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The University of Southern Mississippi

COMPOSITION PROGRAMS AND PRACTICES IN SWEDEN:  
POSSIBILITIES FOR CROSS-FERTILIZATION WITH THE UNITED STATES

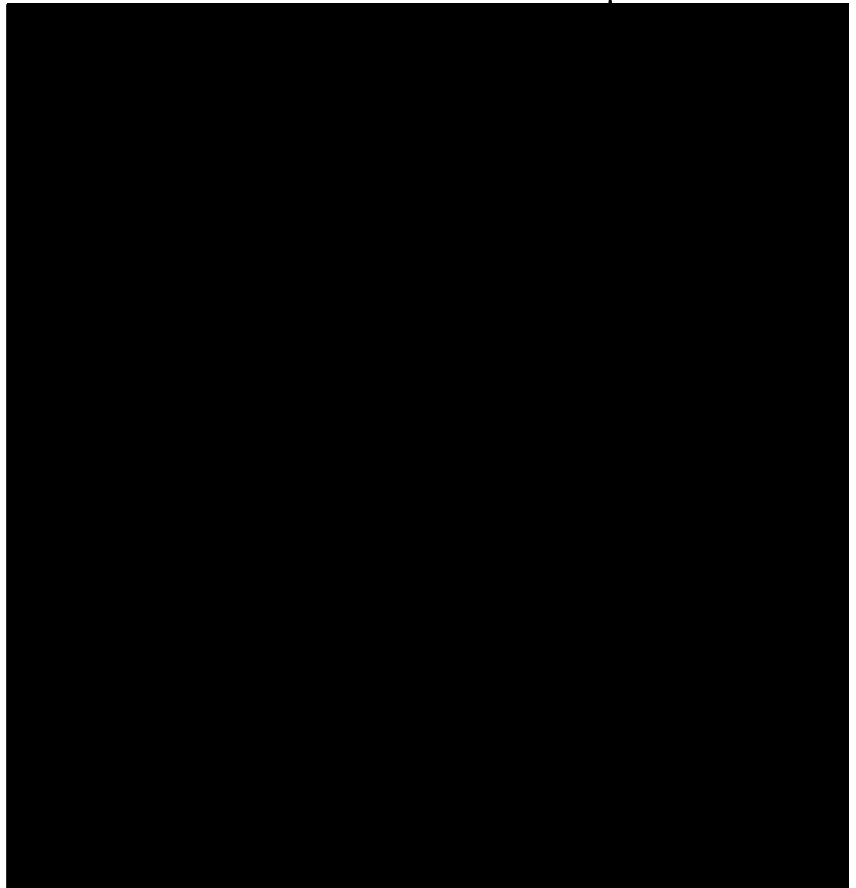
by

Birgitta Linnéa Sjöberg Ramsey

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Studies Office  
of The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Approved:



May 2008

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The University of Southern Mississippi

COMPOSITION PROGRAMS AND PRACTICES IN SWEDEN:  
POSSIBILITIES FOR CROSS-FERTILIZATION WITH THE UNITED STATES

by

Birgitta Linnéa Sjöberg Ramsey

Abstract of a Dissertation  
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May 2008

## ABSTRACT

### COMPOSITION PROGRAMS AND PRACTICES IN SWEDEN: POSSIBILITIES FOR CROSS-FERTILIZATION WITH THE UNITED STATES

by Birgitta Linnéa Sjöberg Ramsey

May 2008

This dissertation contributes to several of the discussions that are taking place within the field of rhetoric and composition at this particular time: about the nature and definition of academic literacy; about the impact of a heterogeneous and multicultural student population on literacy practices in the academy; about the issue of academic socialization; and about the advantages and disadvantages of traditional first-year composition courses. Most importantly, this work is a contribution to cross-national research and an attempt to open up the field of composition to recognize and include voices other than the ones from North America. Even though the differences in political, academic, and cultural contexts make comparisons difficult, researchers and practitioners in the United States and Sweden can learn to question the status quo of some of their own practices by gaining a different perspective.

Chapter I presents the rationale for a research project that compares and contrasts academic writing in Sweden and the United States, presents a literature review and the guiding research questions. Also, it outlines some important differences between the political, social, cultural, and educational/historical contexts and provides as much background information about Scandinavian/Swedish writing research and literacy

practices as the author has deemed necessary to situate her readers. Key words such as *literacy*, *literacy practices*, and *democracy* are introduced.

Chapter II presents the primary research site: Södertörns högskola, in the south part of Stockholm, Sweden, and describes the ethnographic methodology used for the study of academic literacy at this institution.

Chapter III is devoted to “thick description” of literacy practices in Sweden, based on observations of writing/rhetoric classrooms at Södertörn and on interviews.

Chapter IV discusses and analyzes writing centers at Swedish universities, starting with Språkverkstan, the writing center at Södertörns högskola, and compares and contrasts a young writing center to an established American writing center.

Chapter V focuses on two so-called C-essays, examples of the long research essay that most Swedish students have to write before they earn their bachelor’s degree.

Chapter VI sums up what Swedes and Americans can learn from each other’s writing programs and literacy practices and outlines some directions for future research.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Sincere gratitude goes to a number of people who have helped me along the way: Jameela Lares, my third dissertation director, for taking care of a number of practical matters, for valuable proofreading, and for seeing possibilities when I saw only obstacles; Lisa Langstraat, my second dissertation director, for staying with me and patiently reading my drafts and providing me with valuable feedback and encouragement; Julie Lindquist, my first dissertation director, whose Swedish heritage provided a strong impetus for the direction of this dissertation and who introduced me to ethnographic research; and Kenneth Watson and Sheldon Walcher for giving of their time and providing insightful comments.

I owe special thanks to my Swedish research contacts, foremost the teachers and students at Södertörns högskola. Without their willingness to invite me into their classrooms and offices, this dissertation would not have been possible. In addition I want to thank my sister-in-law Ewa-Lena Sjöberg and my nephew Robert Rosander for allowing me to discuss their research essays and for answering all my questions about their writing experiences.

On an even more personal note, I want to thank some of my close friends from graduate school for believing in me and cheering me on, especially Jennifer Beech, Marilyn Ford, and Heidi Rosenberg. Finally, special thanks go to my family: to my husband David for financial, emotional, and technological support over the years and to my children Carl and Anna, who had to share me with this project for far too long.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	iv
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....	viii
CHAPTER	
I.    LITERACY EXPANSION AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS.....	1
Academic Literacy and Changing Times	
Rationale for My Project	
Intersections between American and Scandinavian Writing Research	
Norwegian Writing Research	
Academic Writing in Sweden	
Social Literacy Theories	
Key Terminology	
Cultural Metaphors	
Educational Policies	
Research Questions	
II.   RESEARCH SITE AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	41
Primary Research Site	
An “Impressionist Tale” from Södertörns högskola	
History of Södertörns högskola	
Qualitative Research: Ethnographic Methods	
My Role as Researcher and Participant-Observer	
Observations	
Survey	
Interviews	
Collecting of Artifacts	
Institutional Case Study	
Comparison/Contrast between Sweden and the United States	
Writing Assignments for the 8-point Writing course	
Scholarly Personal Narrative	
SPN as Methodology	
Personal Writing and Democratization of Higher Education	



III. WRITING AND RHETORIC INSTRUCTION AT SÖDERTÖRN.....71

Disciplinary Boundaries  
Introductory Course from an Administrator's Point of View  
Introductory Course: Observation  
Introductory Course and Academic Literacy  
Introductory-Level Writing Course  
General Course Design  
Writing Assignments for the 8-point Writing course  
First Observation of the 8-point Writing Course  
Small-Group Observation  
My Interaction with the Small Group  
Further Observations of the 8-point Writing Course  
Process Pedagogy and Teaching Philosophy  
A Creative Writing Course at Södertörn—First Observation  
Creative Writing Class—Second Observation/Participation  
Analysis of the Creative Writing Course  
Rhetoric at Södertörn  
Interview with Lennart Hellspong  
Analysis of Literacy Practices at Södertörn

IV. WRITING CENTERS.....139

Where Do Swedish Writing Centers Come from?  
Språkverkstan at Södertörn  
Språkverkstan and Early Writing Centers in the United States  
Positives of Språkverkstan  
Marketing of Services  
Writing Centers as Emergency Rooms  
Negatives of Språkverkstan  
Open-House Policy  
Språkverkstan in Comparison to an American Writing Center  
Other Swedish Writing/Language Centers  
Stockholm University's Språkverkstad  
Web Sites from Other Swedish University Writing Centers  
Democracy and Service  
Why Writing Centers?  
Writing Centers and WAC/WID

V.	C-ESSAYS.....	176
	Students' Point of View	
	Small-Scale Comparison of C-Essays between Universities	
	Government Initiated Research on Quality and Standards	
	Opportunity for Personal Interviews	
	Robert's Answers	
	Ewa-Lena's Answers	
	Examples of Essays	
	My Reading of Robert's Essay	
	My Reading of Ewa-Lena's Essay	
	Writing as Socialization	
	The C-Essay as Quality Control	
VI.	CONCLUSION.....	208
	Contact Zones	
	What Sweden Can Learn from the United States	
	What the United States Can Learn from Sweden	
	Future Research	
	Postscript	
	APPENDICES.....	233
	WORKS CITED.....	251

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

### Figure

1.	Södertörns högskola.....	43
2.	Campus Panorama .....	44
3.	College President in Cherry Picker.....	46
4.	Reenactment of a Stage in the Construction Process.....	47
5.	Keynote Address.....	48

## CHAPTER I

### LITERACY EXPANSION AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS

We Americans . . . have a lot of knowledge about writing instruction that could benefit the rest of the world. However, we may have even more to learn about it from those outside of this country. (Schaub 91)

#### Academic Literacy and Changing Times

As the title of my dissertation I have chosen “Composition Programs and Practices in Sweden: Possibilities for Cross-Fertilization with the United States.” The concept *cross-fertilization* is used in a wide variety of disciplines, such as botany, music, psychology, political science, and technology. Cross-fertilization evokes connotations of border crossing, revitalization, and reciprocal learning that I consider very important. As the epigraph to this chapter indicates, the main point I want to bring across in my dissertation is that the two cultures to which I personally belong can benefit one another in the area of academic writing.

Quite consciously, I often use *literacy* and not *writing* as my overall concept in a dissertation that to a large extent deals with the teaching and research of writing. I have found support for this choice in Beth Daniell’s “Narratives of Literacy: Connecting Composition to Culture”: “These days, literacy—the term and concept—connects composition, with its emphasis on students and classrooms, to the social, political, economic, historical, and cultural” (393). Although classrooms with teachers and students, engaged in the production and dissemination of texts, are at the heart of my project in an ethnographic study, I continuously explore the connections between the classrooms and the surrounding cultural contexts. Yet, because writing is such a powerful literacy tool or technology, it will, not surprisingly, receive the most attention in my discussion. With David Barton and Mary Hamilton I believe that “the study of literacy is

partly a study of texts and how they are produced and used” (9). In my dissertation I discuss how Swedes define, understand, and support academic literacy in a variety of ways relatively new to the Swedish university scene, such as through courses in written and oral communication (in most disciplines), lectures, specific writing courses, and writing centers. Remarkably enough, along with all other European languages except English, until possibly very recently, Swedish has not had a useful word for the concept which English calls literacy.<sup>1</sup> Historically, Sweden has topped statistical literacy charts (literacy in this context meaning simply the ability to read rather than reading and writing)<sup>2</sup> whereas writing instruction has been virtually nonexistent at Swedish universities. This ironic discrepancy proves that literacy can have many meanings. It also suggests that university education in Sweden until relatively recently has had an elitist character.

In Sweden, high school students choose tracks or programs, and the ones with low grades and low motivation, and students from homes without academic background, have traditionally chosen vocationally oriented programs that earlier did not sufficiently prepare or qualify students for college. Recently, however, the Swedish school system has been restructured so that most high school students now take curricula that fulfill the general requirements for college admission.

One fact that Americans have to keep in mind is that Sweden is a small country, about the size of California, with a population of approximately nine million people. With regard to the small population, it should come as no surprise that the educational system in Sweden is fairly streamlined, with national directives coming from the Department of Education. Bo Lindensjö uses the word “centralist” (334) to describe Sweden’s educational policies. Sweden’s 39 universities and colleges are all supervised

by Högskoleverket [the National Agency for Higher Education]. The government has stipulated by law that all higher education in Sweden must carry out the following three purposes or tasks: to teach, to do research, and to promote the cooperation and exchange of knowledge between universities/colleges and the surrounding society.<sup>3</sup> Of these, the last one—often referred to simply as “the third task”—is the one most open to different interpretations and controversy. It bears some noticeable similarities to what in the U.S. nowadays is known as service-learning.

In the past, when fewer Swedish students were college bound, writing was something university students were expected to have learned in high school, if not earlier. Students were supposed to pick up even the specific requirements for academic writing indirectly through imitation rather than through any explicit instruction.<sup>4</sup> Today, however, the interest in writing instruction in the academy is gaining momentum in Sweden together with an increase in research and scholarship about writing.

### Rationale for My Project

The rationale for my project can be framed by information on my personal background, changes in Swedish demographics and higher education, and broadening of American written-composition research.

#### *A. Personal Background*

I grew up in Sweden. Like so many of the students who are now being recruited in ever-increasing numbers in Sweden, I am a first-generation college student. Yet I am a product of what Lindensjö calls the “egalitarian elitism” of the old school system in Sweden before the comprehensive nine-year school requirement (essentially mandatory school enrollment until age 16). Under the old system, when I was in elementary school

around 1960, promising pupils were encouraged to continue their education at higher levels whereas the majority finished school after the seventh grade. In the sixth grade the top students applied for admission to junior high school; then in the eighth or ninth grade once again the best students would apply for admission to high school. This was the path I followed, and my parents supported me financially through high school. After high school, however, I was on my own and gradually made the class journey from social group 3 (low-income family) to social group 2 (middle class), as a college graduate and high-school teacher. Although neither of my parents had much more than six years of schooling, I know that the foundation for my literacy was laid in my home, especially by my mother, who introduced me to the world of books by reading bedtime stories to me, not really for any conscious educational purpose but because she enjoyed reading these stories herself.<sup>5</sup>

When I lived in Sweden, I considered myself politically somewhere in a middle position, neither to the left nor to the right, nor was I active in any political party or activities. Like most Swedes, however, I dutifully exercised my democratic right to vote every time I had the opportunity, usually supporting the so-called Liberal party [Folkpartiet]. Participation in elections and referenda is generally very high in Sweden. According to statistics available from Statistiska Centralbyrån [Statistics Sweden—an authorized governmental agency], voter turnout in the 1970s was over 90 percent.<sup>6</sup> In 2002 it had declined to a little over 80 percent, a figure that would still be stunning in an American election. I never reflected much over certain issues but saw it as more or less self-evident that laws which limited the use of guns, helped regulate and prevent pollution, etc. were positive measures, working for the common good.

After I emigrated from Sweden to the United States, and, more significantly, to Louisiana, I experienced a severe culture shock. Views and opinions that I had taken for granted, such as in the examples above, suddenly appeared controversial, and I felt confused and vulnerable. I discovered, for instance, that some words and concepts that I had considered positively charged were no longer necessarily so. To be “liberal,”<sup>7</sup> for instance, came dangerously close to being labeled “leftist,” a very negative word in the eyes of many Americans. Over the past twenty-five years I have had plenty of opportunities to reflect on cultural differences of this nature. One of these moments happened the day I drove behind a pickup truck that proudly displayed a bumper sticker with the words “God, Guns, Guts.” The juxtaposition of these three words sickened me, even though this incident occurred so many years after my emigration from Sweden that I by then had considered myself completely immune to new and disturbing revelations about American (or, rather, Southern) culture.

In retrospect I realize that much of my time in the United States has been taken up by conscious and unconscious efforts to synthesize my two worlds. After living in the United States for over two decades, I am no longer the same person I was when I moved from Sweden. I have become someone different, no longer a Swede but not just simply an American either, in spite of my American citizenship.<sup>8</sup> I am Swedish-American, and as a Swedish-American I feel compelled to look at my two cultures with critical eyes but also to look for the positive in each culture.

Just as I consider my personal life much richer because I am able to view the world through a dual lens, I am convinced that my two cultures could benefit from an increasing exchange of educational theories and practices. Swedish intellectuals need to see beyond their aversion to everything American, just as Americans need to overcome



their attitude of self-aggrandizement. This is where my dissertation comes in. As I was exploring the possibilities for my dissertation, I searched for a topic that would fit with my personal desire to combine my two cultures. I believe that the topic I settled on is a good fit. It deals with border crossings in a global sense, of American composition theories and practices meeting Swedish ones; yet it also deals with border crossings in a more local and personal sense. As a first-generation college student myself, I have deep compassion for the new groups of students who are now encouraged or enticed to join the academic ranks.

As I have already indicated, my idea for a major research project involving Sweden and academic literacy instruction had been brewing for several years. When I moved to the United States in 1982 and shortly thereafter returned to school, I was impressed with and excited about the first writing course of my life, a course in advanced composition in which I enrolled during the spring semester of 1984. This course hit me almost as a revelation. I remember thinking then that I would have benefited from a similar course much earlier in my life, and I began to reflect on how I—and others like me—had learned to write and on how writing could be taught. In recent years, as I have taught first-year composition courses, my reflections on writing have naturally intensified. My own initial enthusiasm for writing instruction has given way to more ambivalent feelings about first-year composition programs as I have seen many students who clearly benefit from the courses as well as numerous others who resent the composition requirement, and for whom the mandatory composition courses, instead of functioning as an aid to further studies, have become major hurdles that keep them from pursuing their academic dreams and professional goals.

*B: Changes in Swedish Demographics and Higher Education*

The second reason for my interest in the topic was the discovery, as I began to make my personal questions more public, that over the past decade Swedish universities have changed their graduation requirements and actually increased the amount of writing students have to produce, at the same time as the enrollment has grown. This new emphasis on writing is linked to demographic changes as well as to democratic efforts to expand higher education. During the nearly three decades I have lived in the United States, Swedish society has undergone far-reaching changes. In part as a result of the turmoil in what was formerly known as Yugoslavia and the many refugees from this region and also from the Middle East, Sweden is gradually developing from a homogeneous nation into a heterogeneous and multicultural one. At this time approximately 20 percent of all Swedes are first- or second-generation immigrants (*Mångfald [Diversity]* 143), and during the 1990s it became obvious that these changes in demographics would have consequences for education at all levels. The result is an increasingly multicultural academic scene which has begun to look more and more like the situation that American educators have worked with for a much longer time.

The push to extend university education to a larger student population comes officially from the government, which, through the Department of Education, in 2001 produced a bill titled “Den öppna högskolan” [“The open college”].<sup>9</sup> The explicit goal is that in the foreseeable future 50 percent of all high school graduates will continue their education at the college and university level by the age of 25. The efforts appear to have been quite successful since, according to the most recent statistics available on Högskoleverket’s [National Agency of Higher education] web site, university enrollment has jumped to 46 percent of high school graduates, up from approximately 30 percent just

a few years ago. If, however, one correlates enrollment figures with social class and educational background of parents, one will find that numbers do not tell the whole story (*Mångfald* 132; Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction*), as students from homes with an academic tradition outnumber first-generation college students. In addition, there are regional differences.

