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Metacognition in adolescent writers

Samantha Jo Shub

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METACOGNITION IN ADOLESCENT WRITERS

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition

by
Samantha Jo Shub
December 1998
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Approved by:

Rise Axelrod Chair, English

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Date

November 4, 1998
ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates how modeling enhances the transference of metacognitive writing strategies in junior high school students. Previous studies focused on college or elementary school students. After establishing a common vocabulary and explicating texts for their adherence to, or deviation from, genre specific attributes, students used planning sheets and peer workshops as scaffolds throughout the process of producing their own myths, legends or folktales. After completing their stories, students reflected upon their uses of the strategies and speculated as to their ability to use the strategies in the future without direct instructor intervention.

Based on the responses of student groups, this type of teaching may help students think systematically about a given writing situation. However, students who reported that they felt confident in their ability to transfer metacognitive writing strategies were less enthusiastic about the scaffolding than students who were ambiguous about their ability to transfer metacognitive strategies to future assignments. Teachers choosing to use metacognitive teaching strategies with students in the age range studied must remember that some students already possess valid metacognitive strategies.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Rise Axelrod and Carol Haviland for their support and continuing inspiration.
To Michael

Your words, joined with mine, will drench the world around us.


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CHAPTER 1

The simplest of writing assignments is never simple. Creating and recreating purpose and product during the writing process usually takes place on an unconscious level for many students and therefore seems either simple (automatic) or simply a job to be done despite not knowing how, exactly, to do the job. Students should and can be taught to consciously and systematically connect reading to writing, particularly re-reading their own writings, to make the unconscious processes of writing clearer and, if not simple, comprehensible. Teaching students how to take conscious control of their writing processes is teaching them how to think on a metacognitive level.

Metacognition is defined as thinking about thinking. A designation between cognition and metacognition is in order. As Erica Lindemann asserts in *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers*, psychologists use cognition to describe two kinds of knowledge: knowledge attained through awareness, seeing or perception and knowledge attained through judgment, thinking or conception (57). Lindemann notes that this is an artificial distinction because the two kinds of knowledge must work together. Metacognition takes these ideas to a higher level by emphasizing that one reaches a metacognitive level through reflection over knowledge acquired by making judgments. When a writer consciously reflects on decisions made during a writing process, often reorganizing and revising the written product as a result of these reflections, a writer has reached a metacognitive state. Because this concept overlaps psychology and composition, one must consider that writing is an aid to thinking and development; it is not only a means of communication to an audience. Enabling students to develop conscious control over their composing processes may also help them develop the appraisal and inquiry skills necessary to think beyond a superficial level about future matters, not just a particular writing assignment.
Linda Flower and her colleague John R. Hayes have written extensively on writing as a cognitive process which requires writers to explicitly choose strategies and shift between levels of conscious processing, thus engaging in metacognitive control of the writing process. Their research has proven extremely influential; however, most of Flower and Hayes’ research has been on college students and adult writers who probably approach the writing task with a more developed repertoire of strategies than do even the most prepared adolescents. When teaching adolescents rather than adults, one must account for the fact that the less experienced a writer is, the fewer strategies, implicit or explicit, she has at her disposal. In “Cognitive Studies and Teaching Writing,” Andrea A. Lunsford uses cognitive psychologist William Perry’s theories to assert that adolescents inhabit a very different developmental space than adults. Adolescents may be struggling to adjust to the idea that problems, such as writing situations, can be successfully completed in a variety of ways (150-152). Additionally, most of Flower and Hayes’ subjects have chosen to face the challenges of college, which suggests a willingness to engage in higher level thinking. Flower and Hayes’ findings, therefore, must be carefully considered before applying them to a junior high or high school composition class which must accommodate all students, not students who have chosen to be in situations where writing is essential. While Flower and Hayes’ models of writing processes have influenced my thinking about writing instruction, it is not their models that I find most useful. Rather, it is the identification and naming of the processes, such as task representation, which writers report engaging in. That noted, the idea of writing as a multi-level, embedded process and the importance of sequencing advanced in Flower’s “Taking Thought: The Role of Conscious Processing in the Making of Meaning” offer significant matters for consideration in any composition class that seeks to teach a metacognitive approach to writing.

In “Changes in Poor Readers’ Knowledge of Cognition and the Association of Knowledge of Cognition with Regulation of Cognition and Reading Comprehension,”
Michael S. Meloth applied cognitive theories to the teaching of reading and identified three types of knowledge necessary for higher reading comprehension in a study set of third grade students. Declarative knowledge was the ability to define a particular reading strategy, while procedural knowledge involved knowing how to engage in various reading strategies. Conditional knowledge, which would be evidence of metacognitive reading control, was knowing when to read in a particular style. Though these three theories first applied to reading, I believe that applying and adapting these knowledge types to writing may assist teachers in seeing the levels of control that students use when writing. In this interpretation, declarative knowledge would involve recognizing the conventions of a genre, procedural knowledge would be the ability to write within those conventions and conditional knowledge would be knowing when to use or bypass certain conventions depending upon the rhetorical focus of the writer. Reaching a level of conditional knowledge would indicate that a writer is engaging in conscious control of the writing process, and thus, in metacognition.

It should be noted that the three types of metacognitive knowledge mentioned above do not necessarily fit into a hierarchy, as they did when applied to reading strategies. For instance, a student may be able to demonstrate conditional knowledge of a genre by deciding to leave dialogue out of a story, but be unable to demonstrate declarative knowledge (knowledge of a genre’s conventions) of other aspects of that genre.

Carl Bereiter and Marlene Scardemalia assert that there are two models of composing that people tend to follow and that one may write well or poorly using either one, but that the more complex one, which involves making writing a task that grows in complexity as a writer’s competence grows, thus replacing old, surmounted problems with ones on higher levels, makes writers able to gain more cognitive development benefits while generally producing “higher levels of literary quality” (5). They posit two instructional methods which may encourage students to use their own self-regulatory strategies, thus engaging in
metacognition. The first instructional method, procedural facilitation, seeks to reduce the burden of bringing more self-regulation to the writing process by using "routines and external aides." The second instructional method is goal concretization. This involves using "substitute goals of a more concrete and stable type than those naturally occurring in compositional tasks" (253). In my study, a variety of plan sheets and workshops achieve this. Though the researchers characterize these self-regulation strategies as leading to increasingly mature cognition, I would argue that adolescents' engagement in even basic self-regulation and judgment must be considered metacognition because they are working at their highest levels and consciously choosing how to approach the writing project with the aide of an instructor. Behaviors considered proof of metacognition in mature writers cannot be expected to manifest identically in less experienced writers.

As psychologist John Flavell points out in "Cognitive Development: Past, Present and Future," children do not process the world as adults do, so why should researchers expect them to process a writing task in the same way? Children are, and perhaps adults should be, constantly engaged in the development of cognitive strategies to make sense of the world (1005). When one writes to transform knowledge, one is doing just that: making sense of a literary world or a composing task.

Lunsford contends that studies of cognitive development provide a basis for pedagogy that unites thought, language and action. In her view, the works of Piaget and Vygotsky are highly provocative for writing teachers because students must "think abstractly and ‘formally’" while writing and because their work suggests that instruction influences development (148). Lunsford sees Piaget as a positive influence on composition instruction because his theories recognize that cognitive development must involve constructing one's own realities, which involves the knowledge transforming approach found in Flower and Hayes. The problems with Piaget's theories, such as universality and the dynamic nature of cognitive development, should not preclude application of these ideas
in a classroom. His conception of learning as occurring when students are ‘decentered’

enough to resolve discrepancies between old and new information corresponds to
Vygotsky’s concept of the zone of proximal development, that is the area between what

learners know and what they need or feel they need to know. If composition instructors aim
to get students working in the space between the known and the unknown, not only will
they be helping students become better writers by broadening their areas of consideration,
they will be helping students to become more conscious thinkers. As Lunsford puts it:

...we can identify certain cognitive strategies that can be taught and, incidentally,
that doing so is as, if not more, important than identifying stages or models. Such
an argument rests... on my basic agreement with Vygotsky and others who say
that instruction can foster development. In particular, I agree with Vygotsky’s
notion that a student’s ‘zone of potential development’ can be broadened and moved
forward by the kind of construction that ‘marches slightly ahead’ of the student, thus
allowing that student’s reach only slightly to exceed his or her grasp (157).

