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Individual Variation in Students' Engagement in Classroom Personal Journal Writing

- Teachers of students from sociocultural backgrounds different from their own must, on the one hand, recognize sociocultural influences on their students and, on the other, remember that students are also individuals. This article examines the role of individual differences in the journal writing of adult ESL students. The study was conducted in an extended education ESL writing class team-taught for two 10-week semesters at a large urban university. The primary writing activity of the class was personal journal writing requiring description and examination of the writers' past experiences. Case studies were conducted of nine students from six countries. Data for the study consisted of student questionnaires, fieldnotes, and audiotapes of classroom observations, teacher and student interviews, and teacher and student journal writing. After describing the conventions of the genre and the backgrounds of the nine subjects and summarizing students' responses to the journal writing, the article focuses on influences on those responses. The findings illuminate the roles of past writing experiences, personality, and cultural background in influencing students' responses to classroom writing.

The rainbow and the patchwork quilt have come to be seen as more appropriate metaphors for the pluralistic population that constitutes the United States than the melting pot of earlier years. Just as that outmoded metaphor does not describe the people of different colors and traditions that inhabit the U.S., it also does not capture the students with individual needs and experiences who inhabit classrooms. Students of the same age from the same country may have had very different educational and life experiences; one may have attended school regularly until she emigrated to the U.S. with her family, while another may have never learned to read and write in his first language before he was sent to the U.S. alone to avoid being forced into military service. Such individual differences among students challenge teachers and educational researchers alike. Teachers are required to teach to groups of students, often very large groups of them, which means that they have very little time

and energy to determine each student's learning style and needs, much less to orchestrate their teaching so that it is synchronous with them. Too often, the most well-intended lesson does not engage the majority of students in a class. Like dancers of different eras, teachers and students struggle to get in step with each other.

Researchers in the field of second language acquisition also struggle with the role of individual differences in language learning. Though they generally recognize that individual differences play some role in language acquisition (see Ellis, 1986, for a review of the literature), they disagree about the importance of individual factors and find it difficult to identify and classify them. Researchers examining second language acquisition among adolescent and adult learners in classrooms tend to agree that individual variation plays a major role, while those studying child second language acquisition in naturalistic settings downplay the role of individual differences (see Fillmore, 1979, for a discussion of this phenomenon).

Several factors influencing individual variation in second language learning have been examined. Age is the most frequently cited such factor (e.g., see Hatch, 1983; McLaughlin, 1987; Snow & Hoefnagel-Hohle, 1978). The effect of age on second language learning appears to be more complex and multidimensional than what is captured by the truism that younger people learn a second language more easily than older ones. Cognitive and affective factors interact with age to mediate its effects in various ways (see Ellis, 1986). Other individual factors associated with language acquisition include personality (e.g., Dulay et al., 1982; Schumann, 1978; Strong, 1983), aptitude (e.g., Gardner, 1980), motivation for learning the language (Gardner & Lambert, 1972), attitudes toward the second language and its culture (Gardner & Lambert, 1972), and learning styles (e.g., Hansen & Stansfield, 1981; Naiman, Frohlich, Stern, & Todesco, 1978). Desire for social integration, communication needs, attitude, and education have been considered together as components of the general "propensity" by which a person is induced to "apply his [sic] language faculty to acquiring a language" (Klein, 1986, p.35).

In a longitudinal study of children learning English as a second language, Fillmore (1979, 1983) could not ignore individual differences among her subjects although she had not set out to examine them. She found differences among the children in language learning styles and social styles and found that these interacted with situational variables in different ways.

The individual differences found in the learning of a second language by the five children in this [part of the] study had to do with the nature of the task, the sets of strategies they needed to apply in dealing with it, and the way certain personal characteristics such as language habits, motivations, social needs and

habitual approaches to problems affected the way they attacked it. They differed greatly in such characteristics, and in the course of the study year, it became quite apparent that it was the interaction of all these factors that produced the observed differences in the rate at which they learned the new language. (1979, p.220)

Despite the research that has been conducted in these areas, more questions than answers remain regarding definitions and identification of individual factors and their influences on second language learning. As the dates of many of these citations suggest, interest in the influence of individual differences on language learning among applied linguists has waned in recent years. Besides encountering difficulties in identifying them and in separating one factor from another, researchers have also been frustrated by the unlikelihood of designing effective interventions to influence individual factors.

Little attention has been focused at any time on the role of individual differences in literacy learning among first or second language learners, though it has been taken into account by some writers (e.g., Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1983; Hudelson, 1986). The examinations of highly individual case studies of native English speaking student writers (e.g., Calkins, 1979, 1980; Emig, 1971; Graves, 1981; Perl, 1979), undertaken as the paradigm was shifting to a process-oriented view of writing, tended to focus on elements of subjects' writing processes that could be generalized to other writers—that is, that could contribute to a description of "the writing process"—and could be incorporated into the writing classroom. Studies of students learning to write in English as a second language which were modeled on studies of native speakers likewise concentrated on identifying elements of students' writing processes that could be generalized rather than on individual variation (e.g., Zamel, 1982). Similarly, research on classroom journal writing (e.g., Fulwiler, 1987; Peyton, 1990; Peyton, Staton, Richardson, & Wolfram, 1990; Staton, Shuy, Peyton, & Reed, 1988) has focused on making generalizations about the writing and the writers, even though journal writing lends itself to greater individual variations than many other classroom genres.

One particular manifestation of individual differences which has received some attention recently is the influence of previous knowledge and experience on learning. Specialists in both first and second language learning (Carrell, 1983, 1984; Goodman, Brooks Smith, Meridith, & Goodman, 1987; Heath, 1983; Krashen & Biber, 1988; Langer, 1984; Langer & Applebee, 1986; Michaels, 1981) argue that learners perform better and learn more quickly and successfully when they have some knowledge of and experience with what they are learning. Langer's (1984) findings, for example, "suggest a strong and consistent relationship between topic-specific background knowledge and the quality of student writing" and indicate that "different

kinds of knowledge predict success in different writing tasks" (p. 41). A student who did not watch the coverage of the 1988 summer Olympics and has never heard of anabolic steroids, for example, would have a great deal of difficulty writing a coherent and convincing essay expressing his or her opinion about the use of such substances in sports and about the justice of stripping Canadian athlete Ben Johnson of his gold medal—though I observed a class in which just such students were asked to write an essay on these issues.

The argument that prior knowledge is crucial to learning and that individual differences affect language learning suggest the need for individualized instruction. But the realities of class size, time limitations, and the human inclination to impose order upon chaos by classifying things and people mitigate against our consistently treating our students as individuals. It is much easier to group them together according to ethnic, economic, and linguistic groups than to respond to each as an individual. Similarly, the necessity to have students in the same class cover the same material makes it difficult to allow much individual variation in the content of and approaches to school learning. Thus, for these and other practical reasons as well as reasons related to the theory and practice of research as discussed above, the role of individual variation in language learning is not well understood.

