

Using Intensive Writing-to-Learn as a Means of Reducing Limitations on Learning in Large Classes

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Preface

Instructors and students at large public universities like the University of Minnesota often have to cope with the impersonality of high-enrollment classes. It is difficult for person-to-person dialogue to occur in such settings, and writing activities offer one way for students and instructors to connect across the barriers imposed by large classrooms. In this technical report, Ruth Thomas and Debbie Peterson report the results of their research on using "writing-to-learn" activities as one means of encouraging personal connection in a large class. Thomas and Peterson found that not only did writing activities help to mitigate the impersonality of a large classroom, they also helped students make personal connections to the course content and their understanding of it.

Projects such as this one, together with ongoing Center projects, should result in improved undergraduate writing, the Center's primary goal. Along with colloquia, conferences, publications, and other outreach activities, the Center annually funds research projects by University of Minnesota faculty who study any of the following topics:

- characteristics of writing across the University's curriculum;
- status reports on students' writing ability and the University;
- the connections between writing and learning in all fields;
- the characteristics of writing beyond the academy;
- the effects of ethnicity, race, class, and gender on writing; and
- curricular reform through writing-intensive instruction.

We are pleased to present this technical report as part of the ongoing discussions about writing-to-learn and using writing in high-enrollment classes. One of the goals of all Center publications is to encourage conversations about writing; we invite you to contact the Center about this publication or other Center publications and activities.

Lillian Bridwell-Bowles, Series Editor

Kim Donehower, Editor

Bob Peterson, Editor

December 1997

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INTRODUCTION

In order for learning that is deep and lasting to occur, students must have opportunities to be engaged in thinking about the concepts they are learning and to connect them to what is already familiar and to what is of personal interest and import. Dialogue is a medium through which this kind of processing of ideas can occur (Paul, 1992; Glatthorn, 1985; DiPardo & Freedman, 1988). Dialogue is more easily incorporated in smaller classes than in larger ones for several reasons. First, "air time" for each student in large classes is limited—there is simply less opportunity for each person to speak. Second, because there are so many students in large classes, it is more difficult for students to get to know each other to a point of establishing the trust and rapport that meaningful dialogue requires. Third, it is easy for students to avoid responsibility for contributing to dialogue in large classes because there are many others to do it.

Because writing-to-learn, like dialogue, provides the opportunity to be actively engaged with concepts that are being learned, and to connect them to what is already familiar and to what is of personal interest and import, and because writing can be done with varying degrees of independence, it may be able to serve functions in large classes similar to those which dialogue serves well in smaller classes. This investigation sought to explore the feasibility and effectiveness of using intensive writing-to-learn activities in a large class to accomplish the learning goals that dialogue has been used to accomplish in smaller classes.

BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM

This project is based on research that has explored implications of cognitive theory for teaching and learning and has supported the following propositions:

- Learning is a process in which new information is combined with prior knowledge to form a new understanding that reflects a revision of the old in a synthesis of new and old.

- Learning is not a purely cognitive process. Emotions, interests, and motivations are involved in sometimes subtle but profound ways, many of which we do not yet understand very well.
- Unless learners can integrate new knowledge with prior knowledge, the new knowledge will have little impact on their thought or actions. Integration requires the activation of prior knowledge, bringing it to consciousness, and considering it in light of new information.
- The integration described above requires that students' own thought be involved in the learning process, not just the thoughts of experts.
- Students have the opportunity to generate and examine their own thought when they are active participants in, and direct their own learning.

While dialogue is an effective medium in small classes (up to 30 students) for making students' own thought front and center, for using content as hypotheses to be examined and critiqued, for actively involving students in the learning process, for confronting students with views that contradict their own, for ensuring deep processing of concepts, and for getting students to accept the responsibility for directing their own learning, large classes present challenges in the use of dialogue as a central medium. For example, although dialogue can occur in small groups within large classes, there is likely to be a wide range in the quality of the dialogue from group to group depending on the experience of group members with dialogue processes and on the degree of commitment and seriousness with which group members engage in dialogue.

The literature on writing suggests the potential of writing-to-learn as a means of reflecting the propositions outlined above in the learning situation (Britton, 1982; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1986a) in that writing-to-learn emphasizes writing as a process or medium through which meanings are discovered, new ideas are generated, and thoughts are worked out, rather than as a product (Applebee, 1981; Britton, 1982; Nickerson, Perkins, & Smith, 1985; Olson, 1985; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1986a; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). Olson (1985) emphasizes the interdependence of thinking and writing in making meaning out of experience, and reflects the role writing plays in helping people

integrate prior and new knowledge: “. . . writers must tap their memory to establish what they know, review the information they have generated and translate it into inner speech or print. . . . Thinking and writing are recursive processes in which one often has to go backward and go forward,” (p. 103). Other theorists have offered similar views of the integrative function of writing (Emig, 1977; Gage, 1986; Odell, 1980), some in relation to writing for learning in content courses (Jones, Palincsar, Ogle, & Carr, 1987).

Writing as an opportunity to pursue what is of deep personal interest is also reflected in the literature (Britton, 1982; Durst & Newell, 1989; Glatthorn, 1985; Stasz, Ramsey, Eden, DaVanzo, Farris, & Lewis, 1993). This function of writing has been linked to Polanyi's (1966) concept of tacit knowing to the extent that writing allows one to begin to tap the deeply personal knowledge that lies beneath conscious awareness. In this sense, we write to discover what we know (Glatthorn, 1985). This personal interest focus is also reflected in what Florio and Clark (1982) refer to as writing to know oneself and others. When students are given opportunities to express themselves freely in writing, when they are permitted to set and pursue their own goals autonomously, they begin to write their own thoughts, rather than what they think the teacher wants, and to view their expressions as having value (Boiarsky, 1981; Stasz et al., 1993; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1986b). This bolsters students' confidence as writers and their motivation to write (Boiarsky, 1981; Stasz et al., 1993), and empowers learners to direct their own learning (O'Flahavan & Tierney, 1991). As one teacher put it, “Start with your own personal interests in order to make your paper a consuming interest rather than work” (Stasz et al., p. 70).

There is other literature which suggests that writing, combined with reading and peer collaboration, is a strong instructional model. For example, O'Flahavan and Tierney (1991) describe a literate community which supports interactions among students who utilize reading, writing, and discussion as vehicles for thinking. The support includes opportunities to discuss, solicit input, and solve problems with others. O'Flahavan and Tierney (1991) point out the role that coordinated reading and writing can play in confronting students with views that contradict their own and in providing a medium for working through the conflict: “. . . reading and writing in combination are more likely to promote critical thinking than when reading is separated from writing. We believe the learner has the opportunity to engage in either a dialectical or dialogical exchange with the self. Reading may serve as the requisite partner in this exchange, as a

resource of opposing views or further elaborations on an idea; writing may serve as a mode through which the learner might resolve disputes or allow ideas to come to fruition" (p. 47). The use of peer response groups in which peers collaborate with each other on writing tasks and assume roles as peer reviewers shifts power from teacher to students and has positive influences on students' writing (DiPardo & Freedman, 1988).

PURPOSE

The purpose of this project was to explore the incorporation of intensive writing-to-learn activities throughout a course which is too large for in-class dialogue to be the central medium for thinking. More specifically, intensive writing-to-learn was explored as a medium in a large class for making students' own thought front and center, for using content as hypotheses to be examined and critiqued, for actively involving students in the learning process, for confronting students with views that contradict their own, for ensuring deep processing of concepts, and for getting students to accept responsibility for directing their own learning.

The course, Child Psychology 5336, Development and Interpersonal Relations, is described in Appendix A. This course can be taught in a very impersonal manner, simply acquainting students with the research in the area and testing their recall of the same on objective tests. On the other hand, it was anticipated that this course offers a rich opportunity for personalizing the learning experience in a way that might foster students' self-understanding and personal growth. These were believed to be important aspects of learning for students enrolled in this course, many of whom are preparing to work with, teach, or conduct research involving human beings, especially children. A goal was to use intensive writing-to-learn strategies as a means of both deepening students' understanding of concepts and research regarding the influence of relationships on development and helping students make personal connections with this content.

METHOD, PROCEDURES, APPROACH

Development of the Writing-to-Learn Assignments

The writing-to-learn activities were incorporated in the Fall 1993 offering of CPsy 5336. Prior to the beginning of fall quarter, criteria for choosing writing-to-learn approaches that would be suitable for the course were identified. These criteria included:

reflecting the propositions about learning outlined in the background and problem section of this report, engaging students in thinking about and with course concepts, helping students connect course concepts to prior knowledge and to what is of personal interest and import, increasing students' self-awareness in areas relevant to course content, allowing students to meet course goals (see Appendix B), and being feasible in terms of the course format. Examples of writing-to-learn approaches that were considered included questions, critical incidents, reflections, and responses to someone else's reflections. Resources that emphasized writing in the content areas, such as Lehr (1980), Hillocks (1982), Meyers (1991), and Giroux (1979), and ones that focus on deepening self-understanding through writing, such as Lehrer (1988), Connelly and Clandinin (1988), McGuire (1990), Walkup (1990), van Manen (1990), and Cell (1984), were consulted. Approaches that involve students in peer collaboration focused on working with each others' writings (Scardamalia, Bereiter, & Steinbach, 1984; Staton, 1980) were also considered.

Six writing-to-learn approaches were selected that met the above criteria. The selected approaches included autobiographies, journals, synthesis of readings, critical analysis of readings, reading and responding to content-related fiction and nonfiction literature, as well as viewing and responding to content-related films. Guidelines for each approach were developed and are included in Appendix C. The 71 students enrolled in the class were given the opportunity to choose one approach that they would use throughout the course. The reason for asking students to continue to use the same approach was to facilitate comparison of the students' work across time. Seven writing assignments were required in addition to an essay final examination. Students were also given the opportunity to do an eighth assignment as extra credit, which most of them did. In addition to the writing assignments that were graded, students were asked to write and submit questions each week. Course requirements and grading procedures are described in Appendix D. The final exam guidelines are located in Appendix E. The writing frequency was based on work which suggests that frequent, informal writing increases fluency of thought, and that frequent writing by students gives teachers insight into students' thinking and helps teachers better support each student's learning (Boiarsky, 1981).

Responding to and Preparing Students' Writing for Analysis

Each student's writing was responded to each week by the same course staff member in a style that was intended to reflect a teacher-as-collaborator role (in which respectfulness,

acceptance, understanding, empathy, invitations to elaborate, and requests for clarification characterized the responses) rather than a teacher-as-judge role (Flonio-Ruane, 1991; DiPardo & Freedman, 1988). This tone of response was viewed as appropriate since the nature of some writing assignments, such as journals and autobiographies, were highly personally oriented, and because the other assignment options could also contain personal material. The criteria used for assessing the writing assignments and which were reflected in the feedback given to students were designed to be appropriate for the potentially personal material students' writing might contain and also to focus on evidence of depth of learning and an active, self-directed learner stance toward the content (see Appendix C for these criteria). Papers submitted in a given class session were returned to the students the following week.

With the students' permission, their writing assignments and final exams were duplicated and prepared for later analysis by assigning an identification number to each student and replacing the student's name on each assignment with the identification number. Duplication was done before the papers were read and responded to by the course staff. Three students indicated that they did not wish to participate in the study and their writing was omitted from the duplication process. After the course was over, at the beginning of the following quarter, one of these students brought all her papers in, indicating she had changed her mind and was willing to participate.

Choosing Students' Writing for Analysis

Although there were many different kinds of analyses of the student writing that could have been done, resource limitations necessitated making choices. It was decided that a comparison of writing by students who received the highest and lowest number of total points in the course would be most helpful in understanding dimensions present in their writing that may have contributed to the scores it received. In addition, since a central interest in the project was ascertaining the kind of learning that writing-to-learn might engage, a sense of possible differences in the nature of learning for students who wrote high- and low-scoring papers was of interest.

Based on the above rationale, the following procedure was used to select student papers for analysis. The total points received by each student for the seven required assignments and the final exam were arrayed. Three samples of students were selected. The first sample was comprised of students whose total points put them in the top 15%

of the array, and students whose total points put them in the bottom 15% of the array. Then, the total points received by students who chose the most frequently chosen writing option (film) were arrayed, and the students in the top 15% and bottom 15% of this array were identified to create the second sample. This same procedure was used to create the third sample comprised of students who chose the second most frequently chosen writing option (journals). The identification numbers comprising the second and third samples were then compared with the identification numbers comprising in the first sample. Identification numbers appearing in either the film or journals sample and the first sample were selected. This final sample represented a 20% sample of all of the students completing the course. As a result of this process, the writing of 14 students was selected, seven students who ranked at the lower end of the total points array, and seven students who ranked at the top of this array. Three of the high end students did journals, and four students in this group did the film option. Two of the low end students did journals, and five students in this group did the film option. All seven required assignments, the eighth extra credit assignment if completed, and the essay final examination for these 14 students were analyzed.

Analysis

In order to examine the writing from multiple perspectives, the students' writing was analyzed first on an individual basis using a three-stage approach. The results of this individual analysis were then compiled for the total sample.