To recruit and accommodate new groups of students, who in the official rhetoric are described as an untapped national resource,<sup>10</sup> the government suggests introductory courses in order to bridge the gap between high school and university. Very confusingly to an American reader, Swedish sources refer to one type of such courses as a “college” semester (*Mångfald* 117, 120). Such courses contain both writing and rhetoric components. Another initiative the Swedish government seeks to implement at this transitional time is an increased emphasis on pedagogical development (such as workshops) for university instructors, to make them reflect more deeply on their pedagogical practices and on techniques for working with groups that are culturally diverse (*Mångfald* 89-90; *Nya villkor* [*New conditions*] 19-20). A third initiative is the establishing of writing centers, long a staple at universities in the United States but still a relative novelty on the Swedish academic scene.<sup>11</sup>

Faced with a mandate to reach new student populations of first-generation college students, both immigrants and native Swedes, university administrators are eager to give literacy instruction (oral as well as written) a much more central position within the academy than it previously held. This trend has also turned into a revival of rhetoric, a field that had come precariously close to extinction at Swedish universities. Thus, it seems obvious to me that Swedish universities could benefit a great deal from the rich scholarship in literacy and composition that American researchers have accumulated over

the past decades. Even though I realize that the different cultural contexts make it impossible to import directly and implement American theories and methods at Swedish universities, I believe that Swedes have much to learn from what has worked and, perhaps more importantly, what has not worked in the U.S.

*C: Broadening of American Composition Research*

At the same time that Swedish universities are placing a new emphasis on rhetoric and composition, in the United States an interest in how writing is taught in other parts of the world is slowly emerging. Consequently, my dissertation contributes to the small but growing body of cross-national studies only recently beginning to appear in rhetoric and composition scholarship. In “Importing Composition: Teaching and Researching Academic Writing Beyond North America,” an article published in *CCC* in 1995, Muchiri et al. point out that “composition remains largely restricted to the United States and Canada” (175). They believe that it would be fruitful to do research on “how much of the work is tied to the particular context of the US” (195), and they maintain that “[t]he very diversity rightly celebrated in the composition literature may lead a teacher to forget that it is diversity joined in a peculiar American way, within American institutions, in an American space” (195). They claim that they want to see their article as the starting point for a cultural exchange or barter and invite their readers to imagine themselves packing a box with what they find most valuable in American composition, and they challenge their readers with the following questions: “What would you pack in this box; what is essential in the composition enterprise? That’s the fun part. Now here comes the hard part: Where would you send it? And even harder: What would you expect to get in return?” (196). I began my research in a conscious effort to answer this challenge from Muchiri et al. After analyzing my findings, I have concluded that I need to export a “box” from the United

States to Sweden filled with composition scholarship and that I want to bring back a cargo of renewed enthusiasm for the teaching of academic writing in addition to pedagogical practices that consciously train students to become active participants in their own learning, both inside and outside of the classroom.

Further, in a more recent article, “English Only and U.S. Composition,” from *CCC* in 2002, Bruce Horner and John Trimbur lament the narrow scope of rhetoric and composition. Even though their main focus is on the suppressed status of languages other than English within the United States and the superior status within our nation of Standard Written English, their position has implications for research on literacy practices in other countries as well. It is worth repeating that in composition scholarship so-called basic writers have often been likened to immigrants, “those whose right to be [in a university setting] is suspect and whose presence is often seen as a threat to the culture, economy, and physical environment of the academy” (Horner and Trimbur 609). According to Horner and Trimbur, the narrow-mindedness of the U.S. language policy in general explains the narrow scope of research in rhetoric and composition, even though U.S. composition lately has become slightly more cosmopolitan:

There are cross-cultural and multicultural readers, syllabi with discussions of globalization, and a *growing interest in how writing is taught in other countries . . . .* The task, as we see it, is to develop an internationalist perspective capable of understanding the study and teaching of written English in relation to other languages and to the dynamics of globalization. At a point when many North Americans hold it self-evident that English is already or about to be the global lingua franca, we need to ask some serious questions about the underlying sense of inevitability in

this belief—and about whose English and whose interests it serves. (623-24; emphasis added)

I decided to use these questions but adapt them to the Swedish scene and ask whose Swedish was being taught to the new student populations in Sweden (i.e., how academic literacy is defined in Sweden) and whose interests it serves. As a result I have found that theories and discussions about multiculturalism and composition—in relation to such important concepts as race, class, and gender—need to be imported into a country like Sweden, which right now has big decisions to make about the nature of its literacy instruction and the exclusion or inclusion of its nonnative speakers and its basic writers.

Further, I was strengthened in my resolve to pursue this project by the book *Writing and Learning in Cross-National Perspective: Transitions from Secondary to Higher Education*, edited by David Foster and David R. Russell. As the title indicates, this book explores how well prepared high-school students are for writing at the college level in a number of countries. I have found the chapter dealing with Germany especially valuable, because the German educational system is similar to the system in Sweden. In their introduction Foster and Russell caution that comparisons between different countries are hard to make because of the diverse cultural contexts that surround literacy instruction; yet they see a value in the exploration of cross-national differences for a better understanding of local practices (4). Although my present project does not focus specifically on Swedish student writers' transition from high school to college,<sup>12</sup> there were, I believe, reasons to look into and discuss what went on at a Swedish university at this crucial time when new institutions were beginning to operate and new literacy practices were being established. Foster and Russell conclude that “[t]here is a clear need

for more context-sensitive study of the development of students' agency as writers" (335) within their various educational, social, and political contexts.

Since *Writing and Learning in Cross-National Perspective* came out, Foster has followed up with a larger, systematic comparative study of student writers at one German and one American university, leading to the book *Writing with Authority: Students' Roles as Writers in Cross-National Perspective*. Like Foster, I believe that it is meaningful to compare and contrast the maneuvering spaces that student writers have within their different cultural contexts.

Finally, I support A. Suresh Canagarajah's belief that including perspectives from what he calls the "periphery" (Third World perspectives) in American composition research (in Canagarajah's terminology, the "center") can be mutually beneficial:

I suggest ways in which both the center and the periphery academic communities can productively refashion the nature of their relationship by accommodating multiple modes of literacy and textual practices. Such a relationship, based on respect for the local knowledge of each community, would serve to democratize academic communication and knowledge production. (7)

Even though Sweden is in no way a "periphery" in Canagarajah's sense (his cultural background is Sri Lankan), his claim—that opening up composition studies to include a variety of international perspectives can add richness to American composition research as well as to research in other countries—still applies to my project. Also, Canagarajah's point about the need for a democratization of academic literacy is one that I fully share, even though I suggest that the whole concept of *democratization* must be further explored so it is not reduced to a nice sounding but empty buzz word.

The rationale for my endeavor as I have outlined it above agrees with Patricia Sullivan and James E. Porter's assertion that several factors come into play in a research situation before research even begins: "[T]he revelation of what to study is always already embedded in many discourses, communities, and events" (68). Although I initially was propelled by strong personal factors, my personal interest also interacted with the interests of the larger research community at a particular place and time.

### Intersections between American and Scandinavian Writing Research

Writing primarily for an American audience, I have felt the need to provide my readers with enough background about Scandinavia so they will be able to understand at least the most important differences between the academic contexts in Sweden and the United States, as well as some of the links between the two cultures. This overview of contexts—which I think of as concentric circles, wider at first and then more narrowly drawn—is general in nature. After discussing some of the intersections between American and European writing research, I will outline the status of what has been done and what is currently being done in terms of writing research in Sweden; finally, I want to point to what I see as needs for the future.

As I was exploring what kind of influences Swedish writing researchers may have received from the U.S., I soon discovered that Swedish writing professionals had sought guidance from Norway. As the larger of these two closely related Nordic countries, Sweden is usually considered the big brother; yet in the area of writing research Norway has taken a strong lead. Consequently, I had to look to Norway to establish a wider context for what is presently going on in the area of writing research in Sweden. Of particular interest in this respect is the book *Skriveteorier og skolepraksis* [*Writing*



*theories and school praxis*], published in 1997.<sup>13</sup> This work contains contributions by some of the most influential Norwegian writing researchers today, among them Olga Dysthe, Lars Sigfred Evensen, Torlaug Løkensgard Hoel, and Jon Smidt. It also includes an article by Martin Nystrand, translated into Norwegian. Nystrand, incidentally, is something of a connecting link between Scandinavia and the United States, since he has worked closely with some of these Norwegian writing researchers for years. The journal *Written Communication*, edited by Nystrand through the fall of 2002 and widely read by writing professionals in Scandinavia, has published articles by Dysthe and other Norwegians as well as by Swedish professor Britt-Louise Gunnarsson, who was one of my first contacts in Sweden. In fact, the 2002 July and October issues of *Written Communication* are devoted almost entirely to Norwegian writing research. My conclusion is, then, that although there are direct links between Sweden and the U.S., there are also numerous indirect links; some of them have come via Norway, others via Denmark, Germany, and Great Britain.

Certainly, all the American influences on Scandinavian literacy instruction are impossible to trace. Nonetheless, Hoel's article, "Innoverretta og utoverretta skriveforskning og skriveteorier" ["Inner-directed and other-directed writing research and writing theories"], which is the opening article in the collection *Skriveteorier og skolepraksis* mentioned above, evidences how closely Scandinavian writing researchers and practitioners have followed the debates and developments within the American field of rhetoric and composition. Hoel informs her readers about the shift in focus in the United States from product to process, from the expressivist emphasis to the cognitive and later to the socio-cultural, and she shows how Norwegians have adapted these American influences to fit their needs. She claims that in Norway there was never such a

revolutionary shift as the one the U.S. experienced when the process movement was born but that the text (product) has kept a central position in Norway, even in a process-oriented pedagogy. She finds the Norwegian position different from the “Swedish version of process oriented writing pedagogy [which] generally speaking has been devoted to writing as a tool for thinking and learning” (9; trans. mine). A similar overview article is “Positioning Early Research on Writing in Norway,” by Sigmund Ongstad, published in the October 2002 issue of *Written Communication*. Yet a third source, exciting because of its sense of immediacy and urgency, is the keynote address Olga Dysthe presented at the First Conference of EATAW (The European Association for the Teaching of Academic Writing) and EWCA (The European Writing Centre Association), held in the Netherlands in June of 2001. In her address, titled “The Mutual Challenge of Writing Research and the Teaching of Writing,” Dysthe summarized the history of writing research and writing instruction as well as outlined the possibilities for creating what she envisioned as “a new breed of European writing teachers” (11), who would teach writing *in addition to* their academic disciplinary specialties and who would need training in how to teach writing by those already established in the field of composition. One advantage of this new breed of writing teachers, said Dysthe, would be that they could keep their disciplinary status and not run the risk of being degraded to a level of lower importance, as has happened in the United States. This point is important since it clearly shows that Europeans do not want to imitate the U.S. but protect their local contexts and make their own contributions to the field. Similar points of view have appeared recently on the lively EATAW listserv, for example, in a discussion about the importance of preserving the intimate format and the European focus of the biennial EATAW conference, which

normally attracts about 300 participants, a stark contrast to CCCC with its yearly attendance of approximately 3000.

Other common denominators exist between the United States and Scandinavia. Ongstad as well as Dysthe, for instance, are heavily influenced by Mikhail Bakhtin's theories, as evidenced in Dysthe's article "The Multi-Voiced Classroom."<sup>14</sup> These theories have then been picked up and spread in Sweden and are closely related to the theories promoted by Bakhtin-inspired books and articles circulating in the U.S.

### Norwegian Writing Research

When I realized the importance of Norwegian writing research, I wanted to find out why Norway had taken the lead over Sweden in this particular area. Sweden is, after all, the more-populous country. Although there are close historical and cultural ties between Norway and Sweden, there are also important differences between the educational systems. For example, Norwegian high-school students appear to write much more than Swedish high-school students do. According to Olga Dysthe, Norwegian high-school students write 8 to 10 five-page essays every semester and enter higher education having more experience of "extended writing" than does the average American high school student ("The Role of Writing" 71). Also, Norwegian high schools have for much longer than the high schools in Sweden held on to a system in which long and demanding written exams precede graduation. Nonetheless, in Dysthe's eyes, the writing that Norwegian high school students do is still different from the writing that the next educational level requires and does not eliminate the need for academic writing instruction.

In a way similar to what has happened in Sweden, the Norwegian government has mandated forceful recruiting of students with nonacademic backgrounds, even though Norway does not have the same immigration pattern as Sweden. In other words, the new students in Norway are mostly native first-generation college students whereas in Sweden the students with immigrant background make up the largest group. In addition, during the past few decades writing has received increasing emphasis in Norway, just as it has in Sweden. Sigmund Ongstad gives an account of the development in his article “Positioning Early Research on Writing in Norway.” Ongstad believes that the history of Norwegian writing research has gone hand in hand with didactics. The concept of didactics (in German “Didaktik,” in Norwegian “didaktikk,” in Swedish “didaktik”), which has been very influential in the German educational tradition, is foreign to the Anglo-Saxon world and not easily translated. It is related to curriculum theory but is at the same time both more philosophical and more local in scope. Rudolf Künzli offers the following simplified summary of what “Didaktik” is interested in:

- What is to be taught and learned? (i.e., the content aspect).
- How is “content” to be taught and learned? (i.e., the mediation or method aspect).
- Why is “content” to be taught and learned? (i.e., the goal aspect). (43)

Ian Westbury explains the fundamental difference in thinking about curriculum between the U.S. and Germany (and, I would add, Northern Europe): In Germany the state curriculum leaves a great deal of room for extensive interpretation, not only by individual schools but also by individual teachers. The teachers are, “in their turn, [seen] as normatively directed by the elusive concept of *Bildung*, or formation, and by the ways of thinking found in the ‘art’ of Didaktik.” In the U.S., on the other hand, curricula have

had a much more controlling function. They vary considerably from state to state and from one school system to another; nonetheless, “whatever the character of the curriculum that is developed for a school or school system, teachers as employees of the school system have been, and are, expected to ‘implement’ their system’s curricula” (Westbury 17). When Ongstad ties research and teaching of writing to “didaktikk,” he seems to mean that the recent emphasis on writing in the academy coincides with the emergence of more reflective teaching practices. Furthermore, the process movement and the writing-to-learn movement, both imported from the United States, have had a tremendous impact in Scandinavia and provide the theory as well as the methods for writing instruction at both Norwegian and Swedish universities.

#### Academic Writing in Sweden

Ann Blücker’s<sup>15</sup> report *Skrivarstugor och loggböcker* [*Writing centers and writing journals*] was published in the spring of 2002, right at the time when I was in Sweden to conduct my field research. It saved me much time since it provided me with a comprehensive overview of the present status of the teaching of academic writing in Sweden. In this report Blücker maps out the solutions that each Swedish university and college has implemented in order to improve the writing abilities of its students. Also, although a report of a survey about the writing instruction and the problems students have encountered in the various departments at Stockholm University, Hans Strand’s *Akademiskt skrivande vid Stockholms universitet* [*Academic writing at Stockholm University*] gives the reader a good idea of the needs at Swedish universities in general. I have used these sources first to familiarize myself and, by extension, my readers with the

political, cultural, and institutional contexts within which Swedish writing theories and practices by necessity operate.

As the first Swedish dissertation dealing with writing in higher education, Mona Blåsjö's dissertation titled *Studenters skrivande i två kunskapsbyggande miljöer* [*Students' writing in two knowledge constructing settings*] from 2004 is breaking new ground for writing research in Sweden. Blåsjö compares and contrasts the writing that both professionals and students do in the Departments of Economics and History at Stockholm University and how students are acculturated into their respective fields. Inspired by Dysthe, Blåsjö uses Bakhtin as her interpretive lens. Hers is a very ambitious undertaking; yet this dissertation does not pay attention to "the extracurriculum" (Gere) of composition. Whereas Blåsjö uses a socio-cultural approach in her discussion of the differences between the economics- and the history-discourse communities, she never discusses individual students' backgrounds and the role that factors such as race, ethnicity, class, and gender may play for their academic success. My dissertation points to the need in Sweden for future studies that take the extended cultural context into account although I have also discovered that some of the type of research I am looking for has at least begun. In relation to diversity Gunilla Jansson has found that immigrant students' writing can be positively influenced when they write in collaboration with native Swedish students. Also, a research project tied to the writing center (Textverkstad) at Växjö university has paid some attention to students' cultural and social backgrounds, something I thought was missing—or was deliberately not the focus at all—in Blåsjö's study, and this project also shows awareness of the power inequities at work in the educational setting.

In the article “Studenter i en akademisk språkvärld” [“Students in a world of academic language”], a part of the Växjö project, Jan Einarsson raises two questions: Do students have to change their language to be successful in higher education? Or does increased diversity in the student population mean greater variety in academic language conventions? Einarsson’s answer to the first question is “yes”; however, his answer to the second question is also a paradoxical “yes.” New student groups should be allowed to influence and make a contribution to academic discourse (79).

By now there have been several Swedish studies of students’ acculturation or initiation into the academy; so the Växjö study introduces an approach that Sweden needs to see more of, especially in light of the changes that Swedish higher education is undergoing at this particular time.

### Social Literacy Theories

In addition to all of these Scandinavian sources that provide background information, I make use of British and American literacy research to position my analysis. Of all the theories that exist on literacy, I want to place my project firmly within the framework of the ones that go under the label *socio-cultural* or *social*, not only because I personally believe that they best explain literacy practices, but because I, like Dysthe (“Mutual”), have found that these theories need to be more emphasized and better understood in Scandinavia. I need to acknowledge the important literacy studies that have been conducted in Great Britain by Brian Street, David Barton, Mary Hamilton, Theresa Lillis, and others. Some of these studies have been highly influential on literacy research in the United States and are also known in Scandinavia. The book *Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context*, from which I have picked up definitions of some of my

key terms, is actually a result of a British and North American collaborative effort, with James Paul Gee from the University of Wisconsin at Madison and Renata de Pourbaix from Carleton University in Canada joining the British contributors, most of whom are affiliated with Lancaster University. To Barton and Hamilton's understanding of literacy as social practice "mediated by written texts," I want to add a point about the place of formal speaking as a literacy practice since Swedish universities nowadays always link oral and written communication, and it has struck me that references to public speaking are scarce in American composition research because of the disciplinary split between speaking and writing.

### Key Terminology

Before proceeding further, I want to define certain terms as used in this study: *literacy*, *literacy practices* and *literacy events*, *democracy*, *hegemony*, and *ideology*.

#### A. *Literacy*

As I have already pointed out, Swedish lacks a word that really corresponds to or fully covers the English concept *literacy*. According to Mona Blåsjö, *literacy* is sometimes translated as "skriftkultur" [culture of written language]; sometimes as "skriftbruk" [use of written language]; and sometimes as "skriftkompetens" [writing competency]. She explains that the word *literacy* contains "a cognitive level (competency), a social-practical level (use) and a socio-historical level (culture)" whereas Swedish needs three different terms to cover all these levels (12, note 4). (See also note 1 to this chapter.) The meanings that are most important to me are the ones that concern *use* and *culture*, as I will further develop in the subsection on "Cultural Metaphors." Should the recently launched word "litteracitet" (Wedin) become widely accepted in Sweden, it



would be a substantial gain since “litteracitet” has a similar flexibility as the English word *literacy*. It could even form the plural “litteraciteter,” and it would work equally well in other European languages, such as Norwegian, Danish, and German.