Methods

An ESL writing class in which classroom personal journal writing was the primary ongoing writing activity provided me with the opportunity to examine the role of individual differences, including previous experiences, in literacy learning. Because none of the students had had experience with classroom personal journal writing before, I was able to examine how they learned and adapted to a classroom genre about which they had few preconceived notions. On the other hand, each of them had knowledge about life, themselves, school, and writing and had had experiences that influenced their learning of the genre. I found that the nine students whom I studied in depth adapted to the genre in different ways and that a variety of factors influenced those ways of adapting. Because I examined only one genre—and not the most important academic genre, at that—the generalizability of the findings to other genres is uncertain. However, many ESL teachers do assign journal writing. The study's outcomes provide them with food for thought regarding the influence that students' background experiences and personalities may have on the ease or difficulty they encounter in writing classroom journals.

The study was conducted during two consecutive sessions (spring and fall 1987) of an extended education English as a second language writing class, called Writing for Fluency, which was team-taught by two teachers one evening a week for 10 weeks, each session at a large

urban university (for more detailed descriptions of the course, see Vanett & Jurich, 1990a, 1990b). Most of the writing, on topics assigned or suggested by the teachers, required the students to describe and examine their past experiences from various perspectives. Each week, the teachers also wrote a journal entry on the same topics and distributed them to the students for several reasons, including establishing rapport with the students by sharing their thoughts and feelings with them, understanding more fully what it was like to do the assignments, and providing examples of the writing of native English speakers. The teachers had designed the class to focus on personal journal writing because they had found over years of teaching that many ESL students wrote more fluent, well-developed pieces about personal topics than about academic ones and because they believed that, by writing about themselves, students would become engaged in communicating through writing rather than in simply completing assignments. They believed that writing would, therefore, become a more meaningful and less threatening activity for them.

TABLE 1
Students' Backgrounds

Student	Native Country/ Language	Age	Visa Status	Years In U.S.	Education	Native Language Writing Experience (besides school)	Writing Experience in English
Sita	Thailand/ Thai	38	permanent resident	9	Thailand, BA, Mass Commun.	stories, news articles, journal	some school, journal
Sunee	Thailand/ Thai	27	student	6	State U, Senior in Economics	some letters	school, some letters
Keiko	Japan/ Japanese	36	student	4	State U, Senior in International Communication	freelance for magazine; editor of magazine	school, newspaper article
Kimiko	Japan/ Japanese	25	student	3.5	State U, Senior in Art History	personal letters, letters to editor	letters, school, journal
Kaoru	Japan/ Japanese	25	student	1	Japan, BA, Sociology; State U, in MA/TEFL program	journal, poems, letters	school
Irene	Vietnam/ Vietnamese & Chinese	25	citizen	5.5	State U, Junior in Computer Science	poems, essays, stories, letters	school, memos at work
Elizabeth	Philippines/ Tagalog	29	permanent resident	6	Philippines, BS, Chemical Engineering	letters to mother	diary, letters, school
Raquel	Puerto Rico/ Spanish	27	citizen	2	Puerto Rico, BA Elementary Ed	journal, notes, letters, poems	letters, school
Alicia	El Salvador/ Spanish	26	permanent resident	7	some courses at Community College	letters, some poems some at work	letters at work, some school

The subjects for the study consisted of nine students from six different countries, who served as subjects for case studies. Three of

the students were enrolled in the spring course and six in the fall course. The students, all females, were selected on the basis of their interest in participating in the study. Table 1 presents information about their backgrounds and experiences. Student names are pseudonyms.

As Table 1 indicates, the students, adults ranging in age from 25 to 38, were from six different native countries and spoke five native languages. Four were students who planned to return to their native countries and five were citizens or permanent residents who planned to remain in the U.S. The lengths of time they had been in the U.S. varied considerably—from 1 year for one of the Japanese students to 9 years for a woman who had immigrated here from Thailand. All were relatively well-educated. The least educated and therefore least experienced with educational contexts was Alicia, from El Salvador, who had graduated from high school and taken a few courses at the local community college. The ranges of experiences they had had with writing also varied. Five (Sita, Kimiko, Kaoru, Irene, and Raquel) had had extensive experience with self-motivated personal and imaginative writing (as defined by Applebee, 1984, pp. 14-16)—journals, poems, and stories—and they spoke in interviews of the joy and fulfillment of writing. The other four students had written primarily out of obligation at school, at work, or to family and were more likely to describe writing as a chore than as a pleasure.

The purpose of the study was to examine the teaching and learning of a particular written genre (classroom personal journal writing) within the context of the Writing for Fluency class. I did not set out with preconceived notions about what I would find. I simply wanted “to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and its meaning for those involved” (Merriam, 1988, p. xii). I therefore allowed relevant factors to emerge from the data as much as possible rather than going into the study with categories already determined. The data for the study consisted of (a) a questionnaire distributed at the beginning of each semester; (b) fieldnotes, audiotapes, and course materials collected during observations of all 20 class meetings; (c) interviews with teachers and students; and (d) the journals written by both teachers and students.

The questionnaires elicited information about students' cultural and educational backgrounds, language use, current living situations, and writing and reading experiences. The fieldnotes and audiotapes of class sessions captured the events of the classes as they unfolded and gave me a record of exactly what was said and done when by teachers and students regarding specific pieces of writing and specific classroom activities. The classroom materials provided a record of the written input the students received just as the audiotapes recorded the oral input. These two sets of data captured what was taught through classroom activities and assignments.

The primary sources of data for the study, however, were the interviews and journals. Each of the nine students and the four teachers was interviewed three times—at the beginning, middle, and end of the course. The student and teacher interviews are included in Appendix A. The interviews were open-ended, allowing for as much flexibility in responses as possible. Numerous prompts, including periods of silence, were used to urge respondents to answer each question as fully as possible. The students were asked to describe their attitudes and feelings about the class, the teachers, and their writing. By interviewing them, I was able to gain an understanding of some of the influences on their individual approaches to and completion of the writing tasks. I uncovered some of their thoughts and feelings, some of the personal knowledge and information that they drew upon as they attempted to make sense of classroom personal journal writing in ways that were satisfying to them and to the teachers. The teachers were asked to describe the class goals, the kind of writing assigned, and their impressions of the students and their writing. From interviews with them, I learned why they designed the class as they did, what they hoped to accomplish with the activities and writing assignments, and what their perspectives were of the case study students and their writing. The interview responses provided me with rich data for describing some of the complexities below the surface of the teaching and learning situation from the perspectives of the learners as well as the teachers.

