *Civic Responsibility  |   |
| *The Golden Mean (Classical Ideal)   | *Pericles                                     |
| *Statesman/ Demagogue  | *Peloponnesian War                            |
| *Aeschylus/Aristophanes  | *Cleon/ Nicias                                |
| *Delian League   | *Peace of Nicias                              |
| *Herodotus/Thucydides  | *Alcibiades                                   |
| *Samos/Mytilene/Melos: <u>Be specific with dates on this one, Not just the ages.</u> |   |
| *Philip II and Alexander of Macedonia  | *Hellenistic Age                              |
| *Doric/ Ionic/ Corinthian orders of architecture                                     |   |
| *discus thrower / Nike unbinding sandal / Laocoon                                    |   |
| *Mourning Athena/Nike Unbinding her sandal/Winged Victory                            |   |

**The Essay QUESTIONS:**

**45% of your exam is essay.**

**On your exam I will choose 1 of the following essay questions for you to answer. The essay is worth 45% of the exam. In the bluebook, in the testing center, begin by writing the question in the bluebook and then write the essay.**

1. Discuss the role of geography in the development of the culture (religion, view of life and life goals, art, architecture, technological development) of Sumer (Mesopotamia) and then discuss the role of geography in the development of the religion and culture (view of life and life goals, art, architecture, technological development) of Egypt. In the process, contrast the two cultures.

2. As Thucydides suggested, there were 3 specific reasons/factors for the success of Athens and her democracy in her "Golden Age." When these same reasons/factors either declined, increased, or changed, her democracy declined.

a. In this context, please explain why Athens's democracy worked so well in the Golden Age, and at the same time, the problems that were present that led to the Peloponnesian War. Include a discussion of Aeschylus.

b. Describe why and how she declined so drastically in the years between 429 and 404 B.C. You are telling the story, from beginning to end, of the Peloponnesian War. Your discussion should lead to and include the story of the Peloponnesian War. Include a discussion of Aristophanes.

3. One can see a correlation between changes over time in Greek religious beliefs (particularly in Athens), the changes in the type of government that they have, and the changes in Greek art and architecture. Begin your essay at 800 B.C. by discussing the overt versus the covert messages found in Greek religion and the role of that covert message in the development of the humanism and individualism and secularism and questioning over the next 300 years that lead to the desire for democracy. Then discuss how art is changing at the same time.

By 500 B.C., we see the dawn of democracy. Now, discuss how artistic forms (sculpture, architecture) reflected the changes the Greeks were going through the Classical Age (Early Golden and Late) and then the Hellenistic Age.

This Hint for Number 3 will not be on the exam

(You know, Greeks move toward democracy as they become more and more humanistic, individualistic and secular and questioning in the Archaic age, and, at the same time, we see these changes in the kouros.

THEN when Athens' democracy is working what does her art and architecture look like? When it begins to decline what does her art and architecture look like? When we move into the Hellenistic age and see a reversion back to monarchies and the end of self government in the region, what does her art and architecture look like?)

**15% map:**

Be able to identify and explain the function (how it was used, historical context) of the following map identifications. Some of these will require more explanation than others, depending on the time we spent on it:

Pyrex  
Bouletereion  
Strategion  
Agora  
Acropolis  
Theater of Dionysus  
Stoa of Attalos  
Long Walls  
Sacred Way  
Areopagus

Parthenon: worth 3 map IDs  
Propylaea  
Hephaesteion  
Erechtheum  
Temple of Athena Nike  
Temple of Olympian Zeus

## EXAM 2 STUDY GUIDE

The window for taking your second exam in the testing center is from Friday, March 31-Monday, April 3.

Look at the Exam 1 study guide for the correct testing center hours.

Make sure you get there in time to allow yourself enough time to finish the exam.

The exams will be different, so don't try to figure out from fellow students what is on the exam!

You must bring your bluebook with your name and my name on it to class before the exam window opens.

You **MUST** bring the following to the testing center:

An identification card with a picture and remember, no hats.

### The Study guide for EXAM 2: THE ROMANS

Suggested time:

30 minutes for the IDs.

30 minutes for the map

50 minutes for the essay

10 minutes for the film section

Number one reminder: IDs, the essay, the map and the film are all part of the same story. Don't think about the map as something separate. Think about the story.

Map-20% -Remember I've loaded a lot of the images and some explanation on my website. Use the website for review. You need to know where the following are and the function: These are like little IDs. For function, you must include a good amount of DETAIL, depending on how much time we spent on it. In some cases content is all that is needed. Place these within the story that we have been covering. For example, those 5 principles that lay the foundation for the Pax Romana.

I'll have these numbered in such a way that you can tell a story:

Theater of Pompey	Circus Maximus
Senate House	House of the Vestal Virgins and Temple of Vesta
Arch of Augustus	Altar of Peace
Palatine hill	Mausoleum of Augustus
Temple of Caesar	Arch of Titus
Theater of Marcellus	Colosseum
Baths of Agrippa	Circus of Nero
Aqua Claudia	Pantheon

Bonus points: There will be bonus quotes from the film series and course pack. When studying, use your film watching questions. If you can incorporate these quotes into the film section of the exam, or the map, or the essay, you will receive bonus points. You will receive no bonus points for quotes not incorporated.

**30% IDENTIFICATION LIST: I WILL CHOOSE 4 FROM THE FOLLOWING LIST. YOU WILL CHOOSE 3. Remember, an ID tells the story. That story must include WHEN. That means sets of dates.**

**Early Roman Republic: THE CHARACTERISTICS**

Struggle of the Orders

Second Punic War/Hannibal

How the Romans change as result of the Punic Wars

Late Roman Republic

OPTIMATES-Cato as an Example

POPULARES-Scipio as an example

First Triumvirate

The Second Triumvirate

Julius Caesar

Octavian (Augustus)

Battle of Actium

The Gladiatorial Games: including their original function and then their functions during the Pax Romana.

The Pax Romana

Virgil and the *Aeneid*

Augustus's Five Principles that laid the foundation for the Pax Romana

Water: here, you discuss the Pont du Gard, as an example of Roman Aqueducts, you discuss the baths, toilets and sewers! Fun!

Julio-Claudian Dynasty

Claudius

The Flavians

Judaism/Christianity

Tacitus/Suetonius

Use Pompeii and Herculaneum and modern Naples to discuss how Romans lived in a big city like Rome and a smaller city like Pompeii during the Pax Romana.

Five Good Emperors, concentrating on HADRIAN

Diocletian/Constantine/Theodosius

"New Wine in Old Bottles"

**10% Film and lecture: I'll be asking questions about these people: Most, but not all, will be related to the terms Optimate and Populare.**

Augustus

Livia

Marcus Agrippa

Marcellus

Tiberius

Julia

Drusus

Antonia

Gaius and Lucius

**ESSAY: You will answer THE FOLLOWING: 40%**

Julius Caesar and Augustus shared a belief in Rome's divine purpose. But where Julius failed at realizing this vision/mission for Rome, Augustus was very successful.

- a. Please explain the political, social, economic situation in the Late Roman Republic, BEFORE JULIUS CAESAR becomes dictator. Don't get too bogged down here on events.
- b. Please explain the vision/mission/purpose for Rome that they believed in, the means they believed had to be accomplished to achieve this end, and why Julius Caesar failed.
- c. Please explain specifically how Augustus succeeded where Julius failed in achieving his goals. **Be specific.** Also: don't forget a discussion of the role of the games!
- d. Please explain Augustus' principles that laid the foundation for the Pax Romana. Include in this part of the essay discussion of the Cave of the Sibyl, Aries, Aphrodisius, Trier and Carthage.
- e. In this essay, include a discussion of Virgil's *Aeneid*, and the historians Tacitus and Suetonius.
- f. Where did Augustus fail? This includes his perception versus the modern historian's perception.