Analysis of Individuals' Writing

Stage I — Perspective-taking. This involved total immersion in each individual student's writing, by reading all of a student's writing without any efforts to categorize underlying or emergent patterns. The approach in this stage was to treat the writing as a captivating novel, read in one sitting. This initial reading approach served a two-fold purpose. First, it was an attempt to become as engaged in and sensitive to the student's thinking as possible and, second, to provide a guide to developing a categorization framework for themes that emerged from the student writing.

Stage II — Categorization of Emergent Theme. In this stage, each student's writing assignments were read a second time to verify emergent themes noted in Stage I, to discover any further themes that may not have been noted in the earlier reading, and to

categorize the themes in terms of the following three categories: (a) self-knowledge, (b) depth and insight related to course content, and (c) integration of course content with course experiences and personal experiences and knowledge.

Stage III — Quantitative Analysis: The final step in analyzing an individual's work was the completion of a word count for each paper in order to obtain a measure of length of each completed writing assignment.

Compilation of Themes

The final process regarding the themes revealed in individuals' writing assignments was compiling them across individuals in the high and low groups within the three categories noted in Stage II.

Course Performance and Word Count Analysis

Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated for the high and low groups for the seven written assignments, for the eighth extra credit written assignment, for the final exam, and for the total points received in the course. Fischer's two-sample t-test was used to compare these means for the high and low groups. Similarly, mean word count and standard deviations were calculated for the high and low groups for the seven written assignments, for the eighth extra credit written assignment, and for the final exam. Fischer's two-sample t-test was used to compare these means for the high and low groups.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Profiles

Students were asked early in the quarter to supply information about their student status on a form prepared for obtaining this information. The majority of students who enrolled in the course were undergraduates, as shown in Table 1. Since 38% of the students were postbaccalaureate, however, (and this would not be unusual given that the course is an upper division/graduate level course) the range of background in terms of experience and academic preparation was enormously wide. This was true despite course prerequisites designed to control this breadth.

Students chose the assignment options with the frequencies shown in Table 2. As stated previously, film analysis and journal writing were the two most frequently chosen

options. Far fewer students chose autobiography, writing a synthesis of each week's readings, and literature. No students chose to write critical analyses of each week's readings.

Only one student did not complete the course. This student submitted only the first writing assignment. Sixty-nine students submitted all seven required assignments and the final exam. In addition, 42, or 60%, of these students also submitted an eighth, extra credit writing assignment. One student who chose the journal writing option

Table 1 : Student Status of Students Enrolled in CPsy 5336, Fall, 1993

Program	N	%
Undergraduate	44	62
Master's	13	19
Doctoral	3	4
Certificate	8	11
Licensure	3	4
Total	71	100

Table 2: Assignment Options Chosen by Students Enrolled in CPsy 5336, Fall, 1993

Assignment Option	N	%
Literature	3	4
Film	36	51
Synthesis	7	10
Journal	17	24
Autobiography	8	11
Critical Analysis	0	0
Total	71	100

submitted only four weekly assignments plus the final exam. This student was not included in the analysis.

Comparison of High and Low Student Groups

Assignment Scores. Table 3 contains the results of comparing the scores received on each written assignment by students at the high and low ends of the range of total course points. The data in this table reflect that scores assigned to the written assignments of these two groups of students were significantly different. This suggests that it was possible to distinguish varying levels of performance in the course through the use of writing-to-learn assignments and assessing them according to the grading procedures and criteria already described.

Length and Qualities of Written Assignments. Over the course of the quarter, course staff believed they noted a pattern with respect to the length of the writing assignments. It appeared that, in general, the higher scoring papers were longer than the lower scoring papers. Using word count as a measure of length, a comparison of the high and low groups of students was done to investigate this possibility. The results are displayed in Table 4, which indicates that the students at the high end of the range of total course points consistently wrote longer papers than did students at the low end of the range of total course points. The strength of this pattern was consistent throughout the quarter until the final exam. The high group of students wrote longer essay exams than the low group, but the discrepancy in length is smaller than that for the weekly assignments.

Another pattern revealed in Table 4 is that the length of the weekly assignments written by the high group of students increased toward the middle of the quarter and then remained fairly constant for the remainder of the quarter. In contrast, the length of the low group papers remained fairly constant through the middle of the quarter and then declined somewhat toward the end of the quarter.

The data in Table 4 raise the issue of the role played by the length of a paper in the grading process. Was there a bias operating in the grading process that resulted in longer papers receiving higher scores, or was length simply a reflection of the presence or absence of the qualities of the assignment that were relevant to the criteria used in grading (i.e., depth and reflectiveness, connecting content with prior knowledge and experience, supporting evidence for claims)? Did the low group students "give up" and do only the minimum by the end of the quarter since their scores weren't improving? The qualitative

Table 3: Comparison of Scores Received on Each Assignment and Written by Students at High and Low Ends of Total Course Points Range

	Group	N ^c	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	t	p																																																																																																
Assignment 1	hi	7	11.71	.76	6.60	<.001																																																																																																
	lo	5	9.2	.45			Assignment 2	hi	7	11.86	.38	2.87	.014	lo	7	9.57	2.07	Assignment 3	hi	6	12	0	5.69	<.001	lo	7	8.86	1.35	Assignment 4	hi	6	11.83	.41	7.36	<.001	lo	7	9.29	.76	Assignment 5	hi	6	11.67	.82	2.24	.05	lo	6	10.33	1.21	Assignment 6	hi	7	12	0	6.36	<.001	lo	7	9.71	.95	Assignment 7	hi	7	11.86	.38	4.75	.001	lo	6	9	1.55	Assignment 8	hi	7	12	0	4.86	<.001	lo	7	9	1.63	Final Exam ^b	hi	7	14.57	1.13	3.04	.01	lo	7	11.29	2.63	Total: 7 required assignments + Final exam	hi	7	98.29	.76	20.32	<.001	lo
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	lo	7	9.57	2.07			Assignment 3	hi	6	12	0	5.69	<.001	lo	7	8.86	1.35	Assignment 4	hi	6	11.83	.41	7.36	<.001	lo	7	9.29	.76	Assignment 5	hi	6	11.67	.82	2.24	.05	lo	6	10.33	1.21	Assignment 6	hi	7	12	0	6.36	<.001	lo	7	9.71	.95	Assignment 7	hi	7	11.86	.38	4.75	.001	lo	6	9	1.55	Assignment 8	hi	7	12	0	4.86	<.001	lo	7	9	1.63	Final Exam ^b	hi	7	14.57	1.13	3.04	.01	lo	7	11.29	2.63	Total: 7 required assignments + Final exam	hi	7	98.29	.76	20.32	<.001	lo	7	77.29	2.63								
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^aA total of 12 points each were possible for assignments 1-8.

^bA total of 15 points were possible for the final examination.

^cStudents had the opportunity to omit one assignment if they did not do the extra credit assignment. Fluctuations in the N reflect omitted assignments.

analysis of papers reported in the next section sheds some light on this issue and suggests that, in addition to length differences, high and low group papers also reflected differences in coherence, extent of elaboration, and support for claims.

Table 4: Comparison of Length as Measured by Word Count of Each Assignment Written by Students at High and Low Ends of Total Course Points Range

	Group	N	Mean Word Count	Standard Deviation	t	p
Assignment 1	hi	7	1942	878.81	2.03	.07
	lo	5	1104	294.88		
Assignment 2	hi	7	1684	561.45	3.01	.011
	lo	7	1026	138.07		
Assignment 3	hi	6	1866	479.05	3.88	.003
	lo	7	1050	266.65		
Assignment 4	hi	6	2187	935.73	3.28	.007
	lo	7	1009	191.15		
Assignment 5	hi	6	2142	1203.63	2.06	.066
	lo	6	1113	221.87		
Assignment 6	hi	7	2060	875.82	3.12	.009
	lo	7	969	298.39		
Assignment 7	hi	7	2045	793.86	3.30	.007
	lo	6	945	176.56		
Assignment 8	hi	7	2015	1136.01	2.21	.047
	lo	7	1032	296.20		
Final Exam	hi	7	2404	660.08	1.03	.32
	lo	7	2112	358.55		

The first characteristic, coherence, was influenced by writing mechanics problems. When writing mechanics were severely limited, it was often difficult to tell if the incoherence was due to poor writing mechanics alone or if muddled thinking was also reflected. Despite the difficulty in teasing these two factors out, some papers suggested that students' thinking was coherent, and it was their writing skills that were the primary detraction from the coherence of their written expression. Some of these students were international students for whom English was a second language. The following is an example of how writing mechanics detracted from coherence in the papers of the low student group:

Reading this article, made me reflect on how I felt as teenager, when my parents went through their divorce. At the time I couldn't think of much but all the conflict at home, I hated seeing these, and I hated both my parents for putting our family through it, When your a child, you seem to think that your parents are super people, Who can make every thing wrong, right, and when divorce enters the picture you realize that they'll only human. With no special powers just feelings, and desires like every one else. But what's sadder is that even though your only their offspring, and their ending their personal relationship = which has little to do with you. You still feel responsible for it. If only I had been good, or stayed quite, or helped with the house work more this would never have happened. At least in my case, I wanted a reason, anything. But no one, not even my parents had one. I felt, that was worth hurting us so. If we could have been able to blame someone or thing I could have accepted it. But since there was not one, I blamed myself = Like scape-goating.

The thoughts the student is expressing in this excerpt are reflective, and the student is able to convey a sense of deeply held feelings despite the punctuation, sentence structure, spelling, and word form problems. Nevertheless, these mechanics detract enough from the ideas being conveyed so that the reader must "fill in" gaps in meaning. As a result, the reader is unsure if the interpretation being made is accurate or not. A paper reflecting the above kinds of patterns, despite the strengths that are also obviously there, could not be given as high a score as a clearer paper because of the many questions of interpretation it raises. The following excerpt concerning a similar life event, in contrast to the one above, was written by a student from the high group:

When I examine my own family, I see the effects of societal pressures on my own father. He lost his job several years ago and changed into a completely different person. Due to this, and other marital tensions mentioned earlier, my parents just recently got divorced. Losing a job really takes its toll on self-

esteem, especially in a society that looks down upon men who can't provide for their families. My father became depressed and actually quite lazy. He was often on edge, and grumpy. Now we hardly speak (not by my choice) because I think he is so ashamed that the marriage failed and he feels guilty because of it ... I had a very hard time with my parents' divorce and I probably involved myself in the process more so than my brother did. It seemed as though I showed much more anger ...

In the example below written by a student in the low group, writing mechanics contribute to a lack of coherence, but muddled thinking and/or lack of understanding appear to be more primary factor(s):

Bronfenbrenner talks about three different models that affect human development. The problems was a exosystem in which he had a problem making human development. He was effected by outside forces.

The second characteristic that differentiated papers by the high and low groups of students was elaboration. Elaboration took several forms, but all resulted in an expressed idea being "fleshed out" in terms of meaning through providing explanations, examples, synonyms, definitions, or connections to events, experiences, and other ideas. Elaboration in the papers by the high student group consistently reflected "going beyond the given,"—bringing something of one's own, something from another context (e.g., another time, place, situation) to the discussion of a concept. Elaboration was less consistently present in the papers by the low group. These students had a tendency to say the same thing over and over again rather than extending a thought or concept. The following examples concerning Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, a course concept, illustrate this difference. The first, by a student in the low group, reflects both limited elaboration and writing mechanics problems; the second was written by a student from the high group and reflects considerable elaboration that involves creative analogical, metaphorical thinking.

The "Ecological theory" seems to be very evident on ordinary life. It does not seem as though one system works alone. For instance, the family system is very influenced by the social system and vice versa.

My romantic side sighs at the absolutely blissful thought of an existence laden with events orchestrated by me; helping to form my very being into a person of confidence, control, and high self-worth. My more practical side knows life to be a far different experience. I would say 'all the world is an institution of higher learning,' and each and every person we encounter in our life is a teacher. Our siblings, peers and friends are each professors of morality and pro/anti-social behavior, using tools such as attachment, acceptance, abuse,

modeling and praise to help us develop the skills we take with us into our life. Each reflection I've done for CPsy 5336 seems to further prove that Urie Bronfenbrenner is indeed correct in his theory that each and every experience in our life forms and shapes us and the manner in which we interact in our current and future relationships.

That papers exhibiting such differences in reflectiveness, depth, insight, connection-making, and provision of support for claims would receive considerably different scores is perhaps not difficult for almost anyone, no matter how unfamiliar with the course content, to fathom.

The third characteristic differentiating the high and low group papers, providing support for the claims, is a form of elaboration. The following excerpts regarding patterns in and importance of children's social relationships illustrate both the degree to which high and low group papers differed in providing support for claims and the tendency for the low group to limit elaboration by restating what has already been said rather than extending it:

Low group excerpts

Importance of social relations is very important in the beginning of a child's life. Through my experiences I back up that statement. My recollections show how important these relations really were. This journal review made me realize the importance and relevants of peer or any social relations that happen early in childhood.

Grandparent-child relationships seem to vary depending on race and culture. Through my experiences and observations I have come to the conclusion that grandparent-child relations differ in different cultures.

High Group Excerpts

In class it was discussed that having strategies of social competence is important in developing friendships . . . The bond that friends share is incredible . . . My friends became my family. We were all inseparable. We all ended up living together, taking classes together, and socialized everywhere together. We depended upon each other for everything. If I had failed a test, did not have enough money to buy groceries, or had a broken heart I knew that I could count on my friends for support.