TABLE 2
Number of Journal Entries Written by Students*

Student	Number of Journal Entries
Sita	11
Sunee	14
Keiko	19
Kimiko	11
Kaoru	11
Irene	19
Elizabeth	7
Raquel	15
Alicia	8

*Some students may have written a few journal entries that they did not submit for inclusion in the research. In most cases, however, the number above represents the number of journal entries written during the class.

The other key source of data was the journals. I collected all of the journals that the students and the teachers wrote for the class

(with the exception of a few pieces that students wrote but did not want to share with me). Altogether, the teachers wrote 39 journal entries (three wrote 10 and the fourth wrote nine). The number of entries written by the students varied considerably, as Table 2 indicates.

The students were required to hand in one journal each week and were supposed to write two others each week that they did not hand in.

Though the teachers did not overtly use or refer to their journals as models for the students' writing, they were seen as such by most of the case study students, five of whom used the word *model* explicitly in discussing the teachers' journals in interviews. Eight of the nine students reported that they looked forward to receiving the teachers' journals and that they always read them. One of them said she wished she could write like the teachers. Thus, the teachers' journals were one means through which the conventions of the journal writing were presented to the students (see Appendix B for examples of two of the teachers' journals). The students' journals provided the written evidence of what they were learning with regard to the genre of classroom personal journal writing.

Data Analysis

Since the purpose of the study was to examine the teaching and learning of the personal journal writing genre within the context of the Writing for Fluency class, my goals in analyzing the data described above were to determine (a) what was being taught—that is, the characteristics of the genre that were being presented to the students as conventions that they should follow in their writing, (b) to what extent the students were learning what was being taught—that is, what conventions they were following in their journals, and (c) why they were and were not learning and following the conventions.

I determined the characteristics of the writing the students were being asked to engage in by analyzing the teachers' oral instructions for in-class and at-home writing, written assignment sheets, the teachers' written responses to the journal entries, classroom materials, such as an excerpt from a piece by Lillian Hellman, and the journals written by the teachers and distributed to the students. To determine the extent to which the students were following the conventions of the genre, I examined the students' journals. To gain as much insight as possible into why they were and were not following the conventions, I analyzed their interview responses.

I focused on three elements in my analysis of journal entries and other prose texts presented as models—organizational features, linguistic features, and content—in an attempt to determine genre conventions, following Ferguson's (1986) definition of genre as:

A unit of discourse conventionalized in a given community at a certain time, having an internal sequential structure and a set of features of form, content, and use that distinguish it from others in the repertoire of the community. (p. 208)

In analyzing organizational features, I drew upon Labov and Waletzky's (1967) approach to describing the *overall structure* of oral narratives. In analyzing linguistic features, I drew upon their analysis of the *basic framework* of narratives (p. 20), using the clause as the unit of analysis, as they did. I focused on those features which, taken together and considered for an entire piece, constituted a description of the transitivity within the piece—that is, the extent to which actions occur and affect people and things and who the participants are and what their roles are within the actions (see Halliday, 1981). Within each clause, I identified and counted participants (i.e., nouns and pronouns), their semantic case roles, verbs, verb types, and verb tenses (see Fillmore, 1970; Halliday, 1967, 1970, 1981; Kennedy, 1982; Traugott & Pratt, 1980). I approached the analysis of content, the third feature of the writing I examined, with "the general pre-theoretical notion of [content] as 'what is being talked [i.e., written] about'" (Brown & Yule, 1983, p. 71), following my intuitions as an experienced reader and writing teacher as well as considering specific features of the writing such as vocabulary, verb tenses, and verb types (see Staton et al., 1988, for a similar approach to discussing content in journal writing). I also examined the data (teachers' journals and other prose texts as well as instructions, assignment sheets, and teachers' responses to student journals) to describe functions (Ferguson's *uses*), focusing primarily on vocabulary. Finally, I added audience to Ferguson's list of defining features of genre, drawing from the work of Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, and Rosen (1975) and Applebee (1981). In analyzing audience in the journals, I considered who read the journals and how they responded as well as what students said in interviews about responders and responses.

Using these analytic approaches, I was able to describe particular functions, content, audience, and organizational and linguistic forms of the writing as it was presented to the students. Table 3 presents a summary of these features.

The combination of representational and reflective *functions* is one of the features of the genre. That is, writers describe events, people, objects, and issues in their lives, and they also reflect on the influences on them and importance to them of those events, people, objects, and issues. In this way, the genre is very similar to personal journals written outside the classroom. The *content* is focused on the personal experiences and feelings of the writers. The *audience* for the genre (the teacher and occasionally other students) responds primarily to the content rather than to the form of the writing and does not

TABLE 3

Features of Classroom Personal Journal Writing

Functions

- *Representational* – description of events, people, issues, objects in the writer's life.
- *Reflective* – discussion of the influence and importance of events, people, issues, and objects in the writer's life.

Content

- Personal experiences, ideas, and feelings of the writer.

Audience

- The audience responds to the content of the writing only, not to form or correctness, responding primarily as an interested reader rather than as an evaluator or teacher.

Organizational form

- *Beginning* – identification of time, place, person, and theme.
- *Middle* – thematically unified description of event, person, issue, or object accompanied by some reflection on its significance for the writer.
- *End* – concluding reflection on the significance of the event, person, issue, or object described in the middle.

Linguistic form

- First-person singular predominates.
- The writer expresses his or her thoughts, feelings and attributes through three primary syntactic structures:
 - first person subject + stative verb + adjective (noun)
Examples: *I was scared.* / *I was a shy child.*
 - first person subject + mental verb + clause/phrase
Example: *I assume that I missed my mother's attention to me.*
 - questions
Example: *How could I do what was expected of me?*

correct the entries, reacting as an interested reader rather than a teacher or evaluator. Though more and more classroom genres involve similar respondent(s), the predominant audience for school writing continues to be the teacher-as-evaluator (see Britton et al., 1975, and Applebee, 1981, 1984). The element of *organizational form* that most distinguishes the genre is the fact that reflection on the meaning or significance of the event, person, object, or issue discussed in the middle typically occurs at the ends of entries. Finally, several *linguistic features* characterize the genre: in particular, the predominance of the first-person participant and the expression of the writer's thoughts, feelings, and attributes (i.e., reflection) through certain syntactic structures (listed in Table 3).

Student journals were also analyzed using these procedures so that I could determine whether and to what extent they were following in their writing the conventions that were presented to them in the class. Two student journals written in response to the same assign-

ment show how these conventions were realized in student writing. The assignment (see Appendix C) asked the students to choose an important time in their lives, a time when something significant was happening to them, and to write about it in detail using a list of questions as guidelines. The two journals presented below, reproduced without editing, were written in response to that assignment. The emphases have been added to illustrate the different types of reflection the two writers engaged in.