Of all the definitions that exist of *literacy*, the one suggested by Robert Yagelski may be one of the most meaningful: “*literacy is a local act of self-construction within discourse*” (xiv; italics original). This definition is not self-explanatory, but to Yagelski the students who are able to carve out a space for themselves both within and outside of the academy, the ones who are able to participate in an exchange of ideas on their own terms, are the ones who are the most literate.

To believe blindly in the benefits of *literacy*, for individuals as well as for society, amounts to what Harvey J. Graff has called the “literacy myth” (passim). According to Graff, literacy in itself is no guaranty for democracy, for example. Unless it is coupled with “critical and independent thinking” (Graff 70), it can be used to control people instead of to liberate them.

### *B. Literacy Practices and Literacy Events*

In the opening chapter of *Situated Literacies* called “Literacy Practices,” Barton and Hamilton explain that in “the simplest sense literacy practices are what people do with literacy” (7). They begin with the assertion that “*literacy is a social practice*” (7; italics in the original), and they further develop this claim in six “propositions” of a “social theory of literacy”:

- Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; these can be inferred from events which are mediated by written texts.
- There are different literacies associated with different domains of life.

- Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies are more dominant, visible and influential than others.
- Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices.
- Literacy is historically situated.
- Literacy practices change and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making. (8)

Because I subscribe to these “propositions” about literacy, I take up a great deal of time and space with discussions about the historical and cultural context that surround literacy instruction at Södertörns högskola, my target institution, in light of the fact that Södertörn has made special efforts to reach out to new groups of students. Barton and Hamilton's third proposition ("Literacy practices are patterned . . .") is the one most applicable to my project, which focuses on academic literacy.

The term literacy *practices* is somewhat abstract in nature and can only “be inferred” from observable literacy *events*, defined by Barton and Hamilton as “activities which involve written texts” (8; 9). Even though Barton and Hamilton do not mention formal speaking, I would personally label a speech class as an observable literacy event. A student who gives a prepared speech has in all likelihood first written down most of her speech (it would then function as a written text) before she memorizes and delivers it, with or without written notes.

### C. *Democracy*

Another key word and focal point in my study is *democracy*, a positively charged word with a wide range of meanings. This concept actually serves as my main

interpretative lens, the measuring rod for what I see as promising or sound pedagogical practice. Yet this word is far from unproblematic. *The American Heritage Dictionary* provides the following definitions of “democracy”:

1. Government by the people, exercised either directly or through elected representatives.
2. A society with such a government.
3. The common people, considered as the primary source of political power.
4. Majority rule.
5. The principles of social equality and individual rights.

The real pressure point here is the fifth definition, with its attempt to combine “principles of social equality” with “individual rights.” Already Alexis de Tocqueville sensed this contradiction at work in the young nation during his visit to the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century, and Jack Solomon has more recently, in his book *The Signs of Our Time*, elaborated perceptively on how *democracy* has a paradoxical pull in various directions and how it can feed both group solidarity and individualism. Similarly, Carole Edelsky sums up this paradox in the following three points:

- Free pursuit of one’s own interests versus participating as equals
- Individualism versus the common good
- Liberty versus order (12)

As Timothy A. Tilton points out, democracy came comparatively late to Sweden (562). Even after the old representative system, which had been based on the four estates (nobles, priests, burghers, and peasants), was terminated in 1866, the right to vote was still limited to about 20 percent of the male population (Tilton 562). Gradually, however, Sweden was transformed into a more democratic society, and this transformation happened without revolutionary means. Although the present-day constitutions differ considerably between Sweden and the U.S. (since Sweden is a constitutional monarchy

and the United States is a republic), both nations are democracies. The Swedish king has long been a figurehead, a symbol, useful for international business relations but with even less political clout than the British monarch has today. Whereas Sweden has moved from a class society to a society that nowadays has some class distinctions but basically consists of a huge middle class, the United States appears to be moving in the opposite direction, with an increasingly larger gap between the rich and the poor.<sup>16</sup> In many respects Sweden and America have followed diverging paths in their understanding of democracy. Having lived under Social Democratic rule for most of the twentieth century, Swedes strongly come out in favor of “equality” and solidarity. In contrast, Americans place much more emphasis than Swedes do on “individual rights.” Nancy Mack and Jim Zebroski express the American democratic dilemma well in their article “Transforming Composition: A Question of Privilege”:

Somewhere along the line, equality and meritocracy get all mixed up. In America we like to believe in a limited form of equality—equality at the starting line but not at the finish line. We believe that all people have an equal chance at making something out of themselves. We justify the inequality at the end as just a measure of the fact that some people work harder than others. (156)

It has become more and more obvious that such blind belief in equal opportunity completely ignores the social contexts in which individuals find themselves from birth.

When I use the term *democratic* as a measuring rod for what I see as positive pedagogical practice, I tend to use it either in the sense of “unconscious of class distinctions” (Williams 97) or in the sense of *participatory*, with a high degree of student engagement and participation.

#### *D. Hegemony*

Even though I never explicitly use the word *hegemony* (except for in a quotation), the concept is present whenever I discuss power structures. Victor Villanueva offers the following definition of hegemony: “[H]egemony represents the ways in which ruling classes affect a society’s moral and intellectual leadership so as to have the rulers’ interests appear the interests of other social groups” (625). It means the degree to which the tastes, the language use, the moral and political principles, etc. of the dominant group permeate and set the standard for a whole society. It is a rule not by force but by invisible ascendancy. Hegemony is secured through institutions, such as schools, churches, and the media. Nonetheless, the same institutions that support hegemony can also become the sites of resistance, as Villanueva illustrates with the examples of E. D. Hirsch and Paulo Freire. Whereas Hirsch’s “cultural literacy” “reproduces the hegemony,” Freire’s “critical literacy” served counterhegemonic purposes (Villanueva 625-26). I discuss a similar possibility for hegemony and counterhegemony, although I use the words *assimilation* and *resistance*, in my analysis of writing centers in Chapter IV.

#### *E. Ideology*

Closely tied to the concept of hegemony, *ideology* is another term linked to the political left. Drawing upon Karl Marx, Greg Myers defines the meaning he attributes to *ideology* as “the whole system of thought and belief that goes with a social and economic system, the thoughts that structure our thinking so deeply that we take them for granted, as the nature of the real world” (417). In a school setting ideology means the hidden curriculum. If hegemony explains how social dominance occurs, *ideology* stands for what is being disseminated through hegemonic practices in any given culture. In the article “Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class,” James Berlin concludes, “It should now be

apparent that a way of teaching is never innocent. Every pedagogy is imbricated in ideology, in a set of tacit assumptions about what is real, what is good, what is possible, and how power ought to be distributed” (697). Considering that Berlin leans heavily on a Swedish source, Göran Therborn’s *The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology*, for his own definition of ideology (680-81), it surprised me that my Swedish contacts were so mum on the subject of ideology and indeed acted as if the teaching tools of writing and rhetoric were neutral or “innocent.”

### Cultural Metaphors

According to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, metaphors “play a central role in the construction of social and political reality” (159), and one of the most prominent metaphors in both Swedish and U.S. culture is linked to the nation’s definition and understanding of democracy. Possibly, the United States has been known as the place to live the “American dream” more than as anything else. Inseparable as it is from this continent’s past with people from all over the world coming to the U.S. to fulfill their version of the American dream, this metaphor has a built-in tension, claims Jack Solomon, just like the word *democracy* itself. One meaning of the dream is that everyone is equal since no one is born to a certain status. Simultaneously, however, it contains the idea of a strong individualism, the possibility for everyone to fulfill her or his specific dream and rise from rags to riches.

In Sweden, on the other hand, the thinking nowadays revolves more around collectivity. A very familiar metaphor for Sweden, made famous by Social Democratic leader Per Albin Hansson in a debate in 1928, is that of Sweden as *folkhemmet* [the “people’s home”].<sup>17</sup> Hansson wanted to emphasize the characteristic of belonging.

Everyone had a place and a function in this home; no one was supposed to fall between the cracks. After Hansson became Prime Minister, he saw himself as “Father of the nation.” The metaphor of Sweden as the people’s home has certainly reinforced that national culture's collectivist mentality in contrast to the individualistic one more characteristic of Americans. Yet, while individuals are protected from competition in Sweden, equality can be taken to such an extreme that individual achievement is sometimes resented. It is not good to call attention to oneself by rising above the crowd. People jealously watch one another, to make sure that no one gets more than her or his allotted share, so there may be little room for excellence in the people’s home.

The “American dream” and the “people’s home” are both myths, of course. The American dream has turned out to be elusive for many people, and the Swedish people’s home has plenty of flaws. Yet as metaphors and myths they continue to have a powerful impact on how Americans and Swedes view their respective society and their place within it, and, therefore, these metaphors are important as historical and cultural contexts even for the activities in a composition classroom.

#### Educational Policies

These two metaphors—the “American dream” and the “people's home”—are important components of the contexts that surround education in the two cultures, in that the whole American educational system (or, more accurately, of course, systems) is much more stratified than the Swedish system. During the latter half of the twentieth century, the Swedish school system underwent several major and minor reforms. A major change was the shift to a system that was consciously put in place by the Social Democrats to promote greater equality.

Under the old system, children were sorted early on and gradually weeded out. Lindensjö uses the phrase “elitist egalitarianism” to explain the Swedish educational politics before the introduction of the nine-year comprehensive school. The democratic efforts were then focused on removing “the economic and social barriers hindering studious children of working and agrarian classes from pursuing higher education” (Lindensjö 314). Under this system most children would quit school after the sixth or later the seventh grade whereas the more promising pupils were encouraged to continue their schooling for at least nine years. The top students in this group were then spurred on to pursue the next step: high school. School aptitude was seen as an inborn trait, and no one really considered the importance of social and economic factors for educational success or educational choices. Yet without scholarships or grants, only a few of the ones who qualified were able to take advantage of educational opportunities. Even though there may not have been a charge for tuition, the ones who continued their schooling beyond the compulsory school were expected to buy their own books, and the parents, of course, had to foot the bills and support their children as long as they stayed in school.<sup>18</sup>

From the 1940s on, the debate about the most democratic school system was intense in Sweden. According to Lindensjö, the Social Democrats defined a democratic school as one “that satisfied the demands of a democratic society” and not necessarily as one in which decisions were made through democratic methods (325). This distinction is important because it shows how foundational the interpretation of democracy is to educational philosophy and to the direction that educational reform will take. Eventually, the idea that children of different abilities should go to school together for nine years won out as the most democratic option, especially because it was seen as the most beneficial to the ones who were less able (Lindensjö 326). In spite of changes in the 1990s that have



led to a previously unheard-of growth of private schools by the introduction of a voucher system, 90 percent of all Swedish children still attend public schools (“Free to Choose and Learn” 74), where instructional materials and even school lunches are free for everyone, regardless of income (through high school). In line with the interpretation of the kind of school best suited to the needs of a democratic society, Swedish schools have never introduced any honors programs or special programs for gifted and talented children although special services are in place for pupils who struggle because of either learning disabilities or social factors.

One of the objectives for Swedish schools of today is to fulfill the “democratic assignment,” according to a fact sheet titled “Democracy and Fundamental Values” issued by Skolverket [The National Agency for Schools].<sup>19</sup> This “democratic assignment” is threefold and worth quoting at length:

The first part of their [schools’ and preschools’] task is to teach the students democracy and fundamental values, which is to a large degree done in the conventional teaching of the school. The second part is that schools and preschools shall themselves operate democratically so that both staff and students are empowered and participate in schoolwork and the learning/teaching environment. This influence can be both formal, by way of different councils etc., or informal, through opportunities to discuss and influence work methods and the content of lessons. The third part of the democratic assignment is the responsibility of schools and preschools to foster democratic members of society able to live and function in a democratic society. This involves working with the fundamental value system, i. e.. democratic values such as solidarity.

equality between people and equal opportunity. In general, it can be said that these parts that make up the democratic whole contribute to the development of democratically aware children, youths and adults.

(Falkeback)

If this “assignment” has been adopted by almost all preschools and schools in Sweden, the students who eventually reach the university level have had many years of exposure to it. Furthermore, the “democratic assignment” is not just a matter of theoretical knowledge, as the fact sheet makes clear in a quote from a national Swedish curriculum guide:

It is not in itself sufficient that education imparts knowledge of fundamental democratic values. It must also be carried out using democratic working methods and prepare pupils for active participation in civic life. By participating in the planning and evaluation of their daily education, and exercising choices over courses, subjects, themes and activities, pupils will develop their ability to exercise influence and take responsibility. (Falkeback)

It bears repeating that this curriculum guide is intended for young children. I believe that others with me would find that the goals of this curriculum guide and the language it employs show a great resemblance to what American educators have come to expect from critical pedagogy and critical literacy scholarship in the United States. So, for example, write Aronowitz and Giroux: “Democracy is not, for us at least, a set of formal rules of participation, but the lived experience of empowerment for the vast majority” (ix). Also, all the calls for activism and social change, as by Ellen Cushman, to use a well-known example, employ a similar language.

Unlike the U.S., Sweden does not really have first-, second-, or third-rate schools since differences between neighborhoods and school districts are far less pronounced in Sweden than in America; yet it would be misleading to say that no differences at all exist. Whereas some school districts have a large number of highly educated professionals, others can definitely be labeled as more working class. Also, there are communities with a high percentage of immigrants and more than their share of social problems. Using the Stockholm region as an example, one will find that the problem schools are located not in the center of the city but in peripheral communities, such as Flemingsberg (where Södertörns högskola is located), Alby, and Rinkeby, all with high concentrations of first- and second-generation immigrants. The latter community has become almost proverbial in the expression “Rinkeby Swedish,” which refers to a type of slang/youth language that shows the influence of the many foreign languages spoken in the area. According to Ulla-Britt Kotsinas, professor in the Department of Scandinavian Languages at Stockholm University, Rinkeby Swedish and similar dialects in other regions have the potential to become a type of Swedish equivalent to Ebonics, if nothing is done to stop the de facto segregation between immigrants and native Swedes (5). Consequently, the concepts of inner-city and suburbs have taken on remarkably different meanings in Swedish and American contexts. Whereas Americans customarily think of suburban schools as less diverse and more white and middle class than inner-city schools, in Sweden the situation is almost the reverse, primarily in and around the largest cities.<sup>20</sup>

Nonetheless, just as the schools in Sweden, generally speaking, are comparable, so are the universities. In some people’s eyes, Uppsala and Lund may hold a certain prestige as the oldest universities and as established research universities, but they are not perceived, within Sweden, as belonging to an elite group like the Ivy League institutions.

Since the entrance requirements are similar all over the country, it is not more difficult to gain entrance to one of these universities than to any other university or college. The web site for Högskoleverket [National Agency for Higher Education] shows that the basic qualification for higher education is a completed high school education with a passing grade in 90 percent of the subjects taken. For some college/university programs this minimum requirement may be enough, but in most cases certain courses are listed as prerequisites. In the case of very attractive programs, a student's grade-point average does become important. To gain points and bolster their chances for acceptance, prospective students may take the college entrance examination, which is not mandatory in Sweden; or they can work for a few years between high school and college and get extra credit points for work experience. In addition, in Sweden the possibilities for scholarships (academic or athletic) are still very limited; so students do not have the same incentives as many American students do to go straight from high school to college. On the other hand, there are no tuition costs, and students usually get by on small grants and not-so-small loans.

Another difference between the American and Swedish educational systems is the use of grades. The underlying assumption is at least in part the difference in value the two cultures place on the group versus the individual. Throughout the American educational systems, from lower elementary school and all the way to the university level, there is an enormous emphasis on tests and grades and on individual excellence. Within the whole Swedish school system, on the other hand, grades are downplayed, especially during the early years. No report cards are sent home until students reach the eighth grade, and from then on only at the end of the fall and spring semesters. The grading scale that is used today in junior high and high school has four categories: no grade (which translates to

fail); pass; pass with distinction; and pass with excellence. At the university level, students in many lower-level courses, at least until recently, have been graded simply on a pass/fail basis. This was the case with all the classes I observed at Södertörn although for other courses and advanced essays/theses students receive the grades *fail*, *pass*, and *pass with distinction*. It seems logical to assume, then, that the more competitive American society has created a more competitive educational system whereas the more inclusive, noncompetitive Swedish society has resulted in a much less competitive educational environment.

#### Research Questions

The overall guiding question for my project was what it means to have a democratic vision for education in general and for writing instruction in particular. The attempt to open up higher education to new student groups has been a controversial but laudable democratic effort both in the United States and in Sweden. Eventually, however, the same questions that theorists and practitioners in the United States have discussed for decades also must be asked in Sweden: "What does it mean to empower students?" (Hourigan). American educators generally no longer see assimilation into mainstream or dominant culture as the only alternative, but how does one strike a balance between the demands (in some contexts) for Standard Written English and students' right to their own language? The solution that American scholarship is leaning toward at present is to find some middle ground: a space between the paralysis of cultural determinism and the liberal optimistic view of free agency (Yagelski; Elbow; Horner and Lu). Had Swedes, who were now beginning to grapple with multiculturalism, asked themselves these questions? I saw the need for packing my "box"—to pick up again the metaphor from

Muchiri, et al.—with some of these difficult questions and sending it over to Sweden, after I had adapted the questions to fit specific Swedish contexts: Could Swedish universities avoid making some of the mistakes we in the United States have made? What major challenges did an institution like Södertörns högskola face to resist reproducing the status quo? Where did clashes between the democratic aims of Södertörns högskola and the actual teaching practices occur? How much space was there for students to maneuver and to make their own choices? Was academic literacy in Sweden possibly an even more monolithic concept than it is considered to be in the United States?

Thus, I sought to foreground the issues of power and politics that Dysthe is aware of but mentions only briefly, as if in passing:

Issues of participation and access, power and politics are certainly not irrelevant for us as writing teachers, as they are closely bound up with the genres we teach, how we teach them and what questions we choose to discuss with students . . . . The academic genres are traditionally premised on elite communities communicating with themselves and selecting a small intake of new initiates every year. What happens to these genres in a world of mass access and participation, for instance? What happens to the non-traditional students learning to write academically? (“Mutual” 7)

Dysthe has here, possibly inadvertently, fallen back upon one of the rhetorical features so characteristic of the Icelandic saga, that of litotes, in her phrasing “are certainly not irrelevant.” I want to make the more forceful claim that the issues of power and politics deserve to receive *much more* attention in Scandinavian writing research.

What has specifically interested me is the Swedish version of academic literacy—how Swedes define literacy and whether their definitions may have changed or be in the process of changing. So, one important question I explored was *how "literacy" is defined* within a Swedish academic context. I also attempted to find out *who makes the decisions* or who sets up the criteria according to which academic literacy is measured and what those criteria are. I have sensed in Sweden a similar tension as the one Tom Fox explores in *Defending Access* between the desire for a more open university and the fear that the quality of a university education will somehow be compromised: “Simultaneously with the transformation from elite to mass education the quality of higher education has been discussed and the discussion has to a high degree concerned . . . *the amount of* heterogeneity that can be combined especially with academic demands of quality” (*Mångfald* 91-92; translation mine; emphasis in the original).

