Kyle Jensen
Professor Bob Broad
EL 497 Final Project

Exploring Situation in Student's Responses to Reading

In a classroom full of graduate teaching assistants during my first writing program orientation, I encountered the word "situated" as an ideological principle for the very first time. Our director had just extended a collaborative group assignment that asked us to generate a working definition of commonplace writing program lexicon. In groups, we were to focus on words like situated, purpose, and critical (among others) in order to better name what it was we really valued in student essays. The term "situated" fell to my group.

I had no idea what "situated" meant (on an ideological level) and squirmed in my chair as a result. In an attempt to save intellectual face in front those who would become my peers in the program, I offered a highly "rhetorical" stab at what I thought it meant. I conjured a vague description of what it meant to be situated in a classroom; that is, the arrangement of chairs, desks, teacher to student proximity, and so forth. Graciously, they offered some modifications to my definition that took the form of a pedagogical exhortation: that our students understand their cultural situation in order to write better. Our presentation was well received.

When I look back at the definition of situatedness produced in that moment, I wonder whether my group members were being as intellectually astute as I had orignially thought. Having spent some time researching positions that emphasize situatedness since then, I see that our definition was a fundamentally confused one. Despite its being a cursory response to an orientation activity, our defintion only understood situatedness as

a pedagogical activity. Because we saw the emphasis on situatedness as an idea that we were to teach in our classrooms, we did not account for the concepts of contingency and locality that philosophers like Stanley Fish, Richard Rorty and others emphasize. Still, we are not the only ones who made/make this distinction.

In her book *The Culture of Reading and the Teaching of English*, Kathleen McCormick argues for a curricular posture that emphasizes the role of situatedness in the composition classroom. She teaches her students to "become theoretically self-aware" in order "to recognize the situated nature of both our critical positions and our interpretations of texts, to acknowledge that they come about as a result of certain beliefs, principles, and broader ideologies – to see that they are not universally true, but historically situated" (177). Additionally, she argues that "This process of developing an incipient awareness of the theoretical underpinnings of one's readings of texts relates to the wider educational practice of enabling students to begin to recognize the general ideological constraints – and also empowerments – within which they live" (177). McCormick's argument seems to apply the insights of a situated theory of interpretation and attempt to move it forward by emphasizing student reflection. Take note, for example, of the phrases "critically self-aware" and "incipient awareness." From these phrases, we can imagine that McCormick's classroom activities invite students to examine their situation or situatedness as a way of identifying how (or that) they interpret the world around them. When students develop this "incipient self-awareness" they are, it seems, more able to think critically in the composition classroom. Thus, once students are able to identify how internalized ideologies motivate the way that they perceive the world, they become more capable of writing effectively.

In spite of the intruiging pedagogical emphasis on accessing situation through personal reflection, McCormick's argument (and pedagogy) breaks from other definitions of a situational theory in a couple of critical ways. The first break is its reliance on foundational knowledge. If we believe that students learn to read and write more effectively when they identify their ideological posture, then we implicitly inherit the foundational assumption that writing only moves towards complication when we identify the ideologies that motivate our thinking. This posture assumes that a reflexive practice will render effective writing habits from every student, every time. In making this claim McCormick's emphasis on situatedness is no longer consistent with the theory of situational knowledge. Instead, her pedagogy emphasizes more of a neo-Foucaultian analysis that seeks to understand how ideologies form and maintain power structures in the self and society. The second break occurs in her emphasis that students identify his or her own ideology. Of course, this argument assumes that we can achieve enough critical distance from our ideological postures to evaluate them soberly. Students, then, are able to move outside of their own situation long enough to evaluate themselves on what most would call an "objective" level. This assumption works against the tenets of situatendess because it fails to identify that interpretation is always already ideological. Or, there is no such thing as critical distance from one's situation.

In "Antifoundationalism, Theory Hope and the Teaching of Composition,"Stanley Fish illustrates how a curriculum that teaches students to identify their situatedness will betray the theory it allegedly speaks from. Fish explains that "any claim in which the notion of situatedness is said to be a lever that allows us to get a purchase on situations is finally a claim to have escaped situatedness, and is therefore nothing more or less than a

reinvention of foundationalism" (349). Moving from this critique, Fish emphasizes the importance of circumstantiality in the interpretive moment writing that "what one must remember is that circumstantiality – another name for situatedness – is not something one can escape by recognizing it, since the act of recognition will itself occur within circumstances that cannot be the object of our self-conscious attention" (351). Therefore, a pedagogy that emphasizes the identification of situatedness must not present the theory as if understanding it will necessarily lead to better writing practices, but rather use it to help identify the instability of knowing anything outside of circumstance.

Instead of emphasizing "situatedness" as a pedagogical principle, Fish argues that instructors can instead teach with situations instead of teaching situatedness. In an interview published in *Philosophy, Rhetoric, Literary Criticism: Interviews*, Fish distinguishes between the two when he explains that earlier in his teaching career "many people taught what we would now call a situational performance" or, the ability to "code switch, to operate successfully in different registers." Continuing on, he argues that "the practice of training students to be able to adjust their verbal performances to different registers of social life requires no theoretical assumptions whatsoever" (49). The job of compositionists, according to Fish, is to focus on helping students understand how language or arguments work in specific social situations instead of establishing a meta-awareness of one's ideological identity. Were we to extend some kind of critical activity from Fish's explanation, we might imagine asking our students to manoeuver within a particularly difficult problem and require them to articulate how they might solve it as long as we/they understand that how they solve that problem will always be entirely contingent upon a multitude of factors and thus subject to change.

