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Author	Loh Chin Ee
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Examining the Cognitive Task Potential of Writing in the Literature Classroom:**Case Studies of Two 12th Grade Students' Written Work**

By Loh Chin Ee

Abstract

This case study is part of a larger study, the National Study of Writing Instruction.

Through the examination of the written work and interview data of two 12th grade High School English students from two different classes in the same school, I seek to paint a picture of the kinds of writing the students do in their English classrooms, and what the writing reveals about what teachers value and what students learn in particular classrooms. The analysis reveals how teachers use writing as a learning tool to shape students' knowledge of particular ways of thinking and knowing within and about the discipline. Additionally, it shows how they inculcate students into discipline-specific ways of writing in each particular classroom. Teachers in both classes taught students to write in line with their idea of "good" writing within the context of the discipline, school policy, and high stakes testing. I argue that the teachers' awareness of their own expectations, the potential of a task and student expectations will allow for more deliberate design of written tasks that encourage general and discipline-specific learning.

Key words: Writing, literature, English instruction, high school, scaffolding, sociocognitive

Literature continues to be a central aspect of English education in America with the debates focussing on what literary texts should be included in the literature classroom. On one side of the debate is Hirsch (1987), calling for a “cultural literacy” based on a fix set of classics. On the other side of the debate, Applebee (1996) moots the need to continually have conversations around the curriculum for students to enter into “culturally relevant conversations,” which in this time and age includes multiculturalism. Underlying this debate is the conviction that texts are powerful forms of media with the capacity to set and change traditions (Apple, 1992; Applebee, 1974; Said, 1993), a principle that has underscored the centrality of literature in English education in the United States.

In Applebee’s (1993) survey of English taught in junior high and middle schools, students reported doing most of their writing in the English classroom. Some 58 percent of the writing was about literature, and this figure rose to 80 percent by senior high grades. This attests to the importance of the role of literature and writing in the English classroom. It then is vital to examine the types of writing that students do regarding literature to understand the role of writing in the instruction of literature. In this study, I focus on the writing of two 12th grade students over the course of the year to highlight how attention to writing practices in the English Language Arts classroom can sharpen educators’ perspectives on the task potential of writing tasks to encourage learning. The central question is: What kinds of discipline-specific knowledge and reasoning are valued in High School English classrooms as shown by case studies of two 12th grade students in different classes in one school? Through the close study of students’ writing in particular

classroom contexts, we are able to see how teachers convey “what counts” as knowledge (Kelly, Luke, & Green, 2008) and rethink curriculum and instructional practices.

Theoretical Framework

Particular Ways of Thinking and Writing

The classroom as a discourse community is a place and space where certain ways of “*saying(writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing*” (Gee, 1996, p. 127) are valued over others. These schooled discourses are learned (Gee, 1996; Wertsch, 1991), and what it means to learn within each classroom and discipline may encompass content knowledge as well as “ways of knowing and reasoning that are accepted as appropriate and necessary for learning and understanding within the particular field” (Langer, 1994, p. 81). Writing as a social practice (Bazerman, 2000) is one way which students learn the particular discourse of a particular discipline, within particular classrooms.

Within the literature classroom, what counts as thinking is deeply related to the content-matter of that discipline. In Langer’s (1994) case studies of eight high-school teachers teaching different subjects, she observes that the two teachers of American literature valued the students’ ability to make personal connections between what they read and their own lives, to connect between two works, and to use these connections to reflect on their own lives. The students’ ability to think was measured by their ability to relate ideas, situations, issues, and feelings to their own lives, and to arrive at interpretations of text and life based on those connections. Clearly, there are specific practices of reading, talking about reading, and writing that apply to the literature classroom, varied as they may be in different contexts.

Learning to Write and Writing to Learn

In the literature classroom, students both learn to write and write to learn. Classroom display of competence requires a grasp of writing in a way that fits in with the teacher's expectations of what writing, for example, a literary essay, ought to look like. In addition to having to learn to write about the subject in the genre expected, teachers may use writing in the classroom as ways of learning about the reading and thinking of the subject-matter.

Marshall's (1987) study of three 11th grade classrooms in taught by one high school teacher demonstrates how the discourse and the writing tasks given in the classroom shaped the thinking about and within the discipline. In the experimental portion of his research where students were assigned different types of reading tasks which included short answer questions, personal extended writing assignments and formal extended writing assignments, Marshall found that different types of tasks encouraged different emphasis in student's writing. Thus, students who were assigned the personal writing assignment included both reader- and text-centered responses whereas students given the formal assignment only included text-centered responses. He also found that the extended tasks tended to help students understand the story better, a finding that parallels Langer and Applebee's (1987) findings in a larger scale research. Thus, different kinds of tasks encourage different kinds of learning.

Student as Learner

Students perceive the kind of learner they need to be and adopt particular identities that affirm, negotiate, or resist the identity of a particular learner in a particular context. In Rex's (2001) ethnographic study of one regular student who transferred to a gifted and talent class, Rex showed how the student gradually adopted the identity of a

reader that was required in that particular classroom as she interacted with the classmates, her teacher and coursework over the year. While the study primarily focused on her reading and writing within the class context rather than her writing *per se*, it can be inferred that learning to write in a particular way and for particular purposes is an essential part of this apprenticeship into the community of practice (Wenger, 1998) of a particular discipline and of a particular classroom. Scaffolding in the form of “guided participation” (Rogoff, 2003) in writing practices can provide ways for students to learn about the ways of knowing and thinking as well as ways of writing in the discipline.