**EARLY WESTERN CIVILIZATION  
In-Testing Center FINAL EXAM STUDY GUIDE**

**Your Final Exam Testing Window is Wednesday, April 26-Saturday April 29. Remember, the Testing Center hours are on your first study guide.**

**BE SURE TO BRING A BLUE BOOK to class Tuesday, April 25.**

When you are ready, you will hand in your at-home or at-library with art books essay to the monitor. She will then give you your bluebook. Once you've completed your identifications, map and chronology hand in your bluebook and you will have completed this Learning Community.

**50% The IDENTIFICATIONS and Chronology LIST: On the exam, I will choose 7 from the following list from which you will choose 4.**

**Also, there will be a chronology question, like on the first exam worth 10%.**

**\*\*7 of the trends of the Early Middle Ages that we listed**

**\*\*Manorialism**

**\*\*1st AGE OF FEUDALISM: ROLLO as an example**

**\*\*The movement into the High Middle Ages: the causes of the new development and the results of those causes.**

**\*\*2nd AGE OF FEUDALISM: William the Conqueror as an example.**

**These next two IDs require material from the Castle and Cathedral films. Use data from the films in preparations for these IDs:**

**\*\*Relate manorialism and Feudalism in the process of discussing the Castle**

**\*\*Romanesque Cathedrals/Gothic Cathedrals**

**\*\*KING JOHN, the MAGNA CARTA and the development of Parliament**

**\*\*THE TRENDS and EVENTS AFTER EDWARD I that help English and French kings centralize their power. This must include a discussion of the Battle of Agincourt.**

**\*\*Henry VIII and English Reformation as part of the Protestant Reformation**

**\*\*Contrast the type of centralized government that develops in England with the centralized government that develops in France**

**\*\*The four basic defining elements that we see the "rebirth" of during the Renaissance**

**\*\*Giotto**

**\*\*early Ghiberti and early Donatello and early Fra Angelico**

**\*\*later Ghiberti and later Donatello and Francesca and later Fra Angelico**

**\*\*Bellini and Botticelli and Later Francesca**

**\*\*Leonardo DaVinci and Michelangelo and Raphael and Titian**

**\*\*Mannerist Titian and Mannerist Michelangelo and Vasari**

**10% of the essay will be the map. Thus, the Map of Florence-Your at-home (or at-library) essay grade will be linked to how well you do on the in testing center map. As you are writing the essay be studying for the map.**

**As you answer the map, TAKE ME ON A STROLL through Florence. Think about that as we cover the map and as you study for the map.**

**There will be travel tips for bonus.**

### The At-home or at-library with art books Essay QUESTION

This counts as 50% of your final exam. 10% of it will be the testing center map.

You will hand in your essay to the testing monitor in the testing center. The testing monitor will then give you the bluebook with the exam sheet.

**THE QUESTION: to be handwritten...** Write to learn. Be studying for the IDs and the Map as you write this essay.

We have been looking at art in this class for one reason: one can see the great changes in society through the changes in the art of the age. We can actually get into the heads of a changing society by simply looking at their art! You want to demonstrate your understanding of this fact in this essay on Renaissance art.

**\*\*1.** Please begin your essay by briefly explaining the 4 basic defining elements of the Renaissance.

**\*\*2.** Then, based on class lecture and the film watching questions from Cathedral and the Moyers film, "Power of the Past," discuss the changes in painting, sculpture and, briefly, architecture.

a. Begin with a BRIEF explanation of Medieval art. Your essay is about the Renaissance. Students have a tendency to write way too much here in the medieval section of the question. Just demonstrate an understanding of what the medieval artist was conveying and why.

Then, go

b. to the Early Renaissance:

(early-Early, mid-Early, later-Early)

c. then, to the High Renaissance

With each of the above, explain how we can visualize, through the artists, the increasing development of those basic elements of the Renaissance. Be sure to use specific examples in your essay of artists and their works.

**\*\*3.** Conclude your essay with an explanation of Mannerism. Once again, be sure to use examples.

As you work through this essay, include quotes and paraphrased material from the Cathedral film and Moyers "Power of the Past," for part 2a and then the Moyers, "Power of the Past" in Parts 1, 2b. and 2c. USE those film watching questions.

You can receive no better than a B grade on the essay without sufficient inclusion of the film watching material.

**IDENTIFICATIONS  
AND ESSAY STUDY GUIDE FOR EXAM 1**

**You must bring a bluebook with you by Tuesday, February 14. (Valentine's gift!)**  
**The Testing Window: The exam is TO BE TAKEN IN THE TESTING CENTER**  
**during the following period: Wednesday, February 15-Sunday, February 19. You**  
**may not take the exam after that date unless you have made arrangements with me**  
**well in advance of the testing window opening day.**

**WHEN YOU GO TO THE TESTING CENTER, BE SURE TO HAVE WITH YOU**  
**YOUR STUDENT IDENTIFICATION CARD. Do not try to wear a hat while**  
**taking the exam.**

Testing Center location: The library

Testing Center phone number:

Testing center hours: NOTE: Take advantage of quiet morning times.

Friday: 7:30 a.m. -2:45 p.m.

Saturday: 10:00 a.m.-1:45 p.m.

Sunday: 1:00p.m.-5:15 p.m.

Monday-Thursdays: 7:30 a.m.-8:45 p.m.

**Note: There will be different exams.**

**THE EXAM WILL BE A COMBINATION OF IDENTIFICATIONS (30%)  
CHRONOLOGY (10%) ESSAY (45%) AND Map (15%)**

**-The list of terms on the next page is a guide for you when studying for the Exam 1. As**  
**you study, remember that we are telling a story. Think in terms of the STORY as you are**  
**contemplating the significance of each of the following figures or events.**

**-DO NOT SIMPLY MEMORIZE. That is worthless. Place these identifications in the**  
**story. Make each come alive in your mind. In the process, you will prepare yourself**  
**for both the essay and the identification portions of the exam. If you know the story**  
**around each of the following identifications you can answer both the Identification**  
**portion of the test and the essays with flying colors!!**

**-Understand: When you are studying for the IDs you're studying for the essays and**  
**when you are studying for the essays you are studying for the IDs!**

**Bonus: there will be bonus quotes on the exam. If you can explain who said it and**  
**what it means, you can get 1 point per quote. If you can incorporate the quotes into**  
**the essay or the identifications or the map at the appropriate place, you can get 3**  
**points per bonus quote.**

**IDENTIFICATIONS and Chronology: 40%**

**30%** of the exam is identifications:

**\*\*ON YOUR EXAM, I WILL CHOOSE 5 OF THE IDENTIFICATIONS LISTED BELOW. YOU WILL CHOOSE 3 TO ANSWER.**

This is the portion of the test where you must give specific data such as dates.

Remember, An identification is a paragraph telling when, who or what, and the significance of the historical figure or event.

**SO, ON THE EXAM, FOR EACH IDENTIFICATION THAT YOU CHOOSE, YOU WILL WRITE A PARAGRAPH EXPLAINING:**

**1. WHEN, (I SIMPLY ASK YOU TO KNOW THE DATES FOR THE AGES, FOR EXAMPLE Old Kingdom: 2700-2200)**

**2. WHO OR WHAT**

**3. AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CHOSEN ITEM**

**Here is a sample identification paragraph for the ID "Ziggurat"**

**Ziggurat:** The Sumerians, who developed the first civilization in Mesopotamia at around 3,000 B.C., built these temples called Ziggurats. The climate of Mesopotamia was very unpredictable. The Sumerian religion developed around the nature of their climate. Their cultural achievements, such as their architecture, developed around their religion. The Sumerians believed that they must appease their gods in order to have a chance of decent planting conditions in the following year. They appeased their gods by offering as much surplus to the gods as possible each year. The primary function of these Ziggurats was to hold the Sumerian surplus that they offered to the gods. The more surplus in these Ziggurats, the greater the chance of good planting conditions the following year.

**\*\*REMEMBER THE STORY when working out the significance of the event. BY SIGNIFICANCE WE MEAN WHERE IT FITS INTO THE THEME. (THE STORY)**

**10%** is a **CHRONOLOGY QUESTION**. I will chose five of these identifications at a certain point in time, and you will place them in order. For example, below you will see Alcibiades. On the exam, 1 of the five that you put in order might be Alcibiades when he convinces the Athenians to attack Syracuse.