While this discussion of situatedness is purposefully uncomprehensive in nature, it is complete enough to heighten our sensitivity to the ways that "situated" gets used as a justification for curriculum. For, in McCormick's estimation, situatedness focuses primarily how ideology directs our interpretations. It is something that when once critically evaluated and measured it will lead students to better writing. Fish, on the other hand, positions himself against McCormick when he explains that "knowing knowledge is tacit cannot put us in possession of it or enable us to possess it in a heightened way" (354). For him, situatedness cannot be measured, nor can teaching it lead us to write any better.

What, then, are we to do with this problem? Do we persist in our emphasis on student reflection and call it situatedness, even if it is a theoretical contradiction in terms (According to Fish)? Or, do we cast aside an emphasis on reflexivity because it does not lead us to teach writing more effectively? In order to answer these questions, it was important for me to take a critical step backwards and first attempt to identify whether a student's situations emerge in their writings. In other words, how do student's situations emerge if they are in a classroom that does not emphasize reflexivity in the way that McCormick describes? If their situations manifested in either implicit or explicit ways, I then needed to identify (and categorize) how those situations emerged from the text that they read and evaluate whether those situations would necessarily lead to better writing. Ultimately, I designed a research project that attempted to answer this critical question: in what ways do student's situations emerge unprompted in their responses to reading? My methods for obtaining data will be discussed in the next section.

The Research Design

For this relatively small pilot project, I extended an open verbal invitation to both of my English 101 courses at Illinois State University during the fall semester of 2005. On a very general level, I presented the research project to them as an opportunity that would benefit me as a future instructor and potentially benefit them in their continued studies. From the potential pool of more than forty students, six students volunteered to participate. And from that group of six, I selected three students to study. These students were selected because their schedules were open enough to participate in the study, as other volunteers had out of town commitments that would conflict with the timeliness of this project.

From this point on, the student subjects will be referred to as Melissa, John and Cassidy. It bears mention that these pseudonyms were not given to them by me, but were instead invented by the participants themselves at the beginning of the study. John and Melissa are what we in the academy would refer to as traditional students: between the ages of seventeen and eighteen coming to higher education directly from high school. Cassidy is not. Cassidy, as it will readily emerge in the subsequent sections, is a non-traditional student in the sense that she served in the armed forces for nearly three years before she came to the university. Most, I think, would consider this detail to be problematic because it renders drawing a coherent line between age groups more difficult. However, Cassidy looks to be of a similar age to her peers and does not publicly project herself as someone who is not a typical freshman. Additionally, my research question seeks to understand how student situatedness emerges unprompted in their

writing and does not explicitly seek to trace patterns among a selected age, racial, gender or regional specific group.

The method employed during the collection and interpretation of data was a synthesis between a case studies approach and grounded theory. Because I approached this project with a relatively open research question and sought to identify emerging patterns that would allow me to generate a theory that would answer my question, my study aligned with a grounded theoretical approach. In addition, I wanted my research to focus on a small subject group of three or four students. Circumstantially, each one of my research subjects participates in the same English 101 course. So, one might interpret this set of data as more representative of an actual case study. This construction, however, is not an intentional one.

Students made individual appointments with me outside of class and we met at my office to conduct the research. I reasoned that my office was an appropriate place to conduct the research because 1) my students (including the research subjects) tend to voluntarily visit for non-academic conversations, and 2) that it was a familiar enough place as to not (in theory) cause overt distraction or discomfort. Once at my office, students were invited to read and sign the consent form that is required by the Institutional Review Board. This consent form informs the subject of the procedures of th study, but does not offer any indication as to what the project intends to discover. Once finished with the description, I asked each student to generate a pseudonym while I went to fill a cup of water just outside of the office. Upon reentering the office, students were then given the specific directions for how they ought to complete the research activity.

Students were to begin the activity by selecting a text from *The Mercury Reader* , their standard English 101 course reader (see appendix A). Generally, the essays in *The Mercury Reader* do not exceed ten pages, nor do they offer material that would confuse the typical freshman. While genres in *The Mercury Reader* range from cartoons to classic literature, each student's selection assumes a more academic ethos.

My only instruction to each student concerning the selection of their text, was that they read an essay that they had not already encountered in class (or for fun). I decided not to select a text for them because I wanted to preserve a potential variable in the study: that students would select the essay based on whether it spoke to their interests. I reasoned that if I selected the text, students may respond differently; differently, in the sense that they may perceive that the data was contrived, or that they had to construct an appropriate interpretation because even though I assumed the posture of a researcher, I was still their instructor. Additionally, I grew concerned that a re-reading of the text might present an unnecessary complication where students could spend more time retracing an argument that they had constructed earlier in the term rather than attempting to sort through the text that they had just read. In truth, I wanted them to respond to a text as undirected as possible.

Students read from their own textbooks and were invited to use a marking device should they desire to. Once finished with the reading, I asked the student to respond to the questionaire which appeared on a laptop in front of them. The screen was visible the entire time, yet the only question that appeared was "Please take a moment to respond to the essay without any prompting." Of course, my request is in fact a general prompt, but does not ask a specific questions in the way that later questions on the screen would.