Teachers plan the curriculum and ways of instruction in light of their own knowledge, experience and beliefs about the course of study (Agee, 2000, 2004; Zancanella, 1991), adjusting to policy and school practices (Agee, 2006). The writing tasks teachers assign reflect these values and beliefs; and students learn from explicit instructions in the writing tasks as well as implicit expectations communicated by the teacher throughout the year what to value in particular disciplines in the context of each classroom.

Methods

Bazerman suggests that “close attention to the textual form of written knowledge will tell us much about what kind of thing knowledge is” (Bazerman, 2000, p. 18). While writing in each class must be understood in terms of the sociocultural context of each classroom (Sperling & Woodlief, 1997), examining the tasks set by teachers and the written work of the students can provide insight into what is valued in the classroom by both teachers, and in turn, reveal what students learn and learn to value.

This case study analyzes written data from two students from different classes in Riverside High School (all names used are pseudonyms). The written work of these two 12th grade students, Beth and Hannah, were collected over the course of one year as part of a larger study, the National Study of Writing Instruction. Interviews with the students also form part of the dataset.

Coding was initially done using the uses of writing categories which Applebee (1981; 1984) adapted from Britton (1975) to classify the main function of each piece of writing under the following subcategories:

- (1) Writing without composing or mechanical writing (e.g., multiple-choice, short answers);
- (2) Informational writing (e.g., reports);
- (3) Personal writing (e.g., journals);
- (4) Imaginative writing (e.g., stories, poems); and
- (5) Any other uses of writing.

This coding exercise gave an idea of the different uses of the writing tasks. After counting and coding the written work of both students, the written data were coded again for key themes and ideas.

The Case Studies

Setting

Riverside is a rural, high-needs school with a traditionally strong writing program across the curriculum instituted by a now-retired English teacher. More recently, the new High School principal has implemented a learning to write program with a strong emphasis on giving the students tools to write, particularly in the area of informational

writing (Baker, 2007). In this context, writing is an important part of learning and learning to write well is an important part of schooling.

Beth (English 12) & Hannah (AP English)

Beth is in English 12, a regular English class with Mrs. M. and Hannah is an Advanced Placement English Literature and Composition (AP English) student with Mrs. F. Both students have passed the Regents examination, a New York State-mandated examination, and both students report that they do most writing in their English class compared with other subjects. They both do some writing in English class every day, though the kinds of writing they do in and out of class differ, as will become evident.

Observations

It is important to note from the onset that the purposes of English 12 and AP English class are very different. AP English's goal is to immerse students in "intensive study of representative works from various genres and periods, concentrating on works of recognized literary merit" (The College Board, 2006, p. 45) and is specifically about literary study. English 12, on the other hand, is not geared towards a final high stakes examination, and the teacher has more freedom (within the limits of school policy) with regard to her teaching aims. The different purposes of both classes impact upon the way literature is used in each classroom.

In Beth's English 12 classroom, an eclectic response and reading comprehension view, coupled with a strong research writing strand seems to be the driving force for the use of literature in the classroom whereas Hannah's AP English class is driven by a strong canonical and textual slant. Beth used three main literary texts for the entire year – *Beowulf*, a literary classic, *Night* by Elie Wiesel, and *The Things They Carried*, a

collection of short stories by Tim O'Brien. In contrast, Hannah's AP English class reading constitutes a far wider range of texts including 27 poems, Aristotle's *The Allegory of the Cave*, Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*, texts that range from classic to relatively modern. While Beth's texts are limited to prose, Hannah is exposed to a wide range of genres from drama to poetry and prose in both fiction and non-fiction form. Though there is no required reading for AP English, at least half of the AP English selections are from a recommended list from The College Board (2006). One can assume that the teacher selected the other half of the texts as being of "comparable quality" (The College Board, 2006, p. 48) to prepare her students for the eventual AP English examination.

The following key categories about writing and literature emerged during the coding: (1) Connections to the text; (2) Connections beyond the text; (3) Vocabulary and Grammar; and (4) Ways of learning to read and write.

(1) Connections to the Text

In both classrooms, students make connections to the texts at various levels of understanding, and much of the writing in class is directed towards helping students make meaning from the literary text under study. The demands of each writing task reveals a common emphasis on textual understandings. Yet, at the same time, the differences as to what constitutes adequate and appropriate understanding of the text in each class are brought to light under this close analysis. Four sub-categories stand out in the analysis of this data: (a) Comprehension; (b) Thematic Understandings; (c) Link to literary devices; and (d) Connections across texts.

(a) Comprehension.

Writing that tests comprehension is evident in both students' written work. However, different types of comprehension are expected from the two students. Beth's comprehension exercises include short answers, readings quizzes and chapter summaries which focus mostly on plot and character understanding. Sometimes, a question about style or structure is asked. A typical comprehension exercise includes short answers to various questions written on the board such as the following:

(1) Grendel relishes it because he is taking on the men because he was trapped for so long. (Beth, Notebook, p. 4)

(4) Grendel was spawned from, "He was spawned in that slime. Conceived by a pair of those monsters born of Cain." (Beth, Notebook, p.5)

These short answer questions are typical of Beth's notebook entries. Comprehension is tested through the use of questions that require information-seeking short answers that test for factual understanding of the story, and to some degree interpretation. Beth shows that she is able to gather evidence from the text in (4) by quoting from the text to answer the comprehension question about the birth of Grendel, and infers Grendel's feelings in (1). She does not elaborate further because the short answer has satisfied the question requirement.

