Learning to Teach the Five-Paragraph Theme

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The five-paragraph theme, while widely used by writing instructors, has often been criticized for its tendency to focus on a rigid formula rather than a writer's ideas. This study investigates the decision of an early-career teacher, Leigh, to teach her eighth-grade students the five-paragraph model in the context of a state-mandated writing assessment that rewarded such writing. The key settings for Leigh in learning to teach were her structurally fragmented teacher education program, her relationship with her mentor teacher during student teaching, and, as she embarked on her first teaching job, her entry-year supervisory committee and her English department colleagues. Through an activity-theory analysis of field notes, observation-based interviews, and other data, we interpret Leigh's decision-making as a function of her participation in tool-mediated action in these settings. Leigh's teaching was affected by forces without (e.g., community expectations to produce passing scores on the state writing test) and within (e.g., her colleagues' pressure on Leigh to teach to the test). These pressures superceded the motives of other settings in which Leigh participated, primarily her administration's downplay of the need to teach to the test. The study concludes with a reflection on why Leigh in particular and other teachers in general find this form useful enough to serve as a primary tool in their approach to teaching writing.

We want to beat the concept of the five-paragraph theme into their souls.

Thus proclaimed the director of first-year composition at a large state university when explaining a prime goal of its introductory composition courses (M. Faust, personal communication, August 15, 2001). This educator's beliefs about the merits of the five-paragraph theme, if somewhat rabid, represent a pervasive vision of writing instruction in both secondary schools and at least some college composition programs. The five-paragraph theme—a genre Smyth (1994) traces to French philosopher Petrus Ramus in the 16th Century—has long been both a staple of writing instruction and the bane of writing teachers and theorists who find its structure overly rigid and limiting.

The five-paragraph theme's ubiquity is more presumed than documented. Still, some evidence suggests that it is alive and well in composition classes. At a website for students (http://cctc2.commnet.edu/grammar/five_par.htm) that has recorded over 12 million hits as we write, English professor Charles Darling asserts that "A classic format for compositions is the five-paragraph essay. It is not the only format for writing an essay, of course, but it is a useful model for you to keep in mind, especially as you begin to develop your composition skills." This model, regarded by Nunnally (1991) as a "national phenomenon" (p. 68), has long been a warhorse of secondary school grammar and composition books. In *Warriner's English Grammar and Composition* (Kinneavy & Warriner, 1993; Warriner, 1977, 1982, 1986, 1988; Warriner & Griffith, 1963)—described by Applebee (1986) as "the most widely used composition text today" (p. 95) and more recently by Hillocks (1995) as the text that "has dominated the teaching of writing in American high schools" for "nearly the last half of the twentieth century" (p. 113)—the model essay provided, while not explicitly identified as a five-paragraph theme, includes five paragraphs, labeled with the classic five paragraph parts (introduction, three topic or body paragraphs, and conclusion).

This model has been under steady attack by writing teachers and theorists for some time (Adler, 1959; Wallace, 1964). Emig (1971), writing in the wake of the Anglo-American Conference at Dartmouth College in 1966, characterized the five-paragraph theme, the paradigmatic exemplar of the "formalist ideal" (Kennedy, 1998, p. 37), as "so indigenously American that it might be called the Fifty-Star Theme" (p. 97), dismissing it as "pedagogically, developmentally, and politically an anachronism" (p. 100). Rosenwasser and Stephen (1997) view the five-paragraph theme as a Procrustean bed, after the Greek myth of Procrustes, the Attican thief who "offers wayfarers a bed for the night, but with a catch. If they do not fit his bed exactly, he either stretches them or lops off their extremities until they do" (p. 44).

The notion that the model limits students' choices and thinking recurs in critiques of the five-paragraph theme and other form-oriented approaches to teaching writing. Hillocks (1986) concludes that instruction that relies on the imitation of models "leads some students to the notion that they must sit down and produce a finished essay without the necessary intervening processes" (p. 228). It can reduce writing to the reproduction of a clearly specified form governed by rules that strictly prescribe minutiae down to the purpose and syntax of each sentence. In such cases attention to and production of this form become the purpose of writing (Hillocks, 2002). Applebee (1984) reports that students, too, often find the five-paragraph formula to be inadequate, citing one student writer who says that English essays are "supposed to have five paragraphs, a thesis statement, and all that other garbage" (p. 52).

Given the possible deficiencies we have reviewed, one might wonder why this

model now approaches its fifth century of widespread use. Below we consider some possible explanations. These include enculturation to traditions of schooling, limitations of teacher education programs, shortcomings of teachers, poor working conditions, institutional pressures, and a belief in the five-paragraph theme's potential as a useful genre.

The Persistence of the Five-Paragraph Theme

Enculturation to Traditions of Schooling

Bazerman (1994) has argued that "The teacher's history of participation in different situations and developing skill in and affinity towards those genres through which that participation is realized, prepares and predisposes the teacher to act in ways that have already proved personally successful" (p. 27). His observation reinforces Lortie's (1975) conclusion that teachers' views of teaching are in large part a function of their *apprenticeship of observation*, as their experiences as students enculturate them to view particular educational traditions and practices as normative and important to perpetuate. Lortie refers to those students who believe in the institution of school and its practices as *identifiers*. He argues that members of this group—rather than the *nonidentifiers* who do not go into teaching, go into teaching and leave because they do not fit, or go into teaching as reformers—are most likely to enter and remain in the field and sustain the educational practices that contributed to their own positive experiences as students. Identifiers are likely to come from the social group that Eckert (1989) calls *jocks*—those identifiers, usually from the upper and middle social classes, who uphold and maintain school values, primarily through their support of school activities—who in turn make up the bulk of the teaching profession (Gordon, 2000).

If, as Applebee (1986) and Hillocks (1995) maintain, the Warriner's (Kinneavy & Warriner, 1993; Warriner, 1977, 1982, 1986, 1988; Warriner & Griffith, 1963) composition and grammar textbooks have provided the most widespread instruction in writing for the greatest number of students since the early 1960s, then their collective apprenticeship of observation includes the five-paragraph theme as the formative way of learning to teach writing. Furthermore, if those not exposed to Warriner's textbooks have instead learned through a competitor's textbook that, rather than providing an alternative, seeks to "out-Warriner Warriner" (Hillocks, 1995, p. 113), then it follows that the great majority of students have learned to write through some version of this format. If those students who are most partial to schooling as it is are the people most likely to enter and stay in teaching, then their experience with this model likely provides the basis for their beliefs about how to teach writing to their own students. They are also unlikely to see the need for alternatives or to recognize alternatives as worthwhile approaches to attempt or support (Wertsch, 1991). Finally, the institutionalization of the five-

paragraph theme in the most widely available textbooks for teaching writing reinforces the notion that it is indeed the most efficacious way of teaching students to write.

Limitations of Teacher Education Programs

Tremmel (2001) observes that most teacher education programs emphasize literature instruction at the expense of writing pedagogy. He argues that

> Even in what is arguably [teacher education's] strongest area, field experience, English education programs tend to be decidedly pre-disciplinary and ambivalent with regard to both writing teacher preparation and the teaching of writing. The reasons for this include the lack of [theory in universities] as well as unevenness in writing instruction in the schools. Bluntly put, there are still teachers out there who are teaching the five paragraph essay, the research paper, handing out worksheets, and not doing too much else with writing. As a result, it is not uncommon for prospective and beginning teachers—despite their best intentions and the best intentions of their professors—to go through an entire field experience sequence without ever becoming fully involved in the teaching of writing and without ever thinking of themselves as writing teachers. (p. 17)

In the same vein, Zeichner and Gore (1990) argue that many university education programs are characterized by what they call *structural fragmentation*, i.e., the absence of a sustained, consistent focus on a pedagogical approach or teaching philosophy. Such fragmented programs, they argue, are unlikely to have a long-term effect on students' thinking about teaching. If a university program does not provide overall coherence, and if it is geared toward literature instruction more than writing instruction, then its students are not likely to enter the field with a clear grasp of alternatives to traditions to which they were exposed as students, such as the five-paragraph theme (Smagorinsky, Cook, & Johnson, 2003).

Shortcomings of Teachers

Some attribute the five-paragraph theme's endurance to teachers' indolence. Emig (1971), for instance, believes that teachers do not read or write very much and thus have limited knowledge or vision to guide their teaching. Instruction in five-paragraph themes, she says, is perpetuated in part by "teacher illiteracy" (p. 98) and "neurosis" (p. 99). Similarly, Wesley (2000) asserts that "teachers of the five paragraph theme . . . have become complacent in their acceptance of a tool that purports to nurture but, in fact, stunts the growth of human minds" (p. 57). This misguided sense of nurturing is manifest, argues Lewis (2001), in teachers' beliefs that they are preparing students for college composition classes in spite of the five-paragraph theme's limited presence in published writing. These critics and others argue that shortcomings in teachers—ignorance, illiteracy, laziness, self-satisfaction—dispose them to reduce writing to flipping McEssays, a mass-produced,

identical product with an introductory bun on top, a thin layer of meat in the middle, and a concluding bun at the bottom that holds it all together.

Poor Working Conditions

Rather than blaming teachers' deficiencies for the persistence of the five-paragraph model, others (e.g., Lott, 1996) point to the poor working conditions—too many students, too little planning time, too few resources, too much bureaucracy, and other burdens and limitations—that require teachers to take shortcuts. In this view, it is not inadequate teachers but oppressive teaching environments that produce efficient but presumably intellectually vacuous instruction. Nunnally (1991) finds that "as a response to the task of instructing multiple sections of over-enrolled classes, the explicitness of the five-paragraph theme—the discreteness of its parts and their functions—makes it practical to teach as well as eminently gradable" (p. 68). In such a vision the five-paragraph theme can serve for poorly supported teachers as "The Instant Essay Success Formula," as touted by one teacher described by Marshall (1984, p. 104).