**\*Cuneiform/mummification**

**\*Old Kingdom/Middle Kingdom/New Kingdom**

**\*conceptual, stylized art**

**\*The overt versus covert message of Greek Religion as seen through the ILIAD**

**\*humanism, individualism, secularism, great questioning**

**\*GREEK ARCHAIC AGE: Geometric, Colonization, True Archaic**

**\*GREEK CLASSICAL AGE: Early, Golden Late**

**\*KOURO (specific examples)/Kritios Boy**

**\*THE SIGNIFICANCE of the Persian Wars FOR ATHENS**

**\*Civic Responsibility**

**\*The Golden Mean (Classical Ideal)**

**\*Ziggurats/Pyramids**

**\*Egyptian Art**

**\*The Athenian Assembly and the Council of 500**

**\*Pericles**

- \*Statesman/Demagogue
- \*Aeschylus/Aristophanes
- \*Delian League
- \*Herodotus/Thucydides
- \*Samos/Mytelene/Melos: Be specific with dates on this one. Not just te ages.
- \*Philip II and Alexander of Macedonia
- \*THE SIGNIFICANCE of the Persian Wars FOR ATHENS
- \*Doric/Ionic/Corinthian orders of architecture
- Discuss thrower/ Nike unbinding sandal/ / Laocoon*
- Mourning Athena/Nike Unbinding her sandal/Winged Victory*
- \*Peloponnesian War
- \*Cleon/Nicias
- \*Peace of Nicias
- \*Alcibiades
- \*Hellenistic Age

**The Essay QUESTIONS:**

**45% of your exam is essay.**

**On your exam I will choose 1 of the following essay questions for you to answer. The essay is worth 45% of the exam. In the bluebook, in the testing center, begin by writing the question in the bluebook and then write the essay.**

1. Discuss the role of geography in the development of the culture, (religion, view of life and life goals, art, architecture, technological development) of Sumer (Mesopotamia) and then discuss the role of geography in the development of the religion and culture (view of life and life goals, art, architecture, technological development) of Egypt. In the process, contrast these two cultures.

2. As Thucydides suggested there were 3 specific reasons/factors for the success of Athens and her democracy in her "Golden Age." When these same reasons/factors either declined, increased or changed her democracy declined.

a. In this context, please explain why Athen's democracy worked so well in the Golden Age, and at the same time, the problems that were present that led to the Peloponnesian War. Include a discussion of Aeschylus.

b. Describe the why and how she declined so drastically in the years between 429 and 404 B.C. You are telling the story, from beginning to end, of the Peloponnesian War. Your discussion should lead to and include the story of the Peloponnesian War. Include a discussion of Aristophanes.

3. One can see a correlation between changes over time in Greek religious beliefs (particular in Athens) the changes in the type of government that they have, and the changes in Greek art and architecture. Begin your essay at 800 B.C. by discussing the overt versus the covert messages found in Greek religion and the role of that covert messages in the development of the humanism and individualism and secularism and questioning over the next 300 years that lead to the desire for democracy. Then discuss how art is changing at the same time.

By 500 B.C. we see the dawn of democracy. Now, discuss how artistic forms (sculpture, architecture) reflected the changes the Greeks were going through the Classical Age (Early Golden and Late) and then the Hellenistic Age.

**This Hint for Number 3 will not be on the exam**

(You know, Greeks move toward democracy as they become more and more humanistic, individualistic, and secular and questioning in the Archaic age, and, at the same time, we see those changes in the kouros.

THEN when Athens' democracy is working what does her art and architecture look like? When it begins to decline what does her art and architecture look like? When we move into the Hellenistic age and see a reversion back to monarchies and the end of self government in the region, what does her art and architecture look like?)

**15% map:**

**Be able to identify and explain the function (how it was used, historical context) of the following map identifications. Some of these will require more explanation than others, depending on the time we spent on it:**

**Pnyx**

**Bouletareion**

**Strategeion**

**Agora**

**Acropolis**

**Theater of Dionysus**

**Stoa of Attalos**

**Long Walls**

**Sacred Way**

**Areopogus**

**Parthenon: worth 3 map IDS**

**Propylaea**

**Hephaisteion**

**Erechtheum**

**Temple of Athena Nike**

**Temple of Olympian Zeus**

## EXAM 2 STUDY GUIDE

**The window for taking your second exam in the testing center is from Friday, March 31-Monday, April 3.**

**Look at the Exam 1 study guide for the correct testing center hours.**

**Make sure you get there in time to allow yourself enough time to finish the exam.**

**The exams will be different, so don't try to figure out from fellow students what is on the exam!**

**You must bring your bluebook with your name and my name on it to class before the exam window opens.**

**You MUST bring the following to the testing center:**

**An identification card with a picture and remember, no hats.**

### The Study Guide for EXAM 2: THE ROMANS

**Suggested time:**

**30 minutes for the IDS.**

**30 minutes for the map**

**50 minutes for the essay**

**10 minutes for the film section**

**Number one reminder: Ids, the essay, the map and the film are all part of the same story. Don't think about the map as something separate. Think about the story.**

**Map—20%—Remember I've loaded a lot of the images and some explanation on my website. Use the website for review. You will need to know where the following are and the function: These are like little IDs. For function, you must include a good amount of DETAIL, depending on how much time we spent on it. In some cases context is all that is needed. Place these within the story that we have been covering. For example, those 5 principles that lay the foundation for the Pax Romana.**

**I'll have these numbered in such a way that you can tell a story:**

**Theater of Pompey**

**Senate House**

**Arch of Augustus**

**Palantine hill**

**Temple of Caesar**

**Theater of Marcellus**

**Baths of Agrippa**

**Aqua Claudia**

**Circus Maximus**

**House of the Vestal Virgins and Temple of Vesta**

**Altar of Peace**

**Mausoleum of Augustus**

**Arch of Titus**

**Colosseum**

**Circus of Nero**

**Pantheon**



**Bonus points:** There will be bonus questions from the film series and course pack. When studying, use your film watching questions. If you can incorporate those quotes into the film section of the exam, or the map, or the essay, you will receive bonus point. You will receive no bonus points for quotes not incorporated.

**30% IDENTIFICATION LIST: I WILL CHOOSE 4 FROM THE FOLLOWING LIST, YOU WILL CHOOSE 3.** Remember, an ID tells the story. That story must include **WHEN. That means sets of dates.**

Early Roman Republic: **THE CHARACTERISTICS**

Struggle of the Orders

Second Punic War/Hannibal

How the Romans change as a result of the Punic Wars

Late Roman Republic

OPTIMATES—Cato as an Example

POPULARES—Scorpio as an example

First Triumverate

The Second Triumverate

Julius Caesar

Octavian (Augustus)

Battle of Actium

The Gladiatorial Games: including their original function and then their functions during Pax Romana

The Pax Romana

Virgil and *Aeneid*

Augustus's Five Principles that laid the foundation for the Pax Romana

Water: here you will discuss the Pont du gard, as an example of Roman Aqueducts, you discuss the baths, toilets and sewers! Fun!

Julio-Claudian Dynasty

Claudius

The Flavians

Judaism/Christianity

Tactitus/Suetonius

Use Pompeii and Herculaneum and modern Naples to discuss how Romans lived in a big city like Rome and a smaller city like Pompeii during the Pax Romana.

Five Good Emperors, concentrating on HADRIAN

Diocletian/Constantine/Theodosius

"New Wine in Old Bottles"

**10% Film and lecture: I'll be asking questions about these people: Most, but not all, will be related to the terms Optimate and Populare.**

Augustus

Marcus Agrippa

Livia

Tiberius

Marcellus

Drusus

Julia

Gaius and Lucius

Antonia

**ESSAY: You will answer THE FOLLOWING: 40%**

Julius Caesar and Augustus shared a belief in Rome's divine purpose. But where Julius failed at realizing this vision/mission for Rome, Augustus was very successful.