In AP English, Hannah also completes comprehension-type exercises that tests understanding of the literary texts being studied. However, the notion of understanding is very much linked to close textual readings. Hannah completes a detailed "analysis chart" for every poem studied, digging for nouns and verbs at every line, and expounding on the significance of each. The poetry analysis chart in Figure 1 shows how Hannah has to

painstakingly work through the nouns and verbs, explaining the significance of each. She does this with every poem studied in class, most more lengthy than this sample. Even though it is a mechanical exercise that is akin to a systematic self-directed short answer exercise, Hannah has to continually interpret the poem beyond the literal level and to make linkages to literary terms. For this assignment, Mrs. F. notes “connect to literary devices”. In that one statement, Mrs. F. conveys her opinion that Hannah needs to do far more interpretation with explicit links to literary devices. In this manner, Mrs. F. builds up Hannah’s close reading skills, scaffolding Hannah towards mastery of one aspect of the language of literary interpretation.

Another example of comprehension-type exercises are Hannah’s summaries of Flannery O’Connor’s *A Good Man is Hard to Find* and *Country People* (Figure 2). This “Major Works of Literature Data Sheet” reveals a eclectic mix of theoretical underpinnings (New Criticism with Leavisite notions of literature). The student is required to fill in data about the background of the author and give the historical context of the literary text (page 1) and close textual readings (pages 2 onwards). Understanding the genre is important and plot summaries with “story-driven” analysis (Vipond & Hunt, 1984) prove Hannah’s understanding of the plot. The close textual analysis are meant to help Hannah dig deeper into the story, to glean through the text to come up with “point-driven” readings (1984) which Vipond and Hunt explain as a particular type of “literary” reading where the reader reads with the understanding that the reading will allow the reader to construct a valid point. To do so, the reader is expected extend beyond the surface to explore the deeper meanings of the text. Hannah must discover these meanings by herself, develop an overview of the literary text and an understanding of the details

that will eventually lead to understanding of the larger themes. Through such comprehension assignments completed on a daily basis, Mrs. F. indicates to her students that what is valued is close reading and interpretation, and knowledge of the historical and biographical background of a literary work.

(b) Thematic understandings.

Thematic understandings are when students are expected to move beyond mere comprehension into understanding the themes or larger meanings behind the literary text. Beth makes significantly fewer thematic connections beyond the text compared to Hannah, and seldom does Beth's written work for thematic connections extend beyond the short answer question or single paragraph assignment. However, Beth's thematic connections once made are transformed into assignments that connect to life, to be illustrated later.

For Hannah, working on thematic connections in her daily assignments such as her poetry analysis chart is a regular feature of class. This could be partly due to the sheer number of texts that Hannah has to consume in the course of her study. She must master independent extraction of thematic connections. For example, in her analysis of *Fire and Ice* by Robert Frost (Figure 1), Hannah notes that the word "suffice" "suggests that something is good enough but not the best. Perhaps talking about defeat." She conscientiously works through the poem line-by-line. In addition to such exercises, Hannah is assigned extended written work that requires the exploration of the theme of a particular text, such as an *Oedipus the King* essay on "suffering," an essay on "madness" in *The Catcher in the Rye*, and a timed writing practice on "secrecy" in *The Dollhouse*.

Hannah is expected to be able to make connections between the theme and text efficiently in order to tackle Advance Placement examination questions. In a typical examination situation, Hannah has to make connections between text and themes in 40 minutes, using one out of a selection of suggested texts, and to do so in a coherent manner. This tacit culture of “theme-digging” is another aspect of the literary discourse that Hannah must master as an AP English student, and for which she is ensured regular practice through the kinds of writing tasks assigned. Hannah shows how understanding of theme is important in her description of her essay writing methods:

*For the “Madness essay on *Catcher in the Rye*, there are so many themes in that book there is a lot of room to interpret and say what you think still using evidence from the book. I like to write about things where I can express my opinions, make connections between ideas. For the Dickinson quote in the “Madness” timed essay, I started with the thesis statement, picked three themes I thought I could write about, and planned it out in my mind. I didn’t use scrap paper or draft.”*

(c) *Link to literary devices.*

While both students make connections to literary devices in their writing, Beth’s connections to literary devices are tied to prose analysis, with attention to symbols, tone, mood, language use, point of view, and characterization. In contrast, Hannah’s written work show more extensive knowledge of literary devices in different genres of prose, poetry, and drama. Notes on different forms of poetry such as the sonnet and villanelle precede Hannah’s study of poems using such forms. She makes constant references to various literary devices such as symbols and metaphors, and even writes an extended essay on symbolism in allegory in *Young Goodman Brown*.

While literary devices are important in both classes, the range of literary devices Hannah must be familiar with, and able to recall independently for her reading, and to note down in her writing, is far more extensive than Beth's. The mark of a "good" student of literature in AP class includes the cultivation of a vast repertoire of linguistic tools for talking and writing about literature that cut across the different genres.