The Cairns et al. article discussed the idea that aggressive children do indeed form cliques of their own. In class it was discussed how peers choose each other on similarities. It would only make sense that an aggressive child would have more in common with another aggressive child . . . Hartup talks about friends as resources. Friends help children in problem solving and are used as buffers in a stressful situation.

Also apparent in the above examples is the difference between the high and low groups in the degree of specificity that characterizes attempts at providing support for claims. Low group students' statements that supported claims were more often highly general and vague compared to support statements in high group papers which drew on named authorities and provided specific, concrete examples from personal experience.

In summary, while the papers written by high and low groups of students did differ significantly in length, differences between the qualities of the papers (elaboration, support for claims, coherence) seem more likely contributors to the score differences between the groups. Length differences, it would seem, are simply a reflection of the difference between groups in the tendency to elaborate, which resulted in shorter discussions and shorter papers for the low group compared to the high group. Elaboration differences between the two groups of students were also apparent in the number of themes that emerged from the papers, the high group of students generating more themes than the low group. This data is reported in the next section.

Themes. As mentioned above, the number of themes reflected in the high and low group papers differed, with a greater number of themes emerging from the high group papers. Fourteen themes were identified within the high group papers; twelve within the low group papers. No themes emerged from low group papers that were not also represented in high group papers. The themes that emerged in each group are as follows:

Themes expressed by students in both high and low groups

Significance of relationships (especially with grandparents)

Significance of peer relationships

Significance of sibling relationships and parental influences on them

Influence of relationships on self-esteem, self concept

Increased understanding related to systems

Power and control as it relates to relationships

Oppression of women

Increased confidence in own critical thinking skills

Processing and/or resolution of painful life experiences and crisis events

Feelings of rejection and abandonment

Processing and deeper understanding of pain, anger, and grief related to loss issues

Increased understanding of the complexity of interpersonal relationships

Additional themes expressed by students in the high group only:

Increased ability to engage in perspective-taking

Fear of failure in/concerns about current or future parenting practices

As stated earlier, a central motive for undertaking this project was to understand the contributions writing-to-learn might make to the following: Making students' own thought front and center; engaging students in examining, critiquing, and making personal connections to content rather than simply memorizing it; involving students as active participants in and co-directors of the learning process; confronting students with views that contradict their own; ensuring deep processing of concepts by students; and getting students to accept responsibility for directing their own learning. This is a tall order, but one reflected in the course goals for CPsy 5336:

- Stimulate, expand, and integrate thinking, and learning about connections between interpersonal relationships and human development.
- Explore connections between interpersonal relationships and development in diverse settings.
- Develop a critical awareness of concepts, patterns, and perspectives reflected in existing knowledge about development and interpersonal relationships.
- Enrich and deepen one's own self-understanding with respect to connections between development and interpersonal relationships.
- Consider the relevance to one's own life contexts of alternative ways of thinking experienced in the course

These course goals are used to organize the presentation and discussion of theme data that follows. Each theme is presented in relation to the course goal to which it most closely relates. (It should be noted that most themes could be seen as relating to more than one course goal). It should also be pointed out that the writing mechanics problems discussed earlier are apparent throughout the excerpts, particularly in the low group, although a number appear in the high group as well, and some in both groups reflect international students writing in their second language. These have been retained without the usual indication (e.g., *sic*), since the numerous insertions that would be required in some excerpts would be highly distracting.

Course Goal: Stimulate, expand, and integrate thinking and learning about connections between interpersonal relationships and human development.

Themes most closely related to this course goal closely reflect the course content. Student writing relating to this goal contains connections between different aspects of course content, between content that is new and unfamiliar to them and that which they already understand, between content and personal life experiences and feelings, and between content and observations of the world in general. By making these kinds of connections, and by discussing course concepts and principles in their own words, students attempt to gain an understanding of course content and push their knowledge frontier into new territory. The excerpts reflect a wide range in depth and clarity of understanding.

The four themes relating to the above course goal reflect the significance of relationships in general, and of specific kinds of relationships, to children's development.

Theme: Significance of relationships (especially with grandparents)

Excerpts from High Student Group Papers

However, the adolescent may take advantage of extrafamilial support systems around him or her. . . Grandparents are very special people. Not everybody is lucky enough to experience the love and support a grandparent can give to a grandchild. My grandparents were and are wonderful models for me.

I hope to relate some of my knowledge about caregiver-child relationships to my husband. Specifically, I would like to relate knowledge about the key qualities of parent-child relationship and development. Together, my husband and I can provide support, reciprocity, responsiveness, and sensitivity to our children that will foster their development

Excerpts from Low Student Group Papers

The relationship that develops between Jacob and Sarah [film characters], although obviously different from a caregiver-child relationship, is one that will greatly affect the way both adults react to the children. Research has shown that the relationship each parent has with their children is more positive and secure when their own relationship is healthy and supportive.

In my family my paternal grandparents were a major influence in my upbringing. When my mother was killed and my father was seriously injured, my grandparents came to live with us until my father was able to take care of my brother and me again. After my father healed and was able to come home again, my Grandparents decided to move closer to us. So they bought a house five houses away at the end of our block. My brother and I were able to go there after school until my father returned from work. My grandma was always there for us.

As the information presented during the course related to various areas of child development and the factors that impact children's interpersonal relationships, I found myself becoming more aware of their implications for individual development (cognitive, social, emotional and behavioral).

My grandmother was very supportive. She had a good balance of communion and agency. My grandma had more influence over my life than my father did: she had the ability to treat me with respect and I in turn respected her. Our relationship was filled with support, intimacy and companionship.

My parental grandparents gave me my extra support and nurturance. They helped me to communicate better with my father, to let him know my wants and needs better. They would also intervene on my behalf. It was sometimes easier to tell them what I needed than to tell my father or when he was unwilling to listen to me they intervened and would tell my father. He would have to listen to them because they were his parents.

During class we touched on the fact that children are close to their grandparent because they enjoy their company and play activities; however, they also enjoy the fact that they don't have residency with them and they don't make their primary relies. I believe extended families may be more beneficial towards children. For example, these children have more people to talk to and rely on for support systems. These kids also have more models. This type of family could also be non-beneficial if the types of family members (models) are negative or harmful. I feel that extended families are mostly beneficial than non-beneficial.

Theme: Significance of peer relationships

Excerpts from High Student Group Papers

In class it was discussed that having strategies of social competence is important in developing friendships . . . The bond that friends share is incredible . . . My friends became my

Excerpts from Low Student Group Papers

Other relationships that are very important are those of siblings and peers. Peer relations are very important especially during school age years. Peers are important for many types of

family. We were all inseparable. We all ended up living together, taking classes together, and socialized everywhere together. We depended upon each other for everything. If I had failed a test, did not have enough money to buy groceries, or had a broken heart I knew that I could count on my friends for support.

...according to Hartup 'cross-sex friendships are relatively rare. . . accounting for only about 5% of the friendships that can be identified' . . . this brought to mind a situation in my life which seems important since I've somehow chosen to remember it. I recall distinctly my dad ridiculing me for wanting to play with a neighborhood girl rather than go to his softball game. This ridiculing of my having girlfriends continued throughout my childhood. It never changed my friendships, but was such shaming treatment in my eyes that often I concealed friendships with girls to avoid it.

relationships for instance, friends provide companionship, intimacy, and relative power. Sibling relations provide reliable alliance, companionship, relative power, conflict, and the relationships are rated high on the importance of relationships. This information is all available in the Furman and Buhrmester article.

The need to be accepted by peers is very important in the development for later life. If a child is not accepted they may suffer mentally and academically. These children may be neglected by peers in early school years which leads to problems later or else, even worse, the child may be rejected by their peers.

Children who are disturbed need to get help before they are rejected and have very low peer acceptance which will hurt them the rest of their lives.

Theme: Significance of sibling relationships and parental influences on them

Excerpts from High Student Group Papers

In class it was said that the quality of parent interaction does reflect on sibling dyads . . . it was illustrated that Conrad and Buck [film characters] had a wonderful relationship. This close relationship more than likely came from the parent interaction with the children.

Siblings definitely influence one another, both negatively and positively. They can be each others worst enemies and yet be best friends. . . Sibling relationships do have an affect on child development.

Excerpts from Low Student Group Papers

Sibling relationships are very important in early childhood. Possibly one of the most important parts of relationships between siblings is the reciprocity in sibling interaction. This can be both positive and negative. The negative illustrates such things as quarrels, teasing, annoying, and competition.

Do infants become attached to older brothers and sisters, viewing them as providers of security? Yes they do and if a mother leaves and the infant is uncomfortable with the situation then he/she goes to the sibling. They provide security to the child in distress. In addition to providing a sense of security and promoting the younger child's exploratory competencies, older

siblings serve as models for their younger brothers and sisters.

Theme: Influence of relationships on self-esteem, self-concept

Excerpts from High Student Group Papers

The 'human potter's tools are esteem building, respectfulness, and behavior modeling to name but a few, and it is with these tools that a child's self-worth, moral reasoning and emotional development are shaped. The parent/caregiver can create a spectacular child with resiliency, confidence, and empathy, or a broken child displaying fear, self-doubt, and even aggressive tendencies.

Another belief of mine that was reinforced throughout this entire class is that the most important possession a child can have is self-esteem. The most effective way a child gets self-esteem is having a stable, loving and receptive adult in their lives.

The bottom line seems to be that by being a reliable, available, responsive and supportive adult we can attempt to build confident, responsible, high self-image children . . . Perhaps the most difficult aspect of this is that we can only control ourselves and our own interactions with children; the rest of the world's adults will interact of their own accord. Truly lucky is the child blessed with a 100% complement of caring, available, and reliable adults.

As a person, I saw myself as complicated, dependent and unfortunate. I always have doubts about myself, other people and relationships. In my life, there is a person that I hate and love the most at the same time. That

Excerpts from Low Student Group Papers

Relationships also effect a child's self esteem. Two dimensions effect self esteem, competence and worth. The child needs to feel valued, noticed, and also important and special. Children need to feel this through their relationships to have a good self concept. People's feelings and attitudes about a child reflect the behavior they share toward a child's, in turn this effects the child's feelings about themselves and in turn effects the child's behavior. This shows how relationships values really effect how the person feels about themselves.

person is my father. He is the only one that I admire and turn me down. It was a great disappointment and anger when he divorced my mother and deserted us. I could not be able to trust or form any relationships with anyone. I felt angry and felt so embarrassed. Nothing could compensate this emotional gap in me. And I could not be able to feel good about myself .

I have been processing how to tie all of the information I have learned in this class together. I have concluded that it is next to impossible, except to think about how my family structure and upbringing have influenced my self-concept. I would have to say that as a child, I don't believe I had a great deal of self-esteem. Yet, my grandma really did help me to feel valuable and worthwhile. Many teachers also influenced my feelings of value. My mom did the best that she could, and I believe that I was probably securely attached to her. I am not sure when my self esteem got so bad that I turned to drugs. I believe that if my esteem was really strong as a teen, that I would not have started using chemicals. They made me feel on top of the world . . . for awhile.

Tom's [this writer's boyfriend's] dad is an alcoholic and everyone, including Tom's two younger siblings, has suffered from it. Tom's mother, always preoccupied with the trials of co-dependency. . . . Tom's mother's and father's unpredictable and unstable relationship and home environment created tremendous insecurity for the children. . . everyone walked on pins and needles. . . His parents were intrusive and unresponsive to Tom's needs. He was never emotionally loved and nourished as a child, and because of this he suffers today with uncertainties and low self-esteem, typical of a person who did not develop a secure bond with a primary caregiver.

These three themes all discuss the importance of children's relationships in their development, and point to the kinds of influences relationships exert in examples drawn from the student's own life or from that of someone they know. This appreciation for the links between relationships and development is the core understanding in this course—the center pin around which all course components revolve. That central understanding is reflected in the excerpts from both groups of students. Interestingly, these themes reflect more elaboration by the low student group than is the case for several other themes.

Course Goal: Explore connections between interpersonal relationships and development in diverse settings.

The second course goal, like the first, concerns connections between interpersonal relationships and development, but adds the dimension of setting as a mediating factor. The following theme and excerpts reflect writing about one of the theories explored in the course that focuses on the influence on human beings of their proximal and distal settings and on the influence of people on these settings. In contrast to the themes presented in relation to the first course goal, differences in elaboration between the high and low groups are more apparent in this theme.

**Theme: Increased understanding related to systems
(Bronfenbrenner's ecological model including microsystems, mesosystems,
exosystems and/or macrosystems)**

Excerpts from High Student Group Papers

That Bronfenbrenner's ecological model can be made clearer for me to understand by both tying it in with the familiar (my own life and its related systems) and by applying it to a situation portrayed in a film speaks of my success in expanding and integrating my thoughts on human development and relationships. I find myself looking at the relationships between the children with which I work, between myself and family/friends/co-workers, and between other adults and their associates, with a feeling of deeper understanding of the interactions that

Excerpts from Low Student Group Papers

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological system suggests that the social class affects who are your friends and neighbors and in turn affects the family.

take place. I could be mistaken, but if Bronfenbrenner is correct in that we do indeed add to our experiences of interpersonal relationships—taking each experience with us to each successive relationship . . .