Once finished with the general prompt, students were asked to scroll down and complete the remaining questions. All of these questions, appeared on the same screen so students were able to answer them out of sequence. I explained to each student that if they felt they had answered the question already, they could simply point to where they answered it in previous questions, or choose to omit the question by saying "I already answere this question."

I remained in the office while each student selected the essay, read it and completed the questionaire (see appendix B), though I explained to them that my presence in the room was based on a need to finish personal work. My intention in giving this explanation was to minimize the feeling that they were subjects being researched. I wanted them to focus on the text and the completion of the questionaire and not on the fact that I was studying them.

For the most part, each student completed the initial task without a break. This means that on average, they worked on the initial activity for approximately one hour. Once finished with that sequence, I offered them an opportunity to take a quick break while I read over their responses. I told them that this offer would accomplish two things: 1) it would give me enough time to see whether I had any questions concerning the arguments that they made in their response and 2) it would enable them to recuperate after a long focused session. Each student took advantage of this offer, as they left my office for approximately five to ten minutes. During their absence, I read over their responses to the questionaire and highlighted specific phrases, textual traits or incomplete thoughts that would direct my interview and, consequently, help me better answer my research question. Generally speaking, I highlighted two textual qualities (traits,

curiosities, specific phrases) per question, which means that I asked between 10-15 questions about their text.

When the student returned from their break, I asked her (him) whether they would feel comfortable answering a few questions about the text that they had just produced. It should be evident from the description above that the questions were entirely contingent upon what they had written. Thus, each question was conceived in the moment of interaction and was intended to elicit a more elaborate response from the subject. Every student obliged my request. The interviews generally took about 20-30 minutes to complete, which means that the every student completed the full research activity in under two hours. Interviews were recorded with a miniature cassete recorder that I held in my hand to capture their voice as clearly as possible. When we were finished with the interview, I thanked my students and they left.

Once in posssession of a complete group of data, I set out to 1) transcribe the audio files 2) generate a subject dossier that contained the written transcript of the interview, the written document produced in response to the reading, and notes that I had taken before, during and after the entire research sequence and 3) do a comparitive analysis with the data in order to determine connections, comparisions and theories that would help to answer my research question. What I found as a result of this comparitive analysis will be discussed in the next section.

Findings

It goes without saying that any researcher who seeks to identify how the writer's situation emerges in his or her textual constructions is, at best, speculating. And, we might readily identify that a he (or she) might approach this analysis in a multitude of

ways. One might, for example, scan the text to find markers that suggest a writer's capitalist preferences, or, attempt to identify the ways in which patriarchal discourses unconsciously emerge in how students summarize the author's main points. While these and other avenues are certainly valuable pursuits, I tried to steer away from them in this study for a couple of reasons: 1) the data immediately indicated that I would not have to scan the text for traces of situation because the student's responses were explicitly self-referential, 2) such pursuits are oftentimes prone to evaluative arguments which seek out certain data to prove a point about the pervasiveness of oppressive constructs. That type of analysis would be problematic for me because 3) the purpose of this project was to trace the complex matrix of student situation, not to evaluate it as a secondary source to a primary argument. Instead, my primary focus attempts to illustrate the complex and dynamic ways that students wove themselves during the acts of reading and writing. In order to manage this matrix, I have generated categories that best describe what I understood their responses to mean. The first category we will investigate is one that I have named: immediate-temporal responses in student to text interaction.

The category *temporal-emotive responses in student to text interaction* might be better understood as how students use their feelings to articulate their situation in the act of writing. Of course, these emotive responses are not only subject to change, but contingent upon a multitude of factors (which to some might render the data less stable and simply not worth investigating). In spite of the variable of contingency, however, I would argue that this category is worth investigating because of the ways that students use their emotions to talk about the essay that they read. Interestingly, the student's

emotive responses emerged most frequently when they discussed specific textual qualities like: ingenuity of argumentation, use of examples, discursive constructions etc.

It is important to note, before presenting this data, that my questions (both on the questionaire and in the interview) specifically asked for emotive responses: what interested you? what were you confused by etc. What I found interesting, however, is the way in which these students revised my question in order to articulate their emotive experience. Take Melissa's response to the question *what confused you in this essay* (*Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson)*?* as an example. She wrote "I was confused when Carson started to explain how the village changed dramatically and everything was going down hill. She was not telling me why it was doing this, so I had to use my imagination and draw my own conclusions." My purpose in asking this question was to anticipate any confusion that might have prevented my students from identifying (either intellectually or emotionally) with the text. But Melissa revises the question to suit her needs. Instead of explaining where a confusion prevented her from identifying with the text, she explains that her confusion (which was a direct result of the discursive elements present in the text) engaged her imagination. Confusion, in Melissa's case, lead not to a breakdown of identification, but an enhancement of it. This conclusion might be pushed further by investigating the way she answered the next question about where she felt particularly interested. She wrote: "At the place I was confused, I was also most interested because I wanted to figure out what disease was spreading throughout the village. I was getting nervous and I was also hoping they could figure out the problem and fix it." What we see in this response is that Melissa's confusion contains a multitude of other emotive responses that are critical to a description of her engagement with the essay: interest,

nervousness, goodwill, a desire to problem solve. While identifying these additional emotive responses is important for reasons that I will explain in the final section of this paper, it seems important now to focus on the way in which these emotive responses unveil additional concerns that allude to more stable markers of the writer's situation.