Institutional Pressures

Wiley (2000, p. 61) believes that formulaic writing is "easy to teach, easy for students to grasp and apply," leading to prompt improvements in standardized test scores (cf. Dean, 2000). This last issue, the effectiveness of the five-paragraph theme in preparing students for mandated writing assessments, often reflects the policy context in which writing instruction takes place. At the high school level Wiley (2000) finds that a formulaic writing format such as the five-paragraph theme "replicates what is found in high scoring essays on district-wide tests and AP exams" (p. 61). In other policy contexts, too, "bland but planned" (Nunnally, 1991, p. 67) five-paragraph essays remain valorized in writing assessments.

Hillocks (2002), in his study of state-wide writing assessments in the U.S., describes the way in which the Illinois secondary school writing assessment uses rubrics based on the five-paragraph model. Remarkably, he finds, this form is rewarded regardless of the domain prompted: narrative, expository, or persuasive. The guide that teachers use to prepare students for the assessment never refers specifically to the five-paragraph theme, yet the rubrics it presents give the highest scores to those papers that include an introduction, three paragraphs of support, and a conclusion. Hillocks argues that the severely limited time available for scoring the writing leaves little time for considering the content of a paper as an issue in rating its quality. Students can be rewarded, then, for producing insipid or specious papers as long as they follow the formula; in Hillocks's (2003) characterization, students "must manufacture blather to fill up the space. The five paragraph formula provides a way to organize the blather, but it ignores thoughtful development" (p. 69), resulting in "shoddy thinking" that students regard as "the solution to any writing problem" (p. 70). Like Hillocks, Bazerman (1994) sees

"compelling forces" (p. 26) such as institutional pressures accounting for such tendencies to teach to standardized tests.

Potential as a Genre

Some have argued that a middle ground exists between those who dismiss the five-paragraph theme altogether and those who offer it as an optimal form (e.g., Anderson & Wigington, 1962; Perrin, 2000). Dean (2000) describes teachers who, while not regarding it as a panacea, feel obliged to teach the five-paragraph theme and learn "to see beyond the limitations of the form to what else it could be" (p. 54). Dean argues that form-oriented writing instruction can provide students with a structure for generating and expressing ideas. She views five-paragraph themes and other forms as *genres*, agreeing with Devitt (1997), who argues that "Only when we understand genres as both constraint and choice, both regularity and chaos, both inhibiting and enabling will we be able to help students use the power of genres critically and effectively" (p. 54; cited in Dean, p. 54).

Undoubtedly some might question whether instruction in five-paragraph themes is genre-oriented. Russell (1997) locates genre theory within the social, cultural, and constructivist theories that have influenced literacy research since the 1980s (see Nystrand, Greene, & Wiemelt, 1993). From this perspective a genre embodies social action (Miller, 1984). Freedman and Medway (1994) argue that the recurring formal features of texts grouped together as instances of a genre must share similarities in terms of "social action undertaken" (p. 2; cf. Coe, 1994). Swales (1990) defines genre as a class of communicative events (p. 44). . . . The principal criterial feature that turns a collection of communicative events into a genre is some set of shared communicative purposes (p. 46) . . . The rationale behind a genre establishes constraints on allowable contributions in terms of their content, positioning and form" (p. 52).

This rhetorical engagement is necessarily dialogic—that is, addressed to and in conversation with prior, immediate, and anticipated speakers and readers (Bakhtin, 1981). Criticism of the five-paragraph theme often centers on the very absence of dialogism or social interaction—the form itself is the emphasis, rather than ideas, expression, or communication. In order for teachers to claim that the five-paragraph theme is a useful genre, they need to help writers employ the five-paragraph structure as a means for dialogic expression.

Those who find the five-paragraph form stifling and monologic would have trouble seeing the potential for meaningful social action available through such writing. For many teachers and students, however, writing tests are forms of social action in that they affect their status and the status of their communities, with consequences such as fluctuations in real estate values often following the rise and fall of test scores (Tindal & Haladyna, 2002). The five-paragraph theme, then, could be seen to enable writers to engage with testing situations as forums for social action that validate their status as achievers.

Such testing situations might lack the sort of authenticity celebrated in many discussions of educational practice (e.g., Nystrand, 1997), in which students engage in open-ended lines of inquiry of their choice with authority (i.e., the expectation that what they have to say will be attended to by others [Goldblatt, 1995]). Teachers, however, have ample reason to take any assessment occasion seriously. In order for students to perform well, regardless of how dubious some might find the means of measurement (e.g., Hillocks, 2002), the five-paragraph theme might be viewed as a way to socialize student writers into the discourse of large-scale assessment. Further, argues Dean (2000), students benefit from learning forms that, when appropriated, enable them to generate and express ideas, a more optimistic view than that expressed by Hillocks (2003). Such a belief could explain the persistence of the five-paragraph theme with teachers who did not attend a structurally fragmented teacher education program, are not characterized by objectionable traits, do not teach within poor working conditions, and are not affected by institutional pressures.

Theoretical Framework

Our goal in this study is to understand the decision of a bright, energetic, early-career teacher to make the five-paragraph theme the centerpiece of her writing instruction. To do so we invoke activity theory, which Grossman, Smagorinsky, and Valencia (1999) have argued can provide a useful framework for understanding teachers' thinking because of its focus on understanding how settings mediate cognitive development. As we indicate below, we understand activity theory to embody Vygotsky's notion of volitional, goal-directed, tool-mediated action as the key to human development (Wertsch, 1981; cf. Cole, 1996; Engeström, 1987; Leont'ev, 1981).

Settings

Activity theory is concerned with the contexts for human development, particularly the development of concepts (Vygotsky, 1987). These contexts are known in activity theory parlance as *settings*. For Leigh—the main participant in the study (all names other than Leigh's and her current school's are pseudonyms)—the key settings of learning to teach were her university program, her field experiences, student teaching, the site of her first job, and the state policy context. Each of these settings includes innumerable *idiosettings*; that is, settings within settings, each with its own unique goals and attendant social practices for achieving them, such as an English department within a school.

Leont'ev (1981), considered by many to be the primary architect of activity theory, identifies the *motive* of the setting—that is, the outcome implicit in the setting—as the overarching goal toward which participants direct their activity (e.g., high test scores). Wertsch (1985) maintains that

> the motive that is involved in a particular activity setting specifies what is to be maximized in that setting. By maximizing one goal, one set of behaviors and the like over others, the motive also determines what will be given up if need be [e.g., interactive, open-ended instruction] in order to accomplish something else. (p. 212)

This motive provides a setting with a sense of purpose that implies a code of suitable conduct. Tulviste (1991) makes the key point that the motives of settings typically develop through engagement with particular *problems* that environments provide for cultural participants to address. The problem-oriented thinking of participants and other players in our study thus becomes a central point for our analysis.

Tools

Tools enable people to act on their environments and are the means through which people engage in activity within a setting. Not all activity within a setting takes place in accordance with the overriding motive. Resistance occurs as well, as does tool use that does not follow conventional practice. When conflicting motives guide settings within settings, participants inevitably choose or gravitate to one set of goals over another.

Conceptual tools are principles, frameworks, and ideas about teaching and learning that teachers use as heuristics to guide their instructional decisions (Grossman et al., 1999). Conceptual tools can include broadly applicable theories such as constructivism and theoretical principles such as cooperative learning, which can serve as guidelines for instructional practice across the different strands of the curriculum.

Practical tools are classroom practices, strategies, and resources that have more local and immediate utility. For the teacher of writing, these might include instructional practices such as the five-paragraph theme, journals, Daily Oral Language exercises, grammar worksheets or textbooks, sentence combining exercises, prewriting activities such as brainstorming or examining data sets, and countless others.

Appropriation

Appropriation refers to the process through which a person adopts the conceptual and practical tools available for use in particular social environments (e.g., schools, preservice programs). Through this process, a learner (in this case, a teacher) adopts ways of thinking prevalent within specific cultures (e.g., accepting a community's value on high pass rates for a statewide test and teaching to maintain those pass rates).

The extent of appropriation depends on the congruence of a learner's values, prior experiences, and goals with those of more experienced or powerful members of a culture such as school-based teachers or university faculty (see Cole, 1996; Newman, Griffin, & Cole,1989; Smagorinsky, 1995; Wertsch, 1991). Funda-

mental to appropriation is the learner's active role in these practices. Through the process of appropriation, learners reconstruct the knowledge they are internalizing, thus transforming both their conception of the knowledge and in turn influencing how that knowledge is construed and used by others.

Context of the Investigation

To study Leigh's use of the instructional tool of the five-paragraph theme, we focus on the following questions:

1. What were the principal settings in which Leigh's writing instruction took place?
2. What overriding motives governed action within these settings, and what mediational tools encouraged action toward those ends?
3. Within these settings, what influenced Leigh's appropriation of the five-paragraph theme as her principal pedagogical tool for teaching writing, and how did her instruction develop in relation to contextual constraints?

We next describe the participants and settings that made up the context for our investigation of these questions.

Participants

Research Team

The research team consisted of authors Tara Star Johnson, Peter Smagorinsky, Pamela Fry, and main participant, case study teacher Leigh Thompson. Smagorinsky was the site principal investigator for the funded research. He and Fry were on the faculty at the university that Leigh attended. Fry collected the data during Leigh's student teaching, and Smagorinsky served as data collector during her first year as a teacher. Johnson, a doctoral student of Smagorinsky's at a different university, later collaborated on the analysis of the data and took the lead role in writing the manuscript as part of her graduate studies.

Case Study Teacher

Leigh was a native of the state and attended the state's namesake university as an undergraduate, earning a B.A. in psychology. She took her teacher certification course work as part of her master's degree at the same university. About her decision to teach, Leigh said:

> I decided to go back and get my teaching certification, and I immediately wanted to do it in English. There is no other subject I would want to do it in . . . because I have always done well in English, always enjoyed it. That was just something that has been in the back of my head, ever since I started my psychology degree.

Part of Leigh's motivation to teach stemmed from her own positive experiences as a student of English, particularly with her eleventh- and twelfth-grade teacher, whom she described as a good role model: "She was more on like a personal level with us. She didn't just stand up there and lecture. She was willing to work with us one on one."