- a. Please explain the political, social, economic situation in the Late Roman Republic, **BEFORE JULIUS CAESAR** becomes dictator. Don't get too bogged down here on events.

- b. Please explain the vision/mission/purpose for Rome that they believed in, the means they believed had to be accomplished to achieve this end, and why Julius Caesar failed.
- c. Please explain specifically how Augustus succeeded where Julius failed in achieving his goals. Be specific. Also: don't forget a discussion of the role of the games!
- d. Please explain Augustus' principles that laid the foundation for the Pax Romana. Include in this part of the essay discussion of the Cave of Sibyl, Arles, Aphrodisius, Trier, and Carthage.
- e. In this essay, include a discussion of Virgil's *Aeneid*, and the historians Tacitus and Suetonius.
- f. Where did August fail? This includes his perception versus the modern historian's perception.

**EARLY WESTERN CIVILIZATION  
In-Testing Center FINAL EXAM STUDY GUIDE**

**Your Final Exam Testing Window is Wednesday, April 2,-Saturday April 29.  
Remember the Testing Center hours are on your first study guide.**

**BE SURE TO BRING A BLUE BOOK to class Tuesday, April 25.**

When you are ready, you will hand in your at-home or at-library with art books essay to the monitor. She will then give you your blue book. Once you've completed your identifications, map and chronology hand in your bluebook and you will have completed this Learning Community.

**50% The IDENTIFICATIONS and Chronology LIST: On the exam, I will choose 7 from the following list from which you will choose 4.**

**Also there will be a chronology question, like on the first exam worth 10%.**

**\*\*7 of the trends of Early Middle Ages that we listed**

**\*\*Manorialism**

**\*\*1<sup>st</sup> AGE OF FEUDALISM: ROLLO as an example**

**\*\*The movement into the High Middle Ages: the causes of the new development and the results of those causes.**

**\*\*2<sup>nd</sup> AGE OF FEUDALISM: William the Conqueror as an example.**

**These next two IDs require material from the Castle and Cathedral films. Use data from the films in preparation for these IDs:**

**\*\*Relate Manorialism and Feudalism in the process of discussing the Castle**

**\*\*Romanesque Cathedrals/Gothic Cathedrals**

**\*\*KING JOHN the MAGNA CARTA and the development of Parliament**

**\*\*THE TRENDS and EVENTS AFTER EDWARD I that help England and French kings centralize their power: This must include a discussion of the Battle of Agincourt.**

**\*\*Henry VIII and English Reformation as part of the Protestant Reformation**

**\*\*Contrast the type of centralized government that develops in England with the centralized government that develops in France**

**\*\*The four basic defining elements that we see the "rebirth" of during Renaissance**

**\*\*Giotto**

**\*\*early Ghiberti and early Donatello and early Fra Angelico**

**\*\*later Ghiberti and later Donatello and later Fra Angelico**

**\*\*Bellini and Botticelli and Later Francesca**

**\*\*Leonardo DaVinci and Michelangelo and Raphael and Titian**

**\*\*Mannerist Titian and Mannerist Michelangelo and Vasari**

**10% of the essay will be the map. Thus, the Map of Florence—Your at-home (or at-library) essay grade will be linked to how well you do on the in testing center map.**

**As you are writing the essay be studying for the map.**

**As you answer the map, TAKE ME ON A STROLL through Florence. Think about that as we cover the map and as you study for the map.**

**There will be travel tips for bonus.**

## **The At-home or at-library with art books Essay QUESTION**

**This counts as 50% of your final exam. 10% of it will be the testing center map. You will hand in your essay to the testing center monitor in the testing center. The testing center monitor will then give you the bluebook with the exam sheet.**

**THE QUESTION: to be handwritten... Write to learn. Be studying for the IDs and the Map as you write the essay.**

**We have been looking at art in this class for one reason: one can see the great changes in society through the changes in the art of the age. We can actually get into the heads of a changing society by simply looking at their art! You want to demonstrate your understanding of this fact in this essay on Renaissance art.**

**\*\*1. Please begin your essay by briefly explaining the 4 basic defining elements of the Renaissance.**

**\*\*2. Then, based on class lecture and film watching questions from Cathedral and the Movers film, "Power of the Past," discuss changes in painting, sculpture, and briefly architecture.**

- a. Begin with a BRIEF explanation of Medieval art. Your essay is about the Renaissance. Students have a tendency to write way too much here in the medieval section of the question. Just demonstrate an understanding of what the medieval artist was conveying and why.

Then, go

- b. to the Early Renaissance:  
(early-Early, mid-Early, late-Early)
- c. then, to the High Renaissance

**With each of the above, explain how we can visualize, through the artists, the increasing development of those basic elements of the Renaissance. Be sure to use specific examples in your essay of artists and their works.**

**\*\*3. Conclude your essay with an explanation of Mannerism. Once again, be sure to use examples.**

**As you work through this essay, include quotes and paraphrased material from the Cathedral film and Moyers "Power of the Past," for part 2a and then Moyers, "Power of the Past" in Parts 1, 2b, and 2c. USE those film watching questions.**

**You can receive no better than a B grade on the essay without sufficient inclusion of the film watching material.**

## APPENDIX G

**TABLE 1. Representation of data collection (January 2006 through May 2006)**

Table 1: Representation of data collection (January 2006 through May 2006). Italics indicate a date on which two group interview sessions were held.

	Jan '06	Feb '06	Mar '06	Apr '06	May '06
<b>Data Collection</b>	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Collection of Student Texts</b>	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Instructor Interviews</b>					
Doug	1/25		3/18		5/6
Amelia	1/25		3/18		5/6
<b>Focus Group Interviews Sessions</b>					
			3/2 3/21	4/13 4/18	
<b>Discourse Based Interviews</b>					
Elicia			3/16		
Matt			3/4		5/9
Shannon			3/14	4/25	
Noah			3/14		5/10
Brandy			3/1		5/10
Jennifer			3/14		5/9
Scott			3/16		5/10
Joe			3/3		5/10
Jack			3/3		5/5
Robin			3/17		5/5
Mandy			3/3		5/5

## APPENDIX H

**TABLE 2. Formal observations of English 112/English 112H  
and History 111/History 111WH during the Winter 2006 semester**

Table 2: Formal observations of English 112/English 112H and History 111/History 111WH during the Winter 2006 semester. The learning community met Tuesdays and Thursdays afternoons from 12-4 p.m.

Date	Observation	Explanations
Tues (1/10)	X	First day of class
Thurs (1/12)	X	
Tues (1/17)	-	No class - inclement weather
Thurs (1/19)	X	
Tues (1/24)	X	
Thurs (1/26)	X	
Tues (1/31)	X	
Thurs (2/2)	X	
Tues (2/7)	X	
Thurs (2/9)	X	
Tues (2/14)	X	
Thurs (2/16)	X	
Tues (2/21)	X	
Thurs (2/23)	X	
Tues (2/29)	X	No class - inclement weather
Thurs (3/2)	-	
Tues (3/7)	-	No class - Spring break
Thurs (3/9)	-	
Tues (3/14)	X	
Thurs (3/16)	X	
Tues 3/21)	X	
Thurs (3/23)	X	
Tues (3/28)	X	
Thurs (3/30)	X	
Tues (4/4)	X	
Thurs (4/6)	X	
Tues (4/11)	X	
Thurs (4/13)	X	
Tues (4/18)	X	
Thurs (4/20)	X	
Tues (4/24)	X	Last day of class
Total number of observations		27/27



## **APPENDIX I**

### **Student Survey**

Julia Fogarty  
IRB 05-210

Survey (administered to students who have signed consent form):

Name; \_\_\_\_\_

Educational Goal: Circle **all** that apply.