(d) *Connections across texts.*

Connections across texts are made when students are given writing tasks that explicitly require students to make intertextual connections. For example, Hannah takes down notes about Aristotle on tragedy and has to follow up with an essay connecting *Oedipus the King* with Aristotle's conception of tragedy. "Theme-digging" takes on an intertextual dimension and Hannah has to cultivate this habit of paying attention to themes, to similarities and differences, across texts.

For Beth, Mrs. M. connects across a movie text by having them watch *Vietnam: A Soldier's Diary* while studying *The Things They Carried*. The film served as a text to be read and also as a visual connection for the students. In addition, Beth compared two short stories in *The Things They Carried* and looked for similarities and differences. These intertextual connections emphasize themes in different media form, allowing the student to see how life and literature may connect.

(2) Connections Beyond the Text

The two students in this study made two different kinds of connections beyond the text: They connected directly to life, or they connected to ideas.

(a) Connections to Life

It was evident from the written work there were different priorities in the two classes: While Hannah's AP English class focussed on creating textual understandings to connect to ideas, Beth's English 12 class focused on creating textual understandings in order to make connections to life. Mrs. M.'s approach to the study of literary texts focuses more on the reader whereas Mrs. F.'s approach is typical of a class that prioritizes the centrality of the text.

Beth's written work shows connections to life being used in two ways in her English 12 class: firstly, the connections to life served as entry points into textual understandings, and secondly, they served to connect themes from the literary text to the world at large. An illustration of the first type of connection from life to text is when Beth writes down a list of the things she carries with her, and realizes that "the things I carry show a lot about me" (Beth's notebook, p. 60). This became an entry point for her to understand the book title and themes in *The Things They Carried*. An example of the second type of connection to life occurred during the study of *Night*. The theme of "indifference" is drawn from the literary text, and Beth researches on an example of "indifference" in the world today. She writes a reflection on the story of Kitty Genovese, a 28-year old woman who was brutally murdered outside her apartment because her neighbours were indifferent to the act of violence that was being committed. This research project culminated in a class presentation where different students shared their different stories about indifference, the theme that had emerged from their study of *Night*. In Beth's notebook, she reflects on how her research on Kitty Genovese links to the theme of indifference in *Night* and to the events of the Holocaust (Beth's notebook, pp.

57-59). The extension from literature to life uses the themes in the literary text as a point of entry into discussions of the students' daily world, and provides lens for which they can use to understand literature and life (Langer, 1995).

(b) Connections to Ideas

While personal connections are made as entry points into textual comprehension, the dominant purpose of connections to life is to make links to ideas. In one assignment, Hannah gives an illustration of what Plato's concept of the allegory of the cave would look like in today's context, thus demonstrating her competence at making connections to philosophical concepts. For Hannah, the demonstration of "literary competence" (Culler, 1975) is shown by her ability to link philosophical ideas with the texts being studied. Hannah's understanding of a text is to be set against not just the words on the text itself but the backdrop of big ideas against which the texts were written. The ideas serve to forward the student's understanding of the author and the text. Ultimately, the focus is on the text and related ideas.

(3) Vocabulary and Grammar

Vocabulary and grammar emphases are also different for the two classes. For Beth in English 12, vocabulary and grammar are very much related to general vocabulary and conventions of writing whereas for Hannah in her more specialized AP English class, the relevant vocabulary is the technical vocabulary for discourse about literature.

The literary texts in Beth's class are seen as starting points for learning new words as evidenced by the vocabulary lists in Beth's notebook. In addition, the study of each text includes vocabulary quizzes. For example, students are given directions to write a story using vocabulary words from the text. Based on a picture, Beth writes a story that

utilizes the words *moors*, *spawn*, *brood*, *laments*, *righteous*, *forged*, *relished*, *plundering*, *heathen*, and *affliction*, words from *Beowulf*. The teacher marks the story specifically for the vocabulary, taking off marks for each incorrect use of the word. This is a clear illustration of how literature is viewed as a resource for transmission of English language skills, with the literary text perceived as a resource to be mined for new words.

For Hannah, it is assumed that she is familiar with many literary terms and there is little focus on general vocabulary. Hannah mentions in her interview that the teacher “assumed we knew how to write an essay” and “spent a lot of time on literary terms and how to use them in your [sic] writing.” Hannah had to constantly refer to the AP book for explanations and has to learn both literary terms and philosophical terms like *epistemology* and *eschatological*. An entire worksheet is devoted to the term *tragedy* and Hannah has to learn the definition of tragedy according to Aristotle before writing an essay on tragedy and *Oedipus the King*. Hannah has to pay attention to the possibility of multiple definitions and the nuances of different words, and understand their usage in different contexts.

(4) Ways of Learning to Read and Write

Parallel to the findings in Applebee’s (1993) study and the earlier study led by Britton (1975) that there was less imaginative writing as the students progressed through their education, there was hardly any imaginative writing in this 12th grade dataset. The students’ written work tended to be mechanical and informational in nature. Out of 83 pieces of Hannah’s written work, 60 were mechanical in nature, 20 were informational, and one personal. The informational pieces were mostly literary essays averaging three pages in length. For Beth, 55 pieces were mechanical, 12 informational, two personal,

and three imaginative; and the imaginative pieces were really vocabulary exercises where the student had to write a story utilizing certain vocabulary words, such as the *Beowulf* vocabulary quiz.

