

AFFECT, EXPERIENCE, AND ACCOMPLISHMENT: A CASE STUDY OF TWO WRITERS, FROM FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION TO WRITING IN THE DISCIPLINES

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Research in composition studies, in recent decades, has focused not only on writing in first-year composition (FYC)—its participants, practices, and pedagogies—but also increasingly on what students do and learn as they participate in writing-in-the-disciplines (WID) curricula. As students become more immersed in the work of their majors, they face an increasing array of rhetorical tasks. Support and instruction become more and more the responsibility of their professors in various disciplines, not all of whom have academic preparation in the teaching of writing. Writing projects take on increasingly sophisticated topics and codified conventions. As students progress from FYC to WID, their development as writers may—or may not—continue, depending upon a host of individual and contextual factors.

A number of longitudinal studies have helped identify characteristics and contexts common to literacy development in the disciplines. In *Worlds Apart*, Patrick Dias et al. conclude that for a host of reasons, the direct transfer of writing skill from one milieu (such as FYC) to another (such as most WID courses) is nearly impossible; yet “portable” skills, such as stylistic flexibility and lexical sophistication, must be “cultivated as a habit and engaged across the curriculum” in order for growth to occur

(232). In *Rehearsing New Roles*, the most successful students are those willing to take on new challenges, employing meta-cognitive awareness to determine, and respond to, the challenges of each new situation (Carroll). The case studies presented in *Persons in Process* demonstrate significant improvement in students' command of academic discourse, attributed in part to important connections between their personal and academic lives (Herrington and Curtis). Chris Thaiss and Terry Myers Zawacki, meanwhile, in *Engaged Writers and Dynamic Disciplines*, point to students' understanding of majors as coherent fields of diverse voices—ones within which they must realize their own ideas—as crucial to their development as disciplinary writers.

For students to develop as disciplinary writers in the college years, these studies suggest, they must not only work willingly on existing skills, but also find connections between the personal and academic, embrace increasingly varied challenges, and seek to locate themselves purposefully in an evolving discourse community. Also crucial to students' development in WID courses appears to be the support of faculty and programs. The graduating seniors interviewed by Richard Light in *Making the Most of College* point in particular to the importance of junior- and senior-level instruction to their development as writers. The aforementioned and other studies highlight the efforts of faculty who build on students' FYC work to help them understand the role of WID (Beaufort; Carter; McCarthy; Russell and Yanez; Walvoord and McCarthy). These studies suggest that students can develop a reflective awareness of disparate WID conventions when their intellectual activity gains strong institutional and instructional support.

An undergraduate degree program is short, and the sets of tasks students encounter can vary widely. With the complexities of learning to write in academic disciplines in mind, we sought to examine the progress of individual writers as they transitioned from FYC to their later WID. Do students improve their abilities in FYC? Do they work to continue to develop their skills beyond FYC? Do they find, or create, the connections between the

personal and academic? Do they embrace the increasingly varied challenges of the tasks they face? Do they develop nuanced or sophisticated understandings of discourse communities?

This mixed-method, longitudinal case study follows two student writers from their experience in FYC to their studies as graduating seniors in specific majors. Despite their having undertaken very different paths towards their academic degrees, the students whose work we profile exhibit some commonalities of personal affect, instructional experience, and individual accomplishment, ones that lead to significant growth and success as writers in their respective disciplines. Ultimately, the cases presented here bring into meaningful focus a complex set of factors—some individual, others institutional—that can result in the productive development of student writing ability.

Methods

Our study was conducted at a comprehensive Midwestern public four-year university requiring a single FYC course bearing four credit hours. Taught by a range of instructors, from teaching assistants to adjunct, temporary, full-time, and tenured faculty, FYC includes a significant reading component, typically culminating in a substantial source-based argumentative research project. Beyond FYC, each major program offers at least two required WID courses: these bear the responsibility of providing instruction in the techniques and conventions of writing in specific disciplines.

The two students whose work is profiled here are college seniors selected from a subset of those who had participated in an earlier study of FYC. The earlier study began with a statistically random sampling of FYC students; the subset from which these two students were selected was limited to those who had continued their college careers at the same institution, who were near graduation, and who expressed a willingness to participate.

Participants were offered a \$50 gift card to the university bookstore in exchange for their participation.¹ Initially, fourteen students agreed to the study, though two did not continue.

Twelve students completed the full round of surveys, interviews, and portfolios; their participation was voluntary and solicited in full cooperation with IRB regulations. Of the twelve, two students exhibited nearly no growth from FYC to WID, while ten students in all demonstrated consistent development in the transition from FYC to WID. The two students profiled here were especially noticeable for their strikingly significant development as writers, both in FYC and in their later WID courses.