Associate's degree

Bachelor's degree

Master's degree

Doctoral degree

Certification completion

Increased job opportunities/professional development

Personal interest

What are your future professional plans (Example: nurse, prison guard, etc.)?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Why did you take these courses as a learning community rather than as separate courses?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Have you enrolled in a learning community before? Circle the one that applies.

yes      no

If yes, where? \_\_\_\_\_

which year and semester? \_\_\_\_\_

what courses were involved? \_\_\_\_\_

did you complete the course? \_\_\_\_\_

Why did you choose to enroll in this learning community? Circle **all** that apply.

It fit your schedule

It sounded interesting

It was recommended to you

It fit your credit needs

You like the instructor(s)

You had taken a learning community in the past and liked it

What is your major (Ex: Education, Psychology, Undecided, etc.)?

\_\_\_\_\_

---

Why did you choose to enroll in a learning community that includes History 111? Circle **all** that apply.

Your curriculum requires a humanities or social science course

You're interested in history

You took history courses in the past

Your major involves history

Would you have enrolled in History 111 if your curriculum had not required a humanities or social science course? Circle the **one** that applies.

yes      no

Why did you choose to enroll in a learning community that includes English 112?

Circle **all** that apply

Your curriculum requires English 112

You want to improve your writing skills

Your major involves writing

Would you have enrolled in English 112 if your curriculum had not required it? Circle the **one** that applies:

yes      no

On a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent) rate your written communication skills:

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

On a scale of 1 (little) to 5 (a great deal) rate your knowledge of Early Western Civilization:

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Did you take history in high school? Circle **one**.

yes      no

Do you think history is about: Circle **one**.

facts

interpretations of events

How do you think the history course will help you in the future?

The characteristics of good writing are: Circle one.  
the same no matter what the discipline  
differ from discipline to discipline

How do you think the English course will help you in the future?

lapdemosurvey

## **APPENDIX J**

### **Sample Faculty Interview Questions**

**Faculty Interview #1 Sample Questions:**

**What is your philosophy of teaching writing in the learning community class?**

**What do you do in the learning community as far as teaching writing goes?**

**How do you see the theme functioning in the course?**

**What is the theme?**

**Do you see any drawbacks in terms of the theme that the theme might create for students?**

**If learning communities are facilitating connections between courses, how are you defining those connections?**

**Do you think that the learning community course changes students' experiences of the class such that they are not just taking it to check off a box, but that something else is happening, that they actually see some other value in the class?**

**What do you think are the particular factors or facets of the learning community that are facilitating that kind of different response in students?**

**How do you see the two courses reinforcing or informing each other?**

**Do you anticipate students encountering any problems as writers because of the learning community model?**

**How do you think the learning community will benefit students in the future?**

**Why do you think that a progression toward more complex thinking happens faster in the learning community?**

**DissFacInterQ#1**

## **Faculty Interview #2 Sample Questions**

**How is it going so far?**

**Do you feel you're fulfilling the outcomes and objectives for the comp/history course?**

**What goals do you have for students in the learning community that are not included there?**

**Can we go through the writing assignments the students have written so far? Why did you choose those assignments or genres? What did you want them to achieve?**

**What are your views on the writing the students have done so far?**

**What evidence do you see of their work in Amelia's/Doug's part of the class in the writing that they have done so far in your part of the class?**

**You said in your first interview that the theme, The Power of the Past, is a conceptual thing for you personally and professionally. Are you seeing evidence that the students are having an experience this term of the theme, The Power of the Past?**

**Would you say that, with the writing you've assigned so far, students are doing history? Is this the sort of thing an historian would do?**

**How do you see the kinds of writing the students are doing in the course, both in history and in composition, ultimately benefiting them as writers?**

**Do you see any connections between what you're trying to get the students to do in their writing and the details that Amelia/Doug wants them to include?**

**What's the purpose of detail in the students' writing?**

**What's the purpose of the comments you write on the students' work?**

**To Doug: I noticed in your comments on their first papers that you were asking them why the elements of civilization were important. Why did you ask that?**

**DissFacInterQ2**

### **Faculty Interview #3 Sample Questions**

**To Doug:** You said in an earlier interview that you want students to take knowledge from history and turn it into something new in their writing for you, to build on it and create a new set of knowledge. Here are some of the students' papers. Can you show me where you think that might be happening?

**To Doug:** You also said earlier that you thought there was more complex thought in the writing of the learning community students than in your stand-alone classes. Can you show me where you see that happening in some of these essays?

**To Doug:** In the second interview, you said that to write the second paper, students would have to use the knowledge they were learning in a progressive way. What did you mean by that?

**To Doug:** In your earlier interview, you talked about the students having a deeper appreciation for history supported by sincere interest. It seemed you were saying that the learning community helped students understand there is a connection between everything they are learning in the class and their everyday lives. Did you see that happening in this group?

**To Doug:** You said the students typically get very personally involved with writing Papers 2 and 3. Did you see that this time?

**To Amelia:** One of your course's outcomes and objectives has to do with students performing coherent writing. How do you see yourself addressing that goal?

**To Amelia:** In an earlier interview, you said the students need to take the material and make it part of themselves. Can you show me on some of these exams where you see that happening?

**To Amelia:** Why did you have the students take home the last essay exam? And why did you have them hand write the answer?

**What are your goals for the students as writers?**

**If fostering cross-course connections is a goal, how do you see yourself fulfilling the goal in the assignments and activities for the course?**

**Are there aspects of Amelia's/Doug's class that are reinforcing or paralleling what you are doing?**

**Are there factors that contribute to the students seeing the learning community as two separate courses?**



**What's your understanding of the WAC policy at the college?**

**If someone complained about the difficulty of the history course, said it required learning too much detailed information, how might you respond?**

**Did you two consciously use the theme to create cross-course connections? Did you sit down and say, okay this is our theme, how can we use it and then decide to do x, y, z?**

**Did you see the theme functioning in this learning community?**

**DissFacInterQ3**

## **APPENDIX K**

### **Sample Student Discourse-Based Interview Questions**

## **Discourse-Based Interview Questions**

### **Sample Questions Interview #1**

**Could you take me through the process you went through for each draft of Paper One for Doug? What were your thoughts? How did you put the material together? What kinds of things were you trying to think about?**

**Where did you get the information about the three elements of civilization?**

**Okay, after you made that revision. What were you thinking about as you moved from that one [draft] to that one?**

**Doug talked to you about the option of using voice. What were your thoughts about that?**

**Then, you got all this feedback from Doug. And did this one [draft]. So what happened between these two?**

**When you got your grade, what did you think?**

**Anything else you want to add about writing that [Paper One]?**

**How did you prepare for the history exam?**

**Could you take me through the exam, the parts of it. How was it going for you as you were writing it and what were you thinking?**

**What did you think of your grade and the comments that she wrote you?**

**Anything else you want to say about any of that [the exam]?**

**What is the theme of the learning community?**

**How do you see the theme functioning?**

**What work from the English course have you found to be useful to you in the history part of the class?**

**What work in History have you found to be useful in the English part?**

**When you wrote the first paper, what from history was helpful in producing that?**

**When you wrote the preface and afterward to Lysistrada, what was helpful from history in writing that?**

**The writing for the history part, the exam, anything from English that you were specifically thinking about as you were writing?**

**If you think about the writing that you have been doing for the history part of the class, what seems to be of value to you in having done that writing?**

**How about writing the exam? How has that been of value?**

**I have the same question about the English writing. How has doing that first paper on the Myceneans, and also on Lysistrada, what's been of value to you?**

**In terms of the expectations for the writing, the expectations that Doug has on the writing that you do, and the expectations that Amelia has of the writing that you've done for you, what differences and similarities do you see?**

**What about their teaching styles? What would you say about similarities or differences?**

**What about the writing you've done so far? Which have you liked doing the most?**

**On your survey that you filled out at the very beginning, about the history class, you said you would take that, even if you didn't have to, and that you thought it would help you in the future to understand our society in its current state. So are you still feeling that you would take the course even if you didn't have to, and that it has that kind of value?**

**Do you think it will help you knowing the history in your future career?**

**And for the English part, you had said that you would take that also, even if it weren't required. And the value for your future seems to be that it would help you if you had to write something for your work. So, do you still feel that it is valuable?**