I have looked into who has access to higher education in Sweden and what the entrance requirements are. Also, it seemed crucial to me to explore what the end-product looks like—in other words, who is considered “literate” enough to graduate. In this context I felt the need to pay close attention to what at Swedish universities and colleges is called the “C-essay.” The writing requirements in the academy have become more stringent over the past few years; so today students who major in humanistic and social fields will have to produce a “C-essay” in the major field to fulfill the requirements for a bachelor’s degree. A C-essay is a substantial research paper worth 10 points (according to the Swedish university system, 1 point equals 1 week of full-time studies); the C means the third semester of full-time studies in a certain field or discipline. I have read some of these “C-essays” and discuss two of them in detail in Chapter V. According to Hans Strand’s report *Akademiskt skrivande vid Stockholms universitet* [*Academic writing at*

*Stockholm University*], many of the faculty members who participated in the survey that this report analyzes pointed to problems and tensions regarding the C-essays. Not surprisingly, these essays cause many students headaches and slow down their academic progress (and in many cases cause students to drop out), at the same time as each university program is allocated governmental funding in proportion to the number of students who successfully finish their course work within the stipulated time frame. Consequently, it is in the departments' interest to assist students in writing these essays at the same time as several voices express concern that academic integrity and standards will be compromised if students are rushed through the essay requirement or given so much help that the essay no longer qualifies as independent work.

As an organizing method I have kept asking the same questions over and over: How do I see democracy at work? Are there any limitations to democracy? Whose voices are heard? Whose voices are not heard? I have used these and similar questions to discuss Swedish university culture in general; Södertörns högskola specifically; individual classrooms; the writing center; and sample essays. (Appendix A displays the approval, by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Southern Mississippi, of my investigation with respect to its involvement of human subjects.)

Also, I have turned the questions around and asked whether a Swedish college like Södertörn might actually in some respects be more "democratic" than a university in the United States. Was there anything in the Swedish cultural, social, political, and educational context which furthered democratic aims and from which American educators might actually learn?

I found, for example, that the relationships between faculty members of different ranks (professors, instructors, part-time instructors) are less hierarchical in Sweden than



they are at American universities and that even a part-time instructor can be a valued member of a teaching team. Also, the absence of a first-year composition program and the different disciplinary divisions in Sweden create a completely distinct institutional situation for writing teachers since they do not feel marginalized like their counterparts in the U.S. Further, I have found the relationships between instructors and students to be on a more equal footing in Sweden than what is usually the case in the United States.

Everyone addresses others by first name, for example; this is how undergraduate students address their professors, regardless of rank.<sup>21</sup> Also the fact that all the Swedish university classes I observed, including the introductory course, met with a particular instructor only once a week for a three-hour session made the difference between a high-school setting and a university setting quite pronounced in a way that, to me, clearly raised the status of all students. Even the ones who were taking a bridging course were respected as responsible adults. It also helped, of course, that the students who took the introductory course received their 20 semester points of college credit for this course whereas so many American bridging courses (known by names such as basic, developmental, transitional) simply do not count toward a degree. Such difference in power structures can serve to challenge the models that are most prevalent in the United States today.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> “Among European languages, only English has the word *literacy*” (Kress 116). Swedish uses the adjectives “litterat” och “illiterat” for “literate” and “illiterate,” respectively. “Analfabetism” is the Swedish word for “illiteracy”; “analfabet” means “an illiterate person.” Nonetheless, until very recently no useful word has existed for “literacy.” Attempts to create a positive word “alfabetism” or “alfabetisering” from the negative term “analfabetism” have not been successful because they seem childish. It was not until I started hunting for a Swedish word that I realized how extremely adaptable the English word *literacy* is. Nonetheless, just recently a new Swedish word, “litteracitet,” seems to have emerged (Wedin). If this word gains popularity, Swedish would indeed have a word for *literacy*, with the same richness and flexibility as the English word.

<sup>2</sup> “Sweden was the first country in the West to achieve near universal literacy, having done so before the end of the eighteenth century. It was also unprecedented in that women had equality to men in literacy. . . .” (Gee 32). The initiative to this literacy campaign came from the Lutheran church authorities, who wanted people to be able to read the Bible “with their own eyes” (Gee 32). Harvey Graff also brings up the example of Sweden (34-35 and *passim*).

<sup>3</sup> <[http://www.studera.nu/hogskolan/univ\\_hogsk/uppgifter.shtml](http://www.studera.nu/hogskolan/univ_hogsk/uppgifter.shtml)>

<sup>4</sup> This indirect method of teaching has, by no means, been confined to Sweden. In their discussion of differences between what they call “continental” and “Anglo-American” traditions, Rienecker and Stray Jørgensen refer to “old fashioned” universities where “students [were] supposed to sit at the feet of their masters and absorb their writing themes and styles” (“The (Im)possibilities in Teaching University Writing” 108).

<sup>5</sup> Linda Brodkey makes a similar assertion about the important role her working class home played in her literacy development.

<sup>6</sup> <[http://www.scb.se/statistik/LE/LE0201/2000I02/X10ST0002\\_12.pdf](http://www.scb.se/statistik/LE/LE0201/2000I02/X10ST0002_12.pdf)>

<sup>7</sup> The Swedish word *liberal* (as continues to be the sense in British English) retains the classical concept of “liberalism” inherent in the *laissez-faire* theory associated with economists such as John Stuart Mill in his *On Liberty*. In American English *liberal* developed a meaning of big government, ironically diametric to the classical meaning. Thus the confusion over “liberalism” is perhaps one of translation rather than essence.

<sup>8</sup> After ten years as a permanent resident alien I became a U.S. citizen in 1992.

<sup>9</sup> The Swedish word “högskola” means an institution of higher learning that mostly caters to undergraduates but also offers master's-degree programs. It is not uncommon for a “högskola” to gain university status after some years when it has become more established and has begun to offer doctoral programs. (Södertörns högskola has its share of doctoral students, but until the college achieves university status, the actual degrees will be awarded by another institution, such as Stockholm University.) The “open college” in this context does not stand for any specific institution per se but refers to the idea of opening up all higher education to new groups of students. Of course, these efforts to democratize higher education in Sweden can be compared to similar initiatives in the United States in the 1970s. (See, for example, James Traub, *City on a Hill: Testing the American Dream at City College*.)

<sup>10</sup> Interestingly enough, the terminology echoes the debate about the compulsory comprehensive school that raged in Sweden during 1950s. The children who did not get a chance to continue their schooling beyond six years were seen as “reserves of ability” (Postlethwaite 97).

<sup>11</sup> These efforts of meeting new demands from a nontraditional student population are not confined to Sweden, as evidenced by *Teaching Writing in European Higher Education*. This book deals with similar situations in Britain, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Norway, and The Netherlands, besides Sweden.

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<sup>12</sup> My early intention was to explore whether the writing Swedish students do in high school is better matched to the needs of college writing than what is usually the case in the U.S. Nonetheless, when a key contact, a professor in Uppsala in charge of constructing the writing component of the national tests which are given to high school seniors every year, failed to respond to my repeated e-mails, I was forced to give up this idea.

<sup>9</sup> With some training Swedes can read Norwegian in the original. Most of the articles in this book, however, are not written in Bokmål (by far the larger of the two official Norwegian written languages) but in Nynorsk, which is less accessible to Swedes. Some Swedish writing instructors will be familiar with a book like this one, having read it in Norwegian, but they will wait for a Swedish translation before they make it a required work for their students.

<sup>14</sup> I know that Olga Dysthe's article "The Multi-Voiced Classroom" exists in a Swedish translation, "Det flerstämmiga klassrummet," translated directly from Norwegian into Swedish.

<sup>15</sup> Ann Blücker is at present working on a dissertation project that studies how new law students are guided into the discourse of their field by the comments teachers write on their reports and essays (an acculturation study).

<sup>16</sup> According to Timothy M. Smeeding, the rich have become richer and the poor have become poorer in the United States over the past forty years, more so than in other comparable countries (955). A bar graph on Smeeding's p. 958 shows that the gap is considerably wider in the U.S. than it is in Sweden.

<sup>17</sup> < <http://www.angelfire.com/pe/peralbin/index.html> >

<sup>18</sup> My own parents are a case in point here, especially my father. I know that he would have liked to continue his schooling after the sixth grade, but as the fifth of nine children, he (with all his siblings) was expected to enter the labor force at the age of twelve to support himself and help alleviate the financial burden for his family.

<sup>19</sup> See <<http://skolnet.skolverket.se/fakta/faktablad/english/democracy.shtml>>

<sup>20</sup> I need to add that Sweden has slowly allowed special interest groups to establish other forms of schools than the public, state-supported ones; so nowadays Swedish parents have some decisions to make about which school to choose for their children. Yet the debate about which is the most democratic form of schooling is not over. Also, it should be clarified that not all suburbs are the same. In the Greater Stockholm region, there are established wealthy communities as well as the new suburbs with their high-rise apartment buildings and ghetto-like structure.

<sup>21</sup> Actually, this practice of addressing teachers (and other adults) by first name now goes all the way down to kindergarten.

## CHAPTER II

### RESEARCH SITE AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Ethnographers admit—sometimes even celebrate—the subjective nature of their inquiry. . . . (Bishop, *Ethnographic Writing Research 2*)

SPN [scholarly personal narrative] scholars . . . ask a series of personal, narrative-grounded, contextual questions that are too often ignored by researchers who use the more established frameworks. This major departure from the usual research norms . . . doesn't make SPN scholarship better or worse, of course; it just makes it different. And difference can be threatening to many scholars who have been trained in the mindset that one research paradigm must fit all. (Nash 5)

#### Primary Research Site

In this chapter, I will first more fully present my primary research site: Södertörns högskola. I have chosen to keep the Swedish name “Södertörns högskola” in my text. Another possibility would have been to call it “Södertörn University College,” as the college is called in the English information section on its web site. I could also have chosen the correct English possessive form “Södertörn’s högskola,” but it looks like a hybrid. So, instead I treat “Södertörns högskola” as one proper noun. For variation, I quite often employ the abbreviated form “Södertörn,” which is widely used by the people who teach and study there, even though “Södertörn” more appropriately refers to the whole region or area in which the college is located. When I then need to use the possessive form, I have chosen to add the apostrophe, “Södertörn’s.” This college, which is located in the greater Stockholm region, was founded in 1996 and applied for full university status in 2006.<sup>1</sup> My reasons for choosing this particular college for my field research were several:

(1) Södertörns högskola is located in a suburb just south of Stockholm, in a region that historically has been underrepresented in higher education and that nowadays has a high

percentage of people with an immigrant background; consequently, the student population is more diverse there than at any other Swedish college or university.

(2) In line with the mandates from the Swedish government, Södertörns högskola has implemented several programs similar to developmental courses at American universities, such as introductory courses and a year-long course in basic studies.

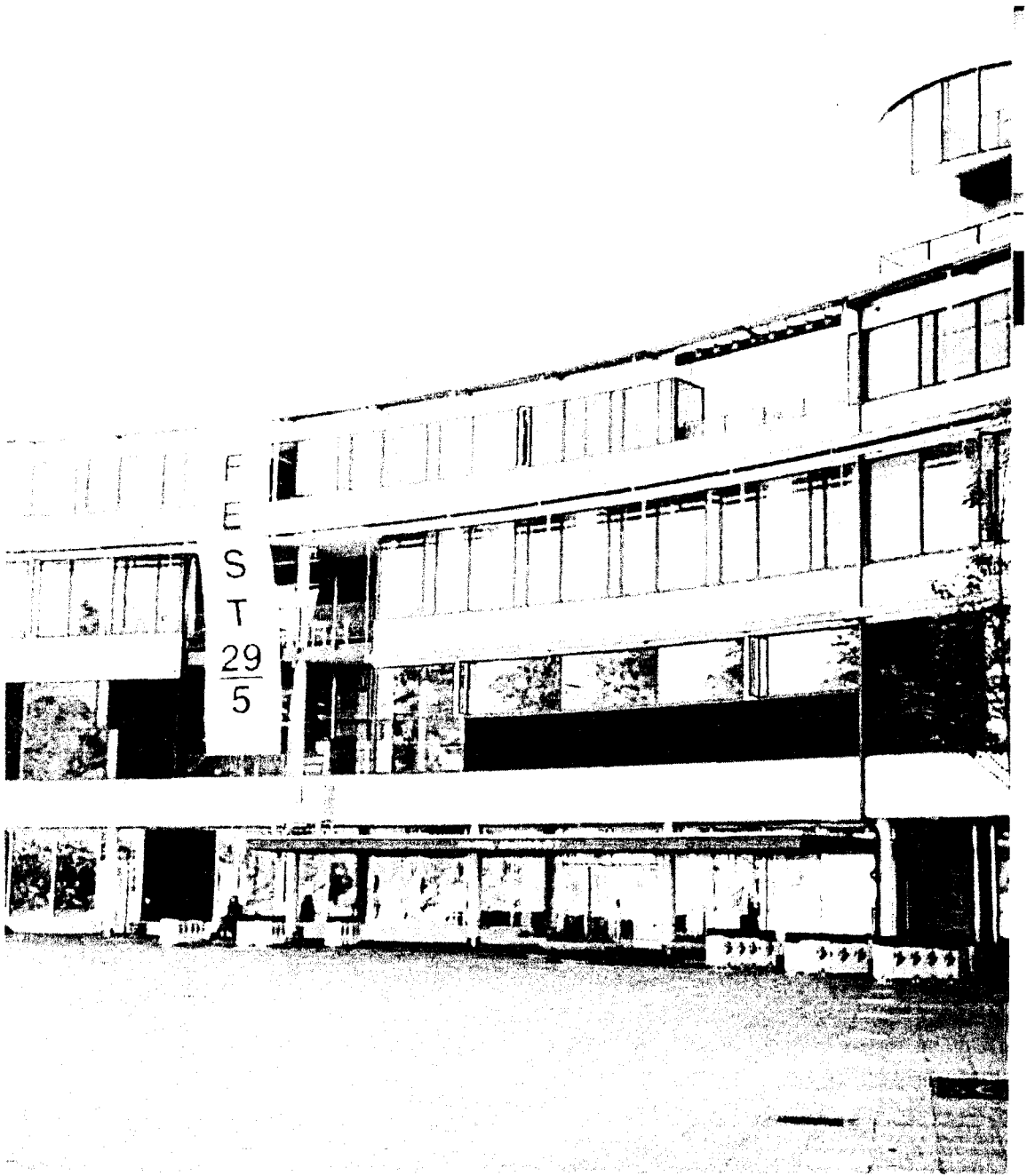
(3) Södertörns högskola also has a writing center called Språkverkstan (possibly the first of its kind in Sweden).

(4) Rhetoric (both oral and written presentation) is emphasized throughout the curriculum. In fact, one of the faculty members, Lennart Hellspong, is participating in two special projects designed to test the value of rhetoric in modern educational settings.<sup>2</sup>

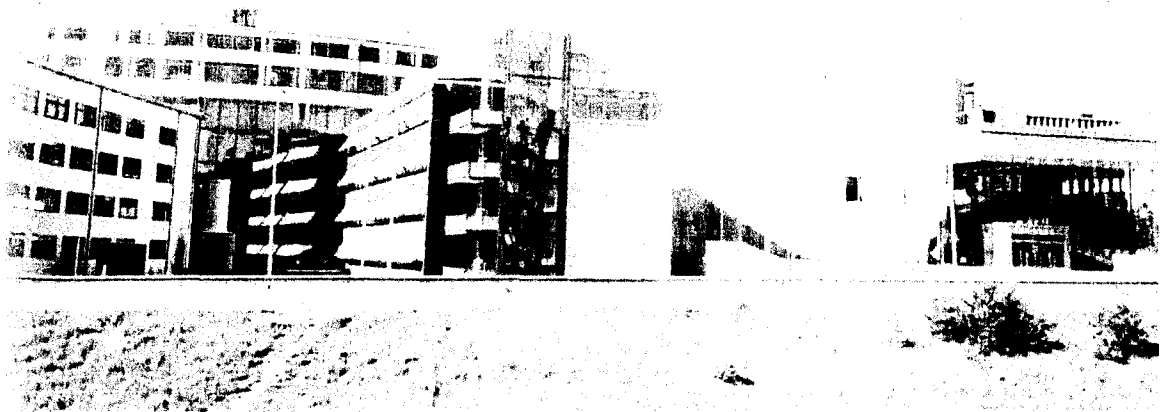
#### An “Impressionist Tale” from Södertörns högskola

According to John Van Maanen, ethnographers can use techniques similar to those of impressionist painters to capture specific moments from their fieldwork (101). The purpose of such an “impressionist tale” is “to draw an audience into an unfamiliar world and allow it, as far as possible, to see, hear, and feel as the fieldworker saw, heard, and felt” (Van Maanen 103). One such specific and memorable moment occurred late in May 2002, during my fieldwork at Södertörn.

On May 29, a windy but sunny and close-to-perfect late spring day in Sweden, I stood in the crowd that had assembled outside Södertörns högskola south of Stockholm for a dedication ceremony of the new main building, Moas båge.<sup>3</sup> (See Figures 1 and 2.) Moas båge is a huge, semicircular structure that houses the administration and teachers’ offices as well as many classrooms and conference rooms. The name of the building,



*Figure 1.* Södertörns Högskola. View of Moas Båge before the dedication ceremony started, May 29, 2002.



*Figure 2.* Campus Panorama. The semicircular new structure of Moas båge is in the background to the left, with the wings in the foreground.

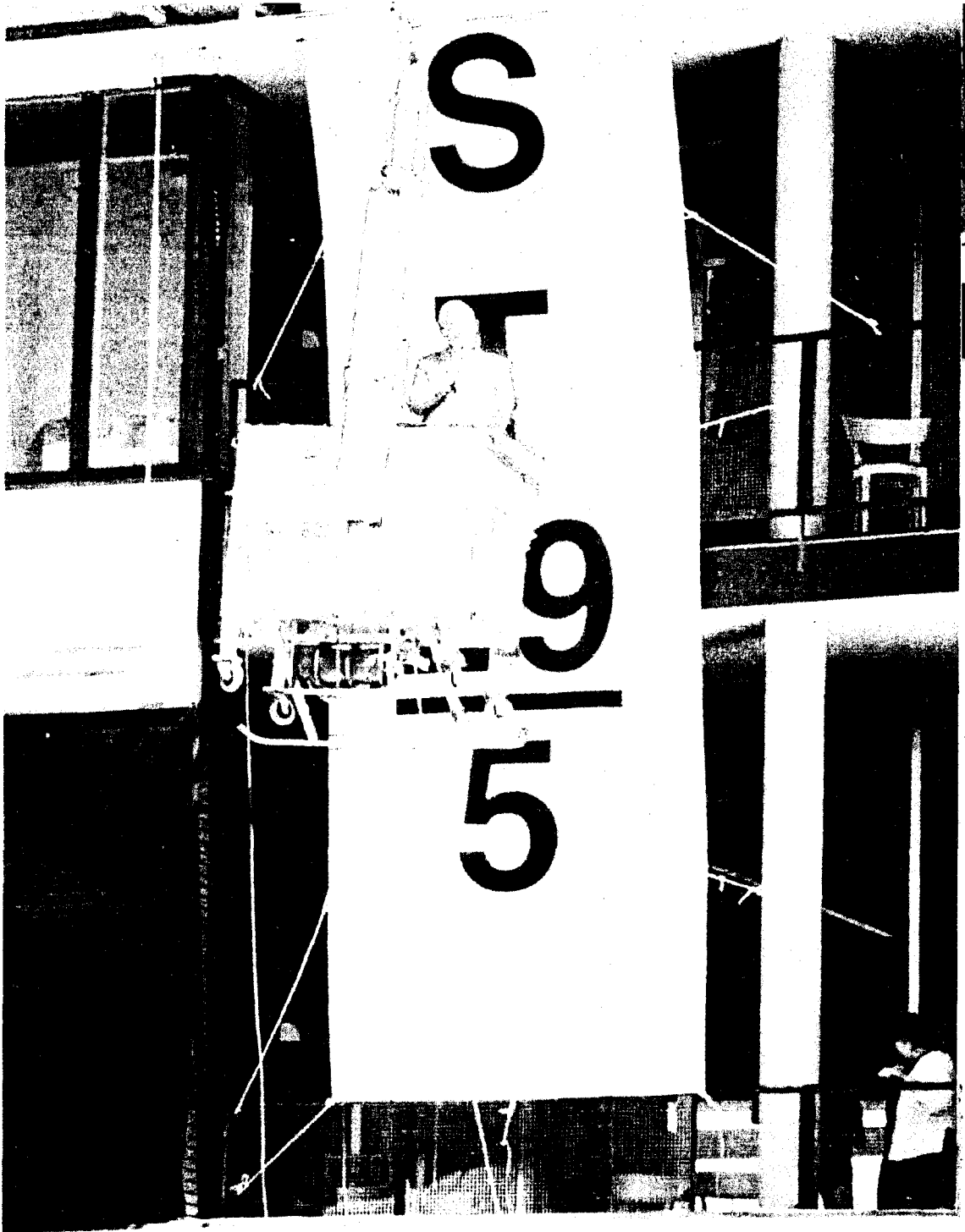
after Swedish working class author Moa Martinson, has been purposely chosen to fit Södertörns högskola's mission statement, which states that a very important goal for this university college is to recruit students from previously underrepresented groups. Moa Martinson (1890-1964) came from the region of Södertörn and was married, from 1929 to 1941, to the even more famous working class author Harry Martinson. Harry's name has been attached to a wing of Moas båge, whereas two other wings are called August (for August Strindberg, who claimed to be sprung from the working class since his father, a merchant, had married one of his servants) and Ivar (for Ivar Lo-Johansson, known for his novels about exploited sharecroppers).