Baseline Data: First-Year Composition

The current project uses results of an earlier FYC study as baseline data. In that earlier study, students' FYC papers were evaluated for evidence of accomplishment in six areas linked to the institution's outcomes: argument, purpose, language, conventions, documentation, and overall performance. The papers included pairs written to similar prompts by the same students at the beginning and again at the end of the term, with each paper rated twice in a blind review using a carefully designed scoring guide. The results of the project showed students to enter FYC with at best marginal writing abilities. Yet better-than-acceptable performance was evident by the course's conclusion. For the larger population improvement was clearly evident, especially in students' abilities to argue with evidence, address an audience, and document sources. Ten of the twelve student writers participating in our longitudinal project—including the two subjects of this case study—demonstrated considerable improvement in FYC.

Current Focus: Writing in the Disciplines

In order to examine more closely the individual students' transition from their FYC courses to their later academic work in their chosen majors, we collected and triangulated data from multiple sources. The earlier study provided source-based argument papers and performance assessments from students' FYC classes. Additionally, for comparative purposes, our

participants completed a questionnaire from the National Survey of Student Engagement's Writing Practices Consortium about their experience in both their FYC and WID courses.² Then, each student participated in three extended interviews following the methodology described by Grant McCracken in *The Long Interview*, each exploring a specific domain: the first, FYC; the second, WID; and the third, a comparison of FYC and WID. Interviews were conducted by a team of trained undergraduate research interns using prepared instructions and scripts.³ Finally, portfolios of WID projects were collected from each participant. Ultimately, the volume and variety of data—writing samples, questionnaire results, extended interviews, and performance assessments—present a detailed portrait of these student writers as they negotiate the transition from FYC to WID.

PARTICIPANTS

This study's two central participants are identified by pseudonyms to preserve their anonymity.

Kate

As an undeclared major with interests in science and the environment upon entering the university, Kate indicated in her interviews that she generally enjoyed writing. In the earlier study of FYC, Kate demonstrated improvement in all areas. She complemented her academic work with occasional creative endeavors and participated actively in the university's environmental club. As a senior Biology major, her primary writing projects consisted of lab reports and case studies. Kate's WID work is reflective of her positive attitude toward and strong work ethic for writing. Her written work evidences especially strong understandings of audience, context, and purpose, and it is consistently sophisticated in its development of content.

Mary

Also undeclared as a first-year student, Mary began her university studies with an interest in language and a record of

achievement in athletics. Her FYC work also demonstrated strong improvement in multiple areas. By her senior year, completing a double teaching major in TESOL and Spanish Education, Mary produced a wide range of different genres—library research papers, empirical research papers, literature reviews, annotated bibliographies, lesson plans, and teaching philosophies. A successful student-athlete and a self-described perfectionist with aspirations for graduate study, Mary displays a rigorous work ethic, a deep and broad knowledge base, and a professed interest in writing and language.

Data: First-Year Composition and Writing in the Disciplines

Kate and Mary each underwent very different experiences as undergraduates, from enrolling in different sections of FYC with different readings and instructors to declaring distinct majors with contrasting sets of expectations and requirements. Yet their experience exhibited many commonalities of personal affect, instructional experience, and individual accomplishment.

First-Year Composition

Kate: “I wanted to learn how to separate my writing styles.”

Her major undeclared as an undergraduate new to the university, Kate considered her work in high school to have provided more solid preparation than had that of her peers. She began FYC with an interest in the environmental sciences and a positive attitude toward writing. She specifically commented on the value of in-class invention work, from journaling to brainstorming to discussing ideas, as well as frequent opportunities to discuss her projects with her professor and peers. In particular, Kate referenced the value of peer-editing, individual conferences, and revision opportunities as allowing her to complete assignments with success. Her FYC section emphasized process, syntax, grammar, usage, and research as students wrote

in different genres, with the course assignments culminating in an extended research paper.

Kate wrote a variety of projects in FYC and enjoyed a considerable degree of latitude in selecting topics. She fondly recalls a memoir assignment: “I had to find a way to make a memory as truthful as possible and still be interesting and have it be a story.” In subsequent interviews, Kate would profess a fondness for creative writing that continued throughout her college career. At the time, however, she dismissed its utility as something for students “who major in English.” Still, being able to work in different genres, Kate feels, allowed her to “learn how to separate my writing styles.”