The nature of these mechanical and informational exercises varied between the students. Much of Beth's mechanical writing consisted of the transcription of class notes whereas Hannah's analysis of *Fire and Ice* is a typical short answer type mechanical exercise. Beth's informational writing were mostly short summaries or research papers whereas Hannah's informational writing were mostly literary essays. These different ways of using mechanical and informational exercises reveals how different ways of learning to read and write were taught in each class, according to what each teacher valued.

In Beth's English 12 class, she spent much of her time "mostly copying from the board" and writing journal entries in her notebook. Her notebook and interview attests to this consistent use of the notebook and note-taking. Mrs. M. tells the students how to read critically and write well, and this translates into "how to" notes in the notebook. A notebook entry entitled *Elements of Writing* reads:

Direct quotations.

Don't quote too much.

When you should use quotes

- *Ensure tech. accuracy*
- *When words are interesting or well-phrased (Beth's notebook, p. 103)*

Beth learns to write through the instructions given by the teacher and through regular practice. This reliance on note-taking reflects an instructional style that values transmission of information to the student who then absorbs the ideas to put into practice for the various writing tasks assigned. Frequent use of short answer questions to test comprehension convey the idea that reading requires understanding of the literal as well as thematic ideas in a story, but perhaps also communicates little need for deeper engagement with the text.

Mrs. M. also places emphasis on the research and writing process, and drafts are written for feedback. Upon receiving feedback, Beth reflects on her writing and completes a final piece. Beth's assignment about heroes, linked to the study of *Beowulf*, follows this process. In Figure 3, the task purpose of the "Revision Reflection" seems to be to encourage students to reflect "about your [sic] own strengths, weaknesses and processes of revision". An examination of this piece of work showed the revisions to be mainly at the level of grammatical rather than meaning level. Little metacognitive awareness of specific revision and writing skills is shown in the reflection. This can be seen in Beth's answer to Question (4) where a general answer is given: "Before my revision I sort of knew what I was doing so I got a low grade. After my revision I knew what I was doing. I know the story and how to do it a bit more."

Unlike the direct instruction given for learning how to write in Beth's English 12 class, it seems there is little direct instruction in the AP English class. The one time there was "explicit" instruction on writing in AP English, it was linked to the study of a text about writing. The students read William Zinsser's *On Writing* and reflected on their own writing styles in light of Zinsser's advice on writing well. This highlights the text-focused

nature of class where students have to discover meaning for themselves, and learn to reflect on texts. Hannah writes:

Writing to Discover: With regards to thinking before I write, I am a little bit of both qualities. I construct my sentences in my mind before I write them. I know usually, how I want each sentence to flow and what I want to deliver. One thing I do like to see on paper and how it looks are the words I use. I do not mean small or necessary words, but larger words, usually adjectives. This way, I can decide if it is really appropriate and how it fits in with the rest of the sentence.

Rather than focus on specific pieces of writing, the study of a text on writing becomes the occasion for reflection on the student's own writing. Intertextual connections between text and self are made as the student reflects on her own style of writing. The focus is on writing style rather than on the conventions of writing.

In Hannah's interview, she expressed her inability to handle poetry as well as prose. Her writing is tied quite concretely to her knowledge. Hannah wishes for more scaffolds where she is uncertain of her content, and because she does not have the same mastery of poetry as she does prose, she finds the interpretive process more difficult. Her lack of knowledge of the content (which includes ways of interpreting the poetic text) affects her writing ability. The interconnectedness of her knowledge of reading to the quality of Hannah's writing can be seen when contrasting her essays. In an essay where Hannah has to compare two poems (Figure 4), she starts with the broad statement that "Poems can be compared no matter how different they may seem." She continues the first paragraph with what her teacher terms a "vague A.T.S." or articulated thesis statement

and goes on to compare the two poems by going through a checklist reminiscent of the poetry analysis chart, albeit in prose form. Rather than analysing key differences and including relevant textual information, Hannah includes all the information on the analysis chart without really organizing the information in a more cohesive manner.

In contrast, Hannah's essay about Toni Bambara's *The Lesson* (Figure 5) shows more skill at extracting main ideas and using textual evidence to support her argument. In her introductory paragraph, Hannah focuses on the issue of identity conflict. Even though there is a planning sheet where she has to find various examples from the text in relation to point of view, she re-works the information into a coherent essay based around the notion of identity conflict rather than use the textual evidence as the main movers of her argument.

The structural scaffolds for reading in both the reading of poetry and prose provided a way for Hannah to access the textual information to support her reading. However, her unfamiliarity with the poetic form caused her to fall back on the structural scaffolds for reading and apply them to her thinking and writing. Rather than comparing the poems using larger thematic analysis, Hannah relied on the structural scaffolds meant to help with the reading for her writing when she is less able to get a handle on the content-matter. She fits the writing into her familiar 5-paragraph essay and so fulfils the form of good writing. However, organizationally, her thinking has not been stretched towards larger thematic comparisons for the two poems.