**Do you think history about facts or interpretation of events? On the survey, you said interpretation of events. So, in terms of this class, has that solidified this response? And how so?**

**Is anything about the learning community causing you to feel a sense of frustration or annoyance or difficulty?**

**Do you see the learning community as one big class or do you tend to see it as separate disciplines and separate classes?**

**Anything else you want to add?**

**DissDiscoInterQues#1**

## **Discourse-Based Interview Question**

### **Sample Questions Interview #2**

**This is your second paper and I know it's been awhile. This is the prewriting you did. Where did these terms come from?**

**On the second page, you mention how lower class the slaves were and they could be killed whenever the master wanted. Where did that knowledge come from?**

**On the front of the prewriting, you mention things like the thesis and how to evaluate an historical novel. You mention correct dialogue, plausibility, thesis, message. Where did those concepts come from?**

**This is the peer memo you wrote to Elicia and you were saying she needs to develop her summary, her thesis statement. Then in the memo to Jennifer, you mentioned her introduction, plot, transitions. Where did these concepts come from?**

**And this is your final Paper Two. This is the second paragraph and you're talking about how the characters need to be believable and you're making the judgment that Saylor does have believable details, not just believable, but historically accurate details and you mention the Roman baths here as one particular thing. So where did that information come from or that knowledge or understanding that the aspects of the novel were historically accurate and particularly the Roman baths?**

**And you go on to mention the Optimates and Populares and you describe those and then go on to also discuss characters. So this concept of Optimate and Populare, where did that come from?**

**And then when you apply those concepts to particular characters, what was the source of that, like your understanding that Gordianus, for instance, was an Optimate. That came from?**

**Is any of this your conclusions?**

**On the third page, you're mentioning some specific characters that were historical in the novel like Marcus Crassus and his wealth and his association with the slave revolt. So where did that knowledge come from?**

**And here's quite a bit of information about the baths, the different temperatures and the series of baths and so on and they're depicted in the novel. So your understanding that that's historically accurate came from?**

**And could you take me through your process here as you move from discovery to advanced to final draft?**

How conscious were you of trying to address some of the issues that Doug kept talking about here which were, making sure you have two or three specific criteria you're using to evaluate the book with and then making sure you're applying those criteria to the various aspects of the book?

Then, here's your second history exam. There was only the one question for the essay part and you had it ahead of time. What kind of process did you do at home if any to get ready to write this? Did you do any drafting at all?

In your Paper Two for Doug, you brought up Marcus Crassus and Optimate and Populare and those are here in your exam also. Did you feel that, because you got that information from Amelia and then you did something with it in the writing for Doug and then you're writing about it again on the exam, when you were writing it here on the exam, did you feel you really knew this? That it was in you and you didn't have to worry about studying it or memorizing it? You had it?

When you wrote the map part of the exam, were you thinking of taking Amelia on a stroll?

Then, this is Paper Three for Doug. In the prewriting, you're mentioning the Roman bath house, and other topics you might write about. Where did all those concepts come from? The aquaducts, the bathhouse, the Vikings and so on?

Here's your paragraph outline for Paper Three. Where did these pieces of information come from?

Here is the note you wrote to Doug about your purpose. Where did this idea or information you include here come from?

This is the peer memo you wrote to Jennifer and you're mentioning her quotes, her audience, her description, her context, the significance of what she's writing about. Where did those concepts come from?

And here's your Paper Three. The information in this first paragraph, these three opening sentences. Where did that come from?

In the second paragraph, you're making some general comments about your topic. Where did that come from?

Then, your concluding comment in this paragraph, was that your judgment or conclusion? Where did that come from?

On page two are some general sentences about the two-field system of planting. Where did that come from?

And down in that same paragraph on page two, you mention [here I read from the paper]. Where did that information come from?

[My questions continue in the same vein above. I'm quoting specific passages and asking where the information came from.]

Can you take me through your process on these drafts? What you had in mind, what you were trying to do?

And how conscious were you of Doug's concepts of context, description and exposition?

How do you feel about your grade?

And here's your final exam. You were able to take home the essay part. Can you describe how you got wrote it? Your process there?

On the map part, were you thinking about taking Amelia for a stroll?

Looking back at the whole learning community, do you see it as one integrated big course or do you tend to see it as two classes?

If you had to think back over all the information from Doug's class, and if you had to select the two or three most important things, what would those be?

If you had to think back to all the information from Amelia's class, and select the two or three most important things, what would those be?

How was your motivation going into the last exam?

What about the last paper for Doug? What was your sense of motivation at that point?

Do you remember the theme for the learning community you were in last fall?

How do you see the theme this semester functioning?

When you think about the kind of thinking you were asked to do in the English part of the class, the kind of thinking that went into the persuasive paper, the evaluation paper, this last paper, how do you think that thinking and the writing will be of use to you down the road?

How would you define the thinking that went on in the history portion of the class, especially as you were writing the exams?

So how might that be of use to you down the road?

Looking back, what do you feel about the appropriateness of the level of information?  
How appropriate was it in your mind for a survey of Western Civ. class?

How appropriate was the level of the English class?

Do you think looking back that you learned about history or did you get a chance to learn about history and then turn around and use it somehow or apply it somehow, or both?

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

DissDiscoInterQues#2



## APPENDIX L

### Sample Student Focus Group Questions

## **Focus Group Interview Questions**

### **Sample Questions Interview #1**

**What is the theme for the learning community?**

**How would you say the theme is functioning in the course?**

**Do you feel you've been able to use what you know from the history part of the class in the writing that you've been doing? Are you able to put to use that knowledge?**

**Do you feel you've been able to use what you know from the English part of the class in the writing you've been doing? Are you able to put that knowledge to use?**

**When you were writing the exam for history, were you consciously aware of the concepts from Doug's part of the class?**

**When you were writing the paper for Doug, were you consciously thinking of the information from Amelia's part of the class?**

**What do you think Amelia thinks is important?**

**There was a moment in class when Doug said that once you have the information from Amelia's lecture in your notes, you own that knowledge and don't have to cite it. What were your thoughts about that?**

**Do you think Amelia's comments on the exams reflect what she thinks is important?**

**What do you think Doug thinks is important?**

**Do you think Doug's comments reflect what he thinks is important?**

**Do you feel the English class is pitched at the right level? Does the level of difficulty fit with your expectations?**

**How about the history class? Do you feel the level is right?**

**What's the value of the writing you've done in the learning community for you?  
How important is the kind of writing Doug is asking for?**