I come from a small town where teen pregnancy is high. My mother had me when she was eighteen . . . I have twelve cousins all who were either teen mothers or teen fathers. My sister had a baby when she was nineteen out of wedlock. Both my step-sister and step-brother had babies while in high school. Several of my friends in high school had babies when they were in school . . . I am only twenty-four years old and sometimes am teased about being a spinster. It is not considered a terrible thing to have babies and be married at a young age in this southeastern Minnesota town. It is considered survival and reality. The friends I have acquired in college look down on pregnancy out of wedlock. Several of my friends have gotten pregnant and ended up getting abortions.

It is very obvious that different ethnicities have different views on the family systems and ways of child rearing. My Asian friends also seem to come from extensive families.

In most families, nuclear families, the parents are the main and direct influences on the formation of a competent child. And grandparents serve as support figures mainly for the parents and have little direct influence on the child. Grandparents are the ones who “spoil” the child and are friends/playmates with the child. In extended families, parents and grandparents share the care-giving responsibilities and both have direct influence on the child.

Course Goal: Develop a critical awareness of concepts, patterns, and perspectives reflected in existing knowledge about development and interpersonal relationships.

The first theme connected with this course goal, power and control, reveals student reflections on their experiences with their own parents or on a particularly moving film that stimulated them to think deeply about the parent-child relationship that was depicted. Particularly notable in several of the high group excerpts and one of the low group examples is the stance of the student toward developing a critical awareness of power and control issues as an avenue to avoiding repetition of patterns experienced in one's own life that are seen as negative.

Theme: Power and control as it relates to relationships

Excerpts from High Student Group Papers

I found both interest and discomfort in thinking of Neil's [*Dead Poets' Society* film character] working model of relationships with his father. I speculate that he was seldom allowed to think on his own, or to make decisions for himself. This was an uncomfortable topic for me to ponder since it resembles closely my own childhood and adolescent experiences. Just as Neil has his course plotted for him, so did I. My parents seemed to know just which choice would be the best for me, and, just as Neil feared the consequences of his own choice for his life, so did I experience the same discomfort.

I think that my awareness of my parents' desire for control of my future allows me to accept two possibilities. First, that they did this *for me* (not *to me*) was probably out of a desire to provide a secure future for me, but at the expense of my self-confidence and selfworth. I really believe they were uninformed and unaware, but it's with me still; decreasing with each experience in which I take control of my life. My second and final thought is that, with my awareness of the situations in my life, I can break the pattern and not pass this on to my children.

People are still controlled, and decisions are still made for them which prohibits their developing autonomy. This instills a lack of confidence and low self-worth, and, as a result, many people carry this on to their own offspring and the cycle is repeated.

If so, then our families, peers and teachers program us to behave, build friendship, and cope with life the way they do. If we are unhappy with this when we reach an age of critical thinking

Excerpts from Low Student Group Papers

My own experience with my father had moments of authoritarian style parenting, mainly when I was an adolescent. He allowed my older brother to do more than myself when I was the same age when my brother was able to do it. His reasoning was that I was a girl and the girls are not suppose to do that or act that way.

Although I do not know what type of parenting my parents employ, I do know that they have put pressure on me to graduate from college with a major that would make a lot of money. When I first began college, I wanted to be an elementary school teacher, but my parents told me that they [teachers] do not make enough money.

I didn't like her. She acted like she knew his children, taking control and telling them what to do. At least my father's friends didn't try that stuff with us; we would have told her where to go. I never have agreed with that. I don't want any man coming into my life trying to control my son. If I ask your opinion, or advise, that's one thing, but don't tell me how to raise my child. I've been doing fair so far, and he has a father. So mind your own business. And the same for women. They don't have to try to replace the

can we enact a change? Will we be strong enough to do this . . . I think that it is possible to anticipate and redirect a reaction; counteracting outside influence to become the friend the son, the partner you truly want to be.

Shame, threats, and guilt seem to be the controlling 'tools' . . . It's interesting to find that there are names for some of the techniques my parents employed on rare but memorable occasions to achieve their desired results. Being aware of these methods help me to consciously avoid doing the same to my own children.

. . . Unfortunately, my mother was emotionally unstable and many times I took over the caretaker role. During these episodes I would consider her caretaking role as more permissive. To two of my sisters, who demanded a great deal of attention, my mother was more authoritarian. She set standards of conduct and was constantly enforcing new rules and demands which they needed to follow.

This is an example of how parents usually mediate or control indirect support from a grandparent—and I feel that direct support is especially controlled by a parent.

In the second theme, below, students reveal an emerging critical awareness of perspectives (ways of thinking) that they are conscious of in themselves, that they have heard expressed by others, or that they see as permeating the culture.

Theme: Oppression of women

Excerpts from High Student Group Papers

Before this class, I would have seen this film and probably paid most attention to the love story-line, instead of noticing the major struggles between the rich and poor, the strong once-

child's mother, all you have to be is the child's friend, especially if the child lives with Mother. That's why step parents have so many problems, trying to use someone else's kids.

My understanding of this is based more on conflicts within the family/or parenting styles: child centered vs. adult centered. This is due to poor adult/child discipline or monitoring, which often leads to behavior problems, rejection by peers and academic failure. End result is deviant group = Delinquency.

Excerpts from Low Student Group Papers

existing importance of a family, and the oppression of women due to the time period. In exploring all the different facets of the film, I was better able to relate the information to my own life especially because each facet discussed in the movie continues to exist and affects me just as much as the characters in the film.

Do you want a career or a family? It does not seem fair that women should have to choose one or the other . . . maybe someday all sexes will be treated equally in the workplace and the family will be put at the top for priority in one's life.

[student recounting a visit to a history museum]: Hanging in the interior doorway in one of the houses was a peculiar instrument made out of leather and metal. I asked the woman of the house what it was and she said it was a rug-beater. She said it was also used on women and children when they got out of line. I reacted with surprise and she responded, 'sure! Women and children are man's property—to do with what he pleases!' . . . At the next house I learned how several women died every year by cooking over hot stoves while wearing the very dresses that so respectfully covered their ankles. The women's dresses would catch on fire and kill the women.

. . . and in their generation, women didn't get divorced. What will people say? It's what my mother said Grandmother told her, She didn't think my mother would be able to work & raise us by herself. My mother said that grandmother had never thought about leaving Grandfather so she could only be so much support.

The following theme reflects a growing awareness on the part of students regarding their own stance toward knowledge—an increasing sense of being a questioner, a seeker of connections, a critic. Interestingly, the excerpts connected with this theme that are written by students in the low group are richer and more elaborated than those written by students in the high group.

Theme: Increased confidence in own critical thinking skills

Excerpts from High Student Group Papers

I have to acknowledge a development of trust and confidence in myself.

Critical thinking about one concept often led me to think and raise questions about another concept . . .

The following theme concerns the ability to see things from another's point of view. Interestingly, only students in the high group reflected this theme.

Theme: Increased ability to engage in perspective-taking

Excerpts from High Student Group Papers

The concepts associated with grandparent-child relations and divorce/remarriage allowed the opportunity to reflect upon personal familial experience. In doing so, I have developed a better understanding of my feelings and behavior as well as those of my immediate family members.

Excerpts from Low Student Group Papers

By focusing on one factor it forced me to analyze and attempt to apply how relationships are formed, why relationships are formed in a certain way and what factors specifically influence relationships . . . I [had] never looked past the description of relationships to explore how they are connected to developing children . . . I have moved from accepting an explanation to questioning and attempting to integrate other possible influences as a different possible explanation for an outcome . . . the class also raised many questions, not always with answers, that provided me with ideas to explore in my own mind.

. . . my understanding will provide not only a sense of confidence to question and criticize, but also it will provide the same sort of guidelines that I relied upon in this course to allow progression.

I believe that understanding a person's actions is half the battle in relationships. People would get along a lot better if they took time to see and understand the other person's perspective or reasoning. However, you do not have to agree with that perspective or reasoning; just try to understand the other person.

An interesting result of the written reflections was that they helped me change perspective. I found myself looking at situations from the viewpoint of others: causing me to reflect on what they might feel or experience.

Robert Selman's perspective-taking theory also demonstrates . . . that the ability to see a situation from another's point of view also can alter an outcome. Everyone is our teacher, and we are a teacher to all we touch in our lives. What a huge responsibility!

I hope my deeper understanding about the impact of cultural background and society will allow me to be more empathetic and appreciative of lifestyles different from my own.

To me now it seems like all scattered puzzles are formed and my eyes and my heart are clear. I learn not to judge people at one moment because there are so many things involved.

Review of the data expressing the four themes associated with the critical awareness course goal reveals an interesting pattern. Students in the low group reflected mostly two of these themes in their writing—the power and control theme, and the critical thinking skills theme. This group of students did not have any expressions regarding perspective-taking. Perspective-taking and discerning oppression embedded in culturally accepted practices require critical thinking. Students who are able to engage in perspective-taking and discerning oppression are not likely novices at critical thinking. Students for whom engaging in critical thinking is an unfamiliar process may be more focused on what this

kind of thinking entails than on applying it in seeing alternative perspectives. It is possible that students in the low group are not as accustomed to thinking critically as students in the high group and, therefore, do not spontaneously generate their own thought and questions. If they are more likely to accept what is given at face value, elaborative thinking is not so likely to occur. One hypothesis that the pattern of responses in this section suggests is that the writing-to-learn assignments, as they were structured, asked students in the low group for a kind of thinking that they were less accustomed to than were high group students. As a result, their learning processes were focused on how to do that kind of thinking and had not yet progressed to as rich involvement with the use of critical thinking in seeing alternative ways of viewing the world. Consequently, their written expression focused more on the thinking processes themselves than on entering alternative perspectives. Since the numbers of students are few and the written expressions are limited in number, this must be viewed as a very tentative, but nevertheless seemingly plausible interpretation.

Course Goal: Enrich and deepen one's own self-understanding with respect to connections between development and interpersonal relationships.

The three themes related to this course goal reflect deep memories and feelings, emotions that have their roots largely in past relationships and life events that course content and experiences, including the writing process itself, brought to mind. These highly personally focused excerpts make evident the need for the tone and kind of feedback that was described earlier as used in responding to students' writing.

Theme: Processing and/or resolution of painful life experiences and crisis events

Excerpts from High Student Group Papers

I haven't gotten to the point that I can fully understand this yet; it's one thing to let the abuse fall on you, but to let your children be drawn into it along with you is another thing . . . I'm trying to get passed it . . . when I was 8 or 9, my aunt had a boy friend who was abusive . . . all I could hear were screams, and I started to cry, and I wanted it to stop. I was so afraid, since I didn't

Excerpts from Low Student Group Papers

know my grandparents' work phone numbers and his sister wouldn't let me call the police. I kept telling her to help me, and my aunt . . . it's a very scary feeling, to know/hear someone you love being hurt and not being able to help them . . . After we went to court, I had to testify because I was there . . . I didn't realize that I've held all these issues in me. It's strange how your memory can come back, and your recall can be so clear.

We were discussing domestic abuse and one woman asked why women stay in abusive relationships. My heart sank because I have been in an abusive relationship and wanted to speak out about the pain and suffering involved and how it is not as easy as it seems to get out of a relationship like that. Thank goodness another woman spoke out and explained how she had been in an abusive relationship and said exactly how I felt. Again I was reassured that I am not alone in my pain and that some people really do understand.

Hetherington et al. mentioned that female children of divorce may have sexual problems during adolescence. This appears to have happened with me. During my seventh grade year I became sexually active and felt compelled to have male contact . . . during that same year (seventh grade) I began my eating disorder saga. I am curious as to what relation there is between eating disorders, divorce, and remarriage? I guess I really felt lost and needed to find satisfaction and comfort in sex and food.

I have learned by journaling almost every day that it is my (and only my) choice to live in the past and feel bad about it, or I can live in today and choose to feel good about it. Journaling about the past—for so many weeks started to be very difficult because I knew I was going to be digging up emotional events that I had already worked through, trying once again

Reading this article, made me reflect on how I felt as teenager, when my parents went through their divorce. At the time I couldn't think of much but all the conflict at home, I hated seeing these, and I hated both my parents for putting our family through it, When your a child, you seem to think that your parents are super people, Who can make every thing wrong, right, and when divorce enters the picture you relize that they'll only human. With no special powers just feelings, and desires like every one else. But what's sader is that even though your only their offspring, and their ending their personal relationship = which has little to do with you. You still feel responsible for it. If only I had been good, or stayed quite, or helped with the house work more this would never have happened. At least in my case, I wanted a reason, anything. But no one, not even my parents had one. I felt, that was worth hurting us so. If we could have

to fix them. The final answer to most of my past challenges was that today is today and it is me that chooses how to make the best out of the day in which I am living. Crying and feeling the pain and anger is absolutely necessary to a certain point, and then it is time to simply let it go. I feel that I came to a deeper level of acceptance about some things in my life in this class.

been able to blame someone or thing I could have accepted it. But since there was not one, I blamed myself. = Like scape-goating.

Theme: Feelings of rejection and abandonment

Excerpts from High Student Group Papers

I felt insecure and discarded . . . I could not even compare myself to others of his children . . . I was afraid of forming relationships . . . I expect a failure in relationships and my situations even before it happens.

Often times I find myself turning from a promising situation. On introspection I believe that it's the fear of rejection that holds me back.