Sita, Journal #2 – 3/12/85

The tragedies happened just about 3 months after I returned from 6 months in Thailand. I got a oversea phone call from one of my brother-in-law on Thursday evening in June 1984. I knew exactly what he would tell me when I answered the phone. My dad passed away! The funeral would held on the following Saturday. Even though I had only one night to decide that I should fly half world for the funeral or not, a few hours to buy air ticket and pack my suit case, I went anyway.

All my relatives were surprised to see me showed up because they didn't expect me to go back home since I've just left Bangkok 3 months ago.

It wasn't only I lost my dad, but for the 2 weeks I was there my second older sister had a blood clod in her brain which caused the left side of her body paralyzed! In addition to that one of my close friends had personnel problem that she considered taking her own life!

I felt overwhelm by tredgedies that I was so vulnerable as if I were in all that experiences myself. I felt so helpless, miserable, and old.

When I arrived to Bangkok I was already psysically and mentally tried and I wasn't able to gain my strength back even after 3 months that I returned back to San Francisco.

Each time that I looked at myself in the mirror, I saw a sad and tried face which over shadow by misery. I didn't just look old, I also felt old. The tragedies hit me so hard at the same time from three different ways. Therefore the impact was almost too difficult and painful to bear.

As I gradually recuperated, I went through the deep contemplations. I have changed so much now than last year. Because of this traumatic experiences, the tremendous force made me to become a mature person.

Alicia, Journal #3 – 10/14/84

When I was 8 years old, I liked to be in shows that the school use to give for Mother's Day and Independence Day, I used to recite and dance I enjoyed doing that very much, all the kits in the school and their parents liked the way that I acted. At the time I was living in one of San Salvador's Town, a beautiful town, My parents liked too. The only thing that my Father did not like was all the make up that I did have to wear to look pretty. I remember one time a friend from school polished my nails when I got home my father saw them, he got so angry that he made me to take the polish off. I never did

that again. At the time my priorities were my books earn the best grades, tried to be one of the best students on class, goal that I always achieved, my religious commitment was attended to church every Sunday with my parents at that time I belonged to Girl Scouts, my favorite clothes was to wear mini skirts, my favorite music oh I loved to listen rock and roll, my hobbies swim and read stories and my favorite food it always been seafood

These two students obviously responded to the same assignment with very different approaches even though they had received the same instructions and preparation in the class. Although both students wrote primarily in first person singular about personal experiences, Sita reflected more on her feelings and thoughts and on the significance of events throughout her piece as well as at the end, while Alicia simply made a series of statements about things she used to like to do. Sita's piece also represents a thematically unified description of one event, while Alicia lists numerous events connected only in that they had occurred in her life. Contrasts like these emerged in the journal writing of the nine writers, allowing me to distinguish different ways of adapting to the writing conventions.

Ways of Adapting to the Genre Conventions

In fact, analyses of their journals and interview responses indicate that the students adapted quite differently to this type of writing (see Lucas 1990, for a more thorough discussion). One student (Sita) embraced the genre. She expressed no difficulty in adapting to it and followed the conventions to a greater extent in her writing than did the other eight students. Five students struggled in different ways with the fact that they had an audience beyond themselves for this very personal writing, but all ultimately adopted the conventions at different times and in different ways. Three (Raquel, Keiko, and Kimiko) struggled with the fact that the writing encouraged them to disclose their personal experiences and feelings to an outside audience. A fourth student (Kaoru) found it difficult to write about personal experiences and feelings to an audience other than herself, not because of the self-disclosure involved but because of the need to describe and explain her experiences and feelings more clearly than she would do for herself. The fifth student (Irene) reported no difficulty with the writing, but in her writing she did not follow most of the personal, reflective conventions until her seventh journal, the assignment for which elicited an entry about her escape from Vietnam by boat as a teenager. Two students (Sunee and Alicia) developed their own agenda for the writing, following some of the conventions but not following most of those involving highly personal content and reflection. Of these two, Alicia reported having difficulty with the personal nature of the writing, and Sunee did not. Finally, one student (Elizabeth) tried to adopt the conventions of the genre but

then opted out of the class entirely after 6 of the 10 classes because the writing was too "personal." It is clear that some of these students engaged in the self-reflection elicited by journal writing more easily than others. This consideration of how they adapted leaves us still with the question, Why did they respond so differently to the writing? What might have led to such different realizations of the assignments? The answers must lie in who the students were and the experiences and expectations they brought to the class and to the assignments.

Influences on Ways of Adapting

In an ideal world, all students would embrace the conventions of a genre that could help them improve their confidence, fluency, and skill in writing (which the teachers believed engagement with this genre would do). But I am sure that it does not surprise teachers to see that these nine students did not all do so. Just as Fillmore's (1979, 1983) subjects responded in different ways to being asked to learn English, my subjects responded in different ways to being asked to engage in (and therefore to learn) classroom personal journal writing. Student questionnaires, in-depth interviews with the students, and the content of the journals themselves revealed a variety of influences on their ways of responding. I will discuss those influences which emerged as most salient from my analyses, focusing only on those students for whom each influence appeared strongest.

Past Writing Experience

Past writing experience—both amounts and types of experience—seemed to play a major role in students' adaptations to the genre. Raquel and Kaoru had kept personal journals for approximately fifteen years each. Raquel described her journal as her "closest companion" and Kaoru spoke of her journal as similarly important in her life. For them and for Kimiko and Sita, who had also kept journals for shorter periods of time, their journals were places to explore their feelings and reactions rather than just to record events. Though Irene had never kept a journal or diary, she had used writing for personal, expressive purposes (see Britton, 1970) in poems, stories, and personal essays that she had written in high school.

In contrast, Alicia and Sunee had had less experience and more limited ranges of experience than the other students writing in any genres in their native languages or in English. Besides a few poems that Alicia had been inspired to write as a young girl, the only personal writing either of them had done was letters. Alicia also had had the least education, having completed high school and taken only a few classes at a community college. Their more limited experiences with writing meant that the genre was very unfamiliar to them, which allowed them to adapt it to their own styles and purposes, ignoring

certain features, perhaps more easily than others who had more clearly defined conceptions of what was involved in journal writing. The fact that Alicia had not had extensive experience with university-level writing classes also gave her fewer preconceptions of what the teachers might "want" from her in her writing than someone like Elizabeth, for example, who appeared to see dropping out of the class as her only alternative to giving the teachers what they wanted.

Those students who had had experience writing in a genre and for functions similar to those of classroom personal journal writing adapted more easily and more completely to what was expected of them—that is, they followed more of the genre conventions more quickly—than those students who had never done personal, reflective writing. A comparison of pieces written by Raquel and Sunee about parents who had died illustrates these differences.