During my interview with Melissa, I asked her to elaborate upon her emotive responses (from the confusion and interest question) by focusing specifically on her use of the word imaginative or imagination. She responded by explaining: "the one thing was that I didn't know what this disease was and so I was really confused by that and then just the fact that I had to decide what kind of a country this was, is she talking about America is she talk….like I was just trying to figure out exactly cause she didn't specify which country it was so I was trying to think of like "oh maybe she's talking about this." Here, Melissa returns to an explanation of her confusion with the more suspenseful elements of the text in order to connect it to the coutry in which she lives. Though she refers to America only once in this response and this reference, it seems, uses America only as an example of what she had in mind, her situation unfolded in an explicit way when I asked what she meant by "imaginative conclusions" again. She responded by saying "Um, to all the way up to the point where she said that this wasn't a country I thought she was talking about America and I thought she was talking about like um, how we started our country and then like how the effects of it, and then I was thinking she was also drawing it into now like with everything we are abusing, that maybe that'll happen again." The apparent shift from Melissa's initial response is her use of the plural pronoun "we" when she evokes America as a topic for discussion. Instead of using America as one potential example that illustrates a "country she had in mind," Melissa uses phrases like "how we

started our country" and "now like with everything we are abusing" to identify herself as an American. These phrases call our attention to the way that temporal emotive responses can contain larger identity constructs. While they can mark larger identity constructs, they do not necessarily signify that Melissa adopts stereotypical American constructs in every situation. True, she does identify herself as an American, but naming herself such does not reflect the ways in which she extends American ideologies in every situation. These responses do, however, provide us with an opportunity to question her further on what she means when she uses the word "we" and in what ways she considers herself to be a part of American culture.

What we might consider simple or knee jerk reactions to the text oftentimes represent larger cultural or ideological concerns that are central to one's identity. Take John's response to the question about interest as another example of this phenomenon. When given the opportunity to discuss some of the aspects that he found interesting in the essay, John expressed a strong emotive interest to the essay that he read. In fact, the frequency of certain adjectival choices lead me to believe that John went out of his way to articulate the degree to which he is interested. In response to the written prompt on interest, John wrote:

> I was extremely interested in the first two theories brought up in the essay. I'm not saying that the disaster theory is not interesting, because it is and I think it is the answer to why the dinosaurs died out, but I have heard about the disaster theory since I was a child. The first two theories are just really far out, unusual ideas. While I was reading I kept thinking, "how did someone even make a connection between these ideas?" It is extremely interesting to me how someone could make such unusual connections that turned out to be very plausable arguments.

Notice that in both the introductory and concluding sentences of this paragraph, John uses the adjective "extremely" as an intensifying marker. Although John chooses to use the

same adjective to describe his interest in each sentence, “extremely” gets paired with two distinct (but related) interests. In the first sentence, John reveals an exteme interest in the “first two theories brought up in the essay.” But in the second sentence, John conveys an extreme interest in the author’s intellect and ingenuity as a rhetor.

John’s second use of “extremely” is interesting here because of the sentence that precedes it. He writes, “While I was reading I kept thinking “how did someone even make a connection between these ideas?” This sentence conveys a similar emotion to the sentence that follows it and does so in a way that is unconventional. Here, John uses quotation marks to cite his own thinking during the reading process which we can read, I think, in a couple of ways: 1) he cites himself as a rhetorical tool in order to creatively emphasizes what interested him in the essay, or 2) he actually remembers this thought during the reading process, and conveyed it on paper in order to adequately represents his emotive response to the essay. Regardless of intention, we must wonder why this second use of “extremely” is necessary if he has already created an ethos of extreme interest with his meta-cognitive citation. I would argue that his second use of “extremely” attempts to calibrate his reader to the aspects of the essay that were most important to him: the construction of theory and the ingenuity of theorists.

John’s effort to illustrate his extreme interest in the essay did not go unnoticed during the interview stage. In fact, you might say that the ingenuity of theory and theorists emerged in virtually every one of his responses to my questions. Like Melissa, John’s emotive responses contained a complex site to express some aspects of his situation. Curious about what made the essay so interesting to him, I asked him to

elaborate on why he uses the word plausible in tandem with the word interesting. He responded by saying:

> The author actually pointed to how maybe the first two theories being wrong because they couldn't be tested, and if a theory can't be tested it goes over to philosophy. Doesn't really count as scientific theory anymore…I guess. But before he kind of did that he just gave all the reasons why they might be the truth, like what actually happened, and the one about the the sex theory where he actually tested alligators, and it turned out, that alligators are like today's dinosaurs, well they're the living relative. He actually gave experiments that pointed to how this theory might be correct,

Were we to read John's first two sentences by themselves, we might conclude that the author sets out to explain why the two theories (he has previously named as extremely interesting) belong to philisophical discourses. His use of "actually" and "wrong" seem to indicate that despite his interest in the theories, he might not be able to declare them as true or valuable because they cannot be "proven" scientifically. Though, notice the critical shift in tone that occurs in the middle of his articulation (after he pauses and says "I guess,"). The remainder of the explanation illustrates that perhaps these interesting theories do contribute to the "scientific discourse." Because it is clear which evidence John finds more "plausible," we might read John's recall of the "alligator evidence" as an effort to construct a space where he can remain both interested and ideological consistent. In the end, I would argue that this passage reflects a reader who uses his memory of evidence to enact intellectual closure to an intellectual conflict.