**How important is the kind of writing Amelia is asking for? What the value of that for you?**

**How do you feel about asking questions in the class?**

**Amelia uses a lot of media, the videos and the overheads of maps and the slides. Is that useful for you?**

**DissFocusGrpQues#1**

## **Focus Group Interview Questions**

### **Sample Questions Interview #2**

**How do you feel about the learning community at this point? How is it going?**

**Did you prepare differently for the second exam than for the first one?**

**Did you copy over your notes from each class session like Amelia advised you to do?**

**How was writing the exam this time around?**

**When you were actually writing it, did you feel better about how it was going this time around?**

**How did you feel about the feedback you got?**

**Have you had exams like this in the past?**

**Did any of you take Amelia on a stroll for the map portion?**

**Do you feel like you're on a learning curve and are learning how to write the exams?**

**Do you think this is a typical college-level history class in terms of the difficulty?**

**Was anything from Doug's class helping you to write the exam?**

**How is your frustration level with the course compared to the first time we talked?**

### **DissFocusQues#2**

## APPENDIX M

**TABLE 6. Student and Teacher Produced Texts Collected – Composition**

**Table 3. Student and Teacher Produced Texts Collected - Composition**

<b>Student Produced Texts</b>	<b>Teacher Produced Texts</b>
<b>Paper One, Persuasive Essay</b>	
<i>Discovery Draft</i>	
<i>Advanced Draft</i>	<i>Letter from Doug (Draft feedback)</i>
<i>Final Draft</i>	<i>Evaluation form on Final Draft</i>
<i>Text Preparation Record</i>	
<i>Note to Doug (Final Draft feedback response)</i>	
<i>Memos to Peers (Discovery Draft response)</i>	
<b>Paper Two, Evaluation Essay</b>	
<i>Prewriting, Parts 1 &amp; 2</i>	
<i>Discovery Draft</i>	<i>Letter from Doug (Draft feedback)</i>
<i>Advanced Draft</i>	<i>Evaluation form on Final Draft</i>
<i>Final Draft</i>	
<i>Text Preparation Record</i>	
<i>Note to Doug (Final Draft feedback response)</i>	
<i>Memos to Peers (Discovery Draft response)</i>	
<b>Paper Three, Time and Place (Analysis Essay)</b>	
<i>Prewriting</i>	
<i>Paragraph Outline</i>	<i>Letter from Doug (Draft feedback)</i>
<i>Discovery Draft</i>	
<i>Note to Doug (describing initial challenges)</i>	
<i>Advanced Draft</i>	
<i>Note to Doug (discussing purpose)</i>	
<i>Final Draft</i>	
<b>Lysistrada Preface and Afterword</b>	
<i>Discovery Draft</i>	
<i>Final Draft</i>	
<b>Listserv Symposium</b>	
<i>Threaded discussion No. 1</i>	
<i>Threaded discussion No. 2</i>	
<i>Threaded discussion No. 3</i>	
<i>Threaded discussion No. 4</i>	

## APPENDIX N

TABLE 7. Student and Teacher Produced Texts Collected – History

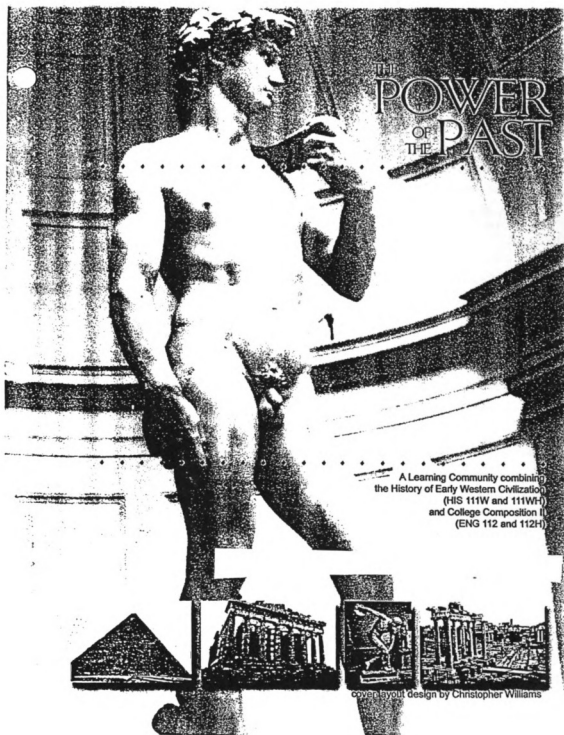
**Table 4. Student and Teacher Produced Texts Collected - History**

<b>Student Produced Texts</b>	<b>Teacher Produced Texts</b>
<b>Completed History Exam I</b>	
<i>Completed exam (with Amelia's feedback)</i>	<i>Letter from Amelia (feedback on exam)</i>
<i>Note to Amelia (response to Exam I feedback)</i>	
<b>Completed History Exam II</b>	
<i>Completed exam (with Amelia's feedback)</i>	
<b>Completed History Exam III</b>	
<i>Completed exam (with Amelia's feedback)</i>	
<b>Early Greeks: Quiz</b>	
<i>Take home questions</i>	
<i>Completed quiz (with Amelia's feedback)</i>	
<b>Classical Greeks: Quiz</b>	
<i>Take home questions</i>	
<i>Completed quiz (with Amelia's feedback)</i>	
<b>Late Republic &amp; Pax Romana: Quiz</b>	
<i>Take home questions</i>	
<i>Completed quiz (with Amelia's feedback)</i>	
<b>Late Middle Ages/Renaissance: Quiz</b>	
<i>Take home questions</i>	
<i>Completed quiz (with Amelia's feedback)</i>	



## APPENDIX O

### **“The Power of the Past” Course Pack Cover**



# THE POWER OF THE PAST

A Learning Community combining  
the History of Early Western Civilization  
(HIS 111W and 111WH)  
and College Composition II  
(ENG 112 and 112H)

cover layout design by Christopher Williams

## APPENDIX P

**Facsimile of Shannon's Essay Exam Excerpt (Student Work)**

Essay #2: As time goes on, one can see a correlation between changes over time in Greek religious beliefs, the changes in the type of gov. that they have, and the changes in Greek art + architecture. Begin your essay in 800BC by discussing the overt vs the covert messages found in Greek religion + the role of the covert message in the development of humanism, individualism, secularism + questioning over time 2nd vs. that lead to desire for democracy. Then:

how artistic forms (Sculpture, Architecture) reflected the changes the Greeks were going through throughout the classical Age (Early, Golden, Late) and then the Hellenistic Age.

In 800BC (Geometric Age) Homer's the Iliad and Odyssey were introduced. During the Iliad, the main scene is when Achilles (hero) is about to kill Agamemnon (king). Just as Achilles is about to draw his sword, Athena comes down from the heavens and stops Achilles from killing Agamemnon. They say if it weren't for her, Achilles would have killed him. This is the overt message that rules throughout the 700s and 600s. At this time the Greeks strictly believe in the Gods and feel as though everything happens because of the Gods.

~~Another overt message is that the gods are in control of everything.~~  
This overt message is displayed throughout their art during the Archaic Age (800BC-500BC).

Kouros is sculpted. Represents a boy at his ideal height (6'). Arms straight at the side, feet elevated, giant almond eyes, left foot slightly forward, not much muscle.

The Greeks are not very humanistic people at all at this point. They show no sign of humanism whatsoever during the Archaic Age. It isn't until 500BC when we finally see that idea of humanism increase, along with individualism, secularism, and questioning. By 500BC, the covert message of the

definition	Heed is ruling. The covert message is that
Not very humanistic at this point.	Achilles could have consciously decided not to kill Agamemnon on his own without Athena. The outcome would have been the same no matter what. This idea shows <sup>how</sup> the Greeks

are becoming more humanistic. They are finally valuing the human being and what ~~he~~ it is capable of doing. This idea is also reflected in their art. Throughout the Early classical Age, the art is much more humanistic. The Kritios Boy is sculpted around 490BC showing GREAT strides towards humanism. The artist has finally figured out how to sculpt a real human being. He is in a contrapposto stance with his weight shifted onto one leg like a real human stands. He's very relaxed with a clearly defined facial figure. No more creepy Archaic smile! He has normal hair now rather than the earlier shock absorber hair. Kritios Boy also has a clearly defined muscular figure. He's absolutely gorgeous! A huge breakthrough in Greek art.

During the Golden Age, <sup>(480-420 BC)</sup> Athenian democracy is at its height and humanism continues to grow. They follow the concept of the Golden Mean, "nothing too much" and apply it to their art + architecture. They are using the simplistic, balanced, + restrained Doric order during this time. The artists

## APPENDIX Q

### Facsimile of Amelia's Letter to Shannon (Student Work)

Overall, a lot of good material. This is a super first exam. First and foremost understand that you did very well.

My comments, though, will mostly focus on what you could have done better, with a mind to Exam 2 and the A level grade that I want to see.

Essay: A lot of excellent material. To a certain extent, your essay got into stride once you got to the Golden Age. But, you never explained why democracy developed. You just all of a sudden had it there in the Golden Age. In the later years of the Archaic age democracy developed as people became more individualistic and said "I want a say in my government. I want political liberty." Then, with the Persian wars they realized how special their government was. That's a pretty big omission.

At the core of this story was the issue of government and the changing nature of individualism. Your essay had government sort of as an aside. So, for Exam 2, whenever we cover ideas and concepts, that's when to really work.