The dedication ceremony itself was highly symbolic. Although the music, drama, dance, and speeches were all traditional elements for such an occasion, the whole

scenario was an attempt to create a less pompous atmosphere than what is usually the case on such occasions. Then-president Per Thullberg<sup>4</sup> gave his speech from the top of a cherry picker (Figure 3), and many of the actors in a dramatic reenactment of the different phases of the planning and construction of Moas båge appeared onstage in dark overalls and red hardhats (Figure 4). When the time came for the customary ribbon cutting, the woman who served as emcee pretended to have misplaced her scissors. At this critical moment of the performance, up came a little group of immigrants driving a forklift. The leader of the group declared in heavily accented Swedish that he had the solution to the problem: he suggested that all who had participated in the ceremony line up, with the exception of President Thullberg, who was still looking on from his elevated position. Thomas Östros, Secretary of the Department of Education, who had given the keynote address (Figure 5), was the last one in the line-up. He was instructed to give the person in front of him a little push; then, in a demonstration of the so-called domino effect, the push was transplanted from person to person until it finally reached a model of Moas båge that had been fashioned from red plastic crates. Then, as the crates came tumbling down, the actual building was declared dedicated.

My “impressionist tale” of this carefully orchestrated event, which actually took place after I had been at Södertörn for almost a month, will serve as the springboard for my discussion of literacy practices at Södertörns högskola as it illustrates many of the questions that provide my focal point: How do governmental initiatives facilitate and limit higher education? What forms of literacy do institutions sanction? What does it mean to convince academic institutions to change their traditional ways? And how much have the traditions really changed? Clearly, the dedication ceremony at Södertörn with its





*Figure 3.* College President in Cherry Picker. President Per Thullberg gives his speech from the bucket of a cherry picker.



*Figure 4.* Reenactment of a Stage in the Construction Process. The crates symbolize Moas Båge. The rocks and some trees have been preserved in the middle of the campus.



*Figure 5.* Keynote Address. Thomas Östros, Secretary of the Swedish Department of Education, gives the keynote address.

hardhats, overalls, and plastic crates represented a break with more ceremonious academic traditions. Christina Bergman—one of the writing instructors at Södertörn, who stood beside me—agreed with me on this point. Yet it remains to be seen how the meeting or clash between the traditional and the nontraditional—which can be described as a contact zone (Pratt)—is going to affect all the players in the academic game. Has Sweden—a country that is right now undergoing drastic changes from a previously homogeneous nation to a heterogeneous and multicultural one—been able to solve these problems in ways that researchers and teachers of rhetoric and composition in the United States can learn from? And what can writing researchers and teachers in Sweden learn from the United States with its rich scholarship on diversity in higher education?

#### History of Södertörns högskola

Södertörns högskola, located in Flemingsberg, in the southern part of the greater Stockholm area, started with approximately 900 students in 1996. Over ten years later, in 2007 the enrollment has increased to over 12,000 (Södertörns högskola's homepage).<sup>5</sup> As I was talking to administrators and faculty members, I was first puzzled when I did not come across anyone who had been at Södertörn from the very beginning. But during my interview with Lennart Hellspång, one of the rhetoric professors, I finally understood why. In the first year of its existence, Södertörns högskola had hired most of its faculty members from other places, primarily from Stockholm University.

The founding of Södertörns högskola did not come about without debate or controversy (Konnander; Skoglund). First, politicians and officials, both at the national and the local levels, had to be convinced that the Stockholm region needed a second university. It was not until the area where Stockholm University is located, Frescati, was

declared a national park and further expansion of this university became impossible that the idea of a new university became easier to sell. Early on, the interest focused on the southern part of Stockholm County for the following reasons: (1) the population was increasing there more rapidly than in other parts of the county, primarily because of immigration; and (2) people in this region were clearly underrepresented in higher education. Nonetheless, there were several cities/communities south of Stockholm that initially entered into the picture as possible sites for a future university. Flemingsberg eventually emerged victorious because Karolinska Institutet's Department of Odontology, Huddinge Research Hospital, and Novum Research Park had already been established at this site (Konnander; Skoglund).

By locating the new college in a region that lacked academic tradition, the founders demonstrated their commitment to the democratic aim of recruiting a nontraditional student body, and some of this aim is preserved in Södertörn's mission statement today:

Our education and research are multiscientific and *multicultural* and aim at civic education.

Our students are trained in critical reflection and ability to connect insights from different fields of knowledge. They are trained to become active citizens.

The work at Södertörns högskola is geared toward the future—education and research should be a power for change.

We keep the best in what already exists but do not get stuck in traditional structures.

Södertörns högskola is active in the midst of society; is open to impressions from the surrounding society and is influenced by it but also offers resistance to it by critically analyzing various societal issues.

The college strives to conduct research and teaching in vital combination: research energizes and renews teaching; teaching clarifies issues and problems in research. . . . .

We believe that our teaching and research well fulfill all the requirements that have so far been established for achieving university status.

Södertörns högskola is a meeting place for people with different cultural and social backgrounds and experiences.

In the teaching and research at the college *multicultural* and multiscientific issues are highlighted and problematized in an *open and welcoming environment*. (Södertörns högskola's web site; trans. mine; emphasis added)<sup>6</sup>

The goals for Södertörn further call for this multicultural institution to display academic excellence and to promote international exchange between faculty and students. In addition to language that emphasizes the conscious effort to recruit new types of students, the authors of Södertörns högskola's mission statement have chosen phrases that are strikingly similar to the language one finds in American texts that promote a so-called liberatory or critical pedagogy, just as is the case with the document that outlines the "democratic assignment" for Swedish schools, as discussed in Chapter I. For example, the mission statement claims that Södertörn's "education and research . . . aim at civic education"; that the "students are trained in critical reflection and ability to connect

insights from different fields of knowledge"; that they are trained to become active citizens"; and that "education and research should be a power for change." These aims can be compared to Henry Giroux's vision of teachers who take on the task as "transformative intellectuals":

Transformative intellectuals need to develop a discourse that unites the language of critique with the language of possibility, so that social educators recognize that they can make changes. In doing so, they must speak out against economic, political and social injustices both within and outside of schools. At the same time, they must work to create the conditions that give students the opportunity to become citizens who have the knowledge and courage to struggle in order to make despair convincing and hope practical. (*Teachers as Intellectuals* 128)

The writers of Södertörn's mission statement share Giroux's passion for an education that results in knowledgeable and participatory citizens who can make a difference.

As already mentioned, in 2006 Södertörns högskola applied to the Swedish government for university status, in time for its tenth anniversary. Because the institution appears to be well qualified, with the majority of the faculty holding doctorates (Södertörns högskola's web site), one may find it surprising that so far no decision has been made. The delay has nothing to do with Södertörn per se, but has turned out to be caused by an extensive debate and far-reaching restructuring of the whole university system in Sweden at this time.<sup>7</sup>

## Qualitative Research: Ethnographic Methods

Since literacy, including academic literacy, is more than anything else a cultural phenomenon, I believe it is best explored through research methods that take cultural aspects into account. Before I began my research, therefore, I decided to employ various ethnographic research methods that I believed would capture the actual literacy practices at one specific institution—Södertörns högskola—within a larger cultural context. Ethnographic methods appealed to me also because they tend to leave room for the researcher as a person and for a narrative, personal writing style.

By now ethnographic methodology should be so firmly established that it no longer needs to be defended, but for those who still remain skeptical Steinar Kvale offers the following justification:

With the breakdown of the universal meta-narratives of legitimation, there is an emphasis on the local context, on the social and linguistic construction of a perspectival reality where knowledge is validated through practice. There is openness to qualitative diversity, to the multiplicity of meanings in local contexts; knowledge is perspectival, dependent on the viewpoint and values of the investigator. . . . Today, the legitimation question of whether a study is scientific tends to be replaced by the pragmatic question of whether it provides useful knowledge. (42)<sup>8</sup>

As Kvale suggests, the important question is instead whether the knowledge it uncovers will make a contribution to the discussion within its particular discipline.

In *Ethnographic Writing Research* Wendy Bishop discusses various definitions and characteristics of ethnography, a concept that can take on different meanings



depending on the discipline within which it is situated. As an introduction to my discussion of research methods, I have deemed it useful to reiterate Bishop's criteria for ethnographic research since they inform my own project:

- Ethnographic writing research is ethnographic in *intent*.
- Ethnographic writing research is participant-observer-based inquiry.
- Ethnographic writing research studies a culture from that culture's point of view.
- Ethnographic writing research uses one or more ethnographic data-gathering techniques.
- Ethnographic writing research gains power to the degree that the researcher
  - a. spends time in the field
  - b. collects multiple sources of data
  - c. lets the context and participants help guide the research questions
  - d. conducts analysis as a reiterative process (Bishop, *Ethnographic* 35; emphasis original)

Looking at my own project through the lens of these criteria, I have concluded that it does not fulfill the requirements for a true ethnography but rather falls short in several aspects. My *intent* may have been ethnographic in the sense that “[t]he purpose of ethnographic research is to describe and interpret cultural behavior” (Wolcott 43; italics original) and to look for “cultural patterning” (Wolcott 45); however, the short time I was able to devote to my actual on-site field studies would in itself disqualify my project from being a “proper” ethnography and instead place it in the category “mini” or “micro”

ethnographies (Bishop, *Ethnographic* 73). Harry Wolcott points out that, whereas prolonged fieldwork is no guarantee for high-quality ethnography, “sufficient” time is crucial for good ethnographic research (39). In the classes that I observed several times, my role as a researcher alternated between that of an observer and a participant-observer, as I discuss further in Chapter III. Yet in other classrooms I was a mere visitor, a one-time guest, who did not have a chance to get to know the students or to enter the “culture.” Although in my study of a Swedish academic writing culture, I employed several ethnographic research techniques (observations, interviews, collection of artifacts) to achieve multiple perspectives for the purpose of triangulation,<sup>9</sup> I did not necessarily study this culture from its own point of view. Instead I tended to look for how it was similar to and different from American writing cultures. Also, I moved between research perspectives, sometimes taking on the students’ point of view and sometimes that of the instructors, and my only continued contacts have been with instructors. Nonetheless, I believe that the ethnographic research methods I employed were well suited to a study of literacy practices, which are intrinsically linked to culture. According to Barton and Hamilton, “Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices” (8). I do believe that I gained some useful knowledge through the methods that I chose. Just as literacy goes much deeper than the mere decoding of words, ethnographic methods will have to move beyond surface observation and record keeping if the researcher wants to enter into and understand a culture (Kutz and Roskelly 119). By looking at the larger contexts and by complementing observation with interviewing and the gathering of artifacts, I believe that I did reach layers beyond the surface.

### My Role as Researcher and Participant-Observer

My position at my Swedish research sites was somewhat unusual in the respect that I came as a Swedish-American. I received my bachelor's degree from Uppsala University, but higher education in Sweden has undergone drastic changes over the past decades while I have lived in America; and I have changed as well. And even though I studied "Swedish," with both literature and Scandinavian language components in Uppsala and later taught at the high-school level in Sweden, my knowledge and experience of rhetoric and composition as a specific field of study come entirely from an American point of view. So, while my Swedish-ness helped me gain easy access to people and information, my American-ness still set me apart.

I moved between the roles of observer and participant-observer among faculty and students in writing classes, group discussions, and in some tutoring sessions in the writing center. Sometimes I even pushed myself outside my comfort zone. For instance, as I will further discuss in Chapter III, I felt more comfortable acting as "opposer" for one of Christina Bergman's writing students in a whole-class situation than I did reading my freewriting to a small group of creative writers.

In line with established recommendations for ethnographic research (Bishop, *Ethnographic*; Mortensen and Kirsch), I wanted to step carefully and treat my research participants with respect and never lose sight of the fact that they were doing me a greater favor than I was doing them. Subjects in "person-based" research offer the researcher a "gift," as Paul V. Anderson so sensitively describes the relationship between researcher and research participants in his article "Simple Gifts: Ethical Issues in the Conduct of Person-Based Composition Research." Consequently, when I was asked, I agreed to share

some of my experiences from the United States with faculty members at Södertörns högskola and Stockholm University in exchange for the information I was hoping to receive from them. At Södertörn some of these exchanges took place spontaneously over snacks and lunches in addition to the contexts of the more formal interviews and classroom observations, but at Stockholm University Mona Blåsjö (who in 2002 was a Ph.D. student in the Department of Scandinavian Languages) had arranged for a small colloquium, in which Britt-Louise Gunnarsson, Hans Strand (both professors in the Department of Scandinavian Languages), Philip Shaw (Associate professor, Department of English ), Mona, and I participated.<sup>10</sup>

### Observations

In 2002 I observed Christina Bergman's writing class on three occasions—on May 7, May 21, and May 28—each time for three hours. I observed a creative writing class on two occasions, on May 13 and 27. On May 15, I sat in on the introductory course, also a three-hour session, but this was the only time I visited that particular class. On May 16, I observed the tutoring sessions in Språkverkstan. Finally, on May 27, I made an impromptu visit by invitation to a rhetoric classroom and listened to speeches. During these approximately 23 hours of observations I took copious field notes. For one observation, during Christina's class on May 7 when I sat in on a small-group discussion, I used a tape recorder. Before I made my first visit to a classroom at Södertörn, I had worked out a set of questions to guide my observations. I have included these questions as Appendix B. The observations served to give me first-hand impressions of present-day Swedish academic classroom culture.

## Survey

As Muriel Saville-Troike writes, “The tradition of participant observation is still basis for all ethnography, but it may be augmented by a variety of other data collection and validation procedures” (4). Consequently, before I even left the United States, I had prepared a survey to distribute among students in Sweden. This survey is included as Appendix C. It was never intended to be a quantitative instrument but mainly a time-saving device for collecting data as a complement to my observations. It would also serve as a means for me to introduce myself to the Swedish students, when I took a moment to speak about my research project before I handed out the survey. As the time came for my first observation, and I stepped into a classroom at Södertörns högskola, however, I almost immediately sensed that I had unwittingly designed my survey with average American college freshmen in mind because of my experience as a composition teacher at two American universities, Southeastern Louisiana University and The University of Southern Mississippi. The Swedish students were older than I had anticipated, and, partly because of their age and partly because they attended their courses by choice, they appeared more mature and more self-propelled than the students I had envisioned beforehand. For these reasons, the survey turned out to be less useful than I had hoped and anticipated.

In this case my own institutional context limited my options, because the requirement that I submit my project to approval before undertaking my research caused me to design my survey in a way that I would not have done if I had had occasion to visit my research site first. (For a copy of my IRB approval, see Appendix A.) In my analysis I will have reason to emphasize the extent to which composition as a field in the U.S. is

ties to mandatory first-year composition programs and how the radically different institutional contexts in Sweden and the U.S. create likewise divergent classroom situations. My survey may have been a near failure for its intended purpose, but it made me more aware of the importance of such institutional differences. Other American researchers have had similar experiences in Europe. For instance, Ann Johns reveals that, in her role as one of the keynote speakers at the EATAW conference in Budapest in 2003, she was “discouraged by the conference organizers from using examples from the students in [her] first year college classes, those seventeen-year-olds who have yet to select a disciplinary major and who need help in writing the famous ‘five paragraph essay,’ still common to many American composition classrooms.”

### Interviews

Unlike my survey questions, the interview questions I had prepared ahead of time worked well, mainly because an interview situation is quite flexible and I did not actually hand out the interview questions to my research participants. Instead, we usually had a rather informal conversation going around my questions although I asked for permission to record the interviews as backup to my notes. None of my research participants refused to give his or her consent to the recordings, and I do not think that the tape recorder, a small and unobtrusive one, in any way affected the interviews negatively. To record the interviews on tape was my personal choice since I felt freer to devote my full attention to the person I was interviewing if I did not have to attempt to write down everything he or she said. Also, I felt confident that I would not misquote anyone if I would be able to go back and listen to the interviewee’s exact words over and over. The questions I had

formulated served both as a starting-point and as a checklist for the interviews. Before the interviews ended, I wanted to make sure that I had not left out any items I considered important. (For interview questions, see Appendix D.)

The individuals at Södertörn whom I formally interviewed were Crister Skoglund (administrator); Lennart Hellspong (professor of rhetoric); Kajsa Sköldvall (writing center director and instructor of Swedish/rhetoric); Britta Sjöstrand<sup>11</sup> (tutor in Språkverkstan and instructor of Swedish); and Christina Bergman (part-time instructor of Swedish). Of Christina, whose class I observed several times and whom I got to know on a personal level, I actually asked some formal interview questions on a later occasion via e-mail. The number of interviews may seem small, but the interviewees I chose allowed me to gather a variety of perspectives, a factor that I considered extremely important. Although I did not formally interview any of the students, I gained the students' perspectives from sitting in on small-group sessions where I participated in the discussion and from talking to the students on an informal basis before, during, and after classes.

My discussion with a group of faculty members at Stockholm University (the colloquium mentioned above) could be classified as a form of group interview even though the situation was reciprocal in that the other participants also asked me questions.

During a much later stage of my research I did add students' points of views when I interviewed two of my relatives, both nontraditional students—my sister-in-law Ewa-Lena Sjöberg and my nephew Robert Rosander—via telephone and e-mail to collect crucial material for my chapter on C-essays.