Curious about whether my interpretation (that he has a preference for scientific evidence) was correct, I followed up with a question that asked him which he perspective he was more convinced by science or philosophy. He responded saying "If I hear a really neat theory at first maybe I'd be more drawn to it, attracted to it, but then after a while I'd want more hard evidence." It is difficult to interpret whether this response refers to the

essay that he just read, or whether it refers to other essays that do not offer hard evidence for their "really neat theories." Regardless, we should be aware that John conveys a second moment of conflict that is perhaps more indicative of his situation (or situatedness) than the first passage.

In his response, John explains that he might be interested in a theory if it is "neat"; neat being synonomous with the extreme interest he conveyed earlier in his response. Though, he goes on to explain that that interest will fade if the theory fails to provide convincing scientific evidence, or what John names "hard evidence." From his adjectival use we understand that John desires a solid, foundational truth that everyone can rely upon throughout time; it is a desire that, ostensibly, apprises us to his situation as a Western thinker. In other words, John (whether consciously or unconscioulsy) requires that any theory must be supported by empirical data that proves its veracity. Such a scientific preference can easily be traced back to the early scientific practices of the Greeks, namely Aristotle, who implicitly criticized Plato for a lack of focus on empirical evidence. One needn't even go back that far to speculate on the potential sources of John's need for empirical evidence as this desire is ubiquitous in our culture, especially in the field of science. Of course, John's preference does not mean that he necessarily uses Western ideologies to interrogate scientific or philosophical theories every time. Still, he has used it this time which at the very least authorizes us to argue that these Western modes of thought are part of his intellectual repertoire (and can thus be tied to his situatedness).

An astute reader will likely critique my analysis of Melissa and John because the place where I end has moved a considerable distance from the categorization of emotive

or immediate-temporal responses. He or she might point to the way in which my analysis draws heavily from the words imagination (with Melissa) or plausible/scientific (with John) in order to argue that I am no longer interrogating the emotive (perhaps because the emotive is itself too simple a construction). Let me respond to such critiques by problematizing the idea that emotive responses are necessarily simple because they are contingent.

There is a tendency, I believe, to discount the contingent or temporal in situational analysis because any set of data is too circumstantial to be pinned down long enough to elicit a reliable conclusion. What I have found in this study, however, is that student's emotive responses are critical sites for investigation if our goal is to understand their situation. For, we never get to the analysis of imagination or plausible without first arriving at confused or interested. And if we never get to an analysis of imagination or plausible, we can only make a cursory guess (in this case) on whether students value one form of evidence over another, or the level to which they align themselves with their country. Such guesses may be correct in the end, but what if they are not? While I will handle this question more directly in the pedagogical implications section, it seems useful now to propose that these guesses could direct our responses to student work in unhelpful ways. Fortunately, emotive responses are not the only ways that students apprise us to their situation (and thus their values) in their written responses. The second category which I have named *self-referential responses in student to text interaction* categorized the ways that students used themselves, their family, and their histories as a way of making sense of the texts that they read.

Although *self-referential responses in student to text interaction* were relatively easy to see in the raw data, the categorization feels, at times, to be an all too general blanket over the complexities that comprise it. There are places, for example, where the students will project an historical representation of their identity in order to illustrate their present self in relation to the text. So, how does one account for the multiple forms of identity without privileging one over the other? Do we name the self that gets used rhetorically as a merely a textual form of evidence, or is it an actual representation of a memory? Do we the self that is constructed in the hermenuetic moment as a true representation, or do we see that as a by-product of the texts ability to direct the reader's gaze? Indeed, the issues of self and self representation are difficult to manage, but they still require our attention. While the following sets of data are not comprehensive of every way that these students used self-reference to make sense of the readings, they are representative of the complex intricacies that emerged in each subject's responses during the research sequence. Let us, then, look at Cassidy's responses as an example of this category.

I noted earlier in this essay that Cassidy's situation is different from most freshman, and that the difference in her situation would be apparent in the data. As one of my reviewers noted, this detail's presence in the essay is a curious one, so I had better explain why I include it (again) in my analysis. The inclusion of this detail attempts to emphasize the way that she repeatedly draws upon her experiences to help the reader (and perhaps herself) make sense of what she read. In fact, this self-referential quality of Cassidy's texts (both verbally and texutally) characterizes the nature of her responses during the entire research session.

While John and Melissa spent a significant amount of space paraphrasing the major points that their respective authors made in the general response section, Cassidy immediately situates herself by applying the author's argument to her life experiences. She writes:

> I think the author makes many good points on the advantages of going to college as well as not going. After joining the Air Force and taking 3 years off from school, getting back in the game and attending college is not only a culture shock, but I seem to have regressed in years. From day one it seems that the idea of attending college is not an option but a must. If you want a good job, and to make good money, you WILL go to college.