One other observation is how the school policy of focusing on the "articulated thesis statement" (Baker, 2007) is echoed by both teachers. Comments on the "A.T.S." abound in both students' work, and it seems that school policy has had an impact on at

least one definition of “good” writing. In her interview, Hannah remarks that while there is less explicit instruction this year, she did learn a lot about writing in her Government class in 11th grade where she learnt that her writing should “have at least five paragraphs, thesis” and practiced writing articulated thesis statements. Other students interviewed echoed the importance of the A.T.S.(Baker, 2007), showing how school policy can profoundly affect perceptions and practices of writing in the classroom and at student level. At Riverside, the A.T.S. has become a way to talk about good informational writing across the curriculum, and teachers as well as students internalize the language with which to evaluate the students’ writing.

Finally, it is clear that Hannah’s writing in the classroom is very much test-directed by the AP examinations even though she does not do practice papers all the time. She writes to learn the content matter – reading of literary texts – in a way which is appropriate to learning to read and interpret closely, with particular attention to literary devices; and she learns to write an extended essay, engaging in discussion about a literary text and its themes. It becomes clear here why AP English class makes little connection to life. Literary study as perceived in this particular classroom as a discipline that requires a rigorous attention to text and the context of the text, paying little attention to the reader’s transaction with the text. Hence, the focus in the class on the ideas that influenced these writers rather than on the connections that students as readers make to life. Connections to life are only relevant insofar as they help students to understand the text in context.

Discussion

This close analysis of two students' written work in their English class reveal the kinds of writing that two particular students do in their English class, and how teachers transmit what they value and believe in through their writing tasks, their comments, and their grading system. School policy which creates a common terminology and uses a common rubric help the staff and student to internalize a certain language for talking about what constitutes "good" writing in the school context (and presumably, for out-of-school contexts) and testing can affect the curriculum selection, instructional style and students' perceptions of what constitutes good writing in general and within the discipline.

The emphases of the teachers in the two classes reveal the different influences towards their view of the instruction of literature. For Mrs. M. in English 12, reader response theory, and a mix of teaching literature for language acquisition and student-centered teaching approaches dominate. For Mrs. F. in AP English, historical and New Critical ideas take precedence over the student's personal responses, and curriculum choice and instructional method seems to be driven by the idea of transmission of cultural heritage and "accurate" readings of great works of literature. The teachers' hidden curriculum that reflects their values and ideas are conveyed through the types of writing tasks that they set in the classroom, and through the expectations they have for "good" students of English.

The description and analysis of the written work of Beth and Hannah show two very different classrooms that are similar in some ways. While both classes are English classes, they are driven by different aims. AP English is about literary study whereas

English 12 is really about learning how to use the English language, particularly in informational ways, even though the literary text remains a central tenet of English instruction. While literary terms are somewhat relevant to the study of the literary texts in English 12, what is far more important are the students' abilities to use the texts to make connections to life. Hence, Beth's writing tends towards research-based connections to life type of assignments. On the other hand, because literary study is the explicit goal of Hannah's AP English course, her reading spans a wide range of texts, and her writing helps her to connect with the texts under study. Connections to life are relevant only insofar as they help her to understand the literary text and its themes.

In both classes, keeping to proper writing conventions including correct grammar and spelling, working on the organization, and displaying relevant knowledge of text and interpretation abilities (as shown in the writing) are skills that both Hannah and Beth must master to fit in with the identity of a "good" English student. However, instructional style and expectations differ because of the different aims of the their teachers. Because the focus of Mrs. F.'s AP English class is on literary study, she works with the assumption that the students are already at some level of competence when it comes to the conventions of writing, and focuses on writing informational essays that prepare her students for the AP test. For Mrs. M., she expects to use the literary text as a resource for her students to learn about vocabulary and conventions of writing. She designs extended writing tasks around research assignments which help students make connections to life, and these connections to life serve as a platform for students to practice their research and informational writing skills. Both teachers convey their expectations through regular structurally similar writing tasks (short answer questions and vocabulary quizzes for Beth

analysis charts and Major Works of Literature Data Sheets for Hannah), extended writing assignments (research papers for Beth and timed writing assignments for Hannah) and through their system of evaluation (rubrics, transmission of oral information taken down by students as notes, teacher's written comments on written work). The written assignments, together with the explicit class instruction driven by testing, school policy and teacher values, sets up a class culture, some of it explicit, some implicit, of what it means to be a good student of English in these two classes.

In both their classes, Hannah and Beth are writing to learn and learning to write. Through the writing tasks given to help with learning, they learn that there are particular ways of reading that are suitable for their identity as students of English, and what counts as being literate. The different types of written work and the different lengths of work assignment may be a reflection of the expectations of their teachers and also of the different opportunities afforded by the written work assigned. With regard to learning to write in a particular genre suited to the discourse, the school's emphasis on the articulated thesis statement has made it easy for students to think about their writing in very structured ways, though perhaps limiting in others. Because both a literary essay and research paper are information-type essays, teachers in both classes can use the same rubric to direct their instruction and student writing towards a common language for talking about writing, while focussing specifically what research papers and literary essays should look like.