Parents have a tremendous impact on our feelings of self-worth! I have wonderful memories of my childhood, but also have memories of guilt-inducing words my mother used to get me to abide by her wishes . . . threat of abandonment if I continued to play a game with friends may have been effective at guiding my behavior, but this memory is with me still . . .

I remember that I did not know my mother as my mother. I called her 'sister' and I called my grandmother 'mom'. I really thought that she was my mother because she was the one who took care of me. . . and I saw my own mother as a stranger who 'came to visit' often. At that time, I was very attached to my grandmother and I liked my 'sister' very much, too, because each visit she usually brought me presents and

Excerpts from Low Student Group Papers

First, my mother was not employed until I was about 10 years. The first ten years of my life I must say were better for me. I enjoyed my mother being home. It was nice to have someone get you off to school, yet also be there when you got home . . . When my mother began her first job when I was a child I was very excited . . . after awhile I missed my mother's presence. I felt as though I only saw her during dinner. I

hugged me. I am not sure when I discovered that my favorite 'sister' was my real mother. I think I was probably three years old . . . I hate my mother and miss her so much when she left me with my grandmother because she had to work late at night and was unable to come and pick me up. I see myself as insecurely attached to my mother at the first place because she was away and inconsistent but later on I became too attached to her. I am scared of losing her . . . I do not have any one except my mother that I can rely on.

began to become very disturbed. I felt neglected and not as loved anymore . . . I became angry and my attitude towards everything quickly changed.

Theme: Processing and deeper understanding of pain, anger, and grief related to loss issues

Excerpts from High Student Group Papers

The divorce, as I remember, was won and over with as quickly as it appeared. My mom had an affair and moved in with this man, Dick. (As a young child I thought that he could have no better name.) They were married within a year and my sister and I moved in with them and his three kids. This is where the conflict really began . . . There was a lot of resentment when my dad got remarried. During the time when my dad was single . . . Life at my dad's was less stressful; he and I spent a great deal of quality time together However, when dad remarried I lost this peaceful, consistent, predictable, loving and intimate place. I also felt like I lost my dad. I hold a great deal of internal resentment for my step-mom . . .

I am very interested in this because I was adopted in infancy. Then my mother and father divorced when I was two. I almost never saw my dad as I was growing up, and I am very interested in what it must be like to have a father-child relationship. I mean a real one.

Excerpts from Low Student Group Papers

Father-child relationships can fluctuate between different family systems. For instance, coming from a divorced family, I am not very close to my father. However, my mother and I are very close. Certain phrases like "daddy's little girl," have frustrated me. I have never been able to feel close to my father or relate to him in that way. I seem to also be envious of my friends who have close relationships with their fathers.

All my friends would talk about their moms and what they did with them and how they helped them. I didn't have that and I was jealous and began to become angry that my mom was taken away from me. I talked to my grandma about how I felt and she and my grandpa decided they

The short statement by Hartup has got me thinking on an even deeper level. My mom and dad were divorced when I was two. After their divorce, I didn't see my dad very often. He was apparently deep in an alcoholic haze for many, many years. When I reached adolescence, I, too, had my love affair with the bottle—as well as various other chemicals. The two of us sobered up at around the same time, and have been trying to establish a father-child relationship. He has a lot of guilt, and I have a lot of anger, so the relationship-building effort has not always been easy. But Hartup's statement got me thinking . . . maybe I am looking for more of a mother-child relationship with my father, and he just can't fit that role.

Hartup may have a point here that I can learn from. It might be time to let dad off the hook for not being as emotional and nurturing as I think he should be. I may need to reevaluate my definition of 'dad.' But now that I'm all grown up and no longer need a playmate, what exactly does a dad do then?

A big part of me will always want a daddy. Also, almost all of the kids that I used to work with were from single-parent homes. There were a lot of us out there that don't know what it is like to have a dad. I wonder what the long-term effect of not having a father around are? Of course, if I learned anything from the last two weeks, I have learned that every family is different, and that every child's reactions will be different. And maybe now that single-parent homes are even more prevalent, the kids in my day care won't be as affected by not having a father around as I was. But I doubt that is the case. I sometimes think that nothing can be said to the little kids who wonder who their daddy is. Hopefully they can tell that I can understand their pain. And anger. And fear. And shame. And how they wonder if it is their fault that they don't have

would move to be closer to us. It helped, but I still felt as though I was missing out on something.

a daddy. I'm sure that kids have a bunch of differing reactions. These were just some of mine.

[Student reflecting on parents' divorce which occurred when she was in college] But when the divorce actually happened, it didn't make things any easier. In fact, it almost made things harder because I felt like I was too old and knowledgeable to feel guilt and remorse. . .

Today I feel a bit sad and confused. And challenged. After reading the readings on attachment . . . , the importance of fathers and sibling relationships, I feel like I got really ripped off in my childhood. And I'm not used to dwelling on the past because I believe that focusing on the negative aspects of life only brings you more negativity. But this class forces me to think about the past, which makes me feel sorrow way deep down where I live . . . I think a major thing that I would like to accomplish in this class is to dump the shame I feel right now.

Abuse, divorce, loss or unavailability of primary relationships (especially fathers) are the prevalent life experiences and events to which deep and painful memories and feelings are attached in the excerpts related to the three themes above. These excerpts, while reflecting course concepts, are also intensely self-focused. The excerpts reflect different states of working through long-standing and painful issues. For some students, working through the issues has been on-going, and they are at a state of seeming resolution regarding them. For others, the writing reflects an early, and perhaps first attempt at working through issues that have been with them for a long time.

It is clear across these three themes that students in the high group more extensively reflected deep-level, highly personal connection-making and processing than did low group students. What is less clear is the reason for this difference between the two groups. Did the high group have more experience in this kind of thinking (as is hypothesized in the discussion at the end of the previous course goal)? Did the high group have more personal issues (this seems unlikely)? Had the high group been more engaged over the

course of their development in working through painful issues? Further discussion of these differences between and high and low student groups is taken up in the conclusions.

The data connected with all of the themes, but especially these self-understanding-focused themes, suggest the importance of awareness of and coming to terms with one's own issues on the part of those who work with, teach, counsel, and do research involving human beings.

Course Goal: Consider the relevance to one's own life contexts of alternative ways of thinking experienced in the course

Similar to the themes related to the self-understanding course goal, the themes related to the personal life contexts goal are also self-focused. Also like the three themes portrayed above, the themes related to this goal reflect the past and the present. Several excerpts do so in a way, however, that shifts the emphasis to implications of past and present for the future.

Theme: Increased understanding of the complexity of interpersonal relationships

Excerpts from High Student Group Papers

. . . through this course I have expanded my thinking—on interpersonal relationships and their developmental significance beyond peer interactions. . . I was amazed to see how the course material and the films directly related to experiences in my own life, and how intimate I was able to get with these reflections. Each week I used the course material to examine my personal awareness of relationships and episodes in my life. I had taken experiences of my own and the people in my life, and analyzed their significance . . . this process of evaluation helped me see how all my interactions have a specific and unique effect on my personal development and academic growth.

I think that I have made a great deal of personal progress in my life due to this in-depth exploration . . . my understanding of connections

Excerpts from Low Student Group Papers

As we studied relationships throughout the quarter it became very apparent to me that relationships are more complex than I ever imagined. So many factors influence them. One seldom takes the time to analyze a relationship that he/she is involved in, especially if it is one that is working well. We might be driven to analyze a relationship only when it is failing or has already failed.

I feel this class helped me to better understand my family life and put it in perspective. It helped me to see how I grew up

between development and interpersonal relationships has been deepened . . . we are all products of our past relationships. Our present ideals and actions reflect a conglomeration of our past . . . now it seems a great deal clearer.

As I was reading the Kandel . . . article I kept referring to my relationship with Tom, my boyfriend. We have many problems and I am constantly wondering if we are just too different to be together . . . In this context, Tom and I do not have a very strong friendship. I value so many different things than he does . . . I wonder how we have lasted six years . . . He was into drugs and being delinquent and I was into everything . . . I think it was the differences that kept us going. Now I wonder if the differences will keep us apart . . . Do you think that if I was an accepted child (from both parents and peers) and I have intense interaction with a person (Tom) who was deeply rejected by both parents and peers, could I begin to feel like the effects of rejection?

and the factors that made me the person I am . . . I also believe that it will help me with future relationships with my family and my soon to be in-laws. It reminds me that my interactions with others will not only affect my development but theirs also . . .

This course opened me up to things in my past. I was able to look at these experiences more in depth and actually analyze the importance of these experiences. This class actually made me realize the developmental importance of social relations. It also made me more aware of my inner self.

Theme: Fear of failure in/concerns about current or future parenting practices

Excerpts from High Student Group Papers

I always worry that I am expecting too much based on the developmental stage of my children.

So much can be learned about how not to parent a child by viewing *The Dead Poet Society*, and consequently about what qualities will help nurture a well-rounded individual . . . truly the job of parenting is an important one; one that can make or break a child.

As I ponder the Baumrind article, I find myself wondering how I can emulate the parenting style which will produce the most competent child . . .

Excerpts from Low Student Group Papers

As I raise my daughter, I have been periodically hounded by the thought that somehow I have not taken into account all of the relevant developmental factors. Perhaps I am overlooking something when I concentrate on positive behaviors which will come back to haunt me later.

The excerpts associated with these themes reflect that, although greater understanding can lead to both greater confidence and clarity, it can also lead to more apprehension and worry because one realizes the potential implications of actions, events, and conditions.

Summary. The themes data provide a rich, in-depth picture of learning in process and of how that learning fits with the course goals. Course goals appear to have been well-served by the writing-to-learn experiences. The themes data reflect the integrative aspects of the writing experience in that the more content-focused themes reflected personal connections to the content, and the self-focused themes reflected course content. Although this appears to be more the case for students in the high group than for students in the low group, students in the low group, too, appeared to feel that the writing was more helpful to them compared to other, more traditional modes of learning. Despite their obviously greater struggles with the writing process, and the more limited results, the students in the low group appeared to engage, as did students in the high group, in generating their own thought, in examining, critiquing, and making personal connections to content, and in actively directing their learning. Students in the high group appeared to do considerably more deep processing of concepts and experiences. Perceptions of students regarding their experience with the writing assignments, reported in the next section, suggest that they, too, saw these patterns in themselves.

STUDENT REACTIONS TO AND REFLECTIONS ON THE WRITING PROCESS AND ASSIGNMENTS

In this section, data are presented that reflect students' reactions to their experiences in the course, and their self-observed learning processes. Most of the data in this section comes from the students' final writing assignment—the essay final examination, although some excerpts included in the first subsection are drawn from weekly papers. Guidelines for the final examination can be found in Appendix E. As has been the case in previous sections, writing mechanics errors are retained in the excerpts presented here.

Change Over Time

Initially, students were quite concerned about submitting a paper approximately five pages in length each week and thought that it would be difficult to maintain the “workload.” Students also were concerned about venturing into a mode of learning that was unfamiliar to most of them. The comment below captures the apprehension that was expressed by many, and expresses the openness and commitment to giving the writing-to-learn approach their best effort that most students were able to muster:

This whole writing to learn thing sure forces a student to take learning a step beyond normal education. I mean, I went through personality development classes and social development classes, just to name a few, but there is a definite difference between learning ‘in the head,’ and preparing to feel it ‘in the gut.’ Introspection is deeper than just plain brain-work . . . As university students, we are not used to placing the focus in the gut. As university students, we must think logically and ‘gutlessly.’ I will do my best to make the shift.

As the quarter progressed, comments such as the following began to appear on student writing assignments:

Sorry this is so long; it’s hard to stop writing when you start generating ideas. Tina [another student in the course] says that long papers are a real drag for TA’s to grade! Sorry about this—every week—but I just LOOOOOVE to journal! [from a student who submitted weekly papers ranging in length from 8-15 pages]

The following comment made by a student in the final exam captures the sense of initial concern eventually replaced by appreciation and understanding that was expressed by several students:

The reflective journals allowed the freedom to express ideas and opinions of which I never had the opportunity to do before. Most courses require a certain amount of ‘memorization’ in order to demonstrate, through standard tests, that concepts have been learned. While the approach of this course initially worried me, I began to appreciate a different mode of learning. I realized I was learning through the thoughtful and reflective responses of my writing.

A number of students commented that they appreciated the choices they had in the kind of writing assignment they did, and a few students expressed continued mixed feelings about the writing. The following comment captures these perspectives and argues,

interestingly, for changing one of the kinds of writing that was done, but does not argue for a reduction in the total number of writing assignments:

The written reflection assignments were interesting. I have mixed feelings about them. I liked the fact that we could choose an option that best suited our styles and the fact that there were so many options to choose . . . I do think that there is a need for more careful evaluation of the papers, because in my papers I made sure I covered at least three of the four components in the paper . . . I do think that it would have been better to assign 8 out of 9 papers with an option to do all 9 for extra credit [meaning do the 9th paper for extra credit] instead of doing 7 of the 8 and a final paper. I feel that the paper is more for you then it is for us as a learning experience.