Raquel, Journal #4 – 10/7/85

When I was 21 years of age the most important person in my life, died.

My mother, my sister and I lived in a nice town in my country. Our life was like the life of many working families: my mother worked to support the family and my sister and I studied to be professional and to support my mother in her old age. My parents were divorced since I was ten years old. My father never took out the responsibilities I think that as father he should take. Thus, all the family burden leaned over my mother's shoulders. She spent almost all her life working and working hard to give a good education to her two daughters.

When my mother was going to see the fruit of her efforts in terms of our education, she got a cerebral stroke that put her in 5 days of comma. We were not expecting this hit in our lives. Those days were the worse days in my life. My mother was the most important person in my life. She was the meaning of my existence and I was losing that in those days of agony. The feelings I experimented with in those days were unknown for me. I was rebelled with every thing, especially with God. I didn't understand why that was happening to us. She was too young to die. I was totally unable to stop the death and that made me feel angry when I saw my own weakness in front of the death. Even the doctors couldn't do anything.

After five days, my mother died. The following days and months were months of completely loneliness, sadness, and emptiness. Her absence was evident in every moment of my life.

As the time went by, I got involved in different activities. The death of my mother left another taste in my life. I started to see the life from another perspective, from the perspective of somebody who had suffered the lose of the beloved one. After that I could understand the suffering of different people because I was sensitive to this. I was alert of when [?] was happening around me and started to rebel against all kind of injustice, oppresion and suffering.

Sunee, Journal #4 – 10/7

My father used to play an important role in my life. My family has five children. Everyone in the family loves him eventhough he had pass away a couple of years ago.

He was a handsome man and had a loud voice. He had brown skin and a bit bald. He was about 5 feet 10 inches. Because of his character, everyone in the family afraid of him. He supported us to have good education and to save our lifes. He worked hard and took full responsibility of his family. When he was alive, he always taught us to respect to other people, honest to other people, be worked hard, and be a responsible person.

We were not close to him when we were little because he left home for work early in the morning and came home late at night. We were closer to him when we grown up because at that time he had a business at home. He always in a good mood when the business was well, otherwise, he was a serious person. He smoked and drank heavily when he was young. He stopped smoking and drinking when he was fifty-five years old because of his health. No one could stop him before that time. He suffered a lot when he was sick in the hospital for four months until he died. Everyone in my family still respect him because he was our father and he was the one we always love.

Raquel's journal is both representational and reflective. She writes predominantly in first person singular, expresses her feelings through the syntactic structures characteristic of the genre (e.g., *I didn't understand, I saw my own weakness, I started to see the life from another perspective*), and ends the piece by reflecting on the effects on her life of the events she described in the body of the piece. Sunee, on the other hand, includes little reflection or expression of feelings in her piece and never uses first person singular. Though the content is certainly personal, Sunee's piece is much less expressive of her own experiences and reactions than is Raquel's.

Since the teachers did not try to force students to be more reflective or disclosing than they wanted to be, Sunee's piece was just as acceptable to the teachers as was Raquel's. However, Raquel's conformed more completely to the conventions of the writing which were presented in the class. It may be common sense that students will perform better on a task with which they have had some experience, but if we think about what we expect our students to do in our classes and the little that we usually know or learn about their past writing experiences, we can see that this common sense is not always applied. That is, we do not always base our expectations of our students on their past writing experiences.

Personality: Self revelation and reflection

Along with other second language acquisition researchers, I have focused on the personality traits that "intuitively strike [me] as impor-

tant" within the context of my research (Ellis, 1986, p.120): self-revelation and reflection. In this case, the ways these students approached classroom personal journal writing was consonant with the degree of self-revelation they engaged in in everyday interactions with me and others in the class and in their pasts as they revealed them to me in interviews. These personality traits, like others, are difficult to measure or to isolate, but the contrast between Sita, on the one hand, and Alicia and Sunee, on the other, illustrates them clearly. In interviews, Sita very comfortably and with little elicitation discussed personal events in her life and her feelings about them and about people. She also asked me questions about myself, departing from the strict interviewer-interviewee relationship that we ostensibly had with each other. After the class ended, she went on to graduate school in counseling psychology, planning to be a counselor. One of Sita's journals shows her willingness to engage in the personal, reflective nature of the writing—a letter to her mother, who had died many years before, in which she expressed some very difficult and complex feelings of guilt and sadness and worry that she had let her mother down. Though somewhat less revealing, her piece about the three tragedies that befell her (Journal #2) also reflects her willingness to engage in personal, reflective communication.

Alicia also told me about some personal events in her life, but she was much less likely to reveal her feelings about them than was Sita. In interviews, she described her father's disappearance from their farm in El Salvador a few years before, her difficult decision to leave her family and El Salvador to come to the U.S. with her husband, and her parents' fights when she was young. But she very explicitly indicated that she did not want to reflect on past events if they made her sad. In her last interview, she said:

[In the class], I wrote about my life on the farm, about living with beautiful nature things. Those were the happiest times of my life. I remember unhappy things, but I wouldn't want to write because it's like living it again. . . . I get upset and cry when I write about bad things. I don't learn anything. I just get upset and start crying.

The entry by Alicia which we saw above mirrors her desire to remember only happy events and to minimize sad ones.

Sunee was even less forthcoming than Alicia. In fact, I learned almost nothing about her life or her feelings in interviews or through reading her journals. In marked contrast to Sita, Sunee seemed to view the interviews only as situations in which I asked questions for which I wanted short, simple, to-the-point answers. She rarely, if ever, elaborated on an answer or expressed her feelings. Again, the journal in which she described her father (Journal #4) mirrors this lack of revelation and personal reflection.

Cultural Background

The last influence to be considered here is culture—that is, the set of values, customs, and beliefs learned by growing up within ethnic, religious, and social groups. For these students, the influence of cultural background was mediated by individual differences such as personal experience. That is to say, the findings illustrate the fact that cultural background is not a monolithic force influencing everyone in similar ways. The most telling example of the mediation of cultural influences by individual differences is the contrast between Sita, who embraced the genre to a greater extent than any other student, and Sunee, who followed only a limited number of the personal, reflective conventions which distinguish this genre from others. We have already seen journals written by these two women which illustrate their very different approaches to the journal writing. They had similar sociocultural backgrounds: both were adult Thai women, were raised and schooled in Thailand through secondary school, Sita even through the university, and were from economic backgrounds which were neither impoverished nor extremely wealthy. We might, therefore, expect them to respond to the writing similarly. But we would be wrong.