More germane to her development as a writer, Kate feels, was her research writing in FYC. Her final project for the course was a research paper on the effects of globalization on food safety and nutrition, arguing for the benefits of greater local production and control. Kate’s process for the paper included such traditional steps as developing an annotated bibliography and a set of explanatory footnotes prior to the submission. The final project is substantive, at eleven pages long, with well-developed arguments based on nine sources and incorporating a number of subtopics, from packaging and preservation to contamination and bioterrorism. Kate’s sources are not particularly scientific, but she does demonstrate through her use of them an ability to employ the university databases to find credible secondary sources, and she puts data from them to good use, quoting purposefully and paraphrasing efficiently. Kate also demonstrates here some developing syntactic dexterity, mixing complex and subordinated constructions with shorter, simpler, more emphatic constructions, as she does here in her forecast and thesis sentence:

As the world’s leaders are pushing towards complete globalization, we are creating great stress on the environment, putting the quality and safety of our food on the line, and pushing small farms out of business. Where there is now globalization, we need localization.

Despite an occasional dependence on weak verbs and imprecise diction, Kate's prose is clear and correct, having been proofread and revised to good results.

Our prior, broader study of FYC allowed us to compare Kate's end-of-semester work with a similar assignment she had completed earlier in the term. Early on, Kate had composed a multi-source paper on teen driving, one that exhibited a number of problems not at all evident in her later work. Her "Teen Driving" paper lists a limited number of internet sources, but it does not quote, paraphrase, or cite parenthetically (or otherwise) any of them precisely. Despite being arranged loosely according to three broad topics (existing laws, parental influence, and restrictions on alcohol advertising), neither this macro-level organization nor the micro-level development leads to a clear thesis, and the development in particular suffers from overly long, meandering paragraphs, sometimes in support of claims as obtuse as this: "Two extremes are present among parents involving their influence on their children. Although there is a middle between the two extremes, the highest level of influence is present at the opposite end of the scale."

Kate's work parallels that of many students whose work we examined in FYC, both in the characteristics exhibited at the start of the term and in the considerable improvement charted by its conclusion. Her paper on "Teen Driving" shows at best a rudimentary understanding of organization and development and no real ability to use and cite source material, problems compounded by a lack of control at the paragraph and sentence levels. However, Kate's final paper for the course demonstrates significant accomplishment in all of these areas. By the end of the term, Kate is using not only better source material, culled primarily from library databases, she is using that material to good purpose, with appropriate quotation, paraphrase, and summary, all of it documented with an effective use of parenthetical citation. The overall argument is developed with concision, precision, and nuance, anticipating counterarguments and advocating for a clear position.

Viewed in retrospect, Kate's efforts in FYC can only be seen as successful. She wrote with success in a variety of genres, developed a number of purposeful writing habits, enjoyed her interactions with her colleagues and instructor, and demonstrated significant improvement during the course of the semester. Her ability to develop topics relevant to her interests in the environment and her improvement as a researcher helped lead, we feel, to success that would continue beyond FYC and into her major.

Mary: "Focusing on language made me a lot more aware."

Like Kate, Mary enjoyed a successful experience in FYC, having come to college with strong skills in language arts and high expectations for her own performance. Her professor assigned a variety of writing projects including a narrative essay, reading responses and analyses, and multiple research papers, these last increasing in scope and complexity throughout the term.

Mary's FYC section also emphasized numerous elements of the writing process, but her engagement in these stages and activities was somewhat idiosyncratic. While class discussions helped suggest potential topics for writing projects, Mary would rarely engage in formal invention activities such as brainstorming or freewriting, preferring instead to work through potential ideas and patterns in her head or with others verbally, indicating that if she couldn't "vocalize what I was thinking . . . before I had to sit down and write it," she knew she would have to research further before drafting. Her experience with peer review was not dissimilar: she participated in class exercises as required but gained little constructive criticism from doing so, and as a result developed her own method of self-critique, focusing especially on coherence, cohesion, and syntax. She also acknowledges that, having heard FYC professors value improvement, she intentionally wrote below her full level of ability for her first (minor) assignments in the course, although she did acknowledge trying to write her best through the majority of the term.

Daily writing practice in FYC afforded Mary the opportunity to develop her ideas and skills. Mary's instructor focused on uses of language, and classroom lessons, conducted with good will and quirky humor, helped create a strong social atmosphere where everyone felt comfortable working with everyone else. Among the foremost lessons of the course, she recalls, was that her writing needed to answer the question "So what?" by its conclusion. In other words, readers needed to understand *why* what they had read was important—a lesson that would resonate with Mary for the duration of her college career.