Lunsford here encapsulates what may be the most important consideration for teachers
interested in the interaction between cognitive development, language, thought and action.

In “The Process of Writing and the Process of Learning,” Lee Odell urges teachers
to identify “the conceptual activities writers need to engage in as they try to understand and
write about specific sets of data” (104). By doing so, teachers have the opportunity to
anticipate when student writers may be working within the zone of proximal development.
When teachers provide examples of genres and engage in the reading and writing processes
with students, they are engaging in modeling behavior which facilitates learning. Later,
student-produced texts can serve as models as well and, perhaps because of their unpolished
nature, may prove even more compelling as models for eighth graders who generally seem
to be intensely interested in how they compare to their peers.

The importance of the interaction of reader and text cannot be underestimated in this
study. For students to successfully write a specific genre, they must not only be aware of
genre-specific attributes, they must also have models to draw upon in order to choose what
they will or will not do in producing their own texts. Elizabeth A. Stolarek, in “Prose Modeling and Metacognition: The Effect of Modeling on Developing a Metacognitive Stance Toward Writing,” found that novice writers, when provided with a model, description and explication of an unfamiliar prose form, produced prose that scored higher on primary trait scoring than did expert writers who were given model only or model and explication (169). What this may indicate is that modeling in and of itself is not enough. Teachers cannot expect students to produce a type of text after only reading examples of that genre. For success, students need a description of what the genre-specific attributes of a text are and they also need to know how specific models exhibit those attributes. Only then, armed with a cache of models, an understanding of how those models meet genre-specific criteria and a knowledge of what the criteria are in the first place, can students be expected to exhibit a level of fluency in writing, thereby increasing the strategies available to them and the levels of conscious control which they can access.

My study was influenced greatly by Bereiter and Scardemalia’s model based inquiry (MBI) and Raphael and Englert’s cognitive strategy instruction in writing (CSIW) which both involve using models and carefully sequenced instructional strategies which, in theory, provide students with increasingly complex and mature cognitive processes. Both of these studies use instructional “scaffolding,” instructor provided materials and techniques designed to de-mystify the writing process and provide students with a support system throughout the writing process. Like the studies mentioned above, my study examines the links between instruction, cognition and metacognitive control within writers. My study was also guided by Odell’s charge to break assignments down into the kinds of behaviors in which writers must engage as well as Flavell’s call to study how youngsters make sense of the unfamiliar. Though Odell was referring specifically to writing as a means of processing information in fields other than English, his charge to explicate assignments was relevant to my study because I was interested in breaking down the elements of a writing assignment,
modeling and practicing each, then allowing students to become the experts in evaluating their own writing processes.
CHAPTER 2

Modeling, which seems to be key for students' understanding of how texts work, can take many forms. The first, and most obvious, involves having students read examples of the type of literature they will be expected to produce. In this study, students were asked to write either a myth, legend or folktale after a unit of explicit instruction in those genres (see Appendix A for a complete schedule of the unit and objectives). According to Lindemann, writing courses influenced by Piaget's theories should emphasize fairly concrete types of writing, among these, simple stories, prior to the ninth grade (68). Using the Prentice Hall literature book adopted for use in California for 1995, students read several examples of these types of tales which, along with being able to hold adolescent attention, are also brief enough to be read and explicated within a single class session.

The students in this study attended Hook Jr. High in Victorville, California in three combined English and history core classes of heterogeneously grouped, multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic eighth graders during the spring of 1995. Adolescents in the 12-14 year age range are a population not often studied by metacognition researchers. Flower and Hayes and Bereiter and Scardemalia concentrate on young adults while Englert and Raphael study 8-9 year olds. Perhaps this indicates a lack of access among composition researchers to students at a stage of development wherein individuality is paradoxically emerging while acceptance by a group is also of utmost importance. If, as Vygotsky's and Piaget's writings indicate, instruction can foster development, composition instruction that integrates cognitive development techniques while also addressing the teaching of metacognitive strategies is most appropriate for students in this age group because it addresses the need of the individuals to develop a community while simultaneously reinforcing individuality and reflection on self.
Approximately 40 students' work will be explored in this study. The students, who will be referred to by first name only, were chosen by two factors. First, students and their parents had to give permission for their work to be used in the study. Secondly, students had to turn in a packet of their work to document the process from beginning to deadline. The entire unit of instruction took place over one month while students were also working on a history project. Examples of all of the planning sheets are provided in Appendices D and E.

Before students were asked to read, however, a list of terms were defined in order to give them a common vocabulary. One of the tenets of metacognitive thought involves explicitly naming not only the strategies one is using, but also establishing a discourse community which speaks a common language in relation to reading and writing. With that established, the community can then engage in the construction of knowledge and the evaluation of texts. For this project, students were given definitions for myth, legend, folktale, hero, character trait, dialogue, dialect and exaggeration. For a list of definitions, see Appendix B. These terms were chosen to allow students to decide which kinds of stories they would write, to help them consider the complexity of what heroes are and what they represent, and to provide them with stylistic choices to make concerning speech and action within their stories.

My study also sought to establish a common vocabulary to describe attributes of the genres which served as models. First, we identified text attributes by defining the differences between myths and legends. As we worked into folktales, students pointed out that the boundaries between the genres were not as clear as they thought they would be. Many mentioned how aspects of the first two genres could be found combined in folktales.

Heroes provided another genre specific attribute of myths, legends and folktales. Students first mentioned the standard, comic-book conception of a hero which allowed us to enter into a discussion of how those heroes and the heroes in myths, legends and folktales
represent what cultures value. Students were asked to make inferences about cultures based on the heroes we read about. In most cases, students were able to see the physical aspects that cultures valued—strength, endurance, attractiveness—much more readily than they were able to see affective attributes such as compassion, altruism, cleverness, respect, and reverence. This would be in keeping with the students’ rather concrete developmental stage, and would also move them into the zone of proximal development to consider what attributes their own heroes would eventually exhibit. Peers were invaluable in pointing out the less obvious traits valued by the societies.

Another text attribute which was emphasized through instruction was the use of dialogue. I consciously chose Greek and Native American tales (which would have to have been translated) with little or very formal dialogue for use early in the study to allow students to contrast them with the more recent, and originally English-language, tales of John Henry and Pecos Bill marked by their free use of dialect and exaggeration. Before students were introduced to those two characters, however, they were asked to write a brief dialogue between Atalanta, a Greek heroine, and Naiya, a Zuni hunter-maiden. Both of the characters had dwelled outside of their traditional societal roles, but had been returned to those roles by the intervention of gods. Students were first involved in group instruction of the punctuation of dialogue, reflecting Bereiter and Scardemalia’s approach of establishing a mutual understanding of a writing strategy rather than correct performance of it. Students were given homework for practice and the next day were allowed to go over the work with a peer before turning it in for assessment. This reflects Bereiter and Scardemalia’s call to allow peers to become the experts as well as the notion that the zone of proximal development is most easily entered into with help from peers. Such an instructional strategy also takes into consideration that, at this the stage of development, students are far more interested in the approval of their peers than in the approval of adult authority figures.
For this study, students were divided into two groups based on their responses to the final question of the unit which asked if they would be able to generate their own list of questions to consider on future assignments. Gavelek and Raphael (1985) assert that high level students can generate their own questions to foster reading comprehension and that students who can eventually give up teacher-created scaffolds of questions to enhance their comprehension are learning self-regulation strategies. I based my grouping on the idea that one of the goals of teaching metacognitive strategies is to enable students to ask their own salient questions so that they can apply questioning strategies from this unit to other contexts.

Students who expressed confidence in their ability to transfer questioning strategies to other writing tasks will be referred to as the confident group while students who were either uncertain or felt unable to generate questions will be referred to as the ambiguous group. I compared the results of a test given to twenty members of the confident group with those of seventeen members of the ambiguous group. Though by no means a scientific sampling, I did find the resulting percentages interesting because of what they reveal about the assumed link between high metacognitive ability (which may be present in students who report that they would be able to generate their own questions to begin a writing task) and success in problem solving (as measured by performance on a test).