Their approaches to the journal writing appeared to be greatly influenced by individual factors such as experience with and attitudes toward writing, especially the use of writing as a mode of reflection, and personality, particularly the degree of revelation and reflection in which they engaged. Sita was also more integrated into American society and culture (she lived with an American man) and was a permanent resident in the U.S., which made her more "Americanized" than Sunee, a foreign student planning to return to Thailand. Sita felt that such personality traits as self-disclosure and reflection were accepted and valued in the U.S. Thus, her adaptation to the personal, reflective journal writing was facilitated by the ways in which certain aspects of her personality interacted with her experience of U.S. culture. All of these factors—writing experience, personality, degree of integration into American culture—and others interacted to produce differences in the ways in which Sita and Sunee approached the journal writing.

The influence of cultural background was more evident in the responses of the three Japanese women in the study. Kaoru, Kimiko, and Keiko all struggled with the audience for the writing and ultimately adapted to the conventions. All mentioned differences in attitudes toward self-disclosure in Japanese and American cultures, and all were somewhat reluctant at first to engage in the self-reflection of the genre. Nevertheless, individual differences mediated the influence of cultural background for these students just as they did for Sita and Sunee. Kaoru's extensive experience with personal, reflective writing in her own personal journal made the adaptation easier for

her than for the other two. Kimiko, too, had done some personal writing, which Keiko had not and, overall, she produced a higher proportion of pieces that followed the personal, reflective conventions of the genre. Keiko, who wrote more journals than any other student besides Irene, engaged in those conventions selectively. That is, some of her entries involve very little personal reflection; she wrote several entries about such impersonal subjects as the effects of television, the content of a symposium she had attended, and the expense of living in a city. On the other hand, she also wrote about being molested as a child, feeling rejected when her younger sister was born, and being left by a boyfriend. She acknowledged that she had difficulty being open in her life and in her writing, attributing that difficulty to Japanese cultural values which, she said, make Japanese people uncomfortable with disclosure. She reported that it was more difficult for her to express her feelings and to disclose in Japanese than in English because "there are too many ways to be polite in Japanese." The fact that Kimiko and Kaoru overcame their initial problems with disclosure more easily than Keiko and that both said they found it easier to express their feelings in Japanese than in English may be related to both culture and age: Keiko grew up in a less open Japan than did Kimiko and Kaoru, who were 11 years younger than she was.

These comparisons illustrate the complex interplay between cultural background and individual differences in students' responses to classroom tasks, in particular their willingness to engage in a type of classroom writing. The distinction between the two is not easily drawn: culture constitutes the context within which individual experiences occur and unique ways of perceiving and conceiving the world develop.

Conclusion and Implications

I have discussed three influences on nine ESL students' ways of adapting to a particular written genre—one involving personal content and reflection—in a university context. These influences were: past writing experiences; degrees of self-revelation and reflection they engaged in in their writing, in interviews, and in classroom interactions; and cultural background. Certainly not an exhaustive list, these are simply major influences I discerned from conducting research on these nine students. From an analysis of these students' experiences, I have concluded, as many educators and researchers are telling us, that what the students brought to the tasks of learning and participating in a written genre influenced the outcomes of their engagement with those tasks. In other words, the extents to which they did what was expected of them were influenced by a variety of factors outside the control of the teachers and, for that matter, of the students themselves.

Though I have discussed these influences separately, they cannot really be isolated. They work together, interacting in different ways and affecting learners' behavior in different ways. They are elements of what Erickson (1986) has called "meaning perspectives." For example, Raquel's and Kaoru's extensive experiences writing personal, reflective journals in their own native languages led them to see the journal writing in the class differently from other students and to adapt to it more easily than some of those students. The fact that Elizabeth, Keiko, Alicia, and Sunee had not engaged in much self-disclosure or reflection in their lives or in writing made the genre more difficult for them than for others. Kaoru, Kimiko, and Keiko experienced a conflict between the feelings about self-disclosure they had acquired growing up in Japanese culture and those of their American teachers, and each resolved it in her own way. The students in my study were making sense of the journal writing in different ways, ways that were not always evident from a consideration of their behavior alone.

What does all of this mean for the classroom? First of all, these findings corroborate a fact that teachers already know and struggle with regularly: each student is an individual unlike any other. As difficult as it is, we must be cautious in our reliance on cultural values and customs to explain students' behavior and learning. We must be vigilant to avoid making generalizations, to ourselves and to others, about "Asian students" or "Middle Eastern students" or "Mexican students." Assuming that Sita and Sunee would respond to journal writing similarly because they are both Thai women, for example, would have been a gross miscalculation. Cultural background certainly plays a role, but individual perceptions, experiences, knowledge, values—by themselves and as they interact with cultural background—have a powerful influence as well. In order to help students who are having difficulty with tasks we set for them, we need to consider not only the cultures that they come from, but also the experiences, knowledge, and values that they have brought to the tasks. While a knowledge of different cultural values can make teachers aware of the influence of culture on individuals, cultural stereotyping can blind us to the myriad of relevant individual experiences and perceptions that influence students' learning.

Teachers need to be able to use knowledge of culture judiciously in order not to stereotype students but to serve them better; this means using cultural knowledge in conjunction with other types of information related to the content and skills to be taught and individual students' preferences and personalities to promote learning. (McGroarty, 1986, p. 305)

A second conclusion for the classroom that grows directly out of the first is that past writing experience seems to have been one of the most important influences for these students. This suggests that when we are teaching writing, we need to know the kinds and amounts of writing experiences our students have had and their attitudes toward those experiences. We should not rely on our assumptions about their experiences; we should ask students about them, perhaps in questionnaires or in individual conferences at the beginning of a course. This knowledge will help us predict who will have the most difficulty fulfilling our expectations of the kind of writing we want our students to produce so that we can provide appropriate assistance to those students.

Third, these findings indicate that students respond in different ways to being asked to engage in a particular genre and that they may have difficulty learning not only the formal features of a second language or dialect but also the conventions of the discourse genres of a culture or subculture different from their own. Most of the students in the study followed most of the conventions in many of their journals, but they struggled in different ways with being asked to produce personal, reflective writing for an audience. If we ask our students to do personal journal writing, we need to give some thought to how they may respond to the personal reflection required in journal writing. We may, in fact, need to adjust our expectations of how easy journal writing will be for them and of the extent to which they will be willing to reflect on personal issues. Similar struggles may also occur in more traditional classes where students are expected to learn to write academic essays. Since essay writing plays such an important gatekeeping role in our academic system, we need to examine influences on students' engagement with and learning of that genre.