In contrast Leigh described her eighth-grade English teacher as "real gruff. . . . I don't think I ever spoke to her during the whole class because I was so scared of her. . . . I got my first 'C,' and I felt like I was working hard, but I was very intimidated with no personal contact with the students." This distinction between these two teachers—one personal and one impersonal—helped define the kind of teacher Leigh wanted to be. When asked which ideas she'd encountered in teacher education that would be most valuable in her own teaching, she replied,

> Just finding creative ways to engage the students. Trying to help—have them relate what we're studying to maybe their personal life experiences. And if you're reading *Romeo and Juliet*, 'cause I just—we just did a lesson on like conflicts and relationships, and try to relate that as much as you can to personal experiences. At least it makes students feel like they're a little more in tune with what they're studying.

She further said that her memories of how she felt as a student strongly influenced her approach to teaching: "The thing I draw on most is probably trying to remember back when I was in eighth grade."

Settings

Leigh learned to teach amidst many settings that both afforded and constrained her teaching. These settings were "nested" (Cazden, 1988, p. 198), i.e., concentric socially, physically, and temporally relative to Leigh. It is not possible to identify and explicate all settings within which Leigh taught. The study was designed to capture what we considered to be key settings in her development as a teacher. These included her university program, the site of her student teaching, the various settings that made up the site of her first job, and the state policy context within which her district functioned.

University Program

Leigh's 5-year preservice/Master's program included both undergraduates majoring in education and graduate students such as Leigh. In our view, the program was characterized by structural fragmentation (Zeichner & Gore, 1990). The students did not go through as a cohort but instead took classes as they were available. Prior to the methods class, students' coursework had a content-area emphasis with roughly 15 courses taken in the English department. The semester prior to student teaching, the students took one methods class as their program capstone course, with roughly 40 hours of accompanying field experiences required. Aside from an English department course in Theory of English Grammar that was taught by one

of the English education professors, secondary English education students took no courses from faculty in the curriculum and instruction department.

In addition to the absence of a student cohort, we see this program as structurally fragmented because the dispersal of courses around the university did not allow for articulation across courses, leaving students without a sustained focus on a unified conception of teaching. In terms of activity theory, the program had, at best, a muddled motive: Because students could go through the program taking courses that were not in formal dialogue with one another about pedagogy, they did not engage in the kind of goal-directed, tool-mediated communal activity that gives an education program a particular culture and focus, and enables its students to develop a conceptually unified approach to teaching (Smagorinsky et al., 2003).

Leigh's program, while including writing courses taken in the department of English, did not include courses specifically about the teaching of writing. Rather, her program came from the tradition described by Tremmel (2001), offering "one methods course in which they attempted to cover the whole discipline from literature to composition, but which, in practice, was mostly concerned with literature" (p. 13). Leigh's training as a teacher of writing, then, came from general principles of instructional scaffolding stressed in the methods class, principles that were not reinforced in her other teacher-education coursework. With little formal training in the teaching of writing, she was left with two primary sources of knowledge to guide her instruction. One was her apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975), i.e., her experiences as a student. The second was her colleagues, whom we describe in two settings: her student teaching site and first full-time teaching appointment.

Site of Student Teaching

Leigh did her student teaching in a sixth-grade class at Walt Whitman Middle School (grades 6–8), one of several middle schools in her college town. The city's residents were generally more affluent than those throughout the state, but on average less so than the U.S. as a whole. Built in 1973, the school had an open classroom environment; that is, the interior of the school had no walls. This design, based on principles developed in British infant and junior schools, is predicated on the belief that children want to learn and will do so naturally if left to their own initiative. Formal relationships between students and teachers are minimized and the absence of delineating barriers is intended to encourage freedom of movement and thought. Ideally, this lack of formal structure eliminates uniform whole-class instruction and encourages instead unfettered student-generated inquiries (Kohl, 1971).

Leigh's mentor during her student teaching was Mrs. Hoover, who had eight years of experience in middle and high schools in the district. She had attended the same university as Leigh, although under a different program structure and

with a different faculty. Leigh was the second student teacher she had supervised. She was initially reluctant to take on a student teacher, saying in an interview that "I never really thought I wanted a student teacher because I'm one of these control people. I like having control over my classes." Mrs. Hoover's predilection toward control appeared to work against the intentions of the open classroom philosophy, which was designed to alleviate teacher authority and promote student autonomy.

Site of Leigh's First Job

The community. The middle school that served as the site of Leigh's first job drew from a homogeneous and relatively affluent suburban community. The community was similar in demographics to the city where Leigh had grown up. The community's lack of diversity was made clear when Leigh was teaching *The Diary of Anne Frank*, a required text in the school's curriculum. Leigh reported that when she provided her students with background information on the Holocaust, some responded by asking, "We don't have Jewish people here in the United States, do we?"

The community took great pride in its school system, which had produced 16 National Merit Finalists in the 2000-2001 school year and whose students tested 22% higher than the national average on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills in 2000 and outranked the national averages for the SAT and ACT scores by 21% combined in 2000. The city's website proclaimed that its success as a community dated to a series of "Firsts" that began "a tradition that lives to this day of a driving desire to be First, a desire for Excellence." Boasts of high test scores representing student achievement were consistent with the city's driving desire for excellence. This emphasis on high test scores was a critical part of the environment in which Leigh taught.

The school. Sequoyah was one of five middle schools feeding into the city's three high schools. It was an exemplary school, having received acclaim as a National Blue Ribbon recipient in 1996, the year before Leigh began teaching there. At the time of data collection, it served approximately 1,200 sixth, seventh, and eighth graders organized in teams with shared core teachers. Leigh said of this school, one of about fifteen she had considered for a job, "This was about the only one I came out thinking, 'I would just die to have this job.'" When asked why, she said:

> I just felt like I could work with all the other teachers that I spoke with and they are the ones that I would be working with, and [assistant principal and entry-year committee member] Dara. I liked the area. I liked the look of the school, the things they told me about the school . . . just as far as the teachers being real supportive of one another, getting along. They had just implemented a reading/writing workshop which goes along with the English curriculum that they were implementing. . . . I just really can't put my finger on it, but I really liked the people that I interviewed with and was impressed with them. It wasn't really like an interview. It was more like a conversation which seemed to go real well.

Our visits to the school corroborated Leigh's impressions of Sequoyah as a safe and comfortable workplace where teachers, particularly those early in their careers, were well supported by colleagues and administrators.

Entry-year committee. Leigh was supervised during her first year of teaching by a state-mandated entry-year committee consisting of one school-based administrator, one school-based mentor teacher, and one university-based professor. The entry-year committee was designed to provide the kind of ongoing support that beginning teachers need but seldom receive (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990). Each of the three committee members was required to conduct at least three sets of observations with the teacher, followed by a debriefing. The mentor teacher's obligation went much further, with more observations and the expectation that an extended relationship would develop. The committee met with the teacher twice during the first semester and once in the spring semester, with a teaching certificate awarded only with the approval of the committee. A first-year teacher not receiving the endorsement of the committee would either not return to the school or return under a second year of supervision.

Leigh's committee was a key means of support during her first year of teaching. The administrative member, Dara, was one of three assistant principals in the school. She was a former English teacher with an M.A. in English education; two of the other three principals in the administrative team had also been English majors. Dara liked a "noisy classroom," noting that "when I hear a certain level of noise, I know . . . that's the sound of learning."

Katherine, Leigh's assigned mentor teacher, was a twenty-eight-year veteran of teaching, and Leigh was the fifth novice teacher she had supervised. She met with Leigh formally about once a week. She described her role as Leigh's mentor as follows: "I try to let her know that first I want to be her friend at school—her mother at school—and you know I try every morning before school starts to say 'hi' to her and ask her how things are going and just let her know I'm there for her." Katherine found Leigh "very easy to work with. . . . She seems pretty comfortable with the curriculum, not having any difficulty with that."

The third member of the committee was Peter, Leigh's university methods course professor and this article's second author. Prior to entering the professoriate he had taught high school English for 14 years in another state. As a member of Leigh's entry-year committee, he visited her class on four occasions. He also interacted with Leigh (as well as with Dara and Katherine) as an investigator in this study. As both a former professor and current entry-year committee member, he also maintained telephone and email communication with Leigh during the year to discuss her teaching and occasionally sent copies of articles that he thought would stimulate her thinking about instructional issues.

Colleagues. Leigh was a member of one of three teaching teams for the eighth grade. Each team consisted of four core teachers, supplemented by a special

education, Spanish, and lab teacher who served all three teams. Meetings and parent-teacher conferences were conducted with the whole team, who shared the same 125 or so students. Leigh turned to her middle school team colleagues particularly for assistance with classroom management: "The team helped probably just as far as dealing with individual students, but not really with my actual lessons or anything like that I was teaching." An exception was when the team attempted to integrate instruction by coordinating cross-curricular activities.

In addition to her team members, Leigh was in frequent contact with the two other eighth-grade English teachers. Leigh typically sought advice from other English teachers for pedagogical or curricular assistance: "The problems with the actual English curriculum and that kind of thing, I'd go to the English teachers. . . . They gave me a lot of ideas. A lot of the units I did I took from them." Leigh also interacted with teachers in the sixth and seventh grades as she taught in a different classroom every period. In Leigh's case these classrooms were in different wings of the building, bringing her in contact with a variety of colleagues and their habitats. In an entry-year committee meeting, Dara said of Leigh's roving status: "[T]hrough her many travels around the building, Leigh has been asked to share classrooms with a variety of teachers. She seems to have grown to view this experience as an opportunity rather than a detriment."

Finally, Leigh participated in a book club formed and led by her literary school administrators, including Dara. The club read a novel a month, meeting at a member's house or a restaurant for their discussions. Bob, the school principal—described by Dara as "the king of adolescent lit"—generally served as discussion leader. Dara noted that Leigh closely observed Bob's role as discussion leader, and kept a close eye as well on the teachers' camaraderie, laughter, and lively digressions about events at school.

The administration also formed student book clubs and invited young adult authors such as Gary Paulson and Brian Burks to speak with students. In general, the school placed a great value on literature and tried to establish a climate in which reading was valued and rewarded.