As the quarter progressed, a general shift occurred between the third and fifth paper in the degree to which personal connections were made in the writing. This shift was particularly evident in the high scoring papers. This characteristic of the high scoring papers is evident in the theme data in the previous section, although that data also makes it clear that such connections were made by low group students as well, just not as extensively. Interestingly, it is also precisely over these assignments that the shift toward longer papers occurred in the high group (see Table 4). By the third paper, students had received feedback on one or more papers and had written a sufficient number of papers to know what it was like, and had organized their life in ways that enabled them to do the writing. Students in the high group also noticed this shift in their own writing. The following student comments illustrate this awareness:

As the course progressed I noticed that my ideas and understanding also made a transition of sorts. At the beginning of the quarter most of my assignments contained questions and general observations about relationships but the more I wrote the more I found that I was attempting to formulate explanations and hypothesize to some of the reasons that relationships are formed the way that they are.

By the third paper I found myself recalling far more personal experiences involving my family.

I found myself integrating my thinking much more readily by the end of the quarter than at the start.

The greatest challenge to me this quarter was to incorporate my own life experiences and personal thought theories into my work. I noticed a most definite move toward incorporating personal experiences. Each line [in the

first paper] hinted slightly at the type of experiences I had growing up. By the second paper I was able to recount a work-related experience, still guarding most of my personal experiences. From whom? Not just from you, the reader/evaluator, but from myself . . . as assignments #4-7 were written, I was . . . [regularly] confronting past issues as class concepts brought them to light.

Students' Perceptions of their Learning through Writing

As the course progressed, students in both high and low groups also became more thoughtful and reflective about the contributions the course experiences made to their own learning. Students made written comments regarding the value of using the writing approach as an aid in understanding and applying course content:

The written reflection assignments . . . aided me in understanding the different concepts that were brought to my attention from class lecture and the learning environment [an interactive, video disc-based computerized learning environment which students experienced weekly]. They also aided me in using the concepts in real life situations. I have learned to look at situations in a different light.

I think that my understanding of the connection between interpersonal relationships and human development has changed drastically. I was accepting relationships as a part of development yet I never looked past the description of relationships to explore how they are connected to developing children. I have become much more aware of the factors that influence people . . . I have moved from accepting an explanation to questioning and attempting to integrate other possible influences as a different possible explanations for an outcome.

My understanding of connections between development and interpersonal relationships has been deepened. I look at relationships very differently now. I analyze and look at all the contributing factors of a relationship instead of simply focusing on one factor that may have affected the relationship.

I think that I made a great deal of personal progress in my life due to this in-depth exploration . . . my understanding of connections between development and interpersonal relationships has been deepened . . . Although prior to this course I vaguely understood this concept, now it seems a great deal clearer. I owe this to my personal reflection and the analysis of relationships found in the videos. Most of my theories regarding peer relationships are not so drastically changed as they are reorganized.

The writing opportunity seemed to provide a structure to "try on" new ideas:

Even though my hypothesis may have been way off, the paper was a safe medium for me to explore my ideas concerning the course material, plus I got great feedback.

Another student spoke in metaphoric terms about the experience of exploration through journal-writing:

My educational experience in this class is similar to those connections that are associated with any kind of development. Is it not true that development is an ongoing process that is always intertwined with the different kinds of relationships in one's life? All four of the 'course experiences' could in fact be compared to the factors that affect a developing human. The reflective journal was my relationship to a caregiver . . . it allowed me to actively explore new insights regarding the connections between interpersonal relationships and development. There was a security in knowing that I was able to sort through my ideas in a journal format. The journal assignments allowed me to express my own feelings and ideas about the appropriate topic, yet it also allowed me the opportunity to explore other dimensions that were not necessarily 'related' to the weekly topic . . . the journal allowed me the opportunity to explore a topic in which I had very little personal knowledge. The fact that my 'caregiver's' expectations included only those things that were readily accessible to me provided an opportunity for me to increase my own awareness without the pressure of an idea being wrong or right. The journal provided a stability that permitted the development of my own ideas about relationships and development.

As was evident in the theme data, the writing experiences seemed to provide the opportunity for most students to process thoughts and feelings surrounding previous life experiences and/or issues in their own development and interpersonal relationships. Events such as abuse, divorce, teen pregnancy, chemical abuse, loss of family members, and past suicidal tendencies were processed throughout the student writing. Again, this was more evident in the high group papers. One student captured this aspect of the writing experiences in the following comment:

This is the first class I've had that has functioned in the capacity of . . . helping me to look back at my life and incidents which occurred, no matter how painful or uncomfortable. As challenging as this was, I truly learned more by this method than in any other non-design oriented [the student did not clarify what was meant by this term] method I've yet experienced. When I can relate and label concepts based on my own past I retain and comprehend at a far higher level . . . I learned so much by looking at my own life and realizing that there was a name for the things I'd experienced in my childhood . . . I was . . . confronting past issues as the class concepts brought them to light. It didn't make them any easier to face, but helped me to understand the theories of people such as Bronfrenbrenner, Baumrind, Hartup and others with much more clarity and understanding.

Another student indicated that:

I feel I not only learned about development of interpersonal relationships but also, I learned a lot about myself. Through the well thought out options and assignments I was able to use the course material in a context that I enjoyed, videos. I think this is what learning is all about, how this new information fits with old knowledge and how we can use it in our lives.

Some students commented on the degree to which they were able to learn in a course which incorporated a range of differing experiences.

Once again, I cannot impress enough, the alternative ways of learning in this course, and how this has helped me in bringing the ideas into real interactions between children, their peers, and the adults in their lives. Most courses do not offer such a variety of learning environments, and I believe that this style of teaching/learning is long overdue, as some people are better able to understand and perform better with this style . . . I found this style to be stimulating, in comparison to having a textbook and two exams with four-hour long lectures.

Student Perceptions of Feedback on their Writing

Written feedback given to students was intended to encourage and expand student learning related to course content and to encourage further thinking and processing of relationship experiences by the student. The following written comments by students express what many students indicated as the value of this two-way communication and the sense of self-confidence and trust they felt regarding the feedback they received:

My development of trust and confidence was revealed in my increased abilities to draw from deeper, personal and sometimes painful experiences. I discovered that these experiences were considered sound and were respected as credible facets of learning. The information that was made available through the course added as well to my understanding of the concepts as they applied to my life, and produced an extremely high level of comprehension. This is success for me!!

The written reflections served as an opportunity for me (being a little shy to speak out in class) to examine some of my personal struggles with relationships. In this context I was freely able to take the course material and apply it to my life. The best and most rewarding part of these written reflections and I think the whole course was the kind and thoughtful feedback that I received on my assignments. Thank you . . . !

Student Contemplations on the Final Exam

The essay final exam provided an opportunity for students to reflect on their own writing by identifying underlying themes or patterns woven throughout their previously written assignments (see Appendix F for exam guidelines). Most students seemed unaccustomed to being asked to engage in an extensive critique of their own work, and found this a challenging opportunity to learn more about themselves and their own patterns of thinking and to deepen their insights regarding course content. One student, who selected the film option, described what this was like in metaphoric terms:

I've never before been asked to review my own written work, and so I haven't had the opportunity to chart changes in my ways of thinking. Much like observing a drop of blood, I find myself looking at the needle pricking my finger, seeing the drop sitting on a microscope slide, and then noticing the individual cells.

Most students perceived the course experiences as opportunities to engage in multifaceted learning. Many thought the writing-to-learn approach contributed to long term memory, particularly since application could be made to personal and professional situations. These perspectives are represented in the following comments:

Have you ever walked out of a final exam feeling as if you've left all the learning behind you in the classroom? The emphasis of connections between course concepts and life experiences, coupled with seeing these concepts in the films helped me associate a concept with a situation. This association has been an effective way of storing and recalling information for me.

This course was an excellent model . . . [as a result] maybe more students will be able to take their knowledge with them rather than leaving it lay on a desk in the form of small graphite ovals [referring to the pencil-filled responses on machine-scored answer sheets] at the end of the quarter.

In summary, like their writing about course content, students' writing about their writing experiences was thoughtful and reflective. The writing was the aspect of the course most frequently mentioned on the course evaluation forms students completed at the end of the quarter as having a positive impact on learning. The excerpts presented here suggest that students had engaged in metacognitive processes—in thinking about their own thinking and learning.

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Can writing-to-learn be considered a reasonable alternative in large classes for accomplishing purposes similar to the ones that dialogue can accomplish in smaller classes?

This investigation sought to explore the feasibility and effectiveness of using intensive writing-to-learn activities in a large class to accomplish learning goals similar to the ones that dialogue has been used to accomplish in smaller classes. This section will explore what the findings reveal regarding this purpose.

The background section of this report identified a number of propositions about learning. While the use of dialogue facilitates the reflection of these in smaller classes, the claim was made that the literature on writing suggests that writing-to-learn also has the potential to reflect these propositions in the learning situation. It was also stated that writing-to-learn was chosen over writing-to-communicate because writing-to-learn emphasizes writing as a process or medium through which meanings are discovered, new ideas are generated, and thoughts are worked out, rather than emphasizing a product. How does the experience with the course taught in the ways described in this report and how do the data presented in the findings section fit with these claims?

Beginning with the propositions, it is interesting to note that students' own words reflect the first one: Learning is a process in which new information is combined with prior knowledge to form a new understanding that reflects a revision of the old in a synthesis of new and old. For example, excerpts in the findings section concerning student perceptions of their learning through writing spoke to reorganization of theories and to learning how new information fits with prior knowledge. The theme data, especially that related to the self-understanding course goal, revealed the second proposition, that learning is not a purely cognitive process in that emotions, interests, and motivations are involved. Much of the theme data, but especially that related to the critical awareness and life contexts course goals, reflected the third proposition: Unless learners can integrate new knowledge with prior knowledge, the new knowledge will have little impact on their thought or actions; integration requires the activation of prior knowledge, bringing it to consciousness, and considering it in light of new information. Students spoke to their changed views as well as to their changed stance toward knowledge.

All of the qualitative data presented in the findings section reflect the final two propositions to varying degrees: Integration of new knowledge with prior knowledge requires that students' own thought be involved in the learning process, not just the thoughts of experts; and students have the opportunity to generate and examine their own thought when they are active participants in, and direct, their own learning. The latter proposition was perhaps most apparent in the final section of findings which revealed students' metacognitive insights regarding their own learning and thinking. It seems that it can be said with some confidence that writing-to-learn, as it was used in CPsy 5336, did meet the expectation of reflecting the propositions regarding learning. Since these propositions reflect key features of learning situations created with dialogue in the first author's experience, it seems fair to conclude that writing-to-learn represents a reasonable substitute for accomplishing in a large class what dialogue can facilitate in smaller classes.

Closely related to the above propositions was an interest in the potential of Child Psychology 5336 to offer opportunities for personalizing learning in ways that might foster students' self-understanding and personal growth. A goal was to use intensive writing-to-learn as a means of both deepening students' understanding of concepts and research regarding the influence of relationships on development and helping students make personal connections with this content. Was this accomplished? The theme data, especially that associated with the self-knowledge course goal, suggests that this goal was accomplished, especially for students in the high group. The frequent writing-to-learn assignments written over an eight-week period were highly effective in personalizing learning and brought out even deeper material than anticipated. The deeply personal issues that emerged in students' writing and that are illustrated in the theme data placed great responsibility on course staff for providing highly sensitive, responsive, and supportive feedback on the papers.

Is writing-to-learn without writing-to-communicate possible?

The choice of writing-to-learn over writing-to-communicate was based on the assumption that writing-to-learn is especially compatible with the learning propositions because it emphasizes writing as a process or medium through which meanings are discovered, new ideas are generated, and thoughts are worked out. The theme data support this assumption by providing evidence that, through their writing, students were, indeed,

discovering meanings, generating ideas, and working out their thoughts. Students enrolled in CPsy 5336 differed widely in academic background, program level, and practical experience relevant to the course content. The writing-to-learn assignments allowed each student to make some choices about their approach to writing and to become engaged with the course content at whatever level their background allowed. In addition, students may have been more willing to write, and to write more extensively, than if writing-to-communicate had been the main emphasis. Hence, students may have learned more about the content and in regard to course goals. Because responding to students' writing was part of the instructional process, however, and because grading is a necessary aspect of a University course, reading and understanding students' writing was necessary. Coherence of the writing was largely, but not solely, influenced by writing mechanics (e.g., spelling, punctuation, word form, sentence structure). Consequently, the ability of instructors to respond to students' writing-to-learn work, and to assess it in terms of the depth and insight it reflected, depended, to an extent, on the student's writing-to-communicate competence. This reflects a certain irony in emphasizing writing-to-learn over writing-to-communicate in order to encourage students' learning through expressing themselves in writing because it raises the issue of when writing-to-learn becomes, at least in part, writing-to-communicate.

In its pure sense, writing-to-learn is for the learner. The process of writing is an aid to gaining understanding, and the material that is produced provides a record of mental processing and ideas that the learner can refer back to in the future. When a reader (e.g., another student, an instructor) becomes a consumer of and/or a responder to that writing, the material produced by learners is no longer solely for themselves, but must also be comprehended by another. Under such conditions, writing-to-learn becomes also, to an extent, writing-to-communicate. This "hybridization" between writing-to-learn and writing-to-communicate becomes even stronger when what is written is assessed by another person. Although the balance may lean heavily toward writing-to-learn (such as in CPsy 5336 where criteria such as depth, insight, and integration were the primary assessment criteria rather than writing mechanics), it should be recognized that when students' writing is read by others and assessed, writing-to-communicate aspects are introduced. This suggests that it may be more appropriate to view writing-to-learn and writing-to-communicate as a continuum along which the relative emphasis on the two differs rather than to view these concepts as representing distinct and completely separable kinds of

writing activity. In summary, writing-to-learn without writing-to-communicate may be possible if no one but the writer will need to read and make sense of the writing, but not if someone else is going to need to read and comprehend the writing.