After students had finished reading models of myths and legends, but before they began writing their own texts, they took a test over the material (see Appendix C). I placed the emphasis on straight recall, or cognition, and limited the use of metacognition to the declarative and conditional types. Students were encouraged to review for fifteen minutes with a partner before the test, thus using the interaction of members of an established discourse community to reinforce their knowledge base. Though students could use any of their study materials to review, vocabulary lists
proved the most popular tool. The results of the test were provided to students before they began drafting to help clarify ideas necessary to complete the writing assignment.

Table: Comparison of Percentage of Students Answering Incorrectly on the Objective Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sections:</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confident</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambiguous</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>5</td>
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*Number of students scoring fewer than 5 of 10 points on the section

Section One

In the first section of the test, 25% of confident respondents as opposed to 18% of ambiguous respondents missed at least two questions requiring declarative metacognitive knowledge. Students were asked to match the terms hero, oral tradition, myth and legend to their definitions. By placing the definitions first on the test, students had the chance to anchor their declarative knowledge, which would be necessary for succeeding on the rest of the test. Perhaps some of the confident respondents were moved into a zone of proximal development by this perceived “failure” early in the reading-to-write process by helping them see that what they perceived did not match the generic definitions established by their discourse community. This disequilibrium may have motivated them to consciously confirm their ideas by frequently referring to the scaffolds rather than relying on pre-existing strategies. In other words, the confident students were more likely to use the tools given them later in the unit which would explain the confidence they reported after writing.
Section Two

Students were then presented with a list of characters from the models followed by descriptions of those characters. The instructions stated that some of the descriptions had more than one right answer and to list all that applied. The first three questions required not only declarative knowledge of the models, but also conditional knowledge because the students had to use the inferences they had made to determine when concepts such as traditional roles and admirable traits were being rejected or reinforced by the characters in question. The remainder of the ten questions in this section were straight recall, requiring cognition without necessarily metacognition. Within both groups, the majority of errors occurred in the first three questions, but the mistakes were generally omission of a character rather than reporting a character that did not match the description. Here, the gulf between the two groups widened considerably. Thirty percent of the confident group missed all or part of the first three questions as compared to 88 percent of the ambiguous group. This result may indicate that the confident group was more consistently thinking on a conditional metacognitive level, combining recall with critical thinking skills such as making inferences, than the ambiguous group. Though not surprising in and of itself, the result may also indicate that the confident students were more conscious of an assortment of correct answers possibly translating into a willingness to try a variety of writing strategies later in the process which might account for their reported confidence in their ability to ask questions that would help them think systematically about writing.

Section Three

This section asked students to underline the dialogue in a passage from “The Girl who Hunted Rabbits.” This type of recognition question would require that students not only know the definition of dialogue, but be able to apply that knowledge to a particular passage, thus engaging in declarative metacognitive knowledge as well as cognitive
recall. For extra credit, students were asked to name the culture that produced the legend, which might be evidence of a deeper internalization of the details of the story. Seventy percent of the students in both groups responded correctly to all parts of the question, possibly because of the intensity of guided and independent practice concerning dialogue and the use of this legend as a model in various lessons about making inferences and character traits. The more ways a model is referenced, the more complex connections the students may be able to form in response to the model.

Section Four

Students were then required to read a collection of brief tales that fell into the categories of myth or legend, based on the definitions described earlier, and indicate to which genre each one belonged. The last passage had traits of both legends and myths. This test was given before students read the American folktales that combined the traits of myths and legends, so I was seeking to determine if any student would circle both. All but the last passage would involve students having a declarative knowledge of the differences between myths and legends and being able to apply that knowledge to examples, which would be evidence of a declarative metacognition. An adaptation of conditional metacognitive knowledge would have been necessary for students to see the overlap of myth and legend in the last passage, and a good dose of courage would have been needed to indicate “both” or “neither” on a test. Though the students would not have to choose when to use conventions because they were not producing text, they would have to recognize when an author was choosing to use those conventions. As a matter of ethics, I did not count that question as part of their grade because it tested a concept not yet taught. Twenty-five per cent of the confident group missed one question compared to 47% of the ambiguous group. As with the question concerning dialogue, these questions required not only the ability to read and comprehend, but also the ability to recall and apply what had been emphasized during instruction to answer successfully.
Only one student in the sample indicated that the final story had aspects of both myths and legends. That student was a member of the ambiguous group. This would confirm my idea that just because a student does not enjoy or immediately understand the possible benefits of a very explicit and deliberate approach to writing, it does not follow that such a student is incapable of astute reflection.

Section Five

This section of the test involved the use of recall and of declarative metacognitive knowledge to determine if students were familiar with the stages of the writing process, concepts necessary to the kind of writing instruction they were going to be involved in. The students had been instructed in a process approach to writing throughout the year and were provided (and re-provided, when necessary) with a handout outlining such an approach. Because one of the basic concepts behind metacognitive strategies in writing involves naming the very behaviors one engages in, I thought it important to pause and assess students’ declarative knowledge of the writing process.

Of the confident group, 85% missed at least one question on this section as compared to 59% of the ambiguous group. Perhaps students who feel less secure in their concepts of the writing process find an explicit approach to writing more comfortable. The assignment is demystified, broken down into steps that can be followed, so instruction becomes clearly linked to accomplishing the writing task. On the other hand, students who have built their own scaffolds for the writing process, members of the ambiguous group, may feel tethered by constant slowing and outside control of the process. Put differently, those whose scaffolds are already constructed may not want to climb up the scaffold built by another (the instructor), whereas students who have not yet built the scaffolds want the reassurance that comes with an other-directed pace. This would account for the students in the confident group being uncertain of the stages of the writing process and valuing explicit instruction.
Section Six

The final section of the test required students to draw a picture of one of the heroes from the unit and illustrate the traits and actions that could be considered noble or inspiring. Students were encouraged to label the drawing to ensure that the message was clear. This activity would require students to recall the events from several of the models to settle on a particular hero, engage in declarative knowledge to apply the definition of character traits, then exhibit conditional metacognitive knowledge to determine which actions would need to be illustrated to fit the criteria of the instructions. While five of the ambiguous students scored 5 points or below out of ten, only one student in the confident group scored in the same range. I have switched to students rather than percentages here to underscore the fact that the one confident student simply failed to draw a picture. The ambiguous students either did not label their drawings, leaving the meanings unclear or they attributed character traits that were not present in their pictures.

The quantitative results of an objective test may be useful as a tool for exploring the relationship between students' reported levels of satisfaction with their achievement on an explicitly taught writing assignment and their ability to first situate themselves within the declarative and conditional metacognitive knowledge necessary to complete that writing assignment. This brief and admittedly unscientific analysis shows that students who reported an ambiguous experience with a metacognitive approach to writing generally performed lower on sections requiring conditional metacognitive knowledge (sections 2, 4 and 6) than students who expressed a confident attitude toward this type of writing instruction. Perhaps ambiguous students were decentered by an instructional approach that makes explicit what many of them do unconsciously. This may translate into the students' lack of interest in using the plan sheets and other scaffolding tools to revise their writing. Conditional metacognition, in this case
recognizing when particular generic traits are present in a text, requires the ability to apply instruction to given text samples, a skill similar to using direct instruction as a tool for writing and revising. If students were unable or unwilling to carefully and consciously apply their declarative knowledge of the terms to text samples in section four, which based on the group’s performance in section one they do know, it may not be surprising that they approach the writing task with the same lack of consciousness. They know the definitions, thereby possessing declarative metacognition, so they feel falsely confident when applying that knowledge in a task requiring conditional metacognition. As with any study of writing and thinking, however, the more intriguing material will be found within students’ texts and reflections over the production of those texts.
CHAPTER 3

After students had read a variety of models, assisted in the explication of those models, and practiced writing dialogue, making inferences and analyzing characters, they were given the following writing assignment:

You will write a myth, a legend, or a tale that combines elements of the two. Your story should be 2 - 4 pages long when typed (double spaced, no more than 14 point font) in the lab. Rough drafts will be due Friday, June 2. Finals will be written in class on Monday and Tuesday, June 5 and 6. You will be typing your tale in the lab during the week of June 12 - 16. As always, you may make revisions to your tale at that time.