The State Curriculum and Assessment

The state imposed two mandates on English teachers. One was the language arts objectives that middle school students were expected to accomplish as part of the state core curriculum, designed to be aligned with existing national standards. The curriculum defined language arts as reading, writing, grammar/mechanics/usage, listening/speaking, literature, and viewing. The list of objectives within these categories identified specific skills that might be assessed through the [State] School Testing Program. Among these skills was to write "narrative, descriptive, expository, and persuasive paragraphs and longer compositions that establish and support a central idea with a topic sentence; supporting paragraphs with facts, details, explanations or examples; and a concluding paragraph that summarizes

the points." This core curriculum objective was aligned with the second mandate: the eighth-grade writing test that required students to write an essay on a given topic, which the scoring rubric treated as a five-paragraph theme.

Method

The purpose of the study was to analyze Leigh's thinking about teaching writing, particularly her instruction in the five-paragraph theme. The study, therefore, relied primarily on observations and observation-based interviews with Leigh about her teaching decisions. The study was not designed to study the effects of this instruction, only the instruction itself and the decisions behind it. Analysis of student writing was therefore not part of the research design. This approach of studying teachers' stated pedagogical content knowledge and the practice to which it is linked falls within the tradition of research exemplified by Shulman (1986), Grossman (1990), Hillocks (1999), and others.

Data Collection

Year of Student Teaching

Gateway interview. Leigh provided a gateway interview before her student teaching, the purpose of which was to elicit background information about her experiences and conceptions of teaching. The interview, as with all interviews we refer to in this section, was taped and transcribed for analysis.

Observation cycles and interviews. During her semester of student teaching, Leigh was observed and interviewed in what we called *observation cycles*. Each observation cycle consisted of a pre-observation interview, an observation of at least two classes that produced field notes, and a post-observation interview. The pre-observation interview was designed to obtain information about Leigh's experiences leading up to and her plans for the upcoming observation, with particular attention to understanding the source to which she attributed her instructional planning. The post-observation interview's purpose was to verify what the researcher had observed and extend the line of questioning initiated in the pre-observation interview.

Additional data sources. Interviews were also conducted with Leigh's mentor teacher and university supervisor about the guidance they were providing for Leigh; one feedback session between Leigh and her mentor teacher was additionally tape recorded. Artifacts from Leigh's university program (e.g., course syllabi and program descriptions) and teaching setting (e.g., curriculum materials) were collected as well.

First Year of Full-Time Teaching

Gateway interview. A week after she began teaching at Sequoyah MS, Leigh was interviewed about her school, community, and teaching assignment.

Observation cycles. During her first year of full-time teaching, Leigh participated in four observation cycles that followed the same procedures and interview protocols as those during her student teaching.

Additional data sources. The two school-based members of her entry-year committee provided interviews about their supervision of Leigh, and entry-year committee meetings were taped and transcribed. Supplementary artifacts such as the state core curriculum and testing program were also included in this phase of the data collection.

Data Analysis

The goal of data analysis was to build an empirically based and theoretically informed case portrait of Leigh that answered our research questions. Toward this end we collaboratively studied and coded the interview and observational data. We then studied the coded data to discover salient patterns of characteristics regarding Leigh and her teaching of writing. In addition we contextualized our developing understanding of Leigh by drawing on the additional data sources, and on the basis of this process we created a case portrait. (The coding system and the research design as a whole were originally developed by Pamela Grossman, Peter Smagorinsky, and Sheila Valencia for research conducted through the National Research Center on English Learning and Achievement.)

Coding Process

Transcripts of the interviews and classroom observations were collaboratively read, analyzed, and coded by Johnson and Smagorinsky using the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti. To code the data we first identified "quotations," Atlas.ti's term for any bracketed segment of text, with brackets determined according to the presence of a codable statement. Given that Atlas.ti allows for overlapping segments and multiple codes for each segment, each quotation conceivably could (and did) include many and various codes. We coded each quotation according to the categories that we describe below, all derived from our motivating theory. We discussed each coding decision until we reached agreement. The codes we used were as follows:

Tools used in Leigh's teaching included the five-paragraph theme, the five-sentence paragraph, cooperative learning, the state core curriculum, prereading activities, discussion, writing rough drafts, and many others. Although different on the surface, these tools share the quality of being instruments through which teachers may act on their environments by employing them in the effort to teach. As activity theory would suggest, understanding the tool-mediated nature of Leigh's activity is central to understanding how she became enculturated to teach.

We identified two types of tools: *conceptual* (i.e., capable of being abstracted to apply to many circumstances, such as instructional scaffolding) or *practical* (i.e., more immediately applicable, such as teaching to a standardized test).

The *areas* of teaching—e.g., the curricular strands— in which Leigh used particular tools included student diversity, management, teaching, learning theory, assessment, writing, speaking/listening, reading, and language.

Attribution by participant referred to where Leigh had learned of the tool, such as apprenticeship of observation, teacher education coursework (English/language arts), teacher education coursework (other), mentor teacher, school administrator, university supervisor, colleagues at site, curriculum materials (ancillary commercial teaching scripts and aids), professional development activities, mandate (e.g., state-mandated skills and objectives), and others.

We coded for the *problem* that Leigh attempted to solve through her use of each tool in order to understand the goal-oriented nature of her tool use. Problem codes included student learning, identity, context surrounding classroom (e.g., policy), relationships, motivation, perception of students, control, classroom logistics, and classroom interactions. We identified a problem by considering a dissonance or imperative in Leigh's decision-making that required action toward a solution.

An example of coded text follows. During an interview in her first year at Sequoyah, Leigh was asked,

> **PS:** When you were teaching those two lessons, and you can either talk about them together or you can talk about them separately, what kind of concepts were you emphasizing?
>
> **Leigh:** Well, as far as the essay I just wanted them to be familiar with the format of writing the five-paragraph essay, getting that down where they don't even have to—where [they] know exactly what they're supposed to be doing no matter what topic I give them, they're used to doing it. It will sort of come a lot easier for them.

In this quotation we identified the *tools* of *writing five-paragraph themes* and *teaching to state curriculum/assessment*, which was evident from other remarks Leigh had made linking this instruction to the state writing test. Because they served immediate instructional purposes we coded them both as *practical*. Leigh made an *attribution* to the state *mandate* that required her students to produce five-paragraph themes for the state writing assessment. In this case the attribution was made subsequent to this quotation when she said, "We're all going towards this goal of passing this writing test. You know getting them through the [state curriculum] skills of 8th grade English. So there's nothing that I can skip." Two *areas* figured into her decision making, *writing* and *assessment*. Leigh's instruction was designed to address two *problems*: the mandate's role in the *context* of her teaching and her *students' learning* about how to succeed on this assessment.

Through our application of this coding system to Leigh's interviews and our

field notes based on observations of her class, we were able to identify the settings within which Leigh appropriated the five-paragraph theme as her principal pedagogical tool for teaching writing, and how her instruction developed in relation to the contextual constraints and affordances within those settings. By focusing on her situated, goal-centered use of pedagogical tools, we were able to analyze her conception of how to teach. In particular, given the frequency of tools associated with the teaching of writing, we were able to analyze Leigh's developing understanding of how to teach writing and how the settings of learning to teach mediated that understanding.

Results

The complete list of codes and frequencies is listed in Table 1. This list includes all of the categories developed for her observations and interviews, some of which are not relevant to our portrait of her teaching of writing, e.g., her use of discipline, literary terms, and other tools. Rather, for this portrait we focus on those codes that specifically feature writing (e.g., writing five-paragraph theme, writing paragraphs) and the attributions (e.g., colleague, cooperating teacher, mandate) she made to explain her use of those tools, typically in terms of a key setting such as the English department or Mrs. Hoover's classroom. We also focus on those problems that suggest the goal-related nature of Leigh's decisions, e.g., the ways in which the context of her teaching (including the imperative of the state writing assessment) influenced her decision-making.

We should qualify any inferences made solely on the basis of relative frequencies between Leigh's student teaching and first year of full-time teaching. Her year of full-time teaching provided twice as many observation cycles as her semester of student teaching, and the presence of an entry-year committee provided more abundant opportunities for interviews and feedback. We see the frequencies as indicative of the centers of gravity of the instruction she engaged in within the contexts of these two settings, rather than as a means for comparing how often she used any pedagogical tool in the two.

Portrait of Leigh

Leigh's preservice education program, like those described by Tremmel (2001), had been literature-oriented. She reported having been taught the five-paragraph theme almost exclusively in high school and noted that she felt comfortable with this format and believed it helped her, and later her students, stay organized: "Overall, the five-paragraph essay really was helpful for me as a student to organize my thoughts; I also think it was helpful for my students who didn't know where to start." With these prior positive experiences in using formulaic writing from her own apprenticeship of observation and her lack of extended preparation to teach writing in her preservice program, Leigh entered the classroom.

TABLE 1: Codes and Frequencies

CODE	Student Teaching	Sequoyah Middle School	Total
AREA			
Assessment	8	18	26
Drama	0	8	8
Language	12	11	23
Management	11	6	17
Reading	16	43	59
Speaking/Listening	11	19	30
Teaching	11	17	28
Writing	**31**	**34**	**65**
ATTRIBUTION			
Administrator/Chair	0	5	5
Apprenticeship of Observation	0	4	4
Colleague	**3**	**25**	**28**
Cooperating Teacher	**45**	**1**	**46**
Curriculum Materials	4	4	8
Entry-Year Committee Member	**0**	**10**	**10**
Mandate	**4**	**26**	**30**
Middle School Team	1	6	7
Professional Development	0	4	4
Self	8	8	16
Students	0	16	16
Teacher Education Coursework	7	19	26
TOOL			
Accommodation	1	6	7
Classroom Layout	1	3	4
Cooperative Groups	0	23	23
Discipline	8	2	10
Discussion	5	25	30
Feedback from Expert	13	17	30
Grammar	**11**	**12**	**23**
Integrating Instruction	2	10	12
Literary Terms	4	5	9
Making Learning Relevant	1	10	11
Multiple Intelligences	9	8	17
Performance	1	17	18
Pre-Reading/Writing Activity	6	5	11
Reading Literature	3	21	24
Scaffolding	0	6	6
Spelling/Vocabulary	**5**	**4**	**9**
Teaching to State Curriculum/Assessment	**1**	**14**	**15**
Test/Quiz	6	9	15
Time Allocation	2	3	5
Writing Five-Paragraph Theme	**0**	**25**	**25**
Writing from a Character's Perspective	3	3	6
Writing in a Journal	**6**	**0**	**6**
Writing Paragraphs	**10**	**1**	**11**

Table 1: Continued

CODE	Student Teaching	Sequoyah Middle School	Total
Writing: Revision	0	5	5
Writing Rough Draft	**7**	**1**	**8**
Problem			
Classroom Interaction	2	12	14
Classroom Logistics	5	8	13
Context	1	18	19
Control	7	8	15
Identity	5	17	22
Perception of Students	12	37	49
Planning	16	26	42
Relationships	1	3	4
Student Learning	**43**	**82**	**125**
Type of tool			
Conceptual	15	54	69
Practical	70	92	162

Note: Codes particularly relevant to our analysis of writing instruction are emphasized in boldfaced font.