The explicit self-reference is important to identify in this passage, but the sentence that precedes it is, in itself, a vastly interesting detail. Remember, the prompt that elicited this response "please take a moment to respond to this essay without any prompting" tended to procure a similar result among subjects: they generally described or quoted some of the author's main points using the phrases "this essay was about" or "this essay offers." At first blush, Cassidy's opening line seems to do this very thing where she writes that "the author makes many good points on the advantages of going to college as well as not going." Cassidy's argument leads the reader to expect an explanation of the principles under which the author constructs her argument. Except, instead of attending to the essay in a passive voice (as her peers do) Cassidy writes "I think the author makes many good points," which explicitly asserts her evaluative identity as the reader of that essay and the writer of that text. Therefore, instead of reading this opening line as an introduction to the essay that Cassidy read, we might read this opening line an introduction to Cassidy's situation where the primary text is her life and the essay that she read merely suplements it. The second line supports this argument as she refers not to the essay, but her experience in college after serving in the Air Force.

This second line of this general response to the essay is especially important to unpack because, as I argued earlier, it represents the student's ability to construct a dynamic self in complex rhetorical ways. We see, for example, that Cassidy calibrates the reader to her current situation by referring to the culture shock she experiences at the present time. The phrase "getting back into the game" indicates her current situation because the verb "get" uses the present continuous marker (she is presently getting back). At the same time, we understand that there was a former version of Cassidy (to whom we (and she) must compare to her present self in order for the articulation to mean what it does) that did not feel discomfort with the daily routines of school. This conclusion is reinforced, in large part, by the past tense marker on "regress" where she says "I seem to have regressed in years." But this regression takes on a different self because it refers to her experience in the Air Force, whose culture is distinct enough from her former educational culture to lead to her "regress in years." We see, then, a complex web of self-reference that includes a pre-Air Force (high school), past-Air Force and post-Air Force (Current University) Cassidy all in the same sentence. It bears mention that Cassidy uses her naivete (in perceiving that college was essential) during high school and work ethic from the Air Force to interrogate her present situation as a university student in many other places in the data. And thus, it would seem that these former selves are being used in a rhetorical way to help the reader better understand the way that Cassidy interpreted her essay. Of course, Cassidy could be using them not for her reader, but for herself to reflexively articulate her current situation. The reader, then, would not be the primary target of the rhetor, but instead the rhetor uses language in order to make sense of his or her own situation.

I included the final lines in this sequence because they were, by far, the most interesting self-references made by Cassidy. There, Cassidy seems to present the points of the essay as if she and not the author had written them (a common quality in freshman writing). These declarative statements take on an argumentative tone similar to the opening line, but are incongruent with the reflective ethos of the previous line. We are invited, then, to read them as if the complex self-referential line that precedes it is merely a cameo of Cassidy who momentarily reveals her identity and then returns to an evaluative presentation of the "good points in the essay." According to the author, however, this interpretation would be a misreading.

Cassidy inserts her situation in a very interesting manner that might go unnoticed if the reader was not paying close enough attention to her phrasing. She writes "From day one it seems that the idea of attending college is not an option but a must. If you want a good job, and to make good money, you WILL go to college." Here, the phrases "from day one it seems" and "you WILL go to college" are important to note because they offer subtle markers of her past situation. While the text does not indicate that these phrases are explicit quotations from either of her parents, we notice that Cassidy emphasizes the word "WILL" in such a way that it invokes a stylistic imperative. And nothing in the text up to this point conveys that Cassidy is the voice of this imperative. In fact, the inclusion of the cluster "it seems" that precedes "from day one" actually positions her as the object of time and the subject of educational rhetoric. Her use of "seeming" is also interesting because it suggests that she no longer believes in the cultural axiom that "college is not an option but a must." We might argue, then, that the lines that appear to be reiterations

of the essay are actually subtle indicators of Cassidy's situation (both culturally, and familially).

As a way of hunkering down this conclusion, it is useful to look at Cassidy's response to a request that invited her to explain why she put "WILL" in all caps. Interestingly, she said:

> That might be just the way I was raised by my parents and I never had a conversation like do you want to go to college are you going to college it was just known that I am going to college. My brother on the other hand is the complete opposite he has the utmost ability and skills, he can take apart something and put it back together in an instant the idea of him going to college everyone knew from his birth that he is never going to attend college, he might attend a vocational school to learn, to strengthen his ability, um, but for me it was just a given its like a stepping stone you go from elementary school, to middle school to high school to college there's not a break in there there's not a what if you don't ask yourself am I gonna go to high school you just go, In my life that's how it was it was just assumed I was going to go to college.

While initially my question intended to elicit a response about writing style, we can see that Cassidy uses it to reveal explicit details about her situation as it relates to the essay that she read. As I argued previously, her immediate reference to her family invites the reader to imagine the "WILL" as a parental imperative, where Cassidy was the subject of an implied expectation and not an agent in her decision. However, the invocation of her brother immediately problematizes this implied expectation that everyone in the family graduates college, for it seems that a liberal arts college would not suit his needs or intellect. We might interpret Cassidy's parental imperative (which is also a cultural and socio-economical imperative), then, not just as an effort to exert power, but to identify intellectual apptitude in a specific field or discourse. Indeed, this aptitude must have been present throughout her education career as she clearly conveys the external perspective that education is a fluid process that begins when you are five and ends with a degree

from a university. Though, we should note the irony of Cassidy's situation: that her formal education was interrupted by an enlistment into the Airforce in order to earn enough money and scholarships to continue her education. We might argue, finally, that in spite of Cassidy's ability to identify the unstable principles of the imperative that "college is the necessary path towards financially security and success," she chooses (for whatever reason) to continue the educational process established by her family and culture.