Think back over the stories we have read. We have been able to make inferences about the people who told the tales based on evidence from the tales. The stories all involve a hero who faces a challenge of some sort. Some tales have heroes who speak in dialects, while other tales use very little dialogue. Some tales involve gods or goddesses; others involve exaggeration or understatement. We read tales written in poetic form and others that were like short stories. In other words, you have a lot of freedom in writing this form, but myths, legends and tales do have certain traits that you will need to consider during the writing process.

I wrote the second paragraph of the assignment above bearing in mind Lee Odell’s suggestion that teachers show students the strategies that help them examine materials (109). Throughout the reading-to-write stage of this unit, I focused on getting students to read interactively by applying terms to the models and comparing the various distinctions and commonalities of the genres. We read the models out loud while a
student, or sometimes I, would point out passages of dialogue, exaggeration, the intervention of gods or some other hallmark of these genres. In this way, reading became a shared experience with weaker readers benefiting from the more adept readers’ abilities. Flower describes critical literacy as the ability of readers to question sources and read for intentions, not only facts (Reading-to-Write 5). Some, but by no means all, of the students could engage in this kind of reading not only of the myths, legends and folktales but also of the writing assignment. By emphasizing the shared nature of interpreting the written texts in the class, I sought to work within Kohlberg’s conventional stage of moral development wherein adolescents try to gain approval by meeting the expectations of authority figures (Lunsford 152). In this case, peers could be seen as authority figures when they identified text attributes and generated questions to focus pre-writing. One vital aspect of teaching a metacognitive approach to writing is the necessity of making the hidden obvious. The revelation of peers’ thought processes may assure reluctant writers that their ideas are valid and bring about opportunities for them to develop their own critical literacy. Encouraging advanced students to make their thought processes and ideas public also unites thought and language. During the drafting stages, action is brought together with thought and language when students rely directly on workshops with their peers. Before drafting began, however, students were asked to come up with a list of questions to help them think before they began to draft. The addition of the second paragraph of the writing assignment indicates the importance of the teacher making explicit the connection between the models and the students’ own writings. Without the second part of the assignment, many students may simply have begun to write a story without actually considering the models as a source to help shape their thinking about their writing.
Classes' Self-generated Pre-writing Questions

Class 1

1. Am I going to write a myth, legend or combination tale?
2. Who am I going to write about? (Who is my hero?)
3. What is my setting?
4. Am I going to use dialogue/dialect?
5. What is my central conflict? What will my hero struggle against?
6. How long is it supposed to be?
7. How do I resolve the conflict?
8. Will my hero have a sidekick?

Class 2

1. Will it be a myth, legend or folktale (combination)?
2. Who will my hero be?
3. What inferences will my readers make?
4. Is there going to be dialogue/dialect?
5. What is the setting?
6. What is my central conflict?
7. How will I resolve the conflict?

Class 3

1. Is it going to be a myth, legend or a combination?
2. Who is my hero?
3. Will I use dialogue/dialect
4. Am I going to write it in story of poetic form?
5. Where is my setting?
6. What is the central conflict?

7. Will I have a sidekick?

8. How is the conflict resolved?

The surprising aspect of the classes’ responses to this writing assignment was that all three groups generated similar questions to help them focus their writing which may be evidence of how carefully sequenced and explicited model texts combined with guided and independent practice of certain text attributes and a very explicit writing assignment can trigger students to make the connections necessary for pre-writing. This is an important step in adolescents’ development of metacognitive control of their writing. If students can systematically analyze a writing assignment to produce questions that need to be considered at the drafting stage, they have generated their own scaffolding. This behavior builds on Raphael and Englert’s finding that elementary students can plan and reflect over their writing when given the structure (389). My study differs, however, because the students’ questions were responsible for shaping the planning sheets they would eventually use.

Flower writes that reading-to-write is highly subject to the goals of the writer and that teachers need to create a context for writing that sets goals and teach thinking strategies that can support those goals (1990, 12). By stating at the beginning of the unit that students were going to write their own myth, legend or tale, I wanted to help students immediately begin constructing a context that explicitly connected reading to writing. Asking students to generate a list of pre-writing questions helped them concretize their goals and makes those goals attainable.

Character Planning

Before writing their stories, they were assigned a Character Planning Sheet (CPS). The class had completed one together as part of the basic instructional principle advanced by Bereiter and Scardemalia concerning shared practice, rather than correct
execution, of a strategy (332). Though Bereiter and Scardemalia focused on writing strategies, in this case a planning strategy was introduced. The character’s name was placed in the circle, character traits were listed on the lines radiating from the circle and the evidence by which those traits were manifested were dependent from the trait lines. By beginning with a character rather than plot, I hoped students could concentrate on a fairly concrete text attribute instead wondering how to begin.

Focusing on heroes also allowed students to imagine what the setting of their stories would be, what kinds of conflicts the heroes would face and what kinds of messages their stories would send. After students had connected thought, language and action by planning their characters, they were asked to describe the central conflict of their story. Dealing with the concrete conventions of character and conflict before formally thinking about plot may have given students an early sense of confidence emboldening them for the other work ahead.

Draft Planning

Once students completed the CPS, they were asked to fill out a three-item Myth, Legend and Folktale Draft Plan (MLF) which drew upon the questions they generated while reading the writing assignment and which emphasized the text attributes that had been explicitly taught in the modeling phase of the unit. I believe that the emphasis placed on character and conflict during the reading of model texts and during the completion of the CPS allowed students to link reading to writing clearly while also demystifying what would be necessary to consider before drafting began. Completion of the MLF further aided students in establishing a systematic approach to the assignment. Carefully sequenced questions asked on the MLF were designed to break down the behaviors writers would need in order to complete this assignment.

A comparison of the groups’ responses on the CPS and MLF reveals fairly similar approaches to the writing situation during pre-writing. The most interesting
responses were the students’ justifications for choosing to write particular genres. Twelve members of the confident group wrote that the genre they chose was linked to ease or interest. The term “interest” is vague and troublesome. It may refer to the writer’s own level of interest rather than an imagined audience’s. It should be noted that no audience was made explicit this early in the process because I was interested in knowing how writers change or control their ideas as a work evolves. The confident group members frequently indicated that they had an idea already or were thinking about the audience, which may have been themselves because they were the primary readers at that point. Audience response would be made concrete during the workshop sessions that followed the initial drafting.

Twelve students within the ambiguous group also linked their genre choice with character or conflict. Erik wrote that he chose a folktale because “it can have both a natural phenomenon or can be based on a real person.” He clearly shows that the story he intends to write will combine genre specific attributes of myths and legends. Jacqui reported a similar but more concrete link between conflict and character. She wrote that her story would be “(b)oth. It’s about saving the desert. It could be true, but Leeper the Kangaroo Rat can talk.” Leeper, the talking Kangaroo rat, is in a struggle to stop off-roaders from tearing up the desert. Richard chose to write “(a) legend because Jackie Robinson is a legend to me. He is my hero.” By writing about a real person who surmounted prejudice in American sports, Richard may have been continuing a tradition touched upon by reading a folktale about John Henry. These students’ writings provide evidence of metacognitive control at the prewriting stage because students who have the ability to explicitly explain why they are going to try something are exhibiting higher level thinking skills. How they judge the success or failure of those choices later in the writing process would further confirm their levels of conscious writing control.
When asked whether they would use dialect or dialogue in their tales, ten members of the confident group and six members of the ambiguous group indicated that they would use dialogue. Yet only one member of the confident group indicated that she would be using dialect as compared to eight members of the ambiguous group. Perhaps writing dialogue was more difficult than the eight had planned, which may have influenced their attitudes at the completion of the process. Moreover, in answering why they decided to use or not to use this particular text attribute, the confident group reported that it would “help the reader.” One student even indicated that she would look back over the Sandburg version of the Paul Bunyan legend, a collection of vignettes with little dialogue, to help think about a form her work could take indicating a high level of procedural metacognition. There were discrepancies within this group’s responses however. One student linked his use of dialect to speaking with an accent. While not totally without foundation, this flawed understanding emphasizes the space between a concept already formed (accents) and a concept forming (dialect). This is, I believe, evidence of the student working within the zone of proximal development. If he is able to correctly form and employ the concept by the end of the unit, he will be exhibiting both declarative metacognition (by concretizing the definition of dialect) and procedural metacognition (by writing dialect).