Student Teaching: Walt Whitman Middle School

For our discussion of Leigh's experiences in learning to teach writing during her student teaching, we looked to the most frequently coded practical pedagogical tools of *writing paragraphs, writing in a journal,* and *writing a rough draft* that she used in her teaching of writing. In conjunction with these tools she included instruction in *grammar* and *spelling*, the relations among which we describe next.

Five-sentence paragraphs. Table 1 reveals differences in the kinds of tools emphasized in her student teaching and first year at Sequoyah. While the five-paragraph theme was the centerpiece of her writing instruction at Sequoyah, writing paragraphs and addressing grammar were the focus of her instruction in the sixth-grade class under the mentorship of her cooperating teacher, Mrs. Hoover. Rather than five-paragraph themes, Mrs. Hoover stressed the more compact tool of the *five-sentence paragraph* for her sixth graders, who she felt were not ready for the rigors of writing five paragraphs all in one theme. Leigh described her emphasis as follows: "Well, they've worked on grammar quite a bit. They've . . . worked on complete sentences, a little bit on nouns and adjectives, working on five-sentence paragraphs trying to tie in like a topic sentence and then three supporting sentences and a clincher sentence."

Mrs. Hoover evaluated paragraphs for what she called content and mechanics. As Mrs. Hoover explained to Leigh when discussing how to assess students' writing, "content" referred to issues of format such as indenting and staying within margins:

MRS. HOOVER: Well, content is easier than what you think because like I said this is sixth grade. . . . If they follow directions, and you go ahead and write what you told them they had to have, you give so many points for each one of those things, that's content. Then you decide, all right, I'm going to give a grade for mechanics and you go ahead and check them for all the comma rules that we've covered and they should check their spelling. And they have to, under content, you'll have to check their writing within margins because otherwise they'll go out in the margin.

LEIGH: And that's included in the content?

MRS. HOOVER: I always include that in content because of common mistakes . . . but mechanics you'll keep purely mechanics and then the content is if they follow directions. Do they have a right and left hand margin? Did they indent for each paragraph? Do they have five sentences per paragraph? . . .

LEIGH: So mainly following instructions and—

MRS. HOOVER: That's content.

LEIGH: —doing what they needed to.

MRS. HOOVER: I mean some people think that's really strange, but that's what we grade as content is if they do what they are supposed to. The mechanics is everything else.

Mrs. Hoover's guidance regarding her expectations for student writing corroborates her self-description as a "control" person, with content interpreted as staying firmly within the boundaries of rules and margins, a measure of containment that belied the intentions of the open classroom design of Walt Whitman Middle School.

Mrs. Hoover's priorities were pervasive during Leigh's student teaching. Table 1 suggests the prominence of Mrs. Hoover's mentoring in Leigh's formative experience in the classroom. Leigh made 45 attributions to Mrs. Hoover as the source for her decisions about which pedagogical tools to use; she was also coded as using "feedback from an expert" as a pedagogical tool for making instructional decisions 13 times, 11 of which were associated with Mrs. Hoover. The other two were associated with her university supervisor, whose relative absence further contributed to Leigh's dependence on Mrs. Hoover for direction in the teaching of writing.

From the Table, then, we infer that Leigh's student teaching immersed her in a setting that stressed conformity to established rules. Mrs. Hoover explained this emphasis during an interview, saying:

> We have to be the same and we have to show them that we try to be fair and that we have to follow the rules. In a building of a thousand students we have to have rules. And I've tried to explain it to them. . . . Because this is a very important stage and it's a very good age for them to learn certain values and morals. . . . But at the same time we're having to show them there are certain things that they need to be responsible for.

This rule-bound setting provided the arena in which Leigh taught writing for the first time. She did so without a strong conceptual framework through which to consider and critique Mrs. Hoover's guidance. Table 1 reveals that the type of tool emphasized during student teaching was decidedly practical, with 70 tools coded as practical and 15 as conceptual. Mrs. Hoover's focus on concrete pedagogical tools—five-sentence paragraphs written within margins—again left Leigh without a conceptual approach to teaching writing, instead concentrating her attention on the practical and mundane.

Journals

Table 1 reveals the use of practical tools that are typically associated with process-oriented approaches to writing instruction. On the surface, the presence of these tools contradicts the idea that Mrs. Hoover's approach to teaching writing was strictly geared to form and mechanics. These practical tools included *writing in a journal* (six instances during student teaching) and *writing rough drafts* (seven instances). A closer look at the data eliciting these codes reveals that journals were, under Mrs. Hoover's guidance, used as supplements to her attention to form and mechanics. For example, Leigh described her instruction in spelling:

> They have a pre-test, which they don't know what the words are, and then they take a pre-test and we don't take a grade on it. We just give it back to them and let them study those words. And then usually a week from the day they took it, they have a test on all the same words again. And in their journals we have them write journal exercises using their spelling words.

Journals, then, were used in service of sharpening students' knowledge of proper form in their writing, rather than to provide a medium for open-ended expression and experimentation as advocated in the pedagogic literature (e.g., Kirby, Liner, & Vinz, 1988).

Leigh did take it upon herself to study her students' use of journals as part of a course she took in teacher research during her preservice program. She described her goals as "Just to look at what topics interest them and what topics are real difficult for them. . . . I'm going to look at the journals they have now and then also ask them what their experiences have been with journals." Her intentions in studying her students' experiences with journals suggests that she believed their writing could tell her something about her students' personal lives, an interest related to her background in psychology and her concern for establishing personal contact with her students.

Rough Drafts

Leigh's use of the tool of *writing rough drafts* under Mrs. Hoover's supervision was quite different from the process described by Calkins (1986): "Like an artist at a sketch pad, we begin to find the contours of our subject. . . . nothing is permanent.

Each writer has his or her own style" (p. 17). In the following feedback session between Mrs. Hoover and Leigh, the rough draft emerged as a required step in a linear process: clustering, rough draft, final draft. The clustering and rough draft were necessary parts of the assignment, even if students produced them *after* they had written a final draft:

> LEIGH: [Lou] turned in the final copy and I told him that huh-uh, he's going to have to go back and do a rough draft. Several people did that. I don't know if I didn't explain it right, but that's why I had posted it on the board that December 6th was the due date. And two or three of them came in here today with the final copy, and so now they're going to have to go back and work on a rough draft and revise that copy. . . .
>
> MRS. HOOVER: Okay. Tomorrow did you let them know that they're going to have to have the clusters to show you what they've done?
>
> LEIGH: I told them to have their clusters done. They are going to have the rest of the hour tomorrow to work on finishing up their rough drafts. . . .
>
> MRS. HOOVER: What did they say when you told them they were going to have to do it again?
>
> LEIGH: I made them rewrite a rough draft, and I told them before they even rewrote their rough draft, they had to use clusters. . . .
>
> MRS. HOOVER: So they had their final copy?
>
> LEIGH: Yeah. In fact, Lou was wanting to turn his in and I said, "No, you're going to have to go back." Plus he only had like maybe four sentences per paragraph, and I told him that's not—he's not going to get a good grade if he doesn't follow the directions. Because I told him to start over, and I told him that he can look at those paragraphs he's written.
>
> MRS. HOOVER: He should use that as a rough draft.
>
> LEIGH: Right. He could use that as his rough draft, but the clustering, I told him to go back and do the clustering for each of those paragraphs that he wrote.
>
> MRS. HOOVER: So he's going to go and do his backwards. Maybe he'll see, and then you can have him—I'd sit down with him later and ask him why it would have been easier if he had done the clusters first.

This exchange again suggests the emphasis placed on form and following directions in Mrs. Hoover's class. Both journals and drafting, each central to process-oriented pedagogies, were used in service of authoritarian instruction more fitting with Mrs. Hoover's self-professed need for control than the open classroom's design for individual expression.

Summary

Tulviste's (1991) principle of *heterogeneity* helps to account for the ways in which, within the decentralized, liberating, inquiry-centered environment suggested by

the open classroom design, Leigh was apprenticed to view writing as a highly formal, authoritarian, rule-bound, lockstep process. Tulviste describes how overlapping social networks can present a learner with a variety of types of problems to solve, thus allowing individuals to develop a number of frameworks for thinking. Mrs. Hoover's mentorship provided a setting that superceded the school designer's intentions of encouraging free movement and expression. This mentorship served as the immediate arena in which Leigh developed her initial approach to teaching writing. Leigh was thus left within a setting that stressed her imitation of Mrs. Hoover's teaching methods at the expense of the sort of insight that Vygotsky (1987) argues is necessary for play or experimentation. Leigh was not, therefore, given the leeway to push the thresholds of either her own learning or the context in which she learned to teach writing.

First Job: Sequoyah Middle School

Sequoyah Middle School provided Leigh with a very different environment than did Whitman MS. The school setting, like that at Whitman, exhibited the kind of heterogeneity described by Tulviste (1991)—that is, there were multiple motives and values in the key settings in which Leigh learned to teach writing. Her administration and entry-year committee members encouraged Leigh to teach in noisy, open-ended, and experimental ways while also recognizing the mandate for preparing students for the state writing test. Her colleagues, however, influenced her to teach more restrictively in preparation for the writing assessment and its emphasis on the five-paragraph theme.