The integrative function of writing

Although the relationship between writing and thinking has already been addressed to some extent in the above discussion regarding writing-to-learn and the propositions regarding learning, the evidence presented in the findings supports this connection strongly enough to give it special mention. As noted in the background section of this report, claims are made in the literature that a) thinking and writing work interdependently as recursive processes in which one has to go backward and forward in making meaning out of experience; b) writing helps people integrate prior and new knowledge by necessitating the tapping of memory to establish what one knows and the translating of new knowledge into inner speech or print. The theme data presented in the findings reflect these processes and, in addition, students' comments regarding their learning experiences reflect their recognition in themselves of these back and forth processes.

The writing assignments also appeared to have another kind of integrative function, as a medium in which connections between academic knowledge and personal knowledge were forged. Although this appears to be more the case for students in the high group than for students in the low group, students in the low group, too, appeared to feel that the writing helped them make these connections. This close intertwining of academic and personal knowledge suggests that the writing-to-learn experience aided students in bridging between the classroom and life, a bridge that is seldom constructed according to studies of learning transfer.

Writing-to-learn as an alternative medium, rather than substitute, for dialogue

The background section of this report noted claims in the literature which suggest that writing, combined with reading and opportunities to discuss, solicit input, and solve problems with others, is a strong instructional model. The theme data could be interpreted as supportive of this claim, at least of the reading and writing parts. But where was the third part—discussion, solicitation of input, solving problems with others—since this was a class in which opportunities for dialogue were viewed as very limited, given the class size, the auditorium space, and face-the-front seats hinged to immovable

writing-surfaces that spanned the width of the room? This third element seems to have been provided by the feedback on the papers. Because papers went back and forth between course staff and students each week, and because the same person provided feedback to a given student throughout the quarter, there was an opportunity for continuity in the feedback received over time and for course staff to note progression beyond previous papers. This regularized, weekly exchange of student writing and feedback on the writing from course staff constituted what might be thought of as a written conversation. This sense of a conversation was referred to by students in the findings regarding student perceptions of feedback on their writing.

The potential role the required weekly readings might have played in this process is discussed by O'Flahavan and Tierney (1991) as enabling a dialectical or dialogical exchange with the self in which reading may serve as the partner, a resource of opposing views, or provide elaborations on ideas, and writing serves as a mode through which the learner might resolve disputes or allow ideas to come to fruition. This reading and writing connection was reflected in both the theme data and students' reflections on the writing process, in that students were clearly processing in their writing what they had read.

The written conversation described above and the possibility of dialogue with the self through combined reading and writing suggest that writing-to-learn, as it was used in this course, rather than being a substitute for and alternative to dialogue, provided the opportunity for two different forms of dialogue to be used, neither of which required oral, in-class dialogic exchange.

Writing as an opportunity to pursue what is of deep personal interest

The claim noted in the background section that writing is an opportunity to pursue what is of deep personal interest is borne out by both the theme data and by students' comments on their learning. More specifically, this data is supportive of the claims noted in the background section that writing allows one to begin to tap the deeply personal knowledge that lies beneath conscious awareness, to discover what one knows, to know oneself and others. Some students clearly achieved making their writing in the course a "consuming interest rather than work" (Stasz et al., p. 70). These students were motivated to write more than was required and truly made their writing their own. Findings reported in the students' reflections on their writing section also indicated that, while this highly motivating experience was a reality for some students, a similar degree of "ownership"

was not experienced by all of the students. The reason for this may be reflected in the resistance noted at the beginning of the course. Students who are conditioned through many years of educational experience to accept and expect a passive role for themselves as learners are not likely to immediately respond to a very different level of responsibility and ownership in the learning process. The transition in stance is likely to take some time. It did in CPsy 5336, and for a few students, it never happened.

The possibility for writing to be a highly motivating opportunity to pursue what is of deep personal interest is closely governed by the way writing assignments are structured. Just the right amount of structure in these assignments is the key—enough to provide a clear and supportive framework and avoid confusion, but not so much that choice and space for students' interests are squeezed out. This is another way of saying what has already been said in the literature about the need for students to have opportunities to express themselves freely in writing and to set and pursue their own goals autonomously in order to be able to write their own thoughts rather than what they think the teacher wants, to view their expressions as having value, and to direct their own learning. There is another reason in addition to motivation to structure writing assignments in ways that leave some "space" for the student. When they are engaged, motivated, and interested, students produce material that is more interesting—both to themselves and to those who read it. This results in students learning more, and in wonderfully diverse papers that give teachers insight into each students' thinking that is helpful in supporting further learning.

In the case of the CPsy 5336 papers, reading many of them was a profound experience, creating the sense expressed by Ferrarotti (1983) that one was not sensitive or subtle enough to understand them fully, to be worthy of them. The diversity of what is produced necessitates general and somewhat generic criteria for evaluating assignments, but written feedback should still be specific. Assignments reflecting intense personal interests should not receive bland or stilted feedback that is limited to an occasional comment such as "great thought," "good," or "excellent paper." There is a need with such assignments for instructors to "enter the student's thinking" and respond to papers in ways that are specific, tailored to the student's needs, and constructive. The earlier discussion of the written conversation also reflects this need for feedback that is highly engaged with the student and attuned to where the student is. The importance of feedback brings up the question of resources.

Resources

While writing-to-learn may substitute for or be, when accompanied by reading and thoughtful feedback from instructors, an alternative form of dialogue that is suited to large classes, it also creates a resource problem. Reading and providing thoughtful, highly individualized feedback on forty, fifty, sixty, seventy, or three hundred or more five-page papers per week demands far more resources than are available for most collegiate courses. Whether or not incorporation of writing-to-learn in large classes is practical depends on the kind and amount of support staff that can be made available and on the creativity of instructors in finding ways to maximize the amount of student writing and, at the same time, make the resource demands entailed in the grading process reasonable.

Although there are ways of dealing with this problem, most have serious disadvantages. Increasing the resources for dealing with student writing or reducing class size are the most disadvantage-free solutions from the standpoint of maximizing learning, but are also perhaps the most unlikely. Given the financial issues that higher education is currently facing, and likely to face in the future, undergraduate education is likely to continue to be delivered in large classes at many institutions. At the very least, resources that would provide training for teaching assistants in responding to student writing would be of enormous help. Finding ways to cut down the number of writing assignments that are graded without severely reducing the number that are written is another strategy. One such strategy is suggested by Richard Paul (1991) and involves having students bring a folder containing all their completed assignments to class each day and, during each class session, calling in at random a few students' folders for grading. Each student's folder is called in only twice or three times per quarter, and only certain assignments in it are graded each time, but all are checked for presence. The disadvantage to this strategy is that students do not get as frequent or as much feedback as they might need. Another strategy is to reduce the amount of writing required. This has the disadvantage of reducing student opportunities for gaining the benefits that the writing provides. Another strategy is requiring frequent writing which is not graded along with requiring a paper that is graded that is much like the final exam in CPsy 5336—an analysis of the papers that have been written. This strategy does not reduce the amount of writing students do, but does limit the amount and frequency of the feedback they receive, and may affect the quality of the papers students write when they know they won't be read.

The intensive writing-to-learn approaches that were developed and used in this project are not seen as limited in their applicability to large classes only. They are likely to be equally useful in smaller classes where the resource issues in reading the papers and providing feedback are greatly reduced. They are also likely to enrich in-class dialogue in such cases when used in combination with it. They may also be preferred to in-class dialogue by some students for whom speaking in a group is a barrier.

Writing in the disciplines

This project concerned the study of writing in classes other than formal composition classes. It addresses the need identified by Scardamalia and Bereiter (1986a) for discovering ways that writing can contribute to the existing purposes of subject matter courses. The findings support the value of writing in such courses as a learning tool that provides opportunities for students to reflect on and speculate about subject matter (Durst & Newell, 1989). Because of this, the findings have implications for departments and programs across educational institutions in which depth of student learning is a priority as well as for those interested in enhancing writing across the curriculum. In addition, at the University of Minnesota, the findings from this project have implications for any department that has interest in providing writing-intensive undergraduate courses in connection with the new Council on Liberal Education requirements and for those charged with responsibility for identifying and developing such courses. The design of CPsy 5336 reported here has the potential to provide a model for transforming large core courses into writing-intensive courses that can meet these new requirements.

Project findings also suggest that the use of intensive writing-to-learn in disciplinary courses can enrich the curricular goals of such courses. A range of potential curricular goals identified in the curriculum literature were all reflected in the theme data emerging from this project: Academic, utilitarian (technical), romantic (humanistic), cognitive-developmental (cognitive processes), and emancipatory (personal transformation, social reconstruction) (Eisner & Vallance, 1983; Mosenthal, 1983). The project demonstrates how writing-to-learn can broaden collegiate courses in the disciplines beyond academic and utilitarian educational purposes to encompass a much wider spectrum of curricular goals, a spectrum necessitated by most endeavors in life to which students will need to try to connect their learning from formal education, and, at the same time, address more deeply the academic goals that are central in such courses. Large classes, whether in the

disciplines or not, often rely heavily on lecture and objective, machine-scorable examinations as primary modes of teaching and assessment of learning. While lectures can be useful, their exclusive use and recall-focused assessment do not reflect the propositions discussed earlier that have been shown by research to be critical to deep-level learning and to thinking at higher levels.

This project has suggested other modes of teaching that are effective for deepening the level and extent of learning and thinking. The findings reported here suggest that writing-to-learn in large classes, and in disciplinary classes, can yield important learning that goes beyond the concepts and principles that comprise subject matter to encouraging a questioning and critical stance toward content, a stance of being responsible for and directing one's own thinking and learning, coming to terms with views that are contradictory, a revision of prior views in a synthesis of new information and prior knowledge, and reflection of feelings. Interestingly, it is in this "going beyond" that understanding of subject matter concepts and principles is strengthened.

Differences between student groups

Project findings offer some insight regarding the thought processes engaged in by learners. Many of the differences between the high and low student groups reflect findings that have emerged from cognitive theory-based research on learning. In this research, elaboration, connection-making, self-direction and self-monitoring are features of effective learning. The knowledge one already has appears to be a major factor underlying these features. For example, Resnick (1989) discusses a "knowledge capitalism" phenomenon which suggests that knowledge begets knowledge. In other words, the "knowledge-rich" become still richer and the "knowledge-poor" remain poor. In her discussion, Resnick reflects a host of cognitive theory-based studies on learning, which have found that when people elaborate items of knowledge and devise relationships among them, they enable formulation of wider arguments and explanations. In addition, dramatic individual differences in peoples' tendency and ability to engage in these elaborative processes have been found. Such differences are believed to depend partly on prior knowledge and partly on habits of engaging with intellectual questions. The result is that those who are knowledge-rich reason more profoundly, elaborate more as they study, and thereby learn more effectively. One way of interpreting the finding that no themes emerged in the low group that did not also emerge in the high group, and the finding that the high group

tended to elaborate more extensively than the low group is that the high group brought a richness of knowledge and habits of mind to their thinking and writing and learning, that the low group did not. The theme data related to the critical awareness goal suggest that the writing assignments engaged low group students in a kind of thinking that resulted in their focussing on the thinking itself, possibly because this kind of thinking was not habitual for this group.

Research that further explores this connection between thinking and learning in the context of writing-to-learn that is suggested by this data could help unravel the relative contributions to learning of habits of mind and knowledge and, in turn, aid in the structuring of writing-to-learn so that its potential benefits can be more fully realized by a wide range of students. Analyses along this line that might be done with the data already available include a tracing of individuals' paths of thinking and learning across the quarter (including a comparison of students whose scores improved over the quarter and those whose scores declined), and a comparison of the writing that was done in each of the writing-to-learn options that were offered.

Summary

- Writing-to-learn represents a reasonable substitute for accomplishing in a large class what dialogue can facilitate in smaller classes.
- Intensive writing-to-learn is a means of both deepening students' understanding of disciplinary concepts and research, and helping students make personal connections with personally-relevant course content.
- It may be more appropriate to view writing-to-learn and writing-to-communicate as a continuum along which differing relative emphasis on the two may be reflected than to view them as representing distinct and completely separable kinds of writing activity. Writing-to-learn without writing-to-communicate may be possible if no one other than the writer will need to read and make sense of the writing, but not if someone else is going to need to read and comprehend the writing.
- Writing-to-learn provides a medium for several kinds of integration, including the making of connections between academic and personal knowledge, between the classroom and life, between the past, present and future, and between what one knows already and what one is learning.

- Writing-to-learn, as it was used in CPsy 5336, constituted two different forms of dialogue, neither of which required oral, in-class dialogic exchange. The first form was the written conversation between student and the course staff member who provided written feedback over the quarter to students on their papers; the second form was the dialogue with the self through combined reading and writing.

- Writing-to-learn, when structured to allow and support it, can provide an opportunity for students to pursue what is of deep personal interest to them, and direct their own learning. When it does provide this opportunity, motivation to learn is high, what students produce is interesting to themselves and others; and sensitive, responsive feedback that is engaged with and attuned to the student is necessitated.