A source-based paper Mary wrote early in the semester, "Euphemisms and the Debate on Vegetarianism," cites its few general web sources—Tyson Foods, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, and the American Meat Institute—accurately to analyze each group's use of language in perpetuating its cause. Her paper is carefully organized, but one can see in it only a developing control of prose style. Though grammatically correct, sentences are rarely complex or modified, and when so, only with simple subordination. Many sentences, often in sequence, rely on weak verbs and ambiguous pronouns, and even Mary's thesis—"There are many euphemisms and differing terms surrounding the controversy of vegetarianism"—suffers from a pronounced lack of specificity. Many paragraphs conclude obliquely with sentences using an inexact subject pronoun (most typical is the "this is" construction), and the paper as a whole concludes only tamely that "In the debate of vegetarianism, these euphemisms are ever present. If one wishes to make a stance on the issue, it is necessary to examine these terms."

Mary's final paper from FYC, "In Support of Bilingual Education in the United States," presents a concise rebuttal of the conventional arguments against bilingual education. Written in response to course readings, Mary's paper uses just a handful of sources, but these are culled carefully from various databases: a CNN report on the Hispanic population boom; United States census data from the Social Science Data Analysis Network; documents from the Center for Applied Linguistics; and academic

research published in *Bilingual Research Journal*. These sources—all of them carefully introduced and correctly cited in MLA format—provide the supporting evidence for Mary’s claims. Further, their cumulative authority helps Mary build an ethos of credibility as she develops the argument.

“In Support of Bilingual Education” evidences an occasional overreliance on weak verbs and ambiguous pronouns, but to significantly lesser extent than in Mary’s earlier work. Her argument is organized carefully with an efficient dismissal of arguments against bilingualism followed by a *précis* of her arguments for it:

There are many reasons to support bilingual education in the U.S. It provides equal opportunities for non-native English speakers in the academic environment. It also conserves other languages and cultures while adding the knowledge of English to a student’s repertoire. Furthermore, with some forms of bilingual education it is possible for English students to learn another language while non-native speakers learn English. Most importantly, bilingual education can be used to integrate all students so there is a sense of unity in the class which later translates to society.

Each of these claims, then, is in sequence articulated and supported in the paper’s subsequent paragraphs, a strategy that Mary had learned well by semester’s end. It would not be until later in her college years that Mary would hone her prose technique, but by the conclusion of her FYC course, she had improved her writing significantly. Her work demonstrates substantial investment in the topic, a well-reasoned and developed argument, and effective rhetorical techniques. The “So what?” question is answered, with emphasis. In addition, her paper demonstrates an advanced ability to locate and use information from multiple scholarly databases and sources. In her first year of college, Mary proved herself a savvy, adept, *intentional* learner,

one who could adapt the learning environment to her own needs as she balanced her athletics and academics. Clearly, her FYC course is one Mary enjoyed, from the pith and pitch of the instruction to the collegiality of the classroom environment.

Charles Bazerman argues for engagement and situatedness as central to good writing pedagogy: “The best way to learn the power of writing,” he writes, “is to write and become engaged in a compelling discourse. Then you learn that the hard work of writing well is worth it” (257). For Mary, this engagement is made manifest in the class’s broad focus on the topic of language. Within that reasonably broad focus, there existed ample opportunity to select topics in ways that proved to be profoundly important to Mary’s eventual choice of a course of study and career. “It made me a lot more aware,” she concludes, “of how language worked.”

Writing in the Disciplines

Kate: “With more knowledge and more experience, I’ve been able to make my writing better.”

A Biology major concentrating in ecology and allied health, Kate completed courses in conservation, physics, anatomy, organismal diversity, biochemistry, biometry, and immunology during her senior year. As a consequence, the majority of Kate’s writing takes place in laboratory-oriented classes, with reports following a fairly standard pattern of abstract, introduction, literature review, materials and methods, results, and discussion. Devoted to her field of study and fully engaged in its contents and conventions, Kate sees writing a lab report as an opportunity “to gain a better understanding of what you did in the experiment,” and acknowledges its heuristic value: “I always realize things I didn’t realize when just doing the experiment.” Almost every comment from Kate’s interviews speaks positively to her understanding of writing as a means of learning and communicating that knowledge with others.

Also germane to Kate's positive attitude towards writing in her discipline is her professed fondness for creative writing. Even while disavowing its utility, she enjoyed composing a memoir in FYC, and an "Intro to Creative Writing" class, completed as a general-education elective in sophomore year, further sparked her interest in literary pursuits. Both before and since completing that course, Kate continued to write creatively on her own. The conflict between literary and scientific prose may prove daunting to some students, but for Kate, the contrast has been illuminating: "I'm able to judge what the audience is going to know already and use that [to inform] my writing," she says. As Dias et al. observe, general writing competence may not transfer directly from one milieu to another, but selective skills such as syntactic and lexical sophistication are indeed "portable" from one task to the next (201). Her heavy load of science courses in her senior year precludes much creative output, but she understands well the distinctions she needs to observe when writing for one audience as opposed to another.