In this section we focus on Leigh's instruction in the five-paragraph theme, which Table 1 reveals to be the predominant mode of writing instruction she used during the course of our observations and interviews at Sequoyah. Leigh's use of the five-paragraph model came in disjunction with other values she expressed regarding the need for students to connect with their education. Table 1 reveals *making learning relevant* to be a relatively frequent conceptual tool for Leigh at Sequoyah and a motivating concern during her instructional planning. Leigh's introduction to cognitive processing as a psychology undergraduate was reinforced during her graduate work in education. She drew on her understanding of cognitive processing to help students make connections between their personal worlds and the texts they read and wrote in school:

> I keep trying to draw on things they've learned. There's a word, schema and prior schema. I like for them to draw on what they know. And I also find myself trying to relate this literature and what we're doing to their lives.

By explicitly linking students' knowledge, experiences, and cognitive frameworks to the concepts she was trying to teach, Leigh appeared to advocate a student- or response-centered approach to teaching, one that helped students "actively and consistently [draw] upon [their] own background knowledge in order

to make sense of the text" (Beach & Marshall, 1991, p. 27). Yet her concern for students' connections to schoolwork appeared, at least on the surface, to be contradicted by her use of the potentially restrictive five-paragraph form. Exploring this tension was among our chief interests in pursuing this study.

Leigh's instruction in the five-paragraph theme in December and January of her first year at Sequoyah Middle School is revealing. We see that each instructional episode was linked to others; that is, Leigh continually referred to prior instruction in the five-paragraph theme with the expectation that students could build on previous lessons to improve their performance on new efforts. Leigh followed a cognitive process pedagogy, while the topic of instruction was learning a fixed form.

In our field notes for early December, we noted that Leigh foregrounded the form of the five-paragraph essay but not at the expense of the students' ideas about their topics. Prior to having the students begin their writing, she led a discussion in which the students generated content for their essays. She also included attention to the process for generating the various paragraphs in ways that the students appeared to have learned as procedural knowledge. We summarized the activity as follows:

> Students came in lively, with Leigh passing back marked papers as they took their seats. Leigh asked them to take out their five-paragraph essay handout from *The Pearl.* She said, "Last week we practiced writing an essay, not worrying about grammar but focusing on the format. What we're going to do now is work on an essay about Tom Sawyer so we can get more and more practice. Look at your essays and the comments I made on your comments. Look for the star where I made my second round of comments. Use those comments to help you on the next essay. Before we get started, what do we need to do?" "Prewrite," say the kids. "What else?" "Pick a topic. Think about things to write about," she said. "Give me some ideas" (fieldnotes, December 2).

We further noted Leigh's eliciting possible writing topics and later, her suggestion to the class, "Let's talk about writing the essay. We have five paragraphs. What are they?" Our final observations for that day: "Leigh led students through the remaining paragraphs of the five-paragraph structure, mingling attention to content with attention to form. The students then began to write as Leigh circulated and answered questions."

Early in the second semester, the following field notes were recorded during a classroom observation one week before the state writing test. During this class Leigh led the students through practice on two different five-paragraph themes. One was a new essay that they began in response to the prompt Leigh provided; in the subsequent class period Leigh revealed that the prompt had been used in a previous state writing assessment. She also told the students that the people who grade the state test looked for evidence that the students had revised their essays.

Revision became the focus of the second five-paragraph theme they worked on during this class, with attention to the introductory paragraph of essay drafts that Leigh had marked but not graded.

January 27

12:50 PM: Leigh projected an overhead with the following:

Warmup #1
If I could take a trip anywhere, I would go to _____
(This is your thesis statement; write an intro. paragraph for this)

Warmup #2
Using your warm-up from yesterday, write your first supporting paragraph (use your 1st reason)
She said, "You wrote an intro paragraph yesterday. Today you'll write your first supporting paragraph, which is your first reason." Leigh reminded them that they needed to state three reasons in the first paragraph. The kids wrote quietly.
1 PM: Leigh passed back writing she had graded (completed five-paragraph essays—not the writing in response to the warm-ups). She said they needed to work on revision. She hadn't graded the writing she'd passed back but had circled errors. She reviewed the traits that needed to be in an introductory paragraph. She told them that today's assignment was to revise the introductions. She stressed that doing so was a way to raise their grades and to learn from their mistakes. Their assignment was to look over the papers she'd passed back, get out a fresh piece of paper, and rewrite. She reminded them that this would help them prepare for the state writing test next week.

1:04: Students began their revisions. Leigh circulated to help kids who had questions.

1:35: Bell.

These lessons were typical of Leigh's approach to teaching the five-paragraph theme, with emphasis on the form expected by state writing assessment evaluators and how the content of their ideas could fit into this form.

Entry-Year Committee

Leigh's entry-year committee provided her with her formal mentorship during her first year at Sequoyah. All three committee members supported Leigh's use of small-group work, open-ended and exploratory discussion, and other forms of student-, process-, and inquiry-oriented pedagogy. In doing so they encouraged her to engage in what Vygotsky (1987) calls "play" (p. 345): to experiment as a learner in order to stretch her understanding of how to teach. Each committee member participated in other communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) that valued open-ended teaching: Dara in the school's administration, Peter in his university circle, and Katherine as a member of the school faculty. Within this general orientation, they mentored Leigh with varying degrees of support for teaching the five-paragraph theme.

Dara, recognizing Leigh's anxiety about the state writing test, did not discourage her from teaching the five-paragraph theme. At the same time she encouraged her to see beyond its limitations. During a feedback session following one of Dara's visits to Leigh's class, Leigh told Dara that she was "worried about this writing test." Dara replied:

> We had like a 99% pass rate the first year. I read the kids' little essays . . . and my gosh, I can't even decipher them, which leads me to believe that for 99% of our kids to pass, there must be a really lenient rate of assessment. . . . By teaching them a real formula kind of writing that they can access when they need it, which is when they'll need that, that's the best you can do. . . . on the other hand, I don't want them to think that's the only way to write.

Dara downplayed the importance of the five-paragraph theme on other occasions as well. She recognized that, like the overburdened teachers described by Nunnally (1991), teachers with large student enrollments at times felt pressured to use formulaic instruction to reduce the demands on their time:

> I was talking to a teacher [who] has 140 kids and she's concerned about their proficiency for that test, and just beyond the test knowing how to write, and I was just trying to share with her ideas of how she can teach them the real basics of a five-paragraph essay without writing a five-paragraph essay. Things like have them write the outline of it or just the kernel points of the whole essay, and give them a day and have them write the thesis, give them the thesis and have them write the supporting points.

Dara encouraged the teacher to teach the organizational principles of the five-paragraph theme without dedicating excessive time or attention to the actual writing. As she said to Leigh, who at one point worried that "I'm not even sure what I would do for another type of essay," she preferred that students get experience with many and varied kinds of writing in their English classes. Dara's goal for students at Sequoyah, rather than to prepare for the state writing test, was for students to be "comfortable with their language, so I'm comfortable with teachers taking it from different angles."

Peter's mentorship was designed to help Leigh work comfortably according to the school's priorities while encouraging her to teach imaginatively within that framework. Leigh said very early in the year, "They are going to be taking this writing test. They are going be going on to ninth grade. If I don't do my job at this point, they are going to be hurting." Leigh's acceptance of both the reality and the merits of the state writing test guided her instruction in writing, a disposition that Peter took into account during his mentorship. Following one observation, for instance, the following exchange took place:

PS: Do you find that you teach differently when you are faced with a statewide assessment than you do when you're not constrained by that?

Leigh: I would definitely teach differently according to what's mandated by the state. I'm teaching to the test.

PS: You're teaching to the test. Well, it sounds like you have to.

His feedback on her instruction in the five-paragraph theme was thus not censorious, but rather sought to support her teaching in the context of Sequoyah and its expectations. This awareness included Leigh's belief that she was obligated to teach to the test. During the semester-end entry-year committee meeting, for instance, he provided positive feedback to Leigh and the other members of the team:

> One thing that I thought was really impressive was that the kids—these are eighth graders—already have a very good vocabulary to talk about writing. And you asked the question,"What do we do first?" And what you were looking for was like the topic, but the kids said, about four kids said, "Prewriting.". . . they have this vocabulary and they know that's the first thing you do. So I thought—perhaps this is school-wide—but certainly it's something that they know you expect of them in your class. They all knew that when you talk about paragraph structure what thesis statements were, and [addressing the other team members] one of the things I know Leigh's been doing is having them do a lot of practice in these five-paragraph themes. And sometimes they are just drafts and sometimes it's a draft and a follow-up. So this idea of cycling back to this skill that they're going to need to demonstrate, I think is very good, and doing it in a number of contexts. . . . She is relating the curriculum to the assessment and following it through a number of different contexts. [Addressing Leigh] And I think that is important for you and your school, and it's good for the kids. And I think they seem to be learning the routines, and that's good.

Peter treated Leigh's instruction in the five-paragraph theme as a necessary evil well done. Mentor teacher Katherine appeared to more wholeheartedly approve of how Leigh prepared them to write five-paragraph themes. At the year's final entry-year committee meeting, Katherine lauded Leigh's teaching by saying,

> I know that she has done an excellent job of teaching writing skills because in my class I have my eighth graders do three assignments that involve writing a formal five-paragraph essay. And I always have my kids tell me what team they're on, and the students that have had her for English do a super job in writing paragraphs and writing five-paragraph essays. So I know she's done a really good job of teaching writing skills.

Katherine had long been a member of the school's English department. She identified two primary influences on her teaching: the high school teachers she'd

had as a student in the late 1950s and "other teachers here at Sequoyah. Some of the teachers that were here when I came were certainly role models for me in the way that I taught English." Katherine thus straddled the settings of the entry-year committee and the world of the middle-school English department.