Additionally, in order to write a good essay, one has to know how to go about finding the data, reading (or interpreting) and presenting the information in a way which is suitable for the particular audience. Hannah's analysis charts and other close reading

exercises teach her that close reading is an important skill in reading literary texts, and that supports her ability to glean evidence in support of her arguments when writing her essays. In Beth's English 12, the focus on research skills and the process-oriented approach of the research write-up conveys the message that the ability to search for information online and to find facts and data to support one's argument is important. Equally important is the process of revision to improve on the work. Unfortunately, the revision process in Beth's work tends to hover at the level of the conventions of writing rather than moving up one notch to revision of meaning as well as technicalities. In Hannah's AP English class, the message conveyed through the timed writing assignments is the idea that good writing must be produced on demand, shaped in large part by the demands of the testing system. Both Hannah and Beth have to master ways of good writing in the classroom that are layered with the complexities of school policy, high stakes testing, and teacher beliefs in order to do well. The measure of success for both students seem to be the ability to write well enough for college level, though they may have differing expectations for the kinds of continuing education they will pursue.

This close analysis clearly demonstrates that writing cannot be separated from thinking or ways of knowing (in this case, particular ways of reading) about particular discipline, and the discipline of English can play out differently in different classrooms depending on the testing, school policy and the teacher's theoretical beliefs and assumptions about literature and literature instruction. As the study of these two students' work from two classrooms illustrate, the teacher's literary background and beliefs in the aims of literature teaching impact upon the kinds of assignments that students are given, and these assignments drive the learning in these classrooms. Different paradigms of the

discourse of literature and theories of literature instruction dominate different classrooms. The number and choice of texts studied and the types of writing assignments given, and teacher instruction in the classroom all mirror the values that are caught by the students and adopted as they work towards meeting the expectations set for them. While students have some control in negotiating their degree of engagement with the task, the task set by the teacher can direct the kind of learning that takes place in substantive ways. Teachers who are aware of these paradigms and their implications are in a better position to judge the efficacy of the writing tasks and writing culture that they construct.

In designing class assignments, teachers will do well to consider the complex interplay of teacher expectations, student expectations together with the task potential for learning, set in the context of the particular classroom. Figure 6 illustrates how the writing process and product is composed of a complex interplay of teacher's expectations, student expectations and the task potential set within the class culture. The way writing tasks are designed and implemented serve to create a particular culture, not just of writing, but also of reading and thinking suitable to the teacher's goals for learning. In order to do so, clarity of approach and learning purpose must guide the design and assignment of the writing tasks that students are asked to complete in the classroom. When there is clarity of approach and learning purpose, the teacher can scaffold (Applebee & Langer, 1983; Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976) the student's learning towards the aims and discourse of the discipline.

The teacher's awareness of how the writing task can contribute to both learning to write and writing to learn will enlarge the potential for learning through writing. At a meta-cognitive level, teachers can articulate their aims to the students and become more

aware of the potential and pitfalls of the writing task. Also, it becomes a way through which teachers can examine if the scaffolds designed for the task may be at times limited or even constrain the learning that is taking place – a writing task that has worked well at the beginning of the year may require change at a later part of the year. In my analysis of this data and other data of work across subjects and students, it seems to me that attention needs to be paid not just to what is visible – the writing and reading – but also the kinds of thinking that a task demands. Understanding the kinds of cognitive demands that a task places on a student allows the teacher to design a writing task to enhance thinking and learning, and to scaffold students in appropriate ways. Perhaps, in the design and instruction of writing tasks, we can begin to explicitly ask what the cognitive potential of the task is and how it can be best encouraged in the literature classroom.

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Figure Captions

Figure 1. Poetry Analysis for Robert Frost's *Fire and Ice* (Hannah, Not Dated).

Figure 2. Major Works of Literature Data Sheet for Flannery O'Connor's *A Good Man is Hard to Find*, page 1 (Hannah, 1/24/2007).

Figure 3. Revision reflection on essay (Beth, 10/13/2006).

Figure 4. Opening paragraphs of Poetry Analysis Essay on Elizabeth Bishop's *The Fish* and Adrienne Rich's *Diving into the Wreck* (Hannah, 10/8/2006).

Figure 5. Opening paragraphs of *The Lesson* essay (Hannah, 17/2007).

Figure 6. Interaction of teacher expectations, task potential and student expectations as considerations for the process and product of written tasks.

Figures

Figure 1

Nouns words	verbs words	Genre, style, rhetoric	Significance
World fire ice desire hate destruction	Say End taste hold favor perish know suffice	• poem • 1920	World: encompasses something on a large scale. Suggests that the effects will reach more than one person.
		form? Rhyme Scheme?	fire/ice: presents a contrast. the author favors fire. This is in regard to "desire". probably symbolic of choices. taste/hold - reference to 2 of the 5 senses, very human ~ brings this factor into the idea of choice.
			desire/hate: another strong contrast. puts a parallel between the ideals of choice.
			Suffice: suggests that something is good enough but not the best. Perhaps talking about defeat.