- Whether or not incorporation of writing-to-learn in large classes is practical depends on the kind, amount, and training of support staff that can be made available to such classes and on the creativity of instructors in finding ways to maximize the amount of student writing and, at the same time, make the resource demands entailed in the grading process reasonable.

- Writing-to-learn provides a learning tool in disciplinary courses that can enrich the curricular goals of such courses and, at the same time, enhance the academic goals central to such courses.

- The design of CPsy 5336 reported here provides a model for transforming large core courses into writing-intensive courses that may assist departments interested in providing writing-intensive undergraduate courses.

- Findings regarding differences among learners in their tendencies to elaborate their thinking and to formulate connections and relationships are consistent with those that have emerged from cognitive theory-based studies of learning. The findings also suggest further analyses of the data that could shed light on the relative contributions to learning of prior knowledge and habits of mind and aid in the structuring of writing-to-learn so that its potential benefits can be more fully realized by a wide range of students.

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APPENDICES

- Appendix A CPsy 5336 Course Description
- Appendix B Course Goals
- Appendix C Written Reflection Assignment Alternatives
- Appendix D Course Requirements
- Appendix E Final Examination Instructions

APPENDIX A

CPsy 5336 Description

This course is intended to provide an overview and reflective, critical analysis of theory and research on the nature and course of significant interpersonal relationships in childhood and adolescence and their implications for individual cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioral development. The course encompasses both relationships within the family and within the peer culture, as well as other extra-familial relationships, and considers the role of the broader social context in the interface between interpersonal relationships and development. Basic to this course is the assumption that relationship processes are fundamental to developmental outcome.

APPENDIX B

Course Goals

Stimulate, expand, and integrate thinking and learning about connections between interpersonal relationships and human development.

Explore connections between interpersonal relationships and development in diverse settings.

Develop a critical awareness of concepts, patterns, and perspectives reflected in existing knowledge about development and interpersonal relationships.

Enrich and deepen one's own self-understanding with respect to connections between development and interpersonal relationships.

Consider the relevance to one's own life contexts of alternative ways of thinking experienced in the course.

APPENDIX C

WRITTEN REFLECTION ASSIGNMENT ALTERNATIVES

This course is designed to encourage the development of your own thinking and self-reflection as it relates to the developmental significance of interpersonal relationships in childhood and adolescence. To encourage your thinking, several reflective writing assignment options have been created. The writing assignment options are a consideration of various learning styles and preferences learners bring to the class.

You may only select one option and contract for that option for the quarter. Be prepared to complete and turn in a contract form during the second class session, indicating your chosen option.

For each writing assignment you will need to make thoughtful connections among at least 3 of the 4 following components of the course:

1. Class discussions, lectures, and questions raised during the class
2. Weekly assigned readings from the course syllabus
3. Learning, insights, or reflections from the video learning environment
4. Personal experiences and prior knowledge

Criteria for assessment of each writing assignment:

- a. Indication of thoughtful, reflective responses. (Thoughtful, reflective responses are deep rather than shallow, make insightful connections, raise thought-provoking questions, examine underlying assumptions, and explore alternatives.)
- b. Clear integration of course-related and past experiences, personal insights, and supporting evidence for claims that are made.

Option 1--Literature

Several brief autobiographies and narratives have been selected that reflect concepts, patterns, issues, and various perspectives of interpersonal relationships and human development focused on during this course. This option involves reading one of the selections listed for each assignment, and responding in writing, integrating at least three of the four course components. You may mix your reading to include some autobiographies and some narratives throughout the quarter. These literature selections are found in one of the following books (the asterisk indicates the book in which the chapter or pages are located). The two books are on reserve in the St. Paul Central Library and at Walter Library:

*Milgram, J. I., & Sciarra, D. J. (Eds.). (1974). Childhood Revisited, New York: Macmillan. (Autobiographies)

**Landau, E. D., Epstein, S. L., & Stone, A. P. (Eds.). (1972). Child Development Through Literature, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall. (Narratives)

Assignment 1

*Christiaan Barnard, Chapter 2

**“And Now Miguel,” pp. 509-511

Assignment 2

*Robert Merrill, Chapter 17

**“A Start in Life,” pp. 60-71

Assignment 3

*Eleanor Roosevelt, Chapter 22

**“Boys and Girls Together,” pp. 369-373

Assignment 4

*Helen Sekaquaptewa, Chapter 25

*Chet Huntley, Chapter 11

**“Butcher Bird,” pp. 349-366

Assignment 5

*Dick Gregory, Chapter 9

*Anne Moody, Chapter 18

**“Nancy,” pp. 492-504

Assignment 6

*Charles Chaplin, Chapter 6

*Kwame Nkrumah, Chapter 19

** “The First Day of School,” pp. 457-461

Assignment 7

*Satchel Paige, Chapter 1

**“The Fight,” pp. 462-470

Assignment 8

*Joan Baez, Chapter 1

**“Doctor Jack-O’-Lantern,” pp. 441-453

Option 2--Video

Several videos have been selected that reflect concepts, patterns, issues, and various perspectives of interpersonal relationships and human development focused on during this course. This option involves viewing one video for each assignment, and responding in writing, integrating at least three of the four course components. The following videos are available at most local video stores for overnight movie rental at a nominal fee of \$1-\$2, or on loan from local libraries. If you would like to suggest another video that is not listed below, please see the instructor.

Assignment 1

Howard’s End or

Sarafina

Assignment 2

Sarah, Plain and Tall or

Baby Boom or

Not Without My Daughter

Assignment 3
 Dead Poets' Society or
 Kramer vs. Kramer

Assignment 4
 A Girl of the Limberlost or
 Roots

Assignment 5
 Shoot the Moon or
 Ordinary People or
 Immediate Family or
 For Keeps

Assignment 6
 Chaplin or
 Dead Poets' Society

Assignment 7
 Vincent and Theo or
 Clara's Heart or
 School Ties

Assignment 8
 Secret Garden or
 Scent of a Woman or
 A River Runs Through It

Option 3--Synthesis of Articles

This writing assignment involves synthesizing the articles assigned for the week prior to the assignment due date, the corresponding class session discussion and video learning environment experience, and your own understanding. Each writing assignment must reflect thoughtful consideration of the authors' perspectives, interpretations, and conclusions, and finding and articulating relationships among them and connections to other course components and your own prior understanding and knowledge of human development. You will want to compare perspectives and consider if there are overarching "big ideas," or themes. See listing in the course syllabus for the schedule of reading assignments.

Option 4--Critical Analysis

This assignment involves using a critical mode of inquiry to critique the articles assigned for the week prior to the assignment due date, the corresponding class session discussion and video learning environment experience, and your own understanding. Examples of models of critical inquiry that you may find helpful in this assignment are listed below:

Paul, R. W. (1990). Critical thinking: What every person needs to survive in a rapidly changing world. Rohnert Park, CA: Center for Critical Thinking and Moral Critique.

Pgs. 74-78; 275

Socratic Method in a written dialogue format: Pgs.269-298

Brookfield, S. (1987). Developing critical thinkers, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Pgs. 23-29; 35-50

Option 5--Reflective Journal

In a journal format, document your reflective thoughts on each assignment focus in the course syllabus. The journal is a personal and on-going notebook of your experiences of the course and records your observations, reactions, thoughts, new ideas, and relevant questions that surface from your reading and reflection. Depth of thought and integration of new knowledge with experiences is essential for this assignment to be meaningful. If you choose to contract for this assignment, you will need to record your thoughts every day. Write as much as you can describing your reactions, thoughts, feelings, and experiences related to the assignment focus.

When you journal you may want to use a looseleaf notebook so pages can be easily removed for submission. Some people enjoy journaling on the computer. If you choose to do that, find an overstuffed chair, put the keyboard on your lap, get comfortable and let your thoughts flow. Please submit each journal entry on the due date in a readable format.

Option 6--Autobiographical Essay

This option involves recalling and writing about relationships in your own life, and then discussing their interface with development, drawing upon course-related experiences and readings, and your own insight and prior knowledge. Relationships you write about should connect with the focus for each assignment.

APPENDIX D

Course Requirements: It is assumed that your work in all course requirements will be reflected in your course grade. Some course requirements will be directly graded. Others will contribute to those which are directly graded.

1. Requirements that contribute to those directly graded:

a. Class Participation. Preparation for and participation in class sessions is expected, since class sessions will extend and introduce material beyond course readings. Preparation for class sessions entails completing the required readings listed for that session, completing the learning environment assignment for that session, and generating questions as described below. Participation entails engagement in the class discussion.

b. Readings. This course has no textbook. Required readings are contained in a packet to be purchased from Copies on Campus, Room 8, St. Paul Campus Student Center (directly across from the bookstore). Required readings are starred (*) in the reading list at the end of this syllabus.

c. Weekly sessions of approximately one hour in length with a learning environment (located in 305 McNeal) are required for the arranged part of the course, which comprises the fourth course credit. These sessions are intended to elaborate, integrate, and help students process course concepts. Instructions regarding this aspect of the course accompany this syllabus and will be supplemented by additional information distributed in class throughout the quarter.

d. Questions to be generated and submitted weekly by students in relation to readings, course sessions, learning environment sessions, and other course experiences. Because students are encouraged to add to their questions (not begin to generate their questions) during the class session, questions will be turned in at the end of the class session. Because these questions will not be returned, students should keep a copy if they wish to retain a record of their questions.

2. Requirements that will be directly graded:

a. Seven written reflection assignments, approximately 5 pages each. These are designed to help students reflectively and critically process and integrate learning. Due dates are indicated in the course outline. These assignments are described in the writing assignment alternatives section of this syllabus. Each of these assignments has a potential maximum of 12 points, and constitutes 12% of the course grade. Together, these seven assignments comprise 85% of course grade. **The course syllabus lists and provides due dates for eight assignments** in order to give students some flexibility and choice. **Students should notify the instructor in writing of the assignment number they will omit on the due date of that assignment. Students may also complete all eight assignments and receive extra credit** (up to 12 possible points).

b. Final examination. This will be a take home examination (approximately 10 pages in length) intended to build on learning throughout the quarter and to provide an integrative capstone to the entire course. This exam will comprise 15% of the course grade. **Due December 8, 4:30 p.m.**

Grading

Criteria that will be used in grading assignments are indicated in the writing assignment alternatives section of the syllabus. Based on these criteria, all written reflection assignments and the final exam will be *rated as follows*: strong (9-12 points; moves beyond the ordinary, the minimum), typical (5-8 points; ordinary, average, meets criteria to a minimally acceptable extent), weak (1-4 points; does not minimally meet criteria), not found (0 points; assignment or exam is missing). Questions will be rated using a plus (strong), check (typical), minus (weak), and 0 (not found) system. These ratings will be used by the instructor to determine the course grade in the case of a borderline score.

A modified curve will be used in grading in which total scores and instructor judgment of the quality of work will be used in determining course grades. An S grade will be assigned for those requesting S-N grading for scores at a C or higher level. Extra-credit points will be added after the grading distribution is established in order to not affect grades of individuals who choose not to submit extra-credit work. The top seven scores will be considered the required assignments for students completing eight assignments. The lowest scoring assignment will be considered the extra credit assignment.

APPENDIX E

Final Examination Instructions

The final exam is a take home examination intended to build on learning throughout the quarter and to provide an integrative capstone to the entire course. This exam will comprise 15% of the course grade.

Criteria for grading the final examination:

- a. Indication of thoughtful, reflective responses. (thoughtful, reflective responses are deep rather than shallow, make insightful connections, raise thought-provoking questions, examine underlying, assumptions, and explore alternatives.)
- b. Clear integration of course-related and past experiences, personal insights, and supporting evidence for claims that are made.

In approximately 10 pages:

1. **Review all of your previously returned written assignments. Make an in-depth analysis of your patterns of thinking and learning in relation to the course concepts as reflected in these written assignments:**

- Describe in detail the patterns you see (e.g. new insights regarding already familiar concepts, increasing depth and personal awareness, increasing application to work setting, saw connections I hadn't made before, no change in thinking or understanding throughout the papers).
- What factors do you think contributed to these patterns (e.g. dug deeper into the concepts, became more critical or reflective, confused as to what was expected, course offered nothing I didn't already know)?

2. **Evaluate your learning in relation to course experiences.**

- How has your understanding of connections between development and interpersonal relationships been deepened or refined, or remained unchanged?

- What contribution, if any, did **each** course experience make in what you have just described regarding your understanding? Explain with examples.

- readings
- class discussions
- learning environment
- written reflection assignments

- Discuss ways you could apply your understanding of the concepts, ways of thinking, or personal insights related to this course to your other life contexts (e.g., work, family, other learning situations).

3. Discuss your learning and development in this course in relation to the course goals listed below. (Feel free to discuss all the course goals or to choose those that you feel are the most significant to you this quarter.) Give specific examples to illustrate your points.

- Stimulate, expand, and integrate thinking and learning about connections between interpersonal relationships and human development.
- Explore connections between interpersonal relationships and development in diverse settings.
- Develop a critical awareness of concepts, patterns, and perspectives reflected in existing knowledge about development and interpersonal relationships.
- Enrich and deepen self-understanding with respect to connections between development and interpersonal relationships.
- Consider the relevance to one's own life contexts of alternative ways of thinking experienced in the course.