Only five students, four from the ambiguous group, indicated that they would use neither dialect nor dialogue. The reasons for this choice ranged from a felt sense of more control, as in Natia’s response that “I could be more specific as a narrator,” to incompatibility with the verse format a student had chosen to write. Though one student reported that using dialogue would be too much work, she then reported that she had changed her mind, possibly after the workshop. Among students who linked their choice of dialect/dialogue to some aspect of the story, most reported that their hero would simply speak that way. Two of the confident students, however, indicated that
dialogue would be more interesting for the audience to read. The focus of these two confident students on the audience is extremely important. They have entered into the zone of proximal development by constructing a relationship of a text attribute to the effect it has on an audience. They are engaging in all three levels of metacognitive thinking at the drafting stage, before they even have a chance to test an audience’s reaction to their work.

The majority of students in each group adhered to the attribute of setting their stories in the past. Ryan, a member of the ambiguous group, even mentioned that following that generic convention was “more traditional,” which could be evidence of procedural and conditional metacognition due to his ability to both choose when and why to follow a text attribute that had been taught during the reading-to-write stage of the unit. Some students who decided to set their stories in the future or present reported doing so because it would be “easier.” At no point, however, did the four students in the ambiguous group who did so indicate it would be easier for the audience, as did two of the seven confident students. Fourteen students in both groups linked their settings to hero or conflict. Students in the confident group were much more specific in their responses, often citing social organization (“princes and queens”), architecture (“castles”), or historical contexts (“a time when things are still being named”). The fact that positive students provided more specific reasons for choosing their settings can be evidence of a much greater level of conditional metacognition among those students. Calvin, demonstrating an exceptional ability to control his planning process, indicated that his setting was both linked to the traditional text attribute of setting legends in the past and “easy” by stating that “(i)t is easier to create a character in times of despair and need” by setting his story in China during the Mongol invasions.
Workshops

After planning and drafting their stories, students participated in workshops. An audience consisted of three students, while a group consisted of four students. One student would read a story aloud while two other students and the author listened. When the story was completed, the three audience members completed a workshop sheet. This pattern was followed until all four stories in a group were read and responded to by the three audience members. Authors of were instructed to listen to what the audience had to say without defending their stories or trying to explain anything to the audience. I could not simply allow the students to read the works and comment, however, if I wanted to link instruction and social interaction. The Workshop Sheet provided students a chance to socially construct knowledge with the help of a scaffold which united not only classroom instruction but also the socially-constructed questions generated by students after reading the writing assignment. By placing the story in the hands of an audience, authors had a chance to see how a generally sympathetic group of peers responded to specific questions about their stories. This approach to the workshop is supported by Piaget's theory concerning "de-centering:" the idea that learning occurs when students are moved to resolve discrepancies between old and new information (Lunsford 148). Students often reported (see next section) that what they thought and the response of the audience were at odds.

Revision

On the revision plan, students' responses showed marked discrepancies between correct use of language to link the thoughts they expressed on the CPS and MLF to their revision plans. For example, seven members of the ambiguous group reported that their readers responded as they expected in naming the genre they had written. However, the genres reported on their planning sheets did not match what the audience identified. One of the students had obviously confused the definitions of myth and legend, a mistake he
made on the test as well. It is unclear why the student did not take the time to look up a definition for clarification, or if he did, why he was unable to correctly learn the concepts even after reading several models and listening to explications. This lack of ability to apply definitions during the writing process provides evidence of a lack of declarative and procedural metacognitive knowledges on the student’s part. The other six students reported that the audience had identified the correct genre, though the genre as named by the audience on the Workshop Sheet and the student-planned genre as given on the MLF were at odds. This may indicate a lack of procedural knowledge because the students were unable to reconcile their plans and their assessment of audience responses or it might indicate simply a change in plans that occurred during drafting but went unreported.

Only three students in the confident group reported that audiences did not identify the genre they had written, but two of these three reported that they had changed genres while the other recognized the readers’ mis-response. Overall, students in the confident group manifested a much greater control of the process at the drafting stage as judged by adherence to plans and evaluation of audience responses to the draft. It could be that these students had more concrete ideas about what they would write than did the ambiguous group. Another possibility may be that the ambiguous group was more open to a self-exploratory kind of writing where changes were made as the draft occurred rather than adhering to a task representation that was no longer valid while the process continued. If this is true, it is no wonder that the members of the ambiguous group would not value the highly structured writing assignments involved in this project. Completing the detailed planning sheets, stopping to listen to an audience’s response to their writing, having to write about how they would revise and actually following a revision plan may have seemed an intrusion into what is often a very private and solitary occupation in school rather than a chance to improve their thinking and writing skills.
The injection of too much instructor-guided process interfered with their own intrinsic, perhaps unconscious, writing style.

Considering the importance of character analysis and creation within the reading-to-write and planning stages of this project, the trends concerning authors’ responses to audiences’ ideas about their heroes is problematic. Of the ambiguous group, sixteen students reported that readers had identified traits that they had planned. A review of the planning sheets, however, reveals that reported traits were not apparent on seven students’ CPS. Perhaps authors did not read the question carefully enough to correctly answer it (reading, “Did the readers identify any character traits?” instead of the actual question) or check their own CPS for verification. In this case, any trait identified by an audience intended by the author, regardless of whether it was reported on the CPS, would have satisfied the author. Three of the ambiguous students reported that the readers had not identified traits they had planned on. Two of the three indicated that they would make changes in their characters based on what they had learned in the workshop, which suggests an awareness of audience when that audience is concrete, but not when the audience remains only a concept. Students may be more likely to revise when a peer audience suggests it, possibly spurred by the social need for peer approval.

The question dealing with the use of dialogue and dialect yielded similar responses within the groups. Fifteen of the confident and seventeen of the ambiguous group indicated that they agreed with the audiences’ responses to the use of dialect/dialogue within the story. This implies a high level of procedural metacognitive ability because students expressed that they were in agreement with the audiences’ opinions. Students with low procedural metacognitive ability might disagree with readers but be unable to defend their choices or describe what changes they would make. In the confident group, one student contradicted himself, saying that he agreed
with what the audience’s opinion that the dialogue was fine but he planned on adding more. The reason for the addition is not addressed in the student’s response, but it may indicate a low level of conditional metacognitive ability. The student was unaware of when a text attribute could be used to shape the story.

Another student in the confident group gave a unique answer to the question, “How would you improve (your story)?” She mentioned the strategy of taking some of the dialogue out of the story. This is intriguing because the audience suggested it and the student decided to take their advice. That the student saw this as a legitimate strategy to add to her repertoire and that she consciously chose to take the advice of the audience indicates an increase in both conditional and procedural metacognitive knowledge.

When students were asked to name three strategies they would use to revise their stories, the blur between revising and editing within the two groups became apparent. In the confident group, adding dialect or dialogue was mentioned ten times while the ambiguous students focused on matters of neatness, spelling and punctuation. Considering the link between naming strategies and using them in metacognitive writing instruction, only three of the confident group mentioned that they would “revise” their dialogue, as opposed to “adding” or “working on it,” the language most often used in the ambiguous group. One strategy mentioned by three students in the confident group was to re-read their stories. While this may seem an obvious strategy to experienced writers, the fact that so few mentioned reading as a revision strategy could mean that that link needs to be made more explicit. Perhaps other students saw this as too obvious to note, but I would not be surprised if students did not see reading as a revision strategy even though it had been taught during the year. Three members of the ambiguous group mentioned that they would clarify the genre which would indicate that they had paid attention to a discrepancy between what they thought they had written and what the
audience perceived. Two others reported that they would use exaggeration, a text attribute that was taught using models and in-class exercises.

Though members of both groups exhibited various levels of procedural metacognition as evidenced by the fact that many authors thought the audience responses reflected their plans, the confident group had a much stronger control of the concept of genre and fewer discrepancies between what the audiences saw as primary character traits in their heroes and character traits they had planned. The confident group also reported a greater number of specific revision strategies focusing on improving the story rather than making cosmetic enhancements.