Writing in these senior-level science courses has also presented Kate with many opportunities to hone the research skills she had begun developing in FYC. Her work in FYC demonstrated a developing ability to locate and use authoritative sources to support claims; her report writing in her science courses now routinely employs the university's scientific databases to present medical and scientific research relevant to her current projects. Kate said she is now able to incorporate sources more appropriately in her writing: "I've been able to more subtly include research," she says.

Kate's reports cover such topics as brown trout population studies in local creeks and streams and the presence of microbial properties in various forms of garlic. By senior year, Kate has read and written so many of these lab reports that the structure of them has been fully inculcated. In a longitudinal case study of a science student, Christina Haas observed increasing rhetorical sophistication led to the student's eventual understanding of her reading and research as a part of an apprenticeship (66-69). Kate's

growth is similar. Her own reports adroitly introduce each study, cite relevant literature, and describe the methodology and data with precision. In some instances, the lab report is additionally formatted to resemble a published journal article, with a byline and biography, columnar format, numbered tables and figures, and a keyword-searchable abstract. Requirements such as these help students see themselves in appropriate roles as apprentice writers-in-the-disciplines and familiarize them with the characteristics of the work they are expected, in these roles, to produce. Furthermore, an increased emphasis on presentation of student research at the university has helped create opportunities for Kate and many others to present their work in a public forum.

These laboratory-research reports are hardly the only types of writing Kate produces in her senior year, but they are by far the most common and, as she has come to understand them, the most important. Thaiss and Zawacki, among others, cite the importance of faculty contextualizing their assignments, practices, and feedback, and Kate's instructors routinely provide detailed instructions for projects and emphasize the goals of reading and writing scientific literature. While Kate reports only infrequently discussing writing matters one-to-one with her professors, she has improved her work in at least a few distinct ways since FYC: through an emphasis on concision, the employment of what she calls the "objective style," an embrace of her instructors' "write-to-learn" philosophy, and careful revision and editing.

Early in FYC, Kate's work evidenced a demonstrable lack of concision, her sentences often meandering in search of a conclusion and individual paragraphs reaching (and sometimes crossing) a full page in length. Yet her final paper in FYC showed that she had made considerable progress in this area. By senior year, Kate's research reports in particular are models of concision. Assignment instructions often delimit stringent space requirements, emphasizing presenting what need be said "in as few words as possible." All that matters, Kate says, is "what you found, why it's important, and how you did it," not the "flowery details." Kate's reports evidence this economy on both a macro-

level—where nothing is included that is not absolutely necessary to the description of the experiment—and on the micro-level, where each sentence is cut to eliminate any wordiness.

By senior year, the quantity and type of the writing she has done has also helped reinforce her understanding of what she calls the “objective style” of scientific reporting. Included among the tenets of this style are not only standard patterns of the broad section-level divisions, but within them, the relatively short, discrete, purposeful paragraphs; the unambiguous, precise use of diction; fairly strict commonplaces and conventions for the presentation of data, figures, and tables; and the general effacement of the writer. While Kate has learned all of these techniques of scientific writing well, this last—the avoidance of first-person and the emphasis on the subject—is one worth further comment. Kate’s prose style in FYC might be seen as relatively flat, lacking affect, and overly dependent on passive constructions. Yet her later writing in the disciplines depends on passive constructions common to scientific writing. With vigilant sentence-level revision, Kate makes certain that her reports employ the style her intended readers expect.

It is interesting to witness too Kate’s understanding of the *purpose* of these reports. Kate does not particularly expect each experiment to yield significant results, nor does the lack thereof impact negatively her care with her report-writing. In a circumstance where the results of a specific experiment prove to be insignificant, such as in her paper “The Effect of Garlic Variations on Growth of *Staphylococcus Aureus*” (antimicrobial properties were found in increments in all three variants of garlic—cloves, powder, and flakes—but not to any measurable degree of statistical significance), Kate’s discussion section speculates intelligently on the possible flaws of the original hypothesis, the limitations of the research design, and the necessity of future studies. She has learned from her instructors that flaws in an experiment’s design or execution do not warrant flaws in writing or presentation; conversely, accounting for what does not work in an experiment may instead require extra care to offer readers

strong value in the report's discussion. Further, she notes, "writing out your thoughts is important because it makes you think differently about things"—an indication that Kate sees value in the process of writing-to-learn. In a number of important ways, then, Kate has taken on the discursive practices as well as the habits of mind that are requisites to professional scientific research.