### Collecting of Artifacts

During my two months in Sweden I made every effort to collect all the artifacts I could get my hands on: course catalogs, syllabi, writing assignments, samples of student writing, and an array of books. Södertörn's book store was very small, but it at least contained required course literature. There I bought a copy of Siv Strömquist's *Skrivboken (The writing book)*, a widely used handbook in Swedish writing courses (for example, in Christina Bergman's course) and some other books. After I had heard my informants mention the titles of some influential Norwegian books on academic writing, by Olga Dysthe and others, I ordered those from Oslo and was able to get them before I left Sweden.<sup>12</sup> I also acquired a collection of brochures that students at Södertörn had produced in an effort to recruit new groups of high school students to higher education. All these artifacts have become objects of my examination and analysis of literacy events and literacy practices and have formed part of the basis for some comparisons between Sweden and the United States.

### Institutional Case Study

Focusing mainly on one Swedish institution (Södertörn) and viewing its literacy instruction from various angles, I also conducted a type of institutional case study. I was influenced in my approach, to some extent, by Jeffrey Grabill's dissertation "Situating Literacies and Community Literacy Programs: A Critical Rhetoric for Institutional Change" and his book *Community Literacy Programs and the Politics of Change*, with the caveat that Grabill himself makes a distinction between a traditional case study and



his own institutional “case” whereas I do not make the same distinction. According to Grabill, an institutional case

- focuses on institutional power relations;
- is both a site and a method (a specific location and a particular way of looking at/constructing that location);
- sees institutions as rhetorical systems and seeks to collect data that might enable one to understand how these systems work to make certain practices/identities possible and others impossible.

*(Community xiv-xv)*

Influences can be very difficult to trace, but I most likely got the idea to pay attention to and ask questions about funding for certain programs and projects from reading Grabill’s works. The issue of funding is just one example of how power relations reveal themselves. Other data that Grabill collected include mission statements, interviews (with different categories of people), and samples of student texts and instructor practices (xv)—data that correspond to my own.

Another source that influenced my choice of methods was Robin Varnum’s *Fencing with Words*, which I view as another case study. She writes that, in her study of first-year composition at Amherst College, 1938-1966,

I have tried to take account of social and political forces, operating outside the classroom, which shaped what happened in class. I have looked at English 1-2 within its local institutional contexts, its larger educational and disciplinary contexts, and such still larger national and international

contexts as World War II, the cold War, and the civil disturbances of the 1960s. (9)

Like Varnum and Grabill, I decided to collect various types of source material—textbooks, course curricula, policy statements, assignment sheets, and samples of actual student writing—as a complement to my interviews and observations. Likewise, I have tried to place the actual literacy events I observed at Södertörn in relation to the changes in demographics and in recruiting policies at the governmental level in Sweden. The larger political scene—influenced by the events of September 11, 2001, and the prevalent Swedish opinion of the George W. Bush administration—is a part of the international context as well.

#### Comparison/Contrast between Sweden and the United States

My primary focus is on Swedish academic literacy practices, and I offer an institutional critique of Södertörn. To carry out a systematic and balanced comparison and contrast between Sweden and the United States was never my intention. Nonetheless, since everything I know about rhetoric and composition comes from an American perspective and I live and work in the United States, it is not surprising that I use as my point of reference my experience from about 15 years of teaching first-year composition at two state universities in the southern United States. Like David Foster and David Russell, I believe that even “informal and admittedly unsystematic comparisons are useful” (“Rearticulating Articulation” 5). The fact that I sometimes critique American literacy practices as well as Swedish ones is mostly a byproduct of my moving between my two cultures and my attempts to make sense of what I saw and heard in Sweden.

### Scholarly Personal Narrative

Even though ethnographic research and writing create a great deal of maneuvering space and agency for the ethnographer as a person, I have chosen to combine ethnography with scholarly personal narrative (SPN) in an effort to more fully capture the two levels of my project: the public as well as the personal. SPN, as explained and demonstrated by Robert J. Nash in *Liberating Scholarly Writing: The Power of Personal Narrative*, is closely related to ethnographic method but “takes qualitative research one major step further” as it “puts the *self* of the scholar front and center” (18; emphasis original). Even though I do not see myself as the center of my project, my presence has been more than marginal, both in my research and in my writing. I have already discussed how I began looking for a research topic involving Sweden because I felt compelled to embrace and build on my Swedish background. My dissertation research was born out of the strong personal need I felt to combine what I sometimes look at as my two lives, one Swedish and one American. I used my personal experience as a springboard into my dissertation project in a manner that I now know is characteristic of SPN.

In spite of the strong personal presence of the writer who chooses SPN, it is not the same thing as a memoir. Nash draws upon Vivian Gornick as he explains the difference:

*A memoir is what writers compose when they use subject matter to explore their personal “personae.” A personal narrative essay [Gornick’s term for what Nash calls SPN] reverses the focus. In this latter instance,*

writers use their personae in order to explore subject matter other than themselves. (28; emphasis original)

In my case, after taking writing courses in the United States, I asked myself how I had learned to write academic essays without explicit writing instruction. From this point I took my questioning to a more universal level when I decided to explore how Swedish university students today learn to write. “A good SPN always puts stories in the service of ideas,” explains Nash (110).

### SPN as Methodology

Since I had not discovered the concept of SPN before I started my research, I cannot claim that I set out to construct a scholarly personal narrative from the very beginning. After I read Nash’s book, however, I have allowed it to shape the writing of my dissertation. Nash writes that he was driven toward SPN by a desire to be “whole” instead of feeling pressured to separate his intellect from his emotions (73). He first learned to teach as a whole person; then he consciously decided to write in the way he had learned to teach. Since my teaching philosophy is similar to Nash’s, it makes a great deal of sense to me to adopt his approach to writing as well. SPN is a methodology because it is informed by a certain outlook on what counts as knowledge in the academy.

If allowing so much room for the writer as a person in a scholarly text is a controversial and suspect practice in the United States, it is even more controversial in a European context. European academics look with some disdain on the American practice of teaching writing for personal development in first-year composition programs. According to Lotte Rienecker and Peter Stray Jörgensen, “Academic writing should not

be taught in the same ways as expressive writing” (“Genre” 71). In direct opposition to Stephen North’s claim that “our job is to produce better writers, not better writing” (“Idea” 438), Rienecker and Stray Jørgensen advise university instructors to focus on teaching the research paper as an academic genre and not on individual writers, presupposing “that there is an overarching scientific genre—the research paper—which is the umbrella-genre for many (all?) other sub-genres of writing done at university” (“Genre” 61).<sup>13</sup> Since this is how writing is taught in European university settings, it is quite clear that European academic texts leave little room for personal narrative and personal experience. Yet I want to challenge this whole way of thinking, especially at a time when universities are going to great lengths to attract students who lack an academic background.

#### Personal Writing and Democratization of Higher Education

Whereas Swedish writing research so far has mostly concerned itself with students’ acculturation or initiation into academic discourse, I would like to evoke American scholarship that discusses how university studies can lead to a loss of identity for students who may feel that the knowledge and language valued in a university setting is very far removed from the knowledge and language of their home cultures. For instance, bell hooks writes about the “pain involved in giving up old ways of thinking and knowing and learning new approaches” (43). And Mary Soliday has in mind scholars such as Linda Brodkey, Keith Gilyard, and Min-Zhan Lu when she claims that “these authors challenge the academic tendency to obscure the autobiographical in discourse and to suppress the ambivalence of adapting to various academic literacies” (263). These

scholars all advocate a less monolithic view of academic discourse and more visibility for the researcher/writer. The reason why I think this discussion has great significance for attempts to create a more inclusive academic climate both in Sweden and in the United States is well expressed by Nash, who writes, “We have seen too often how people of color, women, and assorted intellectual heretics get forced out of the university because they are bold enough to challenge the hegemony of the older research-scholarship models” (148). Instead of simply adapting to the traditional ways of writing in university, a certain resistance can be viewed as a sign of health. In Gilyard’s words, “One calls discourse into question to learn it fully” (326). Sandra Harding argues along the same lines when she suggests that “[t]he best feminist analysis . . . insists the inquirer her/himself be placed in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter, thereby recovering the entire research process for scrutiny in the results of research” (“Is There a Feminist Method?” 9). More visibility for the researcher, reflected in a more personal writing style, can lead to increased authority and participation for the ones who long were excluded from the academy: women, people of color, and the working class.

I have made a conscious choice to write in a personal voice in an effort to model what I think Swedes and other Europeans need to discuss: alternative academic texts. This kind of writing is, of course, an attempt to straddle the fence, to bring the personal into the academic, and to reveal an investment that consciously does away with every claim to scientific objectivity. By combining ethnographic methods with SPN, my product has become a hybrid, but I believe that this approach is well suited to my project. Ultimately, I want to participate in a continued discussion about the nature of academic literacy and the parameters which define legitimate research and knowledge in an

academic setting. With Nash I believe that “the academy is porous in its interstices. There are soft spots everywhere, and you can poke and prod them in some very effective ways. But first you need to find them” (151). Academic conventions may change slowly, but they do change.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The date for the upgrade keeps changing. When I first began my research, the date was set to 2003. Then it changed to 2005 and later to 2006. Södertörns högskola's web site contains information about the efforts to upgrade the college to a university. In addition to Södertörns högskola's renewed application for an upgrade, one can also read the favorable response from the committee that evaluated this application. Unfortunately, the application has evidently been put on hold while the whole Swedish university system is being overhauled and the criteria for upgrades to university status are under scrutiny and debate.

<sup>2</sup> When I started to make e-mail contact with academics in Sweden, I did not even know that this college existed; yet it did not take long before the name Södertörns högskola began to pop up in various conversations. Mona Blåsjö may have been the one who first suggested that this place might be of interest to me.

<sup>3</sup> The word "båge" means "arch." With its semi-circular structure, the building has the shape of an arch.

<sup>4</sup> In January of 2003 Per Thullberg left Södertörns högskola to become chief executive officer of Skolverket [the Swedish National Agency for Education]. His successor as president at Södertörn is a woman named Ingela Josefson.

<sup>5</sup> <<http://webappo.web.sh.se/>> 4 June 2007.

<sup>6</sup> <<http://webappo.web.sh.se/>> 4 June 2007. The web site makes it clear that this is a temporary document, dated 18 Oct. 2004—a declaration of purpose rather than a true mission statement. A new mission statement is said to be under construction. Because of the postponement of the college's upgrade to university status, the emphasis of this document has shifted somewhat, in comparison to an earlier statement, from an emphasis on the diversity of its students to an emphasis on the diversity of its academic endeavors; yet it still mentions "people with different cultural and social backgrounds."

<sup>7</sup> I sent an e-mail to Ann Blücker and asked her why it took so long for the government to make a decision about Södertörns högskola's university status, and she explained what the reason was in her reply.

<sup>8</sup> Ideally, this should be the case. There is, however, a lingering bias against personal writing in an academic context that I elaborate later in this chapter.

<sup>9</sup> To triangulate means to "verify observations by confirming them, using more than one data source (Bishop, *Ethnographic Writing Research* 19).

<sup>10</sup> Britt-Louise Gunnarsson and Hans Strand were both professors in the Department of Scandinavian Studies at the time, and Mona Blåsjö was a doctoral student in the same department. (She has since then completed her Ph.D.) I had established e-mail contact with all three of them before I left the United States. Philip Shaw came from the English Department.

<sup>11</sup> *Britta Sjöstrand* is a pseudonym.

<sup>12</sup> Incidentally, to order books in the U.S. from Scandinavian publishers has been a constant struggle because Scandinavians are reluctant to use credit cards for mail orders. Swedes nowadays do online banking without hesitation, but they are still reluctant to divulge their credit card numbers to companies. Several times I have been able to order books online but not even received an order confirmation. A few weeks later, lo and behold, the books I ordered have appeared in my mailbox together with a bill made out in Swedish-Norwegian currency. Without relatives and friends in Sweden, I do not know how I would have handled this problem. Paper checks to transact personal business have become rare in contemporary Sweden, and transaction fees can be considerable.



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<sup>13</sup> Rienecker and Stray Jörgensen's polemic against North hardly seems fair since North discusses the writing center, not classroom teaching (and certainly not the large classes Rienecker and Stray Jörgensen have in mind).

## CHAPTER III

## WRITING AND RHETORIC INSTRUCTION AT SÖDERTÖRN

The new college profoundly affected the teaching of writing, bringing about a pedagogy shaped by the interests of the middle class. During the last quarter of the [nineteenth] century, more and more students were attending college as the economy expanded and the need for skills provided by the new colleges grew. Most schools, both private and public, began to view themselves as serving the needs of business and industry. Citizens demanded it, students demanded it, and, most important, business leaders—the keepers of the funds—demanded it. The ability to write effectively—then as now—was one of the skills that all agreed was essential to success . . . . (Berlin, *Writing* 60)

## Disciplinary Boundaries

In addition to a new emphasis on writing, Swedish universities have lately begun to focus their interest on the old discipline of rhetoric, which had come very close to disappearing from the Swedish academic scene. Again, some interesting differences exist between the customary scenarios at an American and a Swedish university. The disciplinary boundaries differ in a way that may cause investigators from either country some confusion and bewilderment at first but that may eventually challenge both Americans and Swedes to expand their thinking.

In the United States composition faculty have for a long time expressed their frustration with a hierarchical system that subordinates them to the more highly valued experts in literature. That this situation continues to trouble compositionists is evidenced, for example, by the recent article “The Work before Us: Attending to English Departments’ Poor Relations” by Jennifer Beech and Julie Lindquist. Beech and Lindquist share the experience that “[a]s composition workers, we are often made to feel in our departmental ‘families’ like the embarrassing poor relations, those relatives whom the more upwardly mobile of the family would rather keep at a socially safe distance” (172). To Swedes the split between rhetorics and poetics is of a very different nature since, of long-standing tradition, literary studies are housed in a different department

from Scandinavian languages. So, instead of competing for space, funding, and status with literature experts, writing teachers most likely find themselves sharing departmental space with linguists, language historians, dialect scholars, and scholars with degrees in Icelandic, Danish or Norwegian. Such is the situation, for instance, at Stockholm University. These different contexts are important both as an aid to understanding the legitimacy of rhetoric and composition as a field and to understanding how the ones who work within a certain department see their own worth and identity.

At Södertörn it was in the Department of Swedish and Rhetoric that I found the writing instructors, and some of these instructors taught courses in both writing and rhetoric. Accustomed as I am to seeing rhetoric and composition as a unified concept, I thought that this department made a great deal of sense, until I discovered that what is called rhetoric in Sweden would normally be called speech in the United States and would therefore belong in a communication department. What struck me as fitting in Sweden, however, was the holistic approach to language as both oral and written *communication*, not only within the same department but also within the same courses, and—as I discuss in Chapter IV—in the writing centers. Consequently, students taking a course in Swedish, from the introductory 20-point semester course to the more advanced 40-, 60-, or 80-point courses, will most likely face units not only in writing but also in rhetoric (that is, oral presentation or speech).

That Södertörn places a high value on academic literacy is also evident in the fact that course components in written and oral communication have made their way into a number of programs, in addition to the semester-long courses that specialize in writing and/or speaking.

### Introductory Course from an Administrator's Point of View

I was curious to find out how the so-called introductory course at Södertörn was designed since I had heard and read a great deal about it even before I came to Sweden. When I interviewed Crister Skoglund, an administrator<sup>1</sup> located in “Sekretariatet för främjande av social och etnisk mångfald” [Office for the promoting of social and ethnic diversity]<sup>2</sup> and one of the initiators of the course, I took the opportunity to ask him. He explained to me how the introductory course fits into a larger context by outlining the mission for his office as follows: (1) to awaken the interest in higher education (by visits to high schools, military units, churches, sports clubs, etc.); (2) to influence the influencers (such as high school teachers, parents, coaches); (3) to make the transition from high school to college as smooth as possible (Crister<sup>3</sup> himself believed that the first ten weeks of the college experience are crucial and more or less determine whether a student is going to stay or drop out); and (4) to create a good environment for everybody at the college/university (Crister suggested that decent food, computers, and a prayer room on campus for Moslem students may all be equally important elements in a good environment).

The introductory course falls under the third point of the mission statement since its purpose is to help students adjust to the academy. Crister said that he and others originally got the idea for this course from the mandatory beginning semester at Norwegian universities, but that they had decided to make the course at Södertörn voluntary.

This course counts for 20 points of college credit, with five points each from four different areas: (1) oral presentation and argumentation, (2) studying at college and

university, (3) written communication, and (4) elementary scientific theory. The first unit ends with a videotaped oral presentation. The second unit involves much more than study skills since it is also a course in Western civilization. Incidentally, Crister Skoglund holds a doctorate in the history of ideas or intellectual history. During this second unit, students become familiar with the European university tradition; they learn famous names; and they discuss how university studies differ from high school, why books are so important to the academic environment, and why university teachers do research. They also research educational opportunities in the Stockholm region and interview professionals. While taking the third unit, the one in written communication, students practice various types of writing, such as report, memo, take-home exam, comparison/contrast paper, and also, as I will develop later, an essay in response to literary works. During the fourth unit, students are introduced to Latin scientific vocabulary and practice decoding and understanding of academic text.

In addition to the four course units, students in the introductory course may take advantage of other services, such as computer basics, library science, and career counseling—services that are provided by student organizations. According to Crister, the introductory course attracts three categories of students: the “insecure ones” (those who doubt that they are good enough either because they feel old and rusty or because they were rather average students in high school); immigrants whose language skills may not be up to par; and the “super-enthusiasts” (those who want to do everything they do properly). Students who belong to the third category are not always compatible with students from the other two categories.

When I asked how successful this introductory course had been, Crister told me that, of the students who have taken it, a whopping 96 percent recommend it to other students, according to course evaluations. Also, the government had taken notice, he said, and wanted to make a course like it mandatory at all Swedish universities and colleges. Yet, in Crister's opinion, that was not "sound thinking." The original idea behind the course was to give working class students the same opportunity as children of college graduates, "who acquire much of their cultural capital at the dinner table."<sup>4</sup>

In addition to describing the nature and success of the introductory course, Crister Skoglund gave me a couple of brochures that had been commissioned by his office and designed by students in the 40-point Swedish course taught by Kajsa Sköldvall. Brochures like these and others have actually been used to recruit new students, when students from Södertörn have served as "ambassadors" to high schools in the region, in an effort to recruit new students. One of the brochures is titled "Vill du? En broschyr om introduktionskursen för studier på högskolan" ["Do you want to? A brochure about the introductory course to studies at college"]. (For a picture of the front cover of this brochure, see Appendix E.) It displays Crister Skoglund's picture on the second page and his answers to two questions. To the first question, "What is the introductory course?" Crister answers, "The introductory course is a wonderful chance to find out what you want to study without pressure. Besides, you will receive the tools that are needed for higher education." And to the second question, "Why should I take the introductory course?" he answers, "It's statistically proven that students who have taken the introductory course finish their studies faster than others. It's also good to take your time

and think about what you really want to do. No use to be in a hurry if you are running in the wrong direction” (trans. mine).