Finally, these findings suggest that extralinguistic factors are crucial to learning, even for ESL students (see California State Department of Education, 1986, for a volume devoted to the role of such factors in schooling). Because our profession has been guided for so long by trends and theories in linguistics, we have a tendency to assume that language is the only or most relevant ingredient in the teaching and learning of ESL, whether the focus is on written or oral skills. Neither researchers nor teachers can ignore such factors as experience, attitudes, perceptions, and even idiosyncracies if they want to understand students deeply and teach them effectively. ■

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Appendix A

Student Interviews

Student Interview #1

1. Tell me about why you are taking this course.
2. Tell me about the role of writing in your life.
Follow-up and probing questions:
 - a. What kinds of writing have you done in school in your native language? In English?
 - b. What kinds of writing have you done outside school in your native language? In English?
 - c. What kinds of writing do you now do in your native language? In English?
 - d. What kinds of writing do you think you will do in the future in your native language? In English?
3. Tell me about how you feel when you write (a) in English and (b) in your native language for school? For yourself? For work?
4. How do you feel about the class so far?
5. How do you feel about the assignments so far?
6. a. Have you ever done personal writing? What kind(s)?
b. Have you ever written a diary or journal? In what language? How did you feel about it?
7. Is there anything else about your writing that you would like to tell me?

Student Interview #2

1. How do you feel about the class now?
Follow-up and probing questions:
 - a. What do you like about it?
 - b. What don't you like about it?
 - c. How are your feelings about it different now than they were at the beginning?
2. How do you feel about the teachers?
3. How do you feel about the teachers' journals?
4. How do you feel about the teachers' comments on your journals?
5. How do you feel about your writing now? Do you feel any differently than you did at the beginning of the course?
6. How do you feel about the writing you're doing for the class?
Follow-up and probing questions:
 - a. Do you see any benefits of the writing? What are they?
 - b. What do you find difficult about the writing? Easy?
 - c. What do you like about it? What don't you like about it?
7. Tell me about (specific pieces you've written).
Follow-up and probing questions:
 - a. How did/do you feel about them?
 - b. Did writing about the subjects affect your thinking about them?
 - c. Which one stands out in your mind the most? Why?
 - d. Which do you like the best? The least? Why?
8. How do you feel about the journal topics assigned?
9.
 - a. How do you decide which topics to write about?
 - b. How do you decide which to hand in for the teacher to read?
10.
 - a. How do you feel about the teachers' journals?
 - b. Which ones stand out in your mind?
 - c. Do you think they influence you or your writing? If so, how?
11.
 - a. How do you feel about the teachers' comments on your journals?
 - b. Do they influence your writing? If so, how?

Student Interview #3

1. How do you feel about writing now? Have your feelings changed while taking the course?
2. How do you feel about the class now that it is (almost) over?
3.
 - a. Has this class been different from other English classes you have taken? How?
 - b. From other English writing classes? How?
4. How would you describe the roles the teachers have played in the course?
Follow-up and probing questions:
 - a. What kinds of things have they done in the class?
 - b. How have you felt about them and what they've done?
5. What has been the most important aspect of the course to you?
6.
 - a. Do you perceive any changes in yourself in the last 10 weeks? What are they?
 - b. Any changes in yourself as a writer?
 - c. Do you think the changes are related to the class? How?
7. When you sit down to write something now, do you do anything differently than you did before you took the class? If so, what?
8. How would you describe the kind of writing you've done in the class?
9. Had you ever done this kind of writing before? In what language? In what situation(s)?
10. How do you feel about this kind of writing now? Has your attitude toward this kind of writing changed since the beginning of the course?
11. Do you see any benefits of this kind of writing? What are they?
12. Do you see benefits of other types of writing? What types? What benefits?
13. What was the most important piece of writing you did for the class? Why? Least important? Why?
14. What other pieces that you wrote stand out in your mind? Why?
15. Tell me about (specific other pieces you wrote).
16. Will you continue with this kind of writing on your own? Why or why not?

Teacher Interviews

Teacher Interview #1

1. What are your goals for the class?
2. How would you describe the kind of writing the students are doing in their journals?
3. How would you describe the writing you are doing in your journals?
Follow-up and probing questions:
 - a. Describe the content.
 - b. Describe the organization.
 - c. Describe the purpose.
4. Which students are writing the kind of writing you expected them to?
5. What are your impressions of (the case study students)?
6. What are your impressions of the class so far?

Teacher Interview #2

1. How would you describe the population of the class? Tell me anything that seems important to you.
2. What is your impression of why the students are taking the class?
3. Describe how you see your role in the class.
4. Describe what has happened in the class so far.
5. What are your impressions of the class now?
6. What are your impressions of (the case study students)?

Teacher Interview #3

1. What are your general impressions of the class now that it is over?
2. What were your successes? Disappointments?
3. Will you do anything differently if you teach the class again?
4. How would you describe your role in the class this semester?
5. What was the most important aspect of the 10 weeks for you?
6. What are your impressions of (the case study students) now that the class is over?

Appendix B

Two Teachers' Journals

Teacher's Journal #1

I find sitting down to write difficult. Last week, I waited until the very last moment. I felt I had a good start, but if I had revised it several times or thought about it longer, it would have been more cohesive. So, here I am explaining to myself and apologizing to you about my last entry. But, because it wasn't good, I feel I need to do that much better this time. We'll see about that . . .

I have several objects which have meaning in my life. I have a medal my grandmother gave me, a pair of diamond earrings my exhusband gave me and my calendar book. Other objects come into mind now. Because I moved in July, I have a fairly good idea of old "favorites." But, once again it comes down to choosing. The calendar is something that is everyday and practical. It's not inspirational. The earrings would make an interesting story—better than the medal from my grandmother. So, it is the earrings.

Where should I start? I have to go back seven years, more or less. It was the Christmas before my husband and I separated. We had had a stormy August and September with a lot of fights. Actually, we didn't fight alot. So, there were a lot of unspoken feelings, anger, frustration, distress. It was the lack of communication that made the two months uneven and upsetting. So, at Christmas, I was not feeling very close to him or very jolly. That was difficult for me because I was (am) a great believer in the spirit of Christmas and do my best to make it a warm caring time. But, our problems and a fight on Christmas Eve made me feel at the bottom of it all. As I sat next to his parents' Christmas tree while everyone tore into their gifts, I felt distant, depressed. The last gift passed out was to me. I had failed to notice all evening that I hadn't received a "big" gift from my husband. So, I found a very large box in my hands. I fussed with it, hating to open it in front of the whole family and make all the appropriate comments "How lovely! Just right! Thank you, Mark. I love you." I thought it would all stick in my throat. Finally, everyone made me open it. Inside, I found a tiny note saying follow this string. (I had failed to see the string coming out of the box because of all the wrapping paper and general confusion.) The string led me to a small box on the tree. I opened it slowly to find a pair of diamond earrings. I lost my breath and was overwhelmed. I sat, for one of the few times, dumbfounded. You see I had mentioned several years before that I wanted a pair of diamonds knowing then that we were too poor to get them. Mark had kept that thought and found this pair in May. He had been paying for them little by little, through all our fights or nonfights, so that he could give them to me on

Christmas. All the planning, all the secrecy, showed me he cared, yet I knew then that all the planning, all the secrecy, was not enough. Though he had done everything just the way I liked it, with all the surprise, with all the magic, with all the love, I knew that we wouldn't last much longer.