Through all of her work in the major, Kate has become especially diligent at revision and vigilant about proofreading. She writes in other formats, for other audiences, to an extent—a letter to the family of a patient suffering hypertension for her immunology class, for instance—and in these and in all assignments she evidences care with the presentation of her work. From FYC, she learned to be particularly attentive to matters of coherence and concision, and she revises all of her work through multiple drafts and edits to economize as much as possible. This is work that Kate embraces—the revision, proofreading, and editing: "I notice when I read things out loud, I often change the wording or the order of a sentence." Some students see these tasks as unwelcome chores; others avoid them. But Kate continues to follow processes begun in FYC, reading every paper aloud, checking for grammar, spelling, and word choice before submission. Her meticulousness is just one indication of how she takes the writing projects in her field seriously and professionally.

For Kate, writing in the discipline has come to mean, first and foremost, a mastery of the scientific reporting style. Relatively constant practice in report writing has deeply ingrained in her both familiarity with, and respect for, its commonplaces and conventions. What others might see as a slavish obeisance to prescriptive rigidity, Kate sees as purposeful and communicative attention to readers' expectations. In addition, her creative tendencies, fostered largely outside her major field, present no obstacle to her learning, but instead help deepen her understanding of the conventions of her chosen field. "I feel confident in my abilities," Kate says. "With more knowledge and more experience, I've been able to make my writing better."

From FYC to her advanced science courses, Kate has developed significantly as a writer, exhibiting an unfailingly positive attitude towards her writing, enjoying her creative pursuits, and managing her readers' expectations adroitly.

Mary: "I don't want to be like every other writer who doesn't take chances."

By her junior year, Mary had earned herself All-American honors in her sport and settled into a double major in TESOL and Spanish Education. Having dabbled briefly with a more traditional (non-teaching) major in English, Mary completed the gateway course requirements there but then opted for a more "pragmatic" choice of a teaching major. But career pragmatism was not the only driving force behind her decision; her keen interest in applied linguistics, sparked in part by discussion and writing in FYC, helped motivate her work in TESOL as well as in her study of Spanish.

Anne Herrington and Marcia Curtis argue that writing development in the college years is not merely a cognitive matter but also an ethical and emotional one in which growth occurs at the intersection of the personal and the academic (357-58). For Mary, these intersections were many. In addition to the multiple and sometimes conflicting demands of intercollegiate athletics and a double major, she completed an internship on the university's Common Book project, where she selected, promoted, and presented a screening for a related film series and blogged about her reading. (One blog entry discusses her new commitment to vegetarianism, a topic she had explored in FYC and that was reinforced by her reading of the year's common book selection, a novel about the meat industry.) Study abroad in the summer between her junior and senior years helped her identify with the challenges faced by non-native speakers. This led her, in turn, to volunteer as a cultural exchange partner for the international student program and as a tutor for a native Korean-speaking local high-school student. These experiences fostered an even greater thirst for academic linguistic knowledge, so, to supplement her

coursework in TESOL and Spanish, she completed a set of introductory and intermediate courses in Chinese. As an athlete, tutor, scholar, traveler, vegetarian, language-learner, and apprentice teacher, Mary pursued multiple connections between what she studied and what she lived.

Her writing in the two majors nonetheless presented various challenges, however, as Mary strove to learn disciplinary assumptions and conventions that frequently contrasted with one another. For Mary, having written in a wide diversity of genres through her sophomore and junior years proved helpful to her developing considerable stylistic nuance and generic flexibility. Where some writers are vexed by transition from one genre, audience, or purpose to the next, Mary had worked on a considerable variety of projects large and small by senior year: not only the kinds of argument-based research papers she had practiced in FYC, but also literary analyses and explications (in English and Spanish), blog entries, and position papers, among others. By her senior year, most of the writing done in her advanced coursework was limited to teaching philosophy statements written for multiple education courses; lesson plans prepared for her methods courses; and research projects in applied linguistics for her TESOL courses, including annotated bibliographies, literature reviews, and case studies.

Of these three general categories of projects completed during senior year, Mary finds the least satisfaction in (and, perhaps, the greatest frustration with) teaching philosophy statements. Mary bristles at having to adopt the necessary “heartfelt” and “passionate” tone her professors require. “I’ve just learned pretty much to mimic the language of the texts I’ve read,” she says. “Even if that’s not exactly what I think or the exact way I would present information, I do it anyways just to get a good grade.” Since Mary sees these essay requirements as a measure of students’ motivation and commitment, values of her own that are already deeply-ingrained (as evidenced by her academic workload, intercollegiate athletics, and other extracurricular endeavors), these philosophy statements to her were little more than an

exercise in giving her professors what they need. It is worth noting, though, that the essays she composed in response to these assignments adopt the requisite tone and articulate her philosophies in ways that any reader would find wholly convincing. Like the more successful students in Lee Ann Carroll's *Rehearsing New Roles: How College Students Develop as Writers*, Mary works to understand and respond to each new environment, to take on the new challenge, and provide what is asked for.