The word “tools” is repeated in several places throughout the slim brochure “Vill du?” I have already quoted from the second page. The overall purpose of the course is stated as teaching “the language and *tools* needed in college.” The brochure also promises prospective students that they will learn various techniques that will help them to speak persuasively. And the sales pitch concludes: “So, if you feel insecure. Don’t hesitate. The introductory course gives you all the *tools* you will need to study what you are interested in” (4, 5; trans. mine; emphasis added).<sup>5</sup>

Because Kajsa Sköldvall’s students had designed and put together these brochures, I took the opportunity to ask her about the brochures when I later interviewed her. She said that the brochures had been her idea and that they served several purposes. Besides serving as recruitment instruments for the Office for Promoting Social and Ethnic Diversity, they brought together three different required areas of study for the students in the continuing Swedish course (the B-level or 21-40 points): writing, graphic design, plus oral presentation. She had seen the work with and around these brochures as a *real* assignment, she told me. When students were forced to step outside their classroom to give oral presentations, they got an opportunity to see what it was like to be, in Kajsa’s phraseology, “a rhetorician in real life, outside the college environment,” and this task was, consequently, an important one both for the producers of the brochures and for the target audiences. I see this complex assignment as an example of how Södertörns högskola creatively set out to fulfill the so-called third task, to promote the exchange of knowledge between an institution of higher learning and the surrounding communities.

### Introductory Course: Observation

I would have liked to sit in on several class meetings with the students in the introductory course. Nevertheless, I was only able to observe one of them, possibly because of some miscommunication between the instructors and myself. They thought that I was solely interested in observing how they taught writing, whereas I would have welcomed the opportunity to see how these students were acculturated into academic literacy practices in a broader sense. Normally, this class was taught by Kajsa Sköldvall, but, quite in line with what I saw going on elsewhere, another instructor had been scheduled to teach a specific course segment. So, Britta Sjöstrand<sup>6</sup> took over Sköldvall's class for a couple of class meetings and taught a unit that asked the students in the introductory course to write about literature. I was invited to observe on the day when Britta led a discussion about the books they had read and commented on essays that the students had written and turned in to her ahead of time. Britta had hatched the idea for this unit because she firmly believed that reading fiction—in this case biographical or autobiographical *Swedish* novels—would benefit the students' own writing. The emphasis here is on *Swedish* since Britta had found that the students on their own mostly read foreign novels in translation.

The students in this class looked more like a group of American college freshmen than any others I saw, mainly because they were all about twenty years of age. They both looked and acted like first-year college students; besides, they were sitting in rows, with everyone facing the instructor in front of them.<sup>7</sup> Beforehand, I had heard the adjective “insecure”<sup>8</sup> used about these students. Kajsa Sköldvall had made it clear that she had to ask the students whether they would allow me to sit in on the class since they were



somewhat “insecure.” “Insecure” is also the word used in the brochure that had been designed specifically to attract high-school students to the introductory course. Yet, when Britta introduced me, one female student assured me that I was “welcome,” and the students did not strike me as shy or in any way intimidated by my presence. On the other hand, this group of students was somewhat more diverse than the others I observed. Of the 16 students who were present<sup>9</sup>—ten female students and six male—three of the women had immigrant backgrounds, and one of the young men had a learning disability (dyslexia).

After a rather messy and time-consuming procedure when Britta placed the students in groups according to which books they had read, she wrote the following questions/instructions for group discussions on the board:

What is the book about, in your opinion? How do you interpret the book?  
Select a passage (individually) that has made a strong impression on you;  
share your passages with one another and explain why you chose this  
particular passage. What do you think about the author’s narrative  
technique and language? What do you think of the book as a whole and  
why?

After some discussion, the students and Britta together decided that the groups would reconvene in the classroom after 20 minutes. Small-group discussions are definitely an integral part of Swedish classroom instruction. Sometimes a large group of students will be required to attend lectures on specific topics, but in the individual classrooms where I observed the activities, there was very little lecturing going on; instead the students moved back and forth between whole-class and small-group discussions.

When the students returned, Britta called upon each group to give the answers they had prepared, but the discussion was not limited to those few questions. Many of the students took an active part in the discussion, and I have chosen to share some of the points they brought up when Britta prompted them with the question, “What is the purpose of reading novels?” The first response she got was that “reading makes it easier to write.” When I heard this answer, I wished that I had been present the day when Britta introduced the assignment because I was wondering whether she might have used a similar phrase on that occasion and that she was now simply receiving back what she had given the students; however, I have no way of knowing whether my suspicion was justified. When Britta prompted them further with a “why?” the answers started flying: “You learn different ways of writing, narrative techniques, and rhetorical devices.” “You expand your vocabulary.” Anna maintained that reading is good for a person’s “emotional life,” as the reader engages with the text. She also said that it had value as a way to escape from reality. Further, I heard answers such as “reading is a way to acquire general knowledge” and “reading keeps people mentally healthy and young.” Britta herself wanted to stress that reading is “fun.” She said that it is much better to put it that way than to say that reading is “useful.”

From this whole-class discussion I want particularly to focus on a moment when I am certain that a student did *not* just give Britta back what he thought she wanted to hear but actually engaged in an act of mild confrontation. Thomas challenged Britta somewhat by interrupting all the answers that illustrated the benefits of reading when he said that to him reading seemed to be an antisocial act. Britta countered him and said that in her family her husband, her now grown children, and she would sometimes read together.

During a holiday like Christmas they might sit in the same room, in front of the fireplace, each with a book, and occasionally interrupt their reading with small talk. She wanted to show Thomas that looked at from this perspective, reading could indeed be a social activity. Thomas insisted, however, that if a neighbor happened to come in, the behavior would definitely be antisocial. I thought then in that classroom, just as I am convinced when I am writing about this incident several years later, that this was a moment significant for the discussion of literacy practices and literacy tools. I interpret it as a class confrontation moment because I could see where Thomas might be coming from.

Britta did not push her ideas on Thomas and the other students. Yet the scene she tried to evoke, although completely natural to her, would not fit into the everyday life of a working class family.<sup>10</sup> Not all families live in houses with fireplaces, or even in houses for that matter, and in a working class family novel reading is not necessarily a treasured activity. In the family I grew up in, which fits the working class pattern except for the fact that my father owned a small business, learning to read was important; reading the Bible was important; reading for school, as in doing homework, was important; and reading the newspaper was somewhat important. Also, reading bedtime stories to small children was a social activity that my mother engaged in with pleasure. Yet both my parents regarded novel reading as a frivolous luxury activity, something one could possibly devote one's time to after all the chores were done.<sup>11</sup> No matter how hard I try, I cannot imagine my family sitting together, reading novels. This activity is bourgeois, and my family was not bourgeois; nor was Thomas' family or the families of many of the other students in that classroom, I suspect. The picture that Linda Brodkey paints in "Writing on the Bias" of working-class literacy centered in a hustling and bustling

kitchen, where neighbors may pop in unannounced, fits better with the picture I carry with me from my childhood home than that of Britta's upper middle-class family room where people sit reading quietly and only occasionally speak to one another in soft voices.

As for the students' essays, they were not literary analyses but came closer to responses. One of the choices was that the students write an introduction to their own autobiography in a style that imitated one of the books they had read. Britta went over the essays with individual students during the last part of the three-hour class period. Not all the students had turned in their essays before class, as they had been instructed. Some had brought theirs to class, and Britta calmly made arrangements for the others to turn their essays in to her as soon as possible. Britta had marked all the essays she had received ahead of time and now gave the students some feedback both on content and on language. Only one student was asked to rewrite her essay and turn it in again. Her problem was that she had placed her own social reflections in the foreground instead of the books. Britta advised her to turn her approach around, to begin with the books and make her personal reflections secondary. The student got a tad upset and complained that she had found the instructions for the writing assignment confusing. I should possibly add that the students did not get grades on these essays, just a "Pass," or, as in this case, an opportunity to rewrite the essay to later obtain a "Pass" for the assignment.

#### Introductory Course and Academic Literacy

The introductory course at Södertörns högskola seems rather familiar to someone acquainted with American developmental programs and a course like University 101. It is

a bridging course, whose purpose is to ease students' transition into the academic environment. Somewhat facetiously one could call it a "tool" for equipping students with the appropriate "tools" for academic success. It sounds democratic to speak about literacy tools and equal opportunity, but the questions about *whose* literacy and for what purpose must not be forgotten. When an institution consciously decides to recruit students with a working class and/or immigrant background, someone needs to keep asking the important questions about what one wants to accomplish. In his dissertation "Situating Literacies and Community Literacy Programs: A Critical Rhetoric for Institutional Change," Jeffrey Grabill insists that the three questions that most need to be theorized are "what is literacy, who decides, and in whose interests" (10 *et passim*). These questions should be addressed also in the context of Södertörns högskola.

The debate that has been going on in the United States for quite some time needs to be imported into Sweden. James Paul Gee's definitions of discourses and literacy may appear depressing, but they, nevertheless, set the stage for a meaningful exchange of ideas about the nature of academic literacy. Gee makes a distinction between primary and secondary discourses. Primary discourse, he explains, is the language, behavior, and values that a person *acquires* mostly subconsciously in a family context. A secondary discourse, on the other hand, is the language, behavior, and values that a person *learns*, for instance, in a school setting. Gee adds, however, that, if an individual's primary discourse is similar to a secondary discourse, even the secondary discourse is to a large extent *acquired* instead of *learned* and that the *learning* which then takes place extends the individual's proficiency to a higher level ("Literacy" 539-42).<sup>12</sup> From these assumptions, Gee defines *literacy* as "control of secondary uses of language (i.e., uses of

language in secondary discourses)” (542), and he further distinguishes between various types of literacy, as in *dominant literacy* (control over prestigious discourse, 528) and *powerful literacy* (mastery to the point that the individual is able to critique the uses of literacy at all other levels, 542). Understandably, scholars from a non-mainstream background have objected to Gee’s deterministic view of literacy acquisition and literacy learning, because it appears from his reasoning that individuals who do not acquire dominant literacy from their early childhood will never be able to catch up completely to those who do. So has, for instance, Lisa Delpit challenged Gee by offering examples of individuals who have beaten the odds and become very successful academically because they had special teachers who believed in them and challenged them to excel:

First, their teachers successfully taught what Gee calls the “superficial features” of middle-class discourse—grammar, style, mechanics—features that Gee claims are particularly resistant to classroom instruction. And the students successfully learned them. These teachers also successfully taught the more subtle aspects of dominant discourse [the aspects that have to do with behavior and values]. (“Politics” 549)

After illustrating by her examples that secondary discourses *can* be learned, Delpit shifts the focus to another point of the literacy debate—what non-mainstream students stand to gain or lose by learning to master dominant discourses. To her, the only way for disadvantaged students to influence and eventually “transform” these discourses goes via mastery (552). Following bell hooks, Delpit maintains that teachers of non-mainstream students need to “validate” students’ primary discourses as important to their identity and that the teachers need to be sensitive to the value conflicts which often occur

between primary and secondary discourses (552-53); nevertheless, teachers should not take the position of many well-meaning and radical members of the profession who have decided that the best way to “empower” disadvantaged students is to refuse completely to teach the surface features of dominant discourses (551). Other scholars disagree with Delpit because they believe that the point one needs to focus on the most is to critique the nature of academic discourses and the perception of what matters in an academic context. According to Sharon O’Dair, “the way to ameliorate the invidious distinction between the classes is not by offering a few more people access into the middle class but by accepting that middle class culture is not superior to that of the working class” (603).

One clear intention behind the founding of Södertörns högskola was to bring the university to the people; yet, underneath both Crister Skoglund’s somewhat flippant way of talking about “class journey” and Britta Sjöstrand’s unconscious naturalizing of her middle-class way of life, lies the assumption that higher education is intrinsically linked to middle-class behaviors and values. So, even if the university is trying to reach the people, it appears that “the people” will have to change to be fully accepted into the academy. An increased awareness of the theories behind literacy learning and the stakes for some of the individuals involved would be desirable for teachers and students alike. Although researchers and teachers of literacy may never satisfactorily resolve whether success in higher education has to equal assimilation into the middle class, they need to be fully aware of the complexity of this issue. Also, I contend, we must continue to challenge the seemingly monolithic and unchangeable nature of academic discourse.

### Introductory-Level Writing Course

Another of the classes I observed at Södertörn—in fact the one I spent the most time with—was Christina Bergman’s 8-point writing course. It was a semester-long course that made up the largest chunk of the basic 20-point course in Swedish and graphic design. “Basic,” in this case, does not have the meaning of “remedial” but simply “foundational” or lowest level. Any 20-point course at Swedish universities is a “basic” course. During the spring of 2002, this writing course was offered in three sections, and the instructors for the three sections (two women and one man) worked from a shared syllabus. The three classes met at the same time, and the instructors were in the habit of getting together over lunch or a snack either before or after class. The eleven class meetings for the writing course were spread out over the semester, with the first one on January 22 and the last one on May 28. The class meetings were called seminars and lasted for three hours, with a break in the middle. In addition to these seminars, the students from all three sections attended a lecture on “vetenskapligt skrivande” [“scientific” or academic writing] on March 14, presented by an instructor in the Department of Swedish and Rhetoric who was not one of the regular instructors for this course.<sup>13</sup>

Already from this arrangement, one can notice a couple of differences between some of the underlying assumptions in Swedish and American higher education. First, the Swedish students were treated as more independent learners than most American undergraduate students, who are usually expected to attend classes more often and on a regular basis, either on a Monday-Wednesday-Friday schedule or on a Tuesday-Thursday schedule. To my now-American eyes, the Swedish class schedule seemed somewhat



haphazard, as classes were assigned different rooms from one week to the next and even met at different times. Since I got my information about the time and the place from the instructor, I never quite figured out how the students knew when and where to meet, but I know that the instructors would sometimes contact them via e-mail. Second, the instructors for this course were expected or even required to collaborate. This form of collaboration took place frequently, both among instructors teaching parallel sections and among instructors teaching different units of a larger course. During my month at Södertörn, I watched planning sessions take place in conference rooms everywhere as groups of teachers met to work on courses that would be offered in the fall. I am sure that frictions arose in some of these groups, but, looking on from the outside, I was impressed with the energy that emanated from these planning sessions. As for the spontaneous get-togethers to which I was invited, they were always held in a collegial spirit with a mixture of work-related discussions and mere socializing.

### General Course Design

From the general course information and the course syllabus and assignment sheets Christina shared with me, I have learned how this 20-point course in Swedish and graphic design was planned and what had taken place during the semester before I was able to observe the class in May. Overlapping with the 8-point writing unit, the students had studied a unit in sociolinguistics (2 points), a unit in grammar and textual analysis (6 points), and a unit in graphic design (4 points). The writing course was quite intense, but, if one keeps in mind that Swedish students normally take just one 20-point course per semester, the workload does not seem overwhelming even though at least during some

weeks the students would juggle a couple of course units simultaneously. The total number of writing assignments was eleven, and, entirely in line with process pedagogy, the students had to write most of their assignments in two versions—a first draft, which was taken through reviews both from a peer group and from the instructor, plus a revision.

The process paradigm has been wholeheartedly embraced and put into practice in Scandinavia. In this context the debt to the United States is repeatedly acknowledged. For instance, Ann Blückert writes that “Scandinavian writing didactic research has been influenced by the writing development program that was initiated in the USA in the 1970s” (96). All my Scandinavian sources point to the American “Bay Area Writing Project” and later the “National Writing Project” as the starting points for a process-oriented writing pedagogy (e.g., Blückert 95). And, as I already mentioned, the student writers I observed in Sweden followed the general pattern of writing, receiving feedback from response groups, and then revising. The importance of response groups was the topic for Norwegian writing researcher and teacher Torlaug Løkensgard Hoel’s doctoral dissertation in 1995. Hoel has since followed up on her dissertation with *Skriva och samtala: Lärande genom responsgrupper* [*To write and talk: Learning through response groups*], a book that Christina Bergman mentioned as an influence on her own teaching. Another U.S. idea that has attracted many followers in Scandinavia is the writing-to-learn movement, which appears to be the theoretical underpinning for the so-called C-essay requirement and the ensuing emphasis on Writing Across the Curriculum/Writing in the Disciplines at Swedish universities.

### Writing Assignments for the 8-point Writing course

The syllabus and assignment sheets I have collected show that after the first in-class writing assignment (Assignment 1), which is autobiographical in nature, the assignments get more elaborate.<sup>14</sup> Assignment 2 calls for a profile of someone whose job is interesting or who is interesting for some other reason. It is supposed to be based on an interview. On the handout for Assignment 2, the students get a mini-lesson in how to write direct speech and how to show the difference between direct and indirect speech. On the last line of the assignment sheet, the students receive the following piece of advice: “You may want to read about quotation and direct speech in *Svenska skrivregler* [*Swedish writing rules*].” The instructions further tell the students that the essay should be one to two pages long and that the purpose of the task is to give them practice in writing in vivid, descriptive language. The required length for each paper is very approximate, one to two pages, except for Assignment 5 and Assignment 10, which are both expected to be three-to-four pages long. When Swedes talk about pages, however, they usually mean single line-spaced text. This may seem like a very quotidian piece of information, but I mention it to show how many of the little things that one takes as natural or given in one academic context are not necessarily the same in another context.

A point of special interest is the second paragraph of the handout for Assignment 2, which asks the students to imagine a newspaper or magazine in which their essays could be published and to think about how the choice of publication venue will affect their texts. For Assignment 3, the student is asked to locate a scholarly or complex popular text and adapt it for an audience of children between the ages of 10 and 12. On the assignment sheet, the student writers are exhorted to think especially about what is

likely to interest readers in this age group and how to catch their audience's attention with title and introduction and how to treat subject specific or technical terminology. The purpose of this task is stated as "to practice the ability to pick out what is important to a certain target group; to practice how to adapt text to a specific situation and audience; and to practice how to simplify a complex content." In Assignment 4 the students are asked to write an argumentative article (again with a specific newspaper or magazine in mind) on a topic that interests them. Again, from reading the specific handout, I have found that the student is advised to formulate a thesis and to list relevant arguments in support of the thesis and also to consider counterarguments to increase credibility. They are finally encouraged to consider using a "rhetorical outline, for example as follows":

- Introduction to catch the reader's interest
- Anecdote (for instance, a personal story that relates to the topic)
- Thesis
- Arguments (begin and close with your best arguments; counter-arguments should not come last)
- Summary
- Call to action

Assignment 5 consists of a short story. The instructions for this assignment give students plenty of freedom: "Write a short story about whatever you want. Read some short stories for inspiration. . . . If you want, you may write your own short story with a particular audience in mind, for instance, as a fairy tale for children, a love story for teenagers, a short story to be published in a particular magazine." Assignment 6 calls for more formal writing. Assignment 7 is not an essay in its own right but a preparation for a later

assignment: an introduction and outline for Assignment 10. As Assignment 8 the students are required to write another argumentative article, one in response to a previous one (Assignment 4) written by one of their peers. In doing so, they will practice argument once more while learning to clearly separate their own opinions from those of the previous author. Further, the handout informs the student that the article does not have to stand in opposition to the earlier text but can also be an extension or elaboration of the previous article. Assignment 9 is completely left up to the students; they have the opportunity to write in any genre except for a poem or a play. Assignment 10 (and this is where I actually entered the picture in May) calls for either a short research paper or, for students with previous experience of academic writing, another essay of their own choosing. Finally, Assignment 11 consists of a short reflective essay with a double purpose: to help the students reflect on their own development as writers as they have become more aware of their own writing processes and to provide the teachers with feedback on the course. Since the teachers I observed gave their students the opportunity to evaluate the course informally during the last day of class, I drew the conclusion that Södertörns högskola has not implemented any form of campus-wide evaluation instrument; so it is up to each instructor to conduct his or her own evaluation.