Colleagues

Leigh was a member of two identifiable communities of practice within the faculty, the eighth-grade team and the English department. Her colleagues found her to be a valuable contributor to their activities, as Dara affirmed during the entry-year committee meeting at the end of the first semester: "You're a natural team player. You work well with the teachers on your team." For our research Leigh's descriptions of her colleagues on the eighth-grade team were limited to their advice on classroom management and the individual students whom they shared in class. Her colleagues in eighth grade English, however, appeared often in her attributions regarding her teaching decisions, especially when it came to teaching to the state writing test. Leigh described the kind of guidance provided by her colleagues when discussing her instruction in the five-paragraph theme:

> When they [the students] take the eighth grade writing test, that's what they [the assessors] look for is the five-paragraph essay format. And that's something that I've talked a lot to the other two eighth-grade English teachers about, and so they've helped me on that. But they just said, "Give them lots of practice. Have them practice writing this essay as much as possible" . . . because that's kind of the structure they look for when people grade these writing samples that they have to give.

Leigh's conformity to this instructional norm undoubtedly helped relieve the tension of being a first-year teacher entering an environment with established expectations. However, the motive of this new setting, which included the pressures produced by expectations accompanying the state writing test, also contributed to her experience of new tensions. Two recurring terms in Leigh's accounts of teaching the five-paragraph theme in preparation for this test were *pressure* exerted on her from without, and *stress*, a psychological state she perceived in her colleagues and experienced herself. She was aware of this pressure and experienced this stress very early in her first year at Sequoyah. In an interview conducted in late September, she said that her students needed

> to learn to write because eighth grade takes that writing test in the spring and that's a big thing with this writing test which all the teachers stress about. . . . I want them to focus on being able to write an essay. You know, giving me a thesis statement and backing up your thesis statement, and just your basic old boring essay. . . . I think more and more I'm focusing on structure so that they can write that.

By January, only weeks before the test took place, the pressure intensified and Leigh was feeling the stress to prepare her students:

> I don't feel like I can spend any other time on any other type of writing right now. I have all these other things I want to do as far as writing, but up until they take this test, I don't feel like I can do anything else. . . . I'm just trying to get them ready for this test. And I've told them a hundred times that's my goal and we need to work on this.

The pressure to teach to the test confined Leigh's instruction to the five-paragraph theme, a priority that she made well known to her students. She deferred any other more imaginative writing instruction until after the state writing test:

> I feel like I can't do as many fun activities and different activities. And maybe once I've, like I've said before, maybe once I have some more teaching experience and know what to expect with this writing test a little more and know what works and what doesn't as far as helping them write, then I can vary a little bit. But I think definitely because just like I said, I'm going to let them do some more creative projects in writing after this writing assessment test is over. Right now I feel like I'm just pounding it into them. It kind of stresses me out. This whole writing test stuff.

Leigh revealed that the stress she experienced came through her interactions with her colleagues. She said, for instance, that "I've never heard like if they do awful, that you're going to be fired or anything like that, but I've heard it reflects on you. . . . One teacher commented to me, she said, 'Well, you're lucky you have honors kids because your tests will be higher than mine.'" In contrast to Dara's assurance that her students would pass the test even if she did not dedicate her writing instruction to the five-paragraph theme, Leigh's colleagues impressed upon her the significance of the test scores in terms of their reputations as teachers and the importance therefore of teaching to the test.

During our analysis of the data from Leigh's first year of teaching, we began to wonder if her focus changed in the ensuing years after she knew more about what to expect from the test and her students. During her fourth year at Sequoyah, we asked if she had resolved the tensions and pressures she had felt to teach to the test. She provided her perspective in an email message:

> During my three years of teaching 8th grade English I was extremely stressed about the 8th grade writing test/writing the five-paragraph essay. Although we practiced it a great deal, I was still stressed until the tests were turned in. I became less anxious as the next two years passed. The students seemed to have a firm grasp on what was expected and seemed to be able to write good essays in trial situations. . . . I usually got positive responses from my students when I asked them how they thought they had done. I did really feel pressure to teach to the test but I could manipulate each essay assignment or relate it to our current novel, so it didn't become too repetitive. We also did continue to work on five-paragraph essays along with other types of essays . . . after the test was over. That way they would not forget that method of writing; however, we also used it to compare to other types of writing. . . . Needless to say, when I changed positions this year [to a new teaching assignment], I was quite relieved not to have the pressure of the 8th grade writing test.

Recall that Leigh had said during her first year at Sequoyah that perhaps with experience she would understand the test better, know how to prepare students more effectively, and therefore be able to introduce greater variety into her instruction. Her remarks during her fourth year of teaching, however, suggest that the test was still foremost in her planning of writing instruction. Rather than providing greater variety, she would continue to work on five-paragraph essays even "after the test was over" lest they forget the method. She explained why the five-paragraph theme still dominated her instruction:

> The pressure of the writing test mainly came from my 8th grade English colleagues. I think they explained to me how important this was so I naturally assumed the stress. The scores . . . are reflected through the school as the results are published annually through the city newspaper. Our school has a history of doing extremely well in the writing test so that was always a nice reward to see the 98-99% passage rates. . . . My colleagues also taught the same writing method—there are three 8th grade English teachers at our school. They all felt the same pressure I'm sure. I didn't feel much pressure from the administration. . . . I'm not sure I ever discussed it with them [though] I did discuss it with Dara my first year.

Summary

Although Leigh's colleagues may have pressured her to join them in teaching to the test, it seems there were forces acting collectively on Sequoyah Middle School's teachers to uphold the standards of their school and maintain the high passage rates the community had come to expect. One was afferent (that is, bearing inward toward the center) in that the surrounding pressure from the state and community to teach to the test influenced the eighth-grade English teachers to emphasize the five-paragraph theme to the exclusion of other writing. This exigency in turn contributed to Leigh's gravitation to departmental norms: Her colleagues drew Leigh in toward their standards for effective practice. The combined pressures of state writing test, community values on high test scores, and faculty response to those influences appeared to supercede the effects of the open-ended administration in shaping Leigh's writing instruction. With Dara leaving Sequoyah after Leigh's first year of teaching and the entry-year committee's work complete, these influences met little competition or opposition in Leigh's subsequent years at SMS.

Discussion

Commentators on the five-paragraph theme have argued that teachers who use the form as a tool for writing instruction do so because of enculturation to normative teaching practices, limitations of teacher education programs, personal shortcomings of teachers, poor working conditions in schools, institutional pressures from without, and/or a belief that it may serve as a useful genre. We certainly did not see

Leigh as a beginning teacher hampered by personal shortcomings. She had received both her undergraduate and master's degrees from her state's most competitive university, her master's coming from a college of education ranked in one survey as one of the nation's top 50 shortly after Leigh's graduation. Within her English education program she was regarded as among her graduating class's top students, and as a teacher she received strong evaluations from all who observed her. Rather than being a laggard in a field of neurotic knuckleheads, as some critics have characterized teachers, Leigh was viewed as an outstanding prospect in one of the nation's select Blue Ribbon schools; in Dara's words, in her early-career progress "Leigh's about an eight [on a scale of ten]. She's really got it together. . . . She's very poised and articulate and confident."

Leigh also did not work under poor conditions, even though she did teach approximately 125 students per day, higher than the maximum of 100 recommended by the National Council of Teachers of English (http://www.ncte.org/resolutions/workload831983.html). Aside from this teaching load and her itinerant schedule, her circumstances at Sequoyah were enviable: a sensitive and supportive administration that promoted literacy instruction, an entry-year committee that observed her teaching and gave friendly feedback, an outstanding facility, high-achieving students, supportive parents, competitive salaries, and other attributes. Whatever reasons we see accounting for Leigh's instruction in the five-paragraph theme, an oppressive work environment was not among them.

We do believe that the other four reasons we have reviewed for the five-paragraph theme's persistence did contribute to Leigh's writing instruction. Leigh's deeper belief system included faith in the five-paragraph theme's utility; it was a form that had helped her to stay organized as a secondary student, so she saw value in employing this tool with her students. Her own positive experiences with writing five-paragraph themes as a student predisposed her to accepting the state's mandate as reasonable and fitting.

If Leigh's apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975) suggested the appropriateness of the five-paragraph theme as a tool for writing instruction, her first formal site for learning to teach writing, her teacher education program, might have served as the first setting to trouble that predilection. However, Wideen, Mayer-Smith, and Moon (1998) regard education programs such as the one Leigh attended as "a patina of beliefs layered over a lifetime of learning" whose effects are so limited that "When confronted with the realities of the classroom, these beginning teachers reverted to their deeper belief system" (p. 158; cf. Rust, 1994). With the methods course's emphasis on the teaching of literature and with the program's lack of articulation across courses and departments, Leigh emerged without a strong conceptual framework for critiquing the five-paragraph theme or developing a rationale for teaching writing in other ways.

Once in the field under Mrs. Hoover's mentorship, Leigh was encouraged to emphasize the form of writing. In many ways, for instance, her experiments at Sequoyah with small-group instruction in her teaching of literature, Leigh was an "adventurous" teacher of the sort described by Wiley (2000, p. 65). Yet her writing instruction was more rigid, as she fell back on the five-paragraph theme as a kind of default mode. Without a formal conception of teaching writing through which to evaluate this mentorship, Leigh instead viewed Mrs. Hoover's mentorship through the filter provided by her personal experiences as a student. From a Vygotskian (1987) standpoint, then, Leigh had not developed a *scientific concept* of writing pedagogy—one based on formal instruction—to guide her approach to teaching writing (Smagorinsky et al., 2003). Rather, she was left to develop her conception of writing through apprenticeships with mentors and colleagues in the settings she found in the field.

Particularly at Sequoyah, these mentors and colleagues were nested within an institutional setting that pressured teachers to teach toward the state writing assessment. From the standpoint of an activity theory cultural analysis, Leigh learned to teach writing through her engagement with concentric settings that mediated her beliefs about teaching and learning such that the five-paragraph theme emerged as an important and necessary tool for teaching writing to promote a high pass rate among her students. Even while Leigh's administration encouraged more open-ended approaches to teaching writing, she earned support for teaching the five-paragraph theme. She received both Peter's and Katherine's approval for teaching her students to write well. Perhaps more tacit but no less powerful was the reward for conforming to the instructional norm established by her colleagues. In taking her colleagues' advice to "give them lots of practice" with the format for the state writing test and by using the handouts that they had prepared for their own instruction, Leigh grew more secure as a member of her English department, becoming the "team player" her colleagues and administrators appreciated.