Reflective awareness, which would indicate a level of metacognitive control on the part of writers, must be scaffolded by instruction. What writers think about their processes after they have written a story is every bit as important as what they think while they are drafting and when an audience responds to their work. Without the final step of reflection upon their practices and consideration of what to do differently in the future, students are engaging up to now in a very basic type of metacognition, one directed by the teacher and influenced by peers. Even though the Post-Writing Reflection (PWR) is teacher produced, it allows writers to analyze their own processes as viewed through their thoughts about their products.
Once students had finished their final drafts, they were asked to complete a Post Writing Reflection (PWR) allowing them to focus their thoughts not on production of text or management of strategies, but naming the strategies they used and assessing how well the strategies worked. Vygotsky illustrates the concept of consciousness, or metacognition, with an analogy of a child tying a knot. Though the child may be able to tie the knot, the test of consciousness, or metacognition, would be the child’s ability to explain how the knot was tied (Vygotsky 170). In this chapter, we look at how students explain their knots.

Students were first asked to describe one problem other than spelling, punctuation or neatness that they solved while writing and determine how they first became aware that a problem existed at all. Members of the ambiguous group reported a narrow spectrum of problems with the highest concentration of responses centering on text generation. Contrasted with the fact that only three students in the confident group mentioned generation problems (which should have been lessened by the intervening instructional techniques such as modeling and character analysis), it may indicate that members of the ambiguous group were not connecting the instruction with their writing. They may have relied on their own pre-existing strategies which had various levels of efficacy.

The majority of students in both groups indicated that their awareness of a problem occurred sometime in the actual writing, but this is a bit vague. Most probably, students were aware of problems at the drafting stage, but only three students, all from the confident group, indicated that they were revising when they noticed a discrepancy between what they wanted to do and what they perceived on paper. The use of the term revising, as opposed to use of the broader term writing, is significant because it
indicates a more conscious control of the stages of the writing process which may encompass both drafting and revision. Once students are able to decide how they will handle disequilibrium between their plans and their actual drafts, perhaps by constructing a new task representation, they exhibit metacognition. Students who report that they looked back at a model, let a friend read their work or stopped writing and re-read what they had written are all engaging in procedural (how to use strategies) and conditional (when to adjust strategies) metacognitive activity.

Students were then asked if they used more than one solution strategy, how they finally solved the problem and how satisfied they felt with their solution. Here, the differences in metacognitive thinking between the two groups are clearly delineated. Though eight of the ambiguous students reported that they used more than one strategy, only two of them actually named the multiple strategies they used. One possibility for this response is that these students were simply trying to please the teacher. However, it may also indicate that the students believed they thought more complexly about their writing than they actually did or it may signal that the students were unable to explain all the strategies that they did use. This in itself would be proof of very low declarative and conditional metacognitive activity in those six students. In contrast, only three of the ten confident group members who reported using multiple strategies were unable to name more than one that they employed.

The ambiguous group reported a narrow scope of revision strategies with most students clustering around the vague approach of “writing more.” The confident group presented a much broader range of strategies used, but even they concentrated on adding text. They were more specific, however, indicating that they wanted to add dialogue or highlight a character’s traits. Two students from the ambiguous group and three students from the confident group mentioned that they looked for models to follow, either by reviewing their journals or a model from class, or by looking outside to other sources.
such as the animated feature film Aladdin. This unanticipated use of modeling seemingly proves that these five students internalized the reading-to-write strategy that had been emphasized through instruction.

Whatever strategies they used, no other student came close to living up to Vygotsky’s analogy of the knot than Lindsay. In answer to the questions mentioned above, she wrote, “I tried to deal with my problem (needing to use dialogue) by writing it as if it happened and wasn’t read and then by changing the beginning. . .” The phrase “as if it happened” was clarified in a conversation to mean “like people were saying it” and “changing the beginning” was a change in point of view from first person to third person. She obviously knows exactly how she revised her story to make what she reported was a satisfying change. This student exhibits declarative metacognition (knowing what dialogue is), procedural metacognition (knowing how to write dialogue and how to revise her story) and conditional metacognition (knowing when to use dialogue and change point of view). Though her explanation may need clarification, a student who can describe her methods of revision so concretely certainly has a grasp on her own process and has integrated an emphasized text attribute into her own repertoire of strategies for writing fiction.

Students were asked what they reviewed to help them in their revisions. While most students in both groups reported that they looked over at least one item, the most frequently referenced work was the character planning sheet. Only three members of the confident and one member of the ambiguous group reported looking back over the assignment and questions to consider. Why would more students look at their character plans rather than at the assignment and questions they generated in class? Perhaps students had constructed a task representation that they felt comfortable with and did not want to risk confusing themselves or moving beyond their comfort zone even though the majority of the ambiguous group indicated they were having trouble generating text.
Instead of going back to square one, they apparently felt that concentrating on character was less daunting than beginning again. Students who were unable to see the importance of going back to the beginning to help generate text may be working without procedural metacognitive knowledge because they did not understand the purpose of the questions. At least two of these students indicated that they re-read or thought about other stories to help them generate additional material for their works.

It should be noted that several members of the ambiguous group exhibit metacognition. Perhaps the best example of this comes from Mia in her explanation of what she reviewed and how it helped. She wrote, “I used the workshop. It helped me understand what I needed to fix. I used character planning to find out what my character was going to be like. I used my draft plan to help me get a start. And I used my revision plan sheet to help me revise it better.” Obviously, this student has procedural and declarative metacognitive control of her process. She is able to explain exactly how she used the reviewed material to help her think systematically about her writing. That is the goal of teaching metacognitive approaches to writing.

Though no group has a lock on metacognitive ability, the members of the confident group generally seem to have an easier time of reporting what they perceive as troublesome and how they attempt to revise and solve those problems. Perhaps students who feel comfortable with this instructional strategy and are willing to cooperate and work at a conscious level profit more from it. Students in the confident group seem to have an easier time working in the zone of proximal development.

The final question asked of the students involved revisions they would make if they had more time. Seven members of the ambiguous group wrote they would make their stories longer or change the whole thing. While lengthening the story was mentioned by two members of the confident group, no one in this group indicated that they were completely dissatisfied with their work. Rather, they wrote in terms of
adding action or dialogue and clarifying characters. The main difference is that the confident students were able to more accurately label what they would do to revise. Because naming is one of the central tenets of metacognition, it may be ventured that the confident students benefited more from the instructional framework than the ambiguous group, but to say that the ambiguous students did not benefit would be erroneous.
CHAPTER 5

Now that the scaffolds have been built and the students are climbing, slipping off of, and rebuilding them, how much help, if any, have they been? Students who had not previously experienced much success with writing, often manifested as unfinished projects and off-task responses, seemed to have more success as a group with this kind of teaching. The idea of small manageable tasks modeled on a particular genre which has been read for structure and text attributes seems to provide the students with a ladder to climb and a net to catch them should they fall.

Students who expressed greater comfort with previous writing assignments generally were more apprehensive about the explicit approaches used in teaching students to write metacognitively from models. This may have to do with their own concepts of themselves as writers. The idea of such a rigid system (or so it may appear to students who have felt successful in writing) goes against their feelings of creativity. Instead of viewing explicit instruction as a net to catch them if they fall, they often feel like butterflies caught in a collector's trap. Instruction becomes a barrier to their goals because they feel as though it limits and controls the pace of their ideas. Writing teachers face the challenge of making explicit teaching more flexible to allow for individual students' existing, valid strategies.

Oddly, a subset of the ambiguous group doesn't seem to know the net is there. These students had the most trouble using the planning sheets and examples they were given which might indicate that the links between instruction and writing need to be made even more explicit for some students than they were in this study. Though the students were taught the same basic way about the myths, legends and folktales that they studied, it might be interesting to continue the research in a more quantifiable way using a control group of students who read and discuss a genre as is usually done, then are
asked to write a similar generic work. Then, by contrast, expose a similar group of students to the same texts but with metacognitive writing instruction and the production of similar texts being stated as a clear objective for the unit. I imagine that the students in the second group would have a much clearer conception of how their texts were influenced by or deviated from the models.