There are some striking differences between the Swedish writing assignments and the ones usually assigned in an American first-year or introductory-level composition class. One obvious difference is the inclusion of a creative writing assignment, the short story that makes up Assignment 5. From this one assignment, one can conclude that the boundaries that American writing instruction as a rule maintains between expository and creative writing are not self-evident in another cultural context. As I show in my

description of Christina's writing course and in my discussion of a Swedish writing center, I found the focus at Södertörn to be on *language* or *communication*, which has varied uses and resists being corralled into neat little folds such as creative or expository, written or oral. Another difference that jumped out at me was the amount of choice that these Swedish student writers had. I don't know if many American composition teachers have an assignment like Number 9 on their handouts, but I know that I have never given my college students a major assignment that has been left entirely up to them. Studying the handouts closely, one can also see that the door is open for Assignment 10 to become an essay of the students' own choosing. In a clear attempt to tailor the instruction to individual students' needs and wants, the instructions for Assignment 10 allow the students to choose either A (academic text, the purpose of which is to give students an opportunity to practice academic writing) or B (assignment the students choose themselves). The instructions on the handout elaborate on choice B: "If you have already written a B- or a C-essay [that is, a lengthy, 5 or 10-point research paper for another course] and don't think you'll benefit from doing Assignment 10 A, you may choose your own assignment; therefore, you yourself will best identify the purpose of this assignment." As I will discuss later, quite a few of the students in Christina's class had chosen the non-research alternative. Further, the phrasing in the instructions for some of the other assignments invites students to make their own choices, and, even though these choices may appear less significant, the often informal tone reinforces the impression that students are taken seriously and allowed a great deal of agency.

As an example of what I see as such student agency, I return to the introductory paragraph of the instructions for Assignment 2, "Profile":

You may choose to write a profile of a worker or professional you have interviewed or to write a profile of someone who is interesting for other reasons, perhaps just because he or she is a very ordinary person. If you write a profile connected with the person's job, it is often a good idea to conduct the interview on the job so you'll be able to describe the environment. If you write another type of profile, you may interview the person in a place that somehow is linked to the interviewee. Think about how to begin your text in a way that grabs the reader's attention and how to hold on to the reader's interest throughout the article. Of course, you can do this in several ways; for example, you may pick out interesting details about, for instance, job, personality, environment or something else. Don't forget the title.

In this paragraph, the only sentence that sounds like an imperative is the last one, "Don't forget the title." The rest of the instructions have a much more tentative and less restrictive ring to them: "You may choose"; "perhaps"; "If you write. . ."; "you may interview"; "several ways"; "for example"; "you may pick out." One gets the distinct feeling that the students are encouraged to come up with their own ideas and solutions to the task at hand, as long as they indeed write a profile and remember to write a title.<sup>15</sup> They are not obligated to follow some predetermined guideline.<sup>16</sup>

As for evaluation, one should keep in mind that the students enrolled in this course were graded simply on a pass/fail basis. The criteria for passing, as formulated on another handout, are more quantitative than qualitative: "All assignments, including a second, revised version, turned in and deemed passing: active participation in group

discussions; class attendance (mandatory).” The non-measurable criterion is, of course, the requirement that the essays need to be considered “passing.” Since there is no further explanation of what an acceptable or passing assignment looks like, the students appear to be left pretty much to their own judgment even though the teacher will ultimately make the decision.<sup>17</sup>

The procedures for the class meetings generally followed a set pattern: in a whole-class setting the teacher led a discussion about some part of the writing process, based on the textbook, *Skrivboken* [*The writing book*], and introduced the next writing assignment; the students met in small groups to respond to drafts; the whole class got together again for a concluding discussion. For practically every class meeting students were expected to show up with a revised version of their previous writing assignment to turn in to the teacher as well as a first draft of a paper in progress, with copies both for the members of their response groups and for the teacher.

#### First Observation of the 8-point Writing Course

My first observation of this particular class took place on May 7, 2002. The class was small, only 18 students, and of these 18 only three were male. The class met in a small seminar room in Moas båge (the new main building on campus described in Chapter II), equipped with huge dry-erase boards on two of the walls and an overhead projector at the front of the room. A third wall was completely taken up by windows that allowed for light to flow into what would otherwise have been a slightly gloomy classroom with gray linoleum floor and gray tables. The chairs provided the brightest spot in the room. Made of light wood (possibly ash) with curved backs, they had circular



seats with built-in pads in a royal blue color; they were slender, attractive, and comfortable. The tables and chairs were placed in a rectangle, and there was no special desk or chair for the instructor. This room was in stark contrast to the setting Ira Shor describes in *When Students Have Power*. In Shor's classroom, windowless and located in a basement, the combined desk-chairs for the students are placed in rows all facing the teacher, who has been allotted a special desk and a more comfortable chair than the students (11). If I apply Shor's analysis that the physical location of a classroom and the placement of desks send definite messages of students' and teachers' power and worth, Christina's classroom with its bright and padded chairs and tables in a rectangular formation would implicitly tell the Swedish students who work and learn there that they are important and placed on the same level as their teacher.

At the beginning of class, Christina gave me an opportunity to introduce myself and distribute my student survey, a procedure that took approximately 15 minutes. From looking over the responses to the survey, I have found that of the 18 students the majority (12) were between 21 and 25 years old; five were older than 25, and only one student was under 20. As for their social, ethnic, and educational background, these students were more solidly Swedish middle class than I had expected beforehand. Actually, that few students with an immigrant background had chosen this course should not have been surprising, considering the nature of the course. It was, after all, a course in "*Swedish*" and not a course in "Composition," and it was a course the students had *chosen* to take and not one that was required of them. Ten students came from homes where at least one parent had a college degree; five came from homes where one or both parents were high-school graduates; and only three came from homes where neither parent had completed

high school. One of the three whose parents had not completed high school also had an immigrant background. Although she was born in Sweden, her parents had immigrated to Sweden from Yugoslavia. Yet, if the students did indeed answer truthfully, the survey responses indicate that in this small group eight of the 18 belonged to the category first-generation college students.

### Small-Group Observation

After a whole-class introduction, the students separated into their small groups. I sat in on the discussion in a group consisting of Malin, Kerstin, Jenny, David, and Vesna<sup>18</sup> (who was not with her group from the start since Christina was conducting individual conferences with students during the group discussions, and Vesna was the first one up). In their groups, the students had been instructed to discuss *why and how they read "scientific" (academic) texts* as opposed to fiction, followed by a discussion of their own papers in progress. They had received a handout with questions to guide their discussion. Malin took on the role of chair for this particular group and tried to get a discussion started by giving the first answer herself:<sup>19</sup>

Malin:           You read [academic texts] to gain information [the *why*] and critically [the *how*].

Kerstin:        You read such texts because someone has told you to and not because you want to.

Malin:           When I was writing my B-essay, I read other B-essays to learn how to write such essays.<sup>20</sup>

Here I took the opportunity to jump in and ask a question about the B-essay, since neither B- nor C-essay requirements existed when I was an undergraduate in Sweden.

Birgitta: How long are these essays?

Malin: Eight to fifteen pages; it varies. You can get a passing grade on an essay that is 7-8 pages [. . .] The content is more important than the length. But the requirements may vary from one course to another [. . .] It's better to write a shorter essay, or it will look as if you have problems summarizing your material.

Malin [turns directly to David]: Why do you read "scientific" text?

David [laughing embarrassedly]: Because I have to.

After some more discussion about the difference between "scientific" and "popular scientific" (as in, e.g., an article from *National Geographic*, an article with scientific value but without the scholarly documentation, a genre that David admitted he enjoyed reading), Malin wanted to go on to discuss the essays the group members were working on, so she asked around. Jenny and David had both written about dialogues. As I later found out, the students had received a handout with suggestions for topics, and David and Jenny had chosen one of them: "Analyze some dialogues from relatively new works of fiction from the perspective of how natural they sound. Do you think the dialogue could occur in real life or is it adapted? In what way does it deviate from a real-life dialog?"<sup>21</sup> Whereas Jenny had picked her dialogues from two books, David had chosen to look at a couple of dialogues from television shows to answer the question whether real people talked like the characters in the shows. When Vesna later joined the group, she questioned David's choice of shows. One, *Dawson's Creek*, is an English-

language show, and the other one, *Big Brother*,<sup>22</sup> is a Swedish show, she pointed out. She thought it would have been “smarter” to stick to the same language for a better sense of comparison. The students then moved on to discuss the type of sources they had used for their essays (only two-three sources were really required). They had used their writing handbook and other class material, library books, and internet sources.

On Malin’s initiative they spent some time discussing reference formats. I have included the following brief exchange because it illustrates once more how much initiative Swedish teachers leave to their students. From my—American—point of view, I find it quite remarkable that the instructors would not have specified how they expected the students to handle their references. After referring to their handbook, *Skrivboken*, however, I have found that even in this book Siv Strömquist leaves some choices up to the student.

Malin:           How did you make references?

Jenny:           Parenthetically in the text itself.

Malin:           When I wrote my B-essay, I used footnotes. Then I learned that the instructors didn’t like this system. But I thought it was much better . . . footnotes at the bottom of each page. I find parenthetical references to be cumbersome.

Further, I find Malin’s assertiveness quite refreshing. She had made a conscious choice in regard to reference systems; she was prepared to justify that choice; and she was willing to hold on to her own opinion even after she had discovered that her instructors did not necessarily agree with her. Listening to a student like Malin, I found it easy to forget that this writing course was at such a low level.

Another brief exchange that I find relevant for my project on academic literacy practices took place just after the previous one, this time between Malin and David. Again, these Swedish students impressed me with their focus and motivation in a group setting without a teacher present. David had admitted that he had run into some problems while writing his “scientific” essay.

Malin:           What was difficult about it? [Malin was very skilled at listening and asking each person follow-up questions.]

David:           I’m used to writing lab reports. Then you just write headlines: “Results,” “Analysis,” “Interpretation.”

In David’s view, this writing task was different. Malin, however, wanted to argue in favor of the similarities between the lab report and this research paper. “You present what you are going to do,” she said, “then how you are planning to go about it, and finally what you have found.” Whereas David, Kerstin, and Vesna all exhibited some problems with academic discourse conventions, Malin, who was quite possibly the strongest writer in the whole class, had made the conventions her own, but not docilely so, as she showed when she asserted her right to choose or at least to have an opinion about the reference system she herself preferred. As Malin pointed out, the customary format of the research paper does come close to that of a lab report, just as the term “scientific” writing would indicate. I would argue that this rigidity in format at least to some extent contradicts the flexibility Swedish students have and the choices they are encouraged to make in their writing and that it may even set some students up for failure.

A case in point is Kerstin’s essay that she had given the title “Modersmålets betydelse” [“The importance of the mother tongue”]. (For a copy of Kerstin’s essay, see

Appendix F). Kerstin—a student over 31—claimed to be of working class background, held a part-time job at a correctional facility, and expressed an interest in issues dealing with social class. Not surprisingly, the largest section of her essay discusses language as a “marker” of social class. As interesting as the topic may be, this essay has some problems. The topic is much too broad for a three-page essay; so Kerstin has ended up with a little bit of this and a little bit of that, and in the end she has said almost nothing. Some of the jerkiness and lack of development I see in this essay and in some of the other “scientific” essays I read may, however, have been caused by the Swedish format. Apparently, in their short papers a student like Kerstin is trying to fit her essay into a given format which calls for division into sections and subsections (a structure I find rather problematic even for much longer papers/dissertations) and which does not make any sense at all in a short paper like the ones I am focusing on here.<sup>23</sup> Yet, the students do basically what they have been taught.

Chapter 17 in *Skrivboken*, the handbook for the course, deals with “scientific writing” and goes by the title “Form and Structure.” On p. 198 Strömquist informs her readers that the “largest unit is usually called *chapter*—even if it is only a page long” (trans. mine; italics in the original). So, quite understandably, Kerstin writes in her paper under the subtitle **1.4 Outline**: “In the first introductory chapter I presented background, purpose, and method” (trans. mine; bold original). The result is a very much fragmented presentation that cannot become anything but superficial, besides that some parts of the given format poorly fit Kerstin’s specific paper. Since she has not done a survey or an interview or any other form of empirical study (such as counting the number of words borrowed from English in a newspaper article or compared a translation of a work to the

original), the section titled **Method** makes little sense in her case. She merely claims to have read three books and made her own reflections. Incidentally, she only directly refers to one of the three books in the body of her paper. I have included Kerstin's paper as an example of one of these "scientific" papers, just to show my readers (even those who do not read Swedish) what one of these papers may look like. This Swedish student's paper looks and reads much more like a newspaper article than an essay written by an average American freshman in one of my composition classes, because I, like most other (American) composition teachers, tend to value developed paragraphs and specific details. This paper clearly illustrates that what passes for acceptable writing is culturally constructed and also how students—in different cultural settings—deliver what they believe that they are asked to produce. Exchanging ideas about format, then, between cultures can stimulate discussions about literacy practices which people have more or less taken for granted in their respective cultures.

While none of the students had brought in several copies of their papers-in-progress for the other group members, as I understood that the course information handout actually called for, they did discuss various course related topics during most of their group time. David, Jenny, and Kerstin passed the working copies they had of their papers around in the group. Malin had chosen the non-research alternative. (If Vesna had even started on her paper, I never found out since it never materialized before the end of the semester.) The students seemed confused about what exactly Christina wanted them to get out of the group session. Again, Malin took charge and asked the group to e-mail their essays to the other group members in case they wanted feedback on them, and they

eventually all agreed that they needed to have their essays finished by the following class meeting.

### My Interaction with the Small Group

My sitting in on their discussion was somewhat of a distraction to the students or a diversion, rather, and understandably so. Although they did not appear the least bothered by my presence, they were curious enough—or polite enough—to ask me some questions about where I lived and what I did and what Americans thought about George W. Bush, and so on. (I could detect some, if not anti-American sentiments, at least anti-Bush sentiments in the group.)<sup>24</sup> We talked for a short while about the differences in school systems and about the high cost of schooling in the United States. I took the opportunity to ask these Swedish students some questions about where they were in terms of their education. Kerstin said that she was planning to enroll in Swedish, 40 points, in the fall; David was hoping to get accepted into a media technology program at another university; and Vesna was working very hard to get her chaotic situation under control: “I have studied for three years, and I haven’t even started with what I want to do. And my study loans are slowly but surely about to run out; so I have to get accepted somewhere this fall. If I don’t, I’m going to be in a heap of trouble.” (She never told us clearly what it was she wanted to do.) Vesna was attempting to benefit from some of the bridging programs that have been put in place to help students make the transition from high school to higher education. She was taking some courses at KomVux (an organized, nationwide educational program in Sweden for people over 18 who are either trying to make up courses they did not take in high school or to raise their grade-point averages) at



the same time as she was enrolled in this Swedish course. She had also earlier taken courses in political science but had run into some snags with the essay requirement. She had started on a C-essay. “It [the C-essay] is such a big university thing!” she exclaimed. For various reasons—problems with her choice of topic and problems with advising among them—she never finished this essay. She claimed to have called her advisor time after time, even on his cell phone, and begged him for a meeting, and, during the only meeting they had, he had told her that he felt that she would be able to handle the situation. I would have liked to have spent some more time with Vesna to get a deeper insight into her difficulties—especially as she fit into the category of first-generation college student with an immigrant background—but she was under more than enough stress as it was; so I had to abandon this idea.

Before we broke up for the day, I told the students that I thought they were working very hard for a mere “pass” in this course. I had indeed found them highly motivated despite what they considered vague instructions and despite that their best efforts would not be rewarded even with a “pass with distinction” but only with a “pass.”

#### Further Observations of the 8-point Writing Course

The next two times I sat in on Christina’s writing class, the students were involved in exercises that went by the name “defense.” On the first day of the defenses but before they started, Christina talked briefly about some differences between “scientific” writing and fiction writing. The language in academic writing, she said, is not as “seductive” as in fiction. It has to be more formal to not leave too much room for different interpretations; therefore, academic papers have to follow a specific format. She

said that she was hoping that the students would learn something from the discussion about the essays. In an e-mail that she had sent out between class meetings, Christina had placed the students in pairs. They had been instructed to exchange essays ahead of the class meeting; when they came to class, they were expected to perform a kind of role play. To start, the designated reader of the essay—the “opposer”<sup>25</sup>—took the floor and spoke about the essay: what the main points were, how the essay was organized, and what the strengths and weaknesses were in terms of content, organization, stylistic level, language, and references. Then the writer—the respondent—got a chance to clarify her points and respond to the critique of the essay. Then these roles were reversed.

The first time only four students (two pairs) had actually exchanged papers ahead of time. Because of technological or other problems, such as limited access to computer, the others had not; so Christina had to think on her feet to make her plan for the day accommodate the students who came to class unprepared. She said that the two pairs who were ready would start and instructed the others to use the break to read each other’s essays. Jenny and David, the two students who had written about dialogues, had been paired together, and Christina asked them to go first. Whereas Jenny thought that David had a clear structure, the right stylistic level, and competent language, she said that she had found his method to be “unscientific.” As earlier in the group discussion, David was again criticized for his use of one excerpt from a dialogue in Swedish and another one in English. What he had actually done was to copy the Swedish captions of the English original. When his turn came to defend himself, David admitted that this method was rather “stupid.” As for Jenny’s paper, after saying some positive things about her outline etc., David raised the question whether her quotations were too long. At this point,

Christina (who played the role of chair/examiner) took the opportunity to make a brief statement about the use of quotations. They are supposed to be a “spice” in a text, she said, and she agreed with David that Jenny could have shortened hers. Then David said that, although he found Jenny’s language to be clear, he felt that it may not have enough “weight.” Christina asked him a clarifying question: “You would like it to be more scientific?” David agreed that he would have like to see some specialized vocabulary. Jenny listened, and when she responded, she agreed that her language might be too simple for writing at this level. Christina added that one picks up specialized vocabulary by reading field specific texts that employ technical terms.

Up next were two female students, who had chosen their own genres and topics. One had written what she labeled a “chronicle,” even though I would probably have called it a light-hearted humorous column. The other one, Åsa, had written a documentary travel article about her experiences in India. She had given it the title “Travel in India—not on a smooth track” (my translation). I have included Åsa’s essay (see Appendix G), simply to show what a Swedish essay of this type, which would fit into the category creative nonfiction, may look like. One thing I found interesting was that Åsa had chosen to print her essay in columns, like a magazine or newspaper article. In fact, all the non-research essays the students presented were printed in columns. Another thing that struck me was how seriously Åsa had taken the matter of audience. She had imagined herself writing for the travel magazine *Vagabond*, and the result was so successful that another student in the class recommended that she submit her piece to that magazine for publication.

As Åsa's essay indicates, young Swedes are well traveled, and on this day I also talked to two other students who had spent some time in the United States. Rebecka had studied for a semester at a university in Chicago and had there been enrolled in a first-semester writing course. When I asked her what she thought about it, she said that she had found the course very useful and thought that similar courses were needed at Swedish universities. She said she had liked the more-structured American university system—until she came to the week of final exams. Emeli had a hair-raising story to tell. She had come to California as an au-pair but quickly decided that she was in the wrong family and had made a daring escape from the house in the middle of the night.

The second day of “defenses,” a week later, was similar to the previous one, except that more students had had occasion to look over the essays before they came to class. Another difference was that, instead of being merely an observer, on this day I became a true participant-observer. Because one student was absent, and another student, Johanna,<sup>26</sup> was so hoarse that she could barely speak, I offered to look over her paper and serve as her “opposer.” She had written a short academic paper about the language used in chat rooms. Her thesis claimed that chat-language functions as