Now, you may ask, how could earrings which came with such sadness be favorites of mine? Well, I see those earrings representing care, planning, hard work and secrecy. They remind me of what love can do, of how important planning, hard work and care are in a relationship and for an individual. They also remind me that secrecy and surprises are not always pleasant. What I had kept hidden, my feelings, and what Mark had kept hidden, the gift, hurt the relationship because it was too late.

So, I wear the earrings whenever I must face a difficult situation. I wear them to give me confidence and to remind me how to act. If I have to go to a meeting I don't like or a party I would rather not go to, I wear the earrings. Then I know to act what is in my heart with care. I've never told Mark any of this even though we have remained friends. He doesn't know what his earrings have grown to mean to me.

Teacher's Journal #2

I came to California eight years ago after living in Washington, DC for several years. Prior to that, I'd spent my childhood in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. When I lived on the east coast, California seemed as far away as Mars, and most of what I heard about this state was pretty negative. It has a very anti-intellectual reputation back east and people often see the "lifestyle" out here as quite indulgent—hot tubs, jogging, drugs, health food. In any case, I don't really want to write about how easterners view the west, but when I came here, because of my surroundings, I had a fairly cynical picture about what I might find. Eight years later, I know I made the right decision, for despite all of my preconceived notions about the west coast, I loved San Francisco immediately. I was dazzled by the hilly streets, the colorful Victorians, the friendly and diverse people I met so easily, the bay, the ocean . . . it was all wonderful and breathtakingly beautiful. I'd arrived in June and was able to enjoy the summer since I was living off my savings. Not having to work allowed me to explore the city and travel up and down the coast. When September rolled around, though I was thoroughly enjoying myself, my money was running low and I had to find a job. I did a lot of temporary office work, restaurant work and other odd jobs as I waited for the fall to approach and signal the change of seasons and perhaps a change in my work situation. Yet, all the resumes I sent out, the interviews I went on and the contacts that everyone told me I should be making

came to naught. Without a glimmer of autumn, October came and went as did November and December. Everyday, the sky was a kind of cornflower blue, no clouds, no fog, just warm air and less smog than we have now. Then people began to talk about the drought and all kinds of water saving techniques were established—turn off water while brushing your teeth, don't let it run while cleaning dishes, take short showers. Since this was my first winter here, though others acknowledged the weather as unusual, I began to feel as if the summer had turned endless. Somehow I got it into my head as my work situation got worse and worse, that all those sunny skies were as much a cause of the depression I began to feel as was the terribly competitive job market I was trying to break into. Despite the beauty of the weather, I inevitably compared it to my frustrating job search routine because neither ever changed. I remember thinking about *The End of the Road*, a book by John Barth, in which a character uses the term "weatherless" to describe a certain type of climate. While I don't think he had bright blue skies in mind, that's how I began to experience California. It wasn't until February that it hit me that autumn had come and gone and that I had never seen the firey leaves fall from the trees. I was in a time warp, so mesmerized by the intense blue sky that I'd forgotten what it was like to jump into a pile of crunchy leaves and scatter them everywhere. On the other hand, I was happy to forget about the snow and slush of winter that I knew was blanketing the east coast and other parts of the country. Yet, there was something about having missed the fall that was almost painful.

In time, of course, the drought ended and San Francisco's subtle seasons began to emerge for me. Like all other transplanted easterners, I stopped looking for dramatic changes in the weather. I not only got used to, but began to appreciate the foggy Julys and rainy season. But ever since that first year here, I have never quite gotten over losing fall. In 1977, I flew back east in October and gloried in the colors and crisp air, but when I became a student and then a teacher, the option of leaving at that time of year disappeared. So, in 1978, I established a plan with my mother. As soon as the leaves on the giant maple tree in front of our house turned yellow, orange and red, she would wait for them to fall and begin collecting. The first year, she sent me one or two, but the color turned brown by the time they reached me. The next year, she sent more and I had better luck—a brilliant yellow maple leaf with only a few flecks of brown had made it unchanged. And so, what began as a silly attempt to ease this seasonal homesickness became a ritual I now celebrate every year about this time. Last Friday when the mail came with a big brown envelope addressed to me, I knew what was inside. As I spilled out the contents, amidst the crisp brown oak and ginkgo leaves and between a few moldy maples, a small red leaf fluttered out of the bag. Its veins were still green, but a rich red flushed out on all

sides of those narrow lines—one perfect leaf in a mass of 20 past their prime.

So, my taste of autumn is here with me in my room, a reminder of my favorite time of year, of my childhood, from the tree my mother planted as a sapling, which now obscures the entire front of the house. I look at it and know that in a few weeks, I will finally be able to get away and go up north to delight in the flash of color and smells that I almost forgot one fall eight years ago.

Appendix C

Instructions for Steppingstone Assignment

First Journal Assignment

Steppingstones

(Adapted from the work of Ira Progoff)

You are going to make a list of 8 to 12 significant points in the movement of your life. These points may reflect times of happiness, pain, decision, transition, boredom, or anything else as long as they illustrate a moment or period that is memorable to you, regardless of the importance it may or may not have to someone else.

Write only a word or phrase to indicate each steppingstone period. You are the only one who needs to understand the meaning behind each point, so lengthy or detailed explanations are not necessary.

Your list should begin with your birth and move to the present. If ideas or images should come to you out of chronological order, once your list is completed, go back and number the items in chronological order.

You should take no more than 20 minutes, maximum, to make this list! At first, you may find it difficult to think of 12 points, and then suddenly, 12 will seem like too few. Don't labor over which 12 to pick. Just write the first 12 that come to you without getting too focused on any particular period.

Second Journal Assignment

Look over your list of Steppingstones. Pick one that you would like to write about. You will probably share your writing with some of your classmates, so pick one that you won't mind talking about with other people. Finally, write about a time when you felt something significant was happening in your life, when you were changing or growing as a person.

Now, write about that time in detail. Use the following questions as *guidelines*. You don't have to answer all of them or respond to them in the order they are asked. Pick the ones that are relevant to you. Write in paragraph form.

1. Where were you?
2. What were you doing?
3. How did you feel about yourself?
4. Where did you live? Describe the situation.
5. How old were you?
6. Who was important to you?
7. What was important to you?
8. What were your values and priorities?
9. What were your plans for the future?
10. Did you have any political or religious commitments?
What were they?
11. Did you belong to any groups or organizations? Which ones?
12. How did you picture yourself? What did you look like?
What clothes did you like to wear?
13. What music did you like to listen to?
14. What food did you like to eat?
15. What were your hobbies or interests?