Considering the similarity of the questions generated by each of the three classes following the writing assignment, it seems safe to say that instruction of this sort helps students think in a systematic fashion. The overall responses of the confident group indicated that they felt they would be able to generate their own lists of questions on future assignments and that, though they sometimes tired of filling out the plans and answering questions about their writing processes, they saw value to this instructional method. Generating their own questions is a first step to systematically approaching writing tasks and provides evidence of procedural and conditional metacognition. To determine the degree of internalization of metacognitive strategies, a longitudinal study of students instructed in metacognitive approaches to writing may need to be done.

Certainly, while teaching with an eye toward developing students' own independent metacognitive strategies has the benefits of greater student participation and social construction of meaningful texts, this kind of teaching should not be the only technique used. The frustration felt by many of the ambiguous students was also shared by those who rated this a positive experience. Too much of a good thing could result in burnout for both teachers and students, considering the level of commitment needed to successfully engage in this kind of instruction and learning.

Another possible problem is the seeming over-simplification of the writing process. If students come to rely on a teacher to provide them with all of the steps for an assignment, they become passive respondents rather than active constructors of meaning and shapers of their own processes. Ideally, students would be presented with
a very explicit project like the one in this study at the beginning of the year and progress
to less direct teacher involvement in the process. In this scenario, students would go
beyond generating the questions in response to the assignment to coming up with their
own planning sheets, if needed.

Another dilemma of emphasizing metacognition is the assumed link between
giftedness and metacognitive ability. In his article “Metacognition and Giftedness: The
State of the Relationship,” Pui-Wan Cheng asserts that metacognitive skills are implicit
in definitions of gifted students because their performance depends on “greater
knowledge, more sophisticated strategies, better metacognitive understanding, and
greater use of executive procedures” (105). However, in “The Relationship Between
Metacognition and Intelligence in Normal Adolescents: Some Tentative but Surprising
Findings”, Michel Allon, et al., found no link between metacognition and intelligence in
a group of ninth grade students (94). This ground should be tread upon lightly.
Pushing gifted students to demystify their processes might cause them to resist
instruction, while assuming that those students not identified as gifted lack the ability to
think on a metacognitive level lowers teacher expectations of what they can accomplish.
On the one hand, successful writers are successful because they have internalized certain
practical strategies. However, slowing them down to the same pace as less
accomplished students may cause frustration and resentment. Also, ignoring the useful
strategies that many students already possess may cause students to feel condescended
to, possibly resulting in a lack of engagement in the process.

Another group of concerns about explicit, genre-based writing instruction was
voiced by Aviva Freedman in “Show and Tell?: the Role of Explicit Teaching in the
Learning of New Genres.” She argues that because genres change, genre rules are too
numerous and complex to learn and the number of rules any learner can apply is limited,
this kind of teaching is not the most effective. She also writes that unless students are at
the proper developmental stage and able to incorporate the tacit knowledge they already possess, the teaching can actually be harmful (248). Though I do not agree that this teaching can do any lasting damage if the teacher is cognizant enough to help and encourage students who are having difficulty, I understand her concern about the complexity of the material and the possible inefficiency of the technique. Simply stated, it is not for all students at all times. Then again, no one pedagogy will meet the needs of all students in a classroom every time. Writing classes are too heterogeneous for that. Rather, teachers should focus on making writing accessible to students while helping them see strategies and text attributes they may incorporate into their writing.

Metacognition is thinking about thinking and in much of the literature surrounding it is the implication that junior high students are not hard-wired to attempt such complex cognition. Nevertheless, Raphael and Englert have documented that elementary school students can successfully self-evaluate their own writing with the help of plan sheets and model makers like Flower and Hays and Bereiter and Scardemalia have attempted to draw diagrams of the writing processes. Their work is invaluable, but I think that they underplay some ideas about writing instruction. First, students who read-to-write and write-to-learn become the problem solvers and critical thinkers hoped for by so many scholars and employers. Practicing the ability to find salient parts of texts, determining the attributes of a genre and evaluating peers’ attempts to create a particular work representative of the genre allows students to engage in the kinds of higher level thinking that may be transferred to problems beyond a specific writing task. Secondly, students who exert control over their prose may learn to exert control in other areas of their lives. This is not to say that good writers make good choices, rather that people who understand that options exist for solving problems may try a variety of ways of managing situations, thus equipping students with the skills necessary for life beyond writing. Finally, if students collaborate on what constitutes “good writing” and offer
one another feedback about works in progress, hopefully they can become makers of knowledge rather than simply consumers.
## APPENDIX A

### ACTIVITIES AND OBJECTIVES OF THE MYTH, LEGEND AND FOLKTALE UNIT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Instructional Objectives</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>Establish common discourse community and name genre-specific traits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journals</td>
<td>Allow students to summarize, react to and interpret texts. Provide a writing resource for students to reference during the drafting process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read Nez Perce and Greek fire myths</td>
<td>Explicate models of myths and heroes. Make inferences about cultures in guided group instruction. Explicate models of dialogue. Explicate conflict and resolution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guided dialogue practice</td>
<td>Punctuate dialogue in guided group instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue/Dialect practice</td>
<td>Punctuate, generate and analyze dialogue and dialect independently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myth, Legend, Folktale Test</td>
<td>Establish student mastery of declarative knowledge necessary to complete writing section of unit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read American folktales:</td>
<td>Decenter student’s definitions of myth and legend by explicating how folktales blur those definitions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul Bunyan</td>
<td>Provide models of dialect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Henry</td>
<td>Provide a model with no dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pecos Bill or Johnny Appleseed</td>
<td>Provide a model written in verse form. Provide models of exaggeration.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Read the writing assignment

Explicitly link all previous activities to the writing section of the unit.
Allow students to see previous activities as tools to help them make decisions about their own writing.

Generate questions

Set goals for the successful completion of the writing assignment.

Character Planning Sheet

Allow students to choose a hero’s name, traits, and the actions to demonstrate those traits.
Allow students to choose a central conflict for the hero to face.

MLF Draft Plan

Provide a method for students to decide the genre to write, whether or not to incorporate dialogue/dialect, choose a setting and explain that choice.

Drafting

Create a myth, legend or folktale using some or all the generic traits explicated in the unit, relying on the journals, practices, assignment and plan sheets for clarification.

MLF Workshop

Link reading to writing by using models.

MLF Revision Plan

Permit students to see if their visions as authors manifest in their audience.

Systematically consider whether or not the draft had the planned effect on the audience.

Analyze how the draft can be revised to bring it closer to the author’s original ideas, or how the draft may be changed to incorporate the audience’s feedback.

Post-writing Reflection

Look back over problems, describe how those problems came into the author’s consciousness.

Evaluate the strategies used to solve problems and the effectiveness of those strategies.
Post-writing Reflection (cont.) Speculate on their ability to transfer skills such as questioning or workshops into other writing situations.
APPENDIX B

TERMS AND DEFINITIONS FOR MYTH, LEGEND AND FOLKTALE UNIT

Folktales- Stories handed down from generation to generation through the oral tradition. They often reveal what a society values. Myths and legends are types of folktales.

Oral tradition- Passing of songs, stories and poems by word of mouth.

Myth- Fictional explanation of a natural occurrence.

Legend-Widely told story about the past. May or may not be based on real people or events. (These may have a kernel of truth.)

Hero- Character whose actions are inspiring or noble; reflects what a culture values.

Character trait- What makes a character who he is. Character traits are revealed through characters’ actions and thoughts. Strength, bravery, loyalty and cleverness are some heroic traits.

Dialogue- The words characters speak within a story. Enclosed in quotation marks.

Dialect- Language that reflects a character’s background or culture. Doesn’t always follow the rules of standard written English.

Exaggeration- Overstatement often done for humor or to stress a hero’s larger-than-life nature.
APPENDIX C

OBJECTIVE TEST

Myth and Legend Mini Test

I. Choose the term that matches the definition. 5 pts. ea.
   1. Hero
   2. Oral Tradition
   3. Myth
   4. Legend

   _____1. Hero
   _____2. Oral Tradition
   _____3. Myth
   _____4. Legend

   A. Story that may or may not be based on real people or events.
   B. The passing of songs, stories and tales from generation to generation by word-of-mouth.
   C. Imaginative story that explains a natural occurrence.
   D. Character whose actions are inspiring or noble; reflects what a culture values.