However, conforming to the norm created stresses of its own. Leigh was aware of the five-paragraph fervor early on in the year, but by mid-year it overshadowed all aspects of her instruction as she felt the pressure to prepare her students for the February test. Though Dara downplayed the importance of the test, Leigh heard a different story from her colleagues: "It reflects on you," and "you're lucky you have honors kids because your tests will be higher than mine." If her honors students did poorly on the test, it would reflect on Leigh's teaching ability; it would mean that she did not do her job in upholding the community's high standards for its children and had failed to be a good member of the teaching team at Sequoyah. Reputations were at stake: Leigh's within her department, Sequoyah's within the competitive district where being first mattered, and the district's relative to other similar communities in the metro area and around the state. Add to these concerns her deeper belief that the form was a useful instructional tool, and it is no

wonder that Leigh focused on teaching the five-paragraph theme. Based on her students' effective preparation for the test, Leigh was a good writing teacher.

The final reason we see for Leigh's use of the five-paragraph theme is her view that it can be a useful genre in students' learning to write, just as she'd found it useful in her own work as a student. Critics, of course, might disagree, arguing that the form is inescapably confining rather than enabling, an exercise in imitation devoid of generative thinking (Fahnestock, 1993). More robust discourse genres, many have argued, fuse form and substance as they represent conventionalized social actions in the world beyond school (Miller, 1984).

We see Leigh's instruction in the five-paragraph theme, with its fairly tight script for the placement of sentences and paragraphs, as being neither the flexible, evolving blueprint for action posited by Miller (1984) nor the exercise in blind imitation that many see in the use of this template. Rather, her instruction fell somewhere between these binary points, driven by form yet amenable to the expression of original ideas. Imitation has long been viewed by many educators as behaviorist (e.g., Miller & Dollard, 1941). This view has been modified by those (e.g., Bandura, 1971; Vygotsky, 1978, 1987) who see imitation as potentially a more constructive process. Vygotsky argues that the capacity for insightful imitation relies on play or experimentation as a means to push a learner's upper threshold of learning potential. Drawing on Leont'ev's (1981) more contextual perspective, we would argue that a playful ethos should permeate a learning environment so as to enable learners to experiment, make mistakes, try new ideas, and push the boundaries of their previous understanding. Doing so stretches learners' (and teachers') thresholds for learning to generate the possibility for something fundamentally new and, from a contextual standpoint, creates an environment in which new ways of thinking are possible.

At least in this early stage of her career, this playful extension happened to a degree within the boundaries of Leigh's instruction in the five-paragraph theme, but not beyond it. The policy context of Leigh's instruction mandated the highly specified five-paragraph theme as both the zenith and sole standard for evaluating writing, limiting the room available for play with other genres. Within her instruction in the five-paragraph model, Leigh provided her students with abundant opportunities to write essays on topics that might serve them well on the state writing test. Part of this preparation included instruction in both a general process model of prewriting, drafting, and revision and more specific instruction in the intricacies of each paragraph's form and purpose. If a genre consists of both textual features and dialogic social action, and if producing essays that meet the expectations of mandated assessments counts as social action with dialogic potential given the right combination of writer, purpose, and topic, then the possibility exists for student writers to learn the five-paragraph theme as a useful genre, at least in a limited sense. We say "limited" because, as Miller (1984) observes,

"genres change, evolve, and decay" (p. 163). The five-paragraph theme has not changed along with evolving cultural ways of knowing and representing knowledge in the manner of published academic discourse, as reflected in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* through its five editions (1957, 1967, 1983, 1994, 2001; see Bazerman, 1988, for a sociocultural analysis of this evolution). Rather, the features of the five-paragraph essay have remained constant over many generations of writers and the rhetorical problems their environments provide for them. In this sense it is limiting in the same manner as a sonnet, haiku, blues couplet, and other strict forms that have retained their essential structure over time. Whether such forms exist as genres no doubt depends on how their instantiators use them to express and communicate their ideas.

Another way to look at instruction in the five-paragraph theme is that such teaching constitutes a speech genre (Bakhtin, 1986) in secondary English classes. Kamberelis (1999) argues that current genre theory

> attempts to criticize traditional notions of genres as classes of texts and to rethink the construct of genre in relation to the situated social practices in which discourse and texts are generated, as well as in relation to the personal histories of speakers and writers and the material and discursive histories of collectives and disciplines (e.g., Bazerman, 1997; Kamberelis, 1995; Prior, 1994; Russell, 1997). Such an approach foregrounds genres as dynamic text-forming processes at the intersection of objective social structures, intertextual and interdiscursive relations, and the ongoing activity of making meaning through the enactment of text-forming possibilities. Most of this theory and research has redirected attention away from textual forms and toward the people, institutions, rhetorical situations, social contexts, specific text-making practices, and historical trajectories that together constitute genres and are, in turn, constituted by genres. (p. 405)

From this perspective Leigh's participation in the tradition of five-paragraph theme instruction, historically rooted in her own experience and that of teachers in her school and throughout her state and nation, was and remains part of a well-traveled trajectory dialogically related to the work of teachers both immediate and historically and spatially distant.

Vygotsky (1978) compares a zone of proximal development to an "embryonic state" in which "the 'buds' or 'flowers' of development rather than the 'fruits' of development" (p. 86) should be the focus of teaching and learning. If writers and their teachers are too limited in how they approach their work, their growth may be nipped in the bud. If, however, they approach their work as principled play, they may help to create new settings through which they can push the boundaries of conventional wisdom, generate new ways of thinking about teaching and learning, and help to create a new motive to guide instructional practice within their settings. The institutional setting of Leigh's teaching, constrained by her colleagues' attention to the mandate of the state writing test, provided her less room to play

with conceptions about teaching writing than did less restricted aspects of her teaching, such as her literature instruction in which she experimented with different approaches to using small-group instruction.

Through our study of Leigh, we have tried to account for the persistence of the five-paragraph theme as a staple of secondary school writing instruction. We would argue that it has endured for a variety of reasons, a combination of which surely influences the decisions of many to employ it with their students. Leigh is among a large group of thoughtful educators who rely on this structure for their writing instruction. Just as we hope that teachers do not oversimplify issues of form, we hope that critics do not oversimplify intentions of the legions of teachers who take this approach. We hope further that our analysis of Leigh's case helps to complicate the discussion about the persistence of this inveterate form of instruction.

Leigh's Epilogue

It was really interesting to read about and reflect on how I taught at the beginning of my career six years ago. During my first year there were so many aspects of teaching about which I had no idea. I spent my first three or four months simply keeping my head above water. The teachers here at Sequoyah were and still are extremely helpful when it comes to helping new teachers prepare students for learning. I'd also say that my entry-year committee members encouraged me to help the students be more open-ended in their approach to writing. Dara talked a lot about open-ended discussions with the students, getting them to talk about their opinions of others' writing styles. My supervising teacher when I was student teaching was more structured and did not encourage open-ended writing as much.

My teaching has been influenced by many of the factors discussed in this article. There is definitely enculturation to normative teaching practices at work in my teaching environment. Following norms consumed my teaching during my first few years: what do I teach, make sure I document it, am I covering all the materials, how am I going to teach all of these state core curriculum skills in nine months, etc. Now I can finally fit my teaching style into these normative teaching practices, which is much more enjoyable since I can be more flexible and creative as I work to meet all of the requirements. As a result of my being more creative, I have an easier time allowing and encouraging my students to be more creative or off the wall.

I would say that I learned far more from my first year of teaching than I did in college. I wouldn't call the curriculum at the university fragmented, but in retrospect it really missed something. We never did address how to teach writing, which seems really weird to me now. We did have a grammar class which did and still does influence my teaching. I try to let them write and address grammar in the

context of their writing. I still go over the grammar rules, etc., but try to let students write more rather than correcting sentences out of books. This is sometimes harder for them to do, but of course more challenging and more helpful. I still follow the state core curriculum, but once again I am finding new and different ways to make sure I hit on each skill. I can find more creative ways to do this.

I believe every teacher has personal shortcomings. Some simply teach to the test and use boring materials. I do not profess to be an expert in teaching, but I do know that the more interesting and interactive the lesson, the better results you will have. This is especially true with writing, and that is why I am constantly working to give them better, more interesting topics on which to write, especially when working on the dreaded five-paragraph essay. Other shortcomings are forgetting what the kids like and are interested in and forgetting the basics: smiling at and visiting with the kids, being up and active in the classroom, and enjoying the subject matter. I do feel fortunate to teach in a great school, where I have learned so much from many teachers who possess very few shortcomings.

I can say that I am still working on and refining my skills when it comes to teaching the five-paragraph theme, which the eighth graders are still tested on. I am still using ideas I learned in college and in my student teaching and first year of teaching. I would say that now I approach it differently. I allow for the students to be more unstructured and free with their responses and writing of the five-paragraph theme. If they choose an unusual topic, I let them go with it instead of being so strict when it comes to topics. I think giving the students choices is more beneficial. Maybe letting them be more unstructured in their writing helps a teacher get to know each student better because the students open up more in their writing. That is the issue I explored during the research stage of my student teaching: If you give them topics they can explore, students will write more. Even with a basic five-paragraph structure, students can play with their ideas while trying to express and communicate them. So perhaps in this way the five-paragraph theme can be a useful genre.

I still work on using the five-paragraph format but try to get them to write interesting, well-constructed sentences with lively words. Instead of just restating the thesis in each paragraph, I have them come up with a new and different way to state their point. I still focus on the importance of grammar and its correctness but find myself wanting them to be more creative with their words, sentences, topics, and ideas. Maybe I can attribute this to my having taught for a while now, so I am less stressed; or maybe it's because I'm learning that writing a structured piece such as the five-paragraph theme can be more interesting if I encourage their creativity.

Overall, I would say my teaching career has been enjoyable due to some great experiences and professors in college and some helpful teachers during my first few years of teaching. I know there are a lot of gaps I have to fill in as I learn more

about teaching. I would say it is a continual learning process, and just when you think you have a certain technique down, there's always something else that pops up to remind you that you have a long way to go.

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