Bonus: missed huge opportunity. You could have incorporated them into the essay, into the map. You could have put them at Pnyx since that is where the lawmaking took place and where Pericles made his speeches. You could have put them in your essay when you were talking about the Golden Age....

The Map: A lot of good work here! Here's one quibble: at times it seems memorized. Think about the story as we are covering the Rome map. Don't need to memorize when you are preparing for the exam. A case in point: the treatment of Orestes. Orestes is a fictional character of Greek mythology who was written about in a play by Aeschylus. You wrote about him as a real person who really was tried. That seems to be the product of trying to make the most of notes that you don't really know.

IDs: You've got good material here. A super ID 1, but as in the map I see signs of memorization in 2 and 3. Know the story.

Your exam is very good on dates. Keep up the good work.

Now, for the next exam, work on getting to the core, work on depth.

## **APPENDIX R**

### **Facsimile of Doug's Letter to Jennifer**



Hi            You are making excellent progress on your essay. You have very specific, interesting criteria, a lot of good background, and a thesis that is nicely developing. Much of your essay is also very well crafted in terms of style.

My first main suggestion is to concentrate more on your purpose throughout your essay. There are places where you clearly are evaluating aspects of the book, or the book overall. Those instances work well. But there are also some fairly long stretches in which you describe aspects of the book in good detail, but it isn't clear what your purpose is. At times, it seems like you keep trying to show that the book is a historical novel, rather than evaluating its effectiveness as a historical novel. Does that make sense?

As you revise your criteria, work on developing a single, overall useful thesis that encompasses your main opinions and recommendations about the book.

You include a lot of very specific detail in your summary of the novel, but I wonder if you have too much information. You may include some detail that the reader might enjoy discovering and more than you need to set up your evaluation.

While I thought most of your points were nicely stated, I wonder if you did overstate some ideas. For example, you say that "each character portrays the time as correctly as possible." Can you know if Saylor has done that? Would a more qualified statement still work to support your main points but be more easily supported in your essay? As you revise your statements, think carefully about how you word those points so you say exactly what you want to.

My last suggestion in terms of content is to look for any statement that needs some context or explanation to be fully clear to your reader, such as the reference to Esquiline Hill at the bottom of page one.

You have done really good work so far,            I look forward to reading your final, polished version of this essay. Be sure to contact me if you have any questions.

## **APPENDIX S**

### **Facsimile of Jennifer's Evaluation Essay Excerpt (Student Work)**

Another effective way Arms of Nemesis works/as historical fiction would not only be the prediction of real characters, but the realism of the other characters as well. Each person shared views of being optimates, the very political, non compassionate Roman, or populares the intellectual, open-minded Roman. Important to the realism of the book many of the characters were quite complex and couldn't be characterized as either optimates or populares.

Saylor's characters, however fictional, used the luxurious baths and ate the food known to be from that time. Just as it was back then the optimates and populares differed in their views on these lavish things. A character expressing more optimates traits had said to Gordianus, "[when talking about the food] Too rich for me- I prefer a skin of watery wine and a hard crust of bread" (Saylor 23). Optimates idealized the simplicity of the Early Republic and show this by in turn wanting to eat bread and wine. Of course they never actually gave up these amenities, just talked about doing so. On and on through the course of the book they would protest art and the baths. Populares, liking art and other intellectual things would be more open. One spoke to Gordianus, "Now I paint what I want and when I want. In the good ole days I could never have taken on a project like this one. My mentor wouldn't have allowed it" (Saylor 122). Populares characters were painters and participated frequently in large dinner parties.

well put  
 a reader could find it hard

Can your reader stand  
 understand your

Who specifically?  
 who you intended.

Use of  
 these terms  
 without  
 more  
 background  
 explanation.  
 This is  
 somewhat  
 spread

## **APPENDIX T**

### **Facsimile of Noah's Peer Review Comments to Jennifer (Student Work)**

Nice helpful suggestions,  
 try to offer specific  
 suggestions for revision and  
 all your feedback etc.

To: \_\_\_\_\_  
 From: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date: 31 Jan 2005  
 Re: Discovery draft revision comments etc.

I really enjoy your creative  
 use of voice in the piece,  
 it definitely helps strengthen it overall.  
 In your next draft, I recommend  
 using more parenthetical documentation  
 throughout. The content in the  
 draft does a good job backing  
 up the statement saying that they  
 are civilized, although I think that  
 you need to focus a bit more on the  
 government. /good  
Answer

Like I mentioned earlier, I find  
 the voice choice very refreshing.  
 I like the line "dedicated my life's  
 work."

The structure of the piece is  
 good, but the conclusion needs a  
 bit of work and shouldn't throw  
 in any new information. /good  
point

Lastly, I like the Appendix, but  
 you are lacking works cited.

## APPENDIX U

### Facsimile of Noah's Persuasive Essay Excerpt (Student Work)

Final Draft

It's All Greek to Me

*Clever title*

The civilization of the Mycenaeans was established on the Greek mainland around 2000 B.C. Invading from the north and the east, the Mycenaeans replaced the previous culture known as the Minoans, who were believed to be a fairly wealthy and peaceful people. Although the Mycenaeans brought with them advanced techniques in many areas such as pottery, metallurgy, and architecture, much of their culture was derived from the Minoans (Hooker). The Mycenaeans are also considered to be the "earliest Greeks," as they were the first society that was known to have spoken Greek ("Ancient Greece"). By 1600 B.C., the Mycenaean city of Mycenae had become a major center of the ancient world ("Mycenaean Civilization").

*Watch sentence punct*

*Good interest background*

Over the ages of man's existence, many peoples have sprung up and then crumbled into dust. Many have left no trace; others left evidence of their existence by establishing a civilization. In order for a society to be considered civilized, it must meet three requirements. First of all, it must have a written language. Not only does a written

*Well state*

*Good explanation*

language promote a continuation of the culture over generations, it also aids historians gain insight into a culture's way of life. Second, some form of government must be established in the society, and lastly, a civilization requires city-states. Archeological records have shown that the Mycenaean society was indeed civilized.

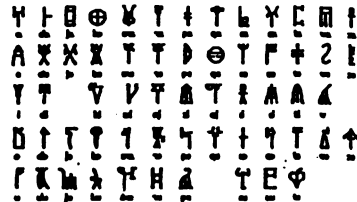
*Why those require?*

The Mycenaeans' form of written language is called Linear B. Although the exact dates of its use are uncertain, it is believed to have been utilized during the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Linear B consists of 89 different syllabic signs as well as over one hundred

→

ideograms (an ideogram directly represents an actual object). Linear B was derived from the Minoan Linear A language and shares 45 similar signs. Linear B has been found in two written mediums: on tablets made of clay, and ceramic vessels (Rutter). Written records have also been found by archeologists which contain

An example of some of the Linear B Characters:



information such as tax records, agricultural stores, and various other lists of inventories (Bowra 32).

The second criteria that establishes the Mycenaean culture as a civilized was its

government. The form of government within each of the Mycenaean city-states was a monarchy with an established hierarchy. At Mycenae, the royal palace located at the summit of the acropolis contained a throne room, living apartments and a shrine. The king, which was called the *wanax*, had supreme authority. Unlike the Minoans, who utilized a more equitable distribution of wealth, the *wanax* possessed a large percentage of the Mycenaean wealth not shared with the rest of society (Hooker). This uneven sharing of wealth is typical of a warlike society: the spoils of war wrested from the weak and belonging to the strong. Despite this, Mycenaean have been found buried with much of their wealth, including gold jewelry, swords, and silver cups (Bowra 31). Next in control was the army (also known as the Leader of the People), which was called the *lawagetas*. The lower officials were known as the *basileus*. Oddly, this term, *basileus*, later became the Greek word for king. Also existed was a special class of priests ("The Late Helladic Period"). Tablets have been deciphered which list many trades of the general population; these include goldsmiths, shipwrights, doctors and cooks as well as many other professions

Good detail  
You probably want to divide long paragraphs that shift focus, or a minor shift

This is very effective information



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