Perhaps the most interesting quality of Cassidy's response is her willingness to use inherited ideological tenets to interrogate the text that she read in this study. These ideological tenets have emerged as a paraphrasing of those individuals (in this case her parents) whose influence still resonates with her. In this case, Cassidy paraphrases her parents in order to connect her situation to the arguments presented in the essay that she read and to illustrate a current difference in opinion from her parents concerning the necessary move towards higher education. Melissa, on the other hand, applies the general argument of the essay to her situation in order to convey a preoccupation with her mother's perspective on the environment, especially in her role as an object of the environment. The sequence that best reflects Melissa's preoccupation with her mother's arguments about the environment is a lengthy one. Never the less, it serves to illustrate how seemingly general argumentative recurrences actually operate from situation specific platforms.

The initial inquiry asked Melissa to elaborate on the rather general phrase "things like now, things we're abusing right now" that she wrote in the initial research sequence. She responded saying, "Um, pollution, um, just mainly I think the main problem is

polution of the ozone layer and just, I don't really know, I think the main problem is just pollution and industries and corporations just wanting money and not really thinking about anything else." Melissa has correctly interpreted what I have asked her to respond to: I want to know what she has in mind when she declares that "we are abusing things right now." And yet, her response suggests that she is either unwilling or unable to articulate what specifically she has in mind when making this argument. Given the opportunity to cite specific evidence, Melissa instead chooses the general terms "industries and corporations" to represent what she had in mind.

Curious about whether she could sharpen up her response, I asked her a similar question that drew upon the emotive markers present in the data. Specifically, I asked her whether she felt nervous about the environment and whether she thought we were wrecking things. She responded saying "Um, I am a little bit of an environmentalist, so, in a sense yeah I am worried and um, especially like skin cancer is really like, I am white and pale and I don't want to get skin cancer and um, so it is a little bit concerning to me." Notice that her initial impulse is to convey a facet of her identity. She names herself "an environmentalist" and in so doing calls the reader's attention to a potential aspect of her situation that up until this point has not explicitly emerged in the data. Melissa's elaboration of her concern over the ozone, which for her is a concern because she is "white and pale and does not want to get skin cancer," provides an additional insight into her situation. While this articulation certainly falls short of our culture's generic conception of an environmentalist, we better understand what Melissa means by naming herself an environmentalist. That is, one who is sensitive to environmental issues that, in her estimation, directly pertain to her. The interesting quality of Melissa's articulation is

that she uses her body as a connecting point with the essay. In other words, she calls forth her physical attributes as evidence of her concern, and in so doing, invites us to see that connection as an attempt to physically connect with the essay's arguments.

I wanted to give Melissa a chance to elaborate on how she understood environmental issues, so I asked her to elaborate on her concern over the ozone layer again (a topic that continued to pop up in the written transcript). She responded by saying "I don't know the exact statistic but I know its something like, it's a really disgusting statistic on how much gas we use compared to other countries and um everything in general how it all just falls off of each other, one thing leads to another and pretty soon it just can ruin so many different things but especially ozone layer and skin cancer." Melissa's use of statistical evidence caught my attention immediately because it 1) seemed to govern the argument that followed it and therefore suggested that Melissa has had or has access to texts that deal with a similar topic 2) it suggests that part of Melissa's intellectual repertoire is to cite numeric evidence as a representation of both her argument and the status of a given situation and 3) it seemed to mark a different hermeneutic strategy in that it moved away from the already established effort to interpret the essay though personal identification. To follow up, I asked her whether she could remember where she heard the statistic, and she cited her mother. I invited her to talk a little bit more about that point, and she said:

> cause I would always go tanning and um she would talk about, just, I don't know, just the effects of skin cancer and then how like I don't know just polution and she'd be like I didn't drive when I was your age I walked everywhere you guys are so spoiled blah blah blah, so I also remember hearing stuff like that during the elections like they always talk about like the conservatives and the liberals, the liberals who was it, I know Bush wasn't really concerned about it as much as um Kerry was and stuff like that so I just remember at our school we were doing

> debates on it and a lot of people brought that into the debates and stuff so I remember hearing some statistics about that too.

What appeared to be merely an external numeric reference, is in fact a continuation of Melissa's effort to connect to the essay in a personal way. It is noteworthy that every environmental issue that Melissa raises prior to this articulation is, in some way, connected to the concerns she attributes to her mother. However, we get a sense from Melissa's use of "blah, blah blah" that her mother's concerns weren't always well received, even though she is quick to use them as a hermeutic device. At the very least, we can speculate that Melissa may have been more convinced by her mother's motives rather than her rhetoric. At the very least, Melissa's use of "blah, blah, blah" indicates a complex construction of her self despite its derisive tone. In other words, we might read Melissa's use of "blah, blah, blah" as an annoyed dismissal of her mother's arguments, but this reading would be inconsistent with Melissa's previous use of those arguments. I would argue Melissa's derides her mother's rhetoric in order to indicate that while her concerns are inherited, she independently chooses to maintain those concerns in her mother's absence. The mocking, then, attempts to calibrate the reader to her situation as someone who shares values with her family, but intends to mark an identity that is her own.