More pragmatic and purposeful to her needs are the lesson plans Mary develops in methods classes. While these do not require skills in articulating a thesis or developing an argument, Mary finds them to help her “address specific standards and goals efficiently” and to provide useful practice in working with “instructional methods and assessment.” Carefully organized and methodically presented, Mary’s plans inventively integrate literary reading and media texts with state standards, precise outcomes, and student-centered pedagogies. A lesson plan on the *Arabian Nights*, for instance, designed for intermediate ESL students, focuses on reading comprehension with a number of active-learning strategies, doing so with careful display of all of the requisite components required by licensing agencies. It is perhaps not surprising that Mary sees the immediate value in such exercises in the semester preceding her student teaching: she knows that faced with what may be a crowded classroom of second-language learners, under the watchful eye of her supervising teacher, she will need to be able to plan effective classroom activities with clear purpose, intentional design, and precisely-articulated outcomes. A “statement of teaching philosophy,” though not unimportant, surely will matter less in her Monday morning ESL class.

In her TESOL courses, Mary frequently compiles annotated bibliographies, composes literature reviews, designs observational projects, and writes up case studies based on her research. For these, Mary employs APA documentation format (she had learned only MLA in FYC, but exhibited no difficulty with the transition).

Her research work shows her to have developed significant competence and confidence in working within disciplinary convention. The sources employed are located in a small but functional set of university-provided databases: WilsonWeb, J-STOR, IdeaLibrary, Expanded Academic ASAP, and ScienceDirect, and they include both scholarly books from university presses as well as articles from periodicals like *Cognitive Psychology*, *Hispania*, *British Journal of Psychology*, *Social Cognition*, and *Brain and Language*. Mary's ability to navigate and employ these databases is perhaps the most noticeable feature of her senior-year writing, though it must be said that her advanced course of study presents with it a set of its own concepts and terms: *the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis*, *cross-cultural understandings*, *L1 interference*, *contralateral perception*, and *ethno-lingual relativity*. That in just a few years Mary can develop from a novice examination of euphemisms employed in the meat industry to an advanced study of memory storage and narrative recall in second-language composition is hardly unprecedented, but it is nonetheless worth remarking upon.

In their foreword to *Coming of Age: The Advanced Writing Curriculum*, Linda Shamoon et al. insist that advanced writing curricula should prepare students for "highly rhetorical participation in public life" (xv), a prospect for which Mary seems well situated. In her advanced coursework, Mary has developed the abilities to work fluently in varying genres (annotations, plans, cases, philosophy statements) and employ multiple modes of development (narration, exposition, comparison/contrast, definition argument). Perhaps in part because of the diversity of her own linguistic experience, in the classroom, as a tutor, and as a second-language learner abroad, she does not register differences between genres or modes as *obstacles*, but simply as *variables*. In a pragmatic sense, she does "what is necessary" for success in the given situation.

Mary describes nearly all of her interactions with her professors and classmates as successful ones, with professors providing explicit instructions and generally helpful feedback. Even when

she experiences a less-than-optimal instructional experience, such as when in an Education course her professor gives every student the exact same feedback (“add more substance”) or in a TESOL course her professor’s instructions are unclear, her period of being “infuriated,” as she says, does not negatively impact the ultimate quality of her work. On the surface, one might assume that the conventions of her two major fields, language and education, would have much in common, yet to her and to us, the differences between them are more stark—and Mary’s ability to navigate them, more apparent.

Evident everywhere in Mary’s senior-year work are strongly developed streaks of perfectionism and individualism. Acknowledging one of her weaknesses to be grammatical error, she assumes that she may still “make mistakes” in her writing and proofreads every piece of her own work carefully so as to address them. Three years earlier, Mary’s FYC professor told her that awareness of conventions is critical to successful writing, a dictum that still motivates her to judge her own and others’ work scrupulously. Perhaps her most noticeable trait as a writer, however, is her individualism, manifest in her drive to improve her work. Developing her skills—playing with alternative and unusual organizations, experimenting with different syntactic structures, and diligently incorporating disciplinary vocabulary into her growing lexicon—is crucial to her sense of self as a writer. “I don’t want to be like every other writer who doesn’t take chances,” she says. “I want to write something new.”