Connect to
literary devices

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Figure 2

Major Works of Literature Data Sheet

<p>Title: A Good Man is Hard to Find</p> <p>Author: Flannery O'Connor</p> <p>Date of Publication: 1953</p> <p>Genre: Contemporary, Short Story Southern Gothic (style)</p>	<p>Biographical Information about the Author:</p> <p>(1925)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Born in Savannah, GA. Raised in Milledgeville, GA. Spent much time in the North, graduated from the Georgian State College for Women, got an M.F.A. at the Univ. of Iowa. Moved to NYC, did some writing, contracted Lupus. Moved back to GA. Much other work was published after her death.
<p>Historical Information about the period of publication:</p> <p>A Roman Catholic in the largely Protestant South.</p>	<p>Characteristics of the Genre:</p> <p>Southern, gothic</p>
<p>Plot Summary:</p> <p>A family is setting out to go on a trip. Everybody wants to go to Florida except the grandmother who wants to go to Tennessee. She tells the family about how the criminal who escaped from the jail, "The Misfit" is on the loose. The father is not swayed and they set out for Florida. Along the way the grandmother talks of an old house. They decide to go see it and turn off onto a dirt path. After not finding it, the grandmother becomes embarrassed because she told the family the wrong state + in effect knocks the car which jumps on (and startles) the father who gets into an accident. Going down an embankment, everybody lives, surprisingly. A car of three men goes by and stops to "help" them. The grandmother recognizes one of them as the Misfit. The other two henchmen take away the father + boy and shoot them. They eventually take away the mother, girl, and baby and shoot them as well. The grandmother is left with the Misfit. They have a debate/discussion (heatedly) about Jesus. The grandmother eventually reaches out and touches the man saying he is her son; she is shot as well.</p>	

Figure 3

Revision Reflection

Directions: Think carefully about your own strengths, weaknesses and your process of revision. Answer the following questions in complete sentences.

1. Explain 3 reasons why writers revise.

1. to get a better grade.
2. to look over to see what I did wrong.
3. so they could get the story out and people would notice it.

2. Explain the step-by-step process you used to revise your examples paragraph.

I first looked over my paper to see what I did wrong. Then I looked at the one example we had to highlight over and over again. After that I started typing it on my computer. I looked at the directions and my old paragraph and the example throughout the time I was typing the paragraph. But I did use the

3. Explain why your writing is more-effective now. Be specific and use the correct terminology (topic sentence, supporting details, etc.).

Writing can be effective than it once was when people first wrote the essays. My writing is more effective now because now I know what I'm doing. I know what I'm looking for, or looked for. It explains now explains that I understand the directions and the essay.

4. How much more effective is your writing now that you have revised it? Give yourself a "before" and "after" grade for each of your paragraphs.

Before my revision I sort of knew what I was doing so I got a low grade. After my revision I knew ~~my~~ what I was doing. I know the story and how to do it a lot more.

Figure 4

10-8-06 AP English Poetry Analysis Essay

Poems can be compared no matter how different they may seem. Two poems that are different in many senses, but that may be compared as well are "^{The Fish}~~One Fish~~" by Elizabeth Bishop and "Diving into the Wreck" by Adrienne Rich. These two poems can be analyzed in two very different ways, but they also parallel each other on many levels.

^{The Fish}~~One Fish~~ is a poem by Elizabeth Bishop. In this poem, the author is speaking in a narrative style. The speaking occasion appears to be the catching of a large fish; though this is probably metaphorical. The poem is written to a general audience. The vocabulary of the poem is fairly straightforward, but the word 'rosettes' ^(line 11) means a rose-like cluster of something. 'Entrails' ^(line 14 ref.) is also found later on in the poem and it means the insides of the fish; the intestines, stomach, etc. In this poem, the author makes use of dashes as well as many commas. These indicate the continuation of thought. The poem is telling a story. It is not really a continuation of feelings, but more a continuation of events; and therefore, it ^{verb agreement} is ~~kept~~ ^{verb} flowing in sequence by these punctuations. At the very end, there is an exclamation point. This exclamation point is used to indicate excitement; the excitement of the buildup to letting the fish free. The utilization of this expression of excitement indicates that letting the fish go free is somewhat of a monumental and probably not premeditated event. ^{quote this line for support}

very vague A.T.S.
Which are? How so?

Figure 5

1-7-07

AP Eng. Per. 9
"The Lesson" essay

Most pieces of literature have a central theme at the heart of their plot. One finds an extremely poignant theme within the short story, "The Lesson" by Bambara. Encompassed within a story about class struggle and social shortcomings of African-American children living in the city is the theme of knowing and finding one's identity. The story is narrated by one of the young disadvantaged children. She cannot be directly characterized, mainly because she is conflicted in many ways. Her identity is a bit scattered within her own mind because she doesn't know where she wants to fit in. One is able to see the conflict of identity within the narrator, Sylvia, through the instance of being embarrassed to go into the toy store, the way she gets so upset with Sugar, and how she disrespects Miss Moore.

Assumptions are often made about characters before one actually gets far into a story. In the short story, "The Lesson", many first impressions are made about the narrator, Sylvia. For one thing, she seems very sure of herself. She doesn't seem timid or at all humble. She is just straightforward, emotionally resilient girl who says what she thinks. That, at least, is the first impression that one would draw from such ^{instances} ~~comments~~ as when she says, "Back in the days when everyone was old and stupid or young and foolish and me and Sugar were the only ones just right..." It appears that nothing can make her feel bad about who she is and where she comes from, although some people might think that she would feel inferior. She simply seems as if she cannot be brought down. The clues that one might pick up from the story to come to this characterization of Sylvia become muddled when she and the other children are brought to the toy store by Miss Moore. All of the children look in the windows for awhile and comment on the expensive

Good

Figure 6