II. Place the letter of the character (or characters) in the blank that best describes them. For some of the descriptions, there may be more than one right answer. Put all that apply. 3 pts. ea.


   _____1. Rejected the traditional role she was expected to fill.
   _____2. Suffered because he brought fire to his people.
   _____3. Represented traits that the society did not admire.
   _____4. Gently helped a heroine return to the role expected of her.
   _____5. Created mankind and gave them the best protection.
   _____6. King of the Greek Gods
   _____7. Greek Goddess of Love
   _____8. Scatterbrained Titan who created the animals.
   _____9. Had just finished the sacred vigil
   _____10. Her husband had the help of one of the goddesses.

III. For 10 pts., underline the dialogue that appears in the following passage. For 5 more pts., identify the name of the tale and the culture which produced it.

   “Why certainly not,” insisted the old man, rubbing his lean knees and shaking his head over the days that were gone. “No, no; let us live in poverty rather than that you should run such risks as these, O my daughter.”
IV. Identify the following tales as either myths or legends by circling the appropriate choice that appears underneath the tale. 5 pts. ea.

Narcissus, a handsome Greek youth refused all love offered to him, preferring instead to gaze upon his own reflection in a pond. As punishment for his indifference, Aphrodite made him fall in love with his own image in the pool. He returned day after day, but the beautiful image he saw would not return his attentions and he pined away with longing and was changed into the flower that bears his name to this day.

Myth

Robert the Bruce, King of Scotland was trying desperately to drive the English out of his homeland. Discouraged and weary, he took refuge on an island off the coast of Ireland. One morning he sat watching a spider mending her web. She would slip from the beam and struggle to climb back up the thread. Again and again she would slip, but she always struggled her way back to the beam to continue her mending work, never stopping. Robert learned patience, perseverance and courage from the tiny spider and seven years later he was successful in driving the English from his land.

Myth

Big Tom was about six feet tall and weighed over two hundred pounds, and he was as brave as he was strong. In fact, it took two or three men to tie him to the whipping post before the overseer would thrash him. Big Tom never broke; he just gritted his teeth and took it like the real man he was. He made up his mind to escape and live with the Indians. First, he toted a plank that was eight inches wide, ten inches thick and sixteen feet long to the edge of the swamp and hid it there. Another night, he dug sweet potatoes and put them in a sack with some cornmeal and smoked meat. He put his store in a hole near his cabin and piled rocks on it so the dogs wouldn’t get it. When he got ready to leave, he rubbed his feet and legs with cayenne pepper so the bloodhounds couldn’t follow him and he made for the swamp which was filled with alligators and snakes and wild hogs. Even now, it takes a brave man to go into that swamp at night, but Big Tom waded into the boggy swamp, pulled up that plank and floated on it when the water was deep enough and laid it out as a bridge when the ground got too soggy to walk on.

Myth

The Aztecs were told by one of their gods that an eagle with a serpent in its beak perched on a cactus on a tiny island would be the place for them to settle. The Aztecs saw this sight on one of the islands in the salt water lake, which became Tenochtitlán, or Mexico City.

Myth
Tabby cats and Siamese cats have a faint “M” on their foreheads because Mohammed, the prophet of Islam, was studying when one of his cats fell asleep on the long, flowing sleeve of his garment. Rather than wake the pet, he cut the sleeve off of his garment and touched the cat lightly on the head, blessing it.

Myth

Legend

V. Name the writing stages that go with the following actions. For five pts. extra credit, number them in the order suggested on your notes. 1 pt. ea

Thinking about your topic, reading examples of the kind of writing you will be doing, reading and re-reading the assignment, brainstorming, talking about it with others, listing, clustering, webbing, mapping, drawing. Anything that helps you get new ideas falls in this stage.
Stage____________________________Suggested Order_____

Final copy (with an interesting title). Computer, typewriter or blue or black ink. May be shared with an audience outside of your classroom.
Stage____________________________Suggested Order_____

Reading your draft with more thought given to the purpose of the writing, the audience, the tone. You may need to incubate your ideas at this stage. Do not confuse incubating with giving up. Always complete the writing assignment.
Stage____________________________Suggested Order_____

Mechanical fine tuning-spelling, punctuation, word choice, sentence structure.
Stage____________________________Suggested Order_____

Writing, reading what you have written, re-reading the assignment, concentrate on fulfilling the assignment’s requirements.
Stage____________________________Suggested Order_____

VI. On the back of this paper, draw a picture of one of the heroes from this unit illustrating the character traits and actions that you think are noble or inspiring. You may label your drawing. 10 pts.
In the diagram below, fill in the traits you want your hero to have. You may add spokes (to represent traits) if you need to. You might even have more spokes (traits) than you end up showing in your story. The main point here is to think about what kind of hero you are going to create.

Now that you have a plan for a hero, what force is that character going to struggle against? Explain the central conflict of your tale in the space below.
MLF Draft Plan

1. Will you write a myth, a legend, or a tale that combines elements of the two? Why?

2. Do you plan on using dialogue or dialect? If so, try writing a line of dialogue as you would hear your hero say it. (For example, how would your hero say, "Hello. I am glad you are here."?) If not, why not?

3. Most of the tales we read were set on the frontier, or in the ancient past. Where and when will your tale be set? Why?
APPENDIX E

DRAFT WORKSHOP

Author's name ________________________________

Group Members ______________________________


MLF Workshop

Directions: In your groups, one person other than the writer will read a tale out loud. The other members of the group will answer the questions below going beyond 'yes' or 'no'. If you answer yes, give specific examples from the tale to support your answer. If you answer no, give helpful suggestions for revising. Remember, the group will be doing this to your paper and you want all the constructive input you can get.

1. Is this a myth, a legend or a tale that combines elements of the two? Give evidence from the tale to support your answer.

2. List two main traits of the hero. How do you know he or she has those traits? Do you find those traits inspiring or noble? Why or why not?

3. Underline any dialogue that is in the tale. Is it dialect? Do you like the way the dialogue is written? Why? (If there is no dialogue, either explain why that is O.K. with you as readers, or write the author a note about why and where you might like to hear some dialogue.)

4. What can you infer about the writer from the tale you have read? Fill in the diagram below to help the author consider what they are saying about their culture.

Evidence ________________________________ Inference ________________________________
5. What did you like about this tale? (Give 2 examples)

6. How would you revise this tale? (Give 2 suggestions, go beyond just neatness, spelling, or punctuation. Think about all you know about myths, legends and tales.)
APPENDIX F

REVISION PLAN

Have your tale, the workshop and your Character Planning with you as work on this revision plan.

1. Did the readers indicate that your tale was a myth, legend, or combination of the two as you expected they would? Why or why not?

2. Did the readers pick traits that you planned on your Character Planning diagram? If yes, what did they use as evidence of the traits? If not, how will you make sure that those traits you want your audience to see in your hero are clear?

3. Did you agree or disagree with what your readers had to say about the use of dialogue/dialect in the tale? What changes, if any, do you plan on making to the use of dialogue in the tale?

4. Using your knowledge of myths, legends and tales, as well as the input of your readers in the workshop group, list at least three ways you will revise your tale.
APPENDIX G

POST-WRITING REFLECTION

Complete this ONLY after you have finished your assignment. Have your MLF Packet with you while you complete this. Use the back of the paper when necessary.

1. Describe one problem you experienced while writing this assignment. (Do not mention spelling, punctuation or neatness). How did you become aware that you were having the problem?

2. Did you try more than one way to deal with the problem? How did you attempt to solve the problem? How satisfied are you with the solution you used?

3. Did you look back on any of the assignments or planning sheets we did for help? If so, which ones did you use and how did they help you? If not, can you think of some that might have helped you?

4. If you had more time to revise, what revisions do you think you might make? Why?

5. You have been asked to answer many questions to help you plan your writing. Do you think answering these questions helped you think clearly about your assignment? Why or why not?

What did you learn about yourself as a writer from this assignment?

Do you think you might be able to ask your own questions to help you write in the future? Why or why not?
BIBLIOGRAPHY