With a double major, a teaching licensure, intercollegiate athletics, and significant community service, Mary must navigate the varying discourse communities of each of her academic disciplines. In addition, despite her very high level of accomplishment, not every one of her academic endeavors succeeds as intended: in her interviews, Mary pointed out her occasional disappointment with vague feedback and unclear instructions. Yet from FYC to her advanced work in multiple majors, she has developed as a writer in many remarkable ways,

from her capability as a researcher and her fluency in multiple genres to her command of advanced linguistic concepts.

Discussion and Conclusion: Affect, Experience, and Accomplishment

Despite taking on very different majors and tasks as senior-level writers, Mary and Kate both exhibit some very clear similarities in personal affect, instructional experience, and individual accomplishment, ones we observe to have facilitated their considerable development as writers in the college years.

Both Kate and Mary consistently display a set of positive affective behaviors. Neither sees herself as already a “fully developed” writer in any way; in fact, while both are indeed excellent writers, clearly more fluent and accomplished than others in our data set, both Mary and Kate are well aware of their own weaknesses as writers and have worked very hard to address them. Despite her fondness for creative writing and propensity to use poetic language, Kate is vigilant about concision and precision in her laboratory reports. Mary is similar in regards to her specificity and correctness, and she further seeks alternative, better ways of organizing and presenting information. Especially in their interviews, both exhibit positive, sometimes even effusive, attitudes about their writing. Each expresses confidence in her abilities, to be certain, but both also enjoy the process of writing, seeing it as a means of learning, of communication, of expression. Additionally, neither appears particularly daunted by challenges. Kate has had to learn when to restrain her more creative impulses and when to accept the results of unsuccessful experiments. Mary has had to accept, in some instances, vague directions and unsuccessful peer collaborations. Both have had to navigate sets of very distinct generic conventions in their respective disciplines. Mary and Kate view challenges as ways of deepening their learning and increasing their skill sets. In other words, both function as independent, motivated, intentional

learners who are very committed to developing their disciplinary expertise and writing ability alike.

Kate and Mary have also shared a commonality of instructional experience that, beginning in FYC, helped instill in each a set of successful writing practices that they have adapted to their own needs as writers in the disciplines. Both took full advantage of opportunities in FYC to pursue topics related to their own interests—vegetarianism, bilingualism, environmentalism, globalization. From FYC on, both developed their abilities as researchers, encountered high expectations, and engaged in what we might call “elongated” processes for writing projects. Kate and Mary both budget sufficient time to conduct their research, to explore databases, to review data and sources, and to work through multiple drafts and revisions. Kate’s revision work is more limited to sentence-level concision and precision than is Mary’s, whose revisions often include experimentation with different patterns; however, both engage in multiple revisions for almost everything they submit. Additionally, Kate and Mary report having received, more often than not, clear instructions from their professors, samples of student work, and useful feedback, a set of instructional practices that have helped familiarize them with expectations. While both Kate and Mary write in different genres and for different audiences and purposes, neither found doing so particularly confounding, and both too have benefited from the simple repetition of the most common kinds of assignments in their majors.

Finally, perhaps the most salient characteristic both Kate and Mary share is the one that led us to focus this analysis on the two of them in particular: both demonstrate observable, considerable development as writers, beginning in FYC and continuing through their WID courses. The improvement Kate and Mary demonstrate in FYC occurred on multiple levels. Comparing their early work with their final papers indicates, for each, significant improvement in their abilities to articulate thesis statements, develop arguments with evidence, employ authoritative sources, and use language that is concise and varied, precise and unambiguous, clear and

correct. That improvement continued as each faced new challenges in their chosen majors, where Kate and Mary put their increasing rhetorical aptitude to work. If FYC provided both the opportunity to become, as Bazerman advocates, “engaged in a compelling discourse” (257), their later work thrived in part because of the increasing number of writing challenges they would face in subsequent years:

The best way to learn flexibility in writing is to become engaged in a second discourse, and perhaps a third. When you experience the rewards of writing well in one domain, you are likely to demand of yourself that same high level of participation in any discourse you will engage in the future. The lesson that it is worth working hard at writing is perhaps the most important lesson, and it is the one most transferable. (257)

That the level of development registered by Kate and Mary in this study occurs when positive behaviors are reinforced by a supportive instructional experience may be no great surprise. Indeed, any readers who design, offer, and/or oversee either FYC or WID courses may see in Kate and Mary resemblances to students they have known. Their writing development is neither idiosyncratic nor representative, we would claim, but instead *indicative* of what happens when successful higher learning occurs at the intersection of personal affect, instructional experience and individual accomplishment.

Notes

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