This argument attains further plausibility when we consider the articulation that follows the "blah, blah, blah" as Melissa cites the recent election as a potential source. There, Melissa describes what she remembered to be a central issue in the presidential debate: that either Bush or Kerry (probably Kerry) had invoked a stastic about the harmful effects of fuel emissions. Notice, though, that in order to meaningfully situate this debate, Melissa includes the additional phrase "so I just remember at our school we

were doing debates on it and a lot of people brought that into the debates and stuff so I remember hearing some statistics about that too." In making this point, Melissa is able to maintain her personal connection to this argument in a space that does not include her family. We also know that this topic is something that Melissa has considered prior to this research session. What strikes me, however, is that in spite of her prior knowledge on the issue, Melissa chooses to use personal examples to connect to the essay. This decision is a curious one, because we could easily imagine her constructing a general recollection of those debates that in no way correlates with her family.

Hopefully, what my study has shown is that students freshman students cannot help but write themselves into their texts as a way to make meaning of what they have read or are writing (regardless of circumstance). This insight contends with those who argue that students can produce texts in a disinterested/disconnected fashion, and that the key to good writing is to tap into their interests. Granted, each student in my study conveyed "emotive" interest in the essay that they read, but I would argue that we could conduct a similar analysis on a negative or disaffected response and find out interesting things about their situations. Interest does not ensure more complex writing, nor does it preclude that students will be more apt to connect with it on a personal level. Situated writing is a quality that we can count on regardless of the task, regardless of instruction.

Additionally, my analysis illustrates that students weave themselves into their responses in ways that aren't always explicit or expected. Both Melissa and Cassidy responded with lines that on the surface appeared to merely generalize about the essays that they read. When those lines were questioned, however, both provided explicit self-referential disclosures that apprised the reader/listener to how the essay connected with

them on a personal level. These disclosures, as I have shown, are not only complex on a personal level but on a rhetorical level as well, as both Cassidy and Melissa construct descriptions of former selves in order to articulate what they understood the text to mean. Such descriptions, as I see them, serve multiple rhetorical functions for themselves, the reader, or both simultaneously. And while we might never pin down the "true" motivations for such articulations, we can begin to trace the hermeneutic repertoires that are available to freshman in the reading and writing tasks.

Pedagogical Implications

In the introduction to this research project, I developed a goal to investigate student texts in a way that would shed some light on the pedagogical application of situatedness. With the investigation now complete, there are three pedagogical points that I wish to make: 1) Stanley Fish is correct when he argues that teaching situatedness in the writing classroom does not ensure that students grasp their situation more effectively and thus produce better writing. My data has shown that students respond to texts by applying their "situation" regardless of instruction 2) Stanley Fish is correct when he argues that students will always already operate from their situations and are not able to distance themselves from a situated perspective to evaluate anything from an objective platform and 3) Stanley Fish is correct when he argues that an effective way to teach writing is to propose a situation and ask students to work their way through it.

While it would seem that Fish has won, which is his goal as a rhetor for better or worse, I fear that extending his argument to its furthest reaches will lead us into a space that is as unproductive as the pedagogy he criticizes. We are invited by Fish, I think, to discard the role of situatedness in the classroom altogether in order to focus more readily

on the formulaic ways that language works. His arguments encourage teachers to ask themselves why students should investigate something that 1) does not help them improve their writing and 2) is indeterminate, unknowable, and ellusive. Are we to return, then, to a pedagogy that dismisses content for structure?

Although I agree with Fish that focusing on situation will not ensure higher levels of writing, I see usefulness in the attempt to reflexively speculate upon one's hermeneutic strategies. While such an activity does not help us capture our situatedness in a closed definitive way (nor necessarily lead us to write better) it mirrors the definition of a "situation" that Fish offers in his interview: a difficult problem that requires students to articulate, with some precision, how they arrive at their conclusions. In fact, this activity complicates Fish's definition because it requires students to account for multiple texts: the tangible text that they read and the rhetorical self they construct in order to make meaning.

In addition, I think this research requires us to build a sensitivity towards our assumptions about what "typical freshman habits" signify. All too frequently, I find myself in conversations that treat generalizations in freshman papers as simple constructions that indicate underdeveloped writers (both rhetorically and intellectually). The knee jerk reaction to underdevelopment is to respond with critical questions that will ensure a step towards growth. In other words, questions "like, how do you account for this aspect of the conversation (is there such thing as hard evidence)" which attempts to construct a rhetorical dialectic that students must at least consider in their argumentation. And while I would agree that critical facilitative questions can oftentimes lead students towards growth, we are working counterintuitively if a critical thought is already built

into the articulation. That is, when we implore students to “get more critical” we assume that their thoughts are not already critical, and cast aside the possibility that it is critical masked as understated.

In light of this evidence we might broaden our approach in responding to student papers by allowing them do the intellectual work of explaining how (and why) they construct the articulations that appear on the page. When we do so, we offer our students the opportunity to see the activity of writing as a communicative act where they speak and are spoken for in a variety of ways. And that might be an offer neither we, nor they can refuse.

Works Cited

Fish, Stanley. "Antifoundationalism, Theory Hope and the Teaching of Composition." *Doing What Comes Naturally*. Durham, Duke UP, 1989. (342-355).

McCormick, Kathleen. *The Culture of Reading & the Teaching of English*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1994.

Olson, Gary. "Fish Tales: A Conversation with 'The Contemporary Sophist.'" *Philosophy, Rhetoric, Literary Criticism (Inter)views*. Carbondale: SIU Press, 1994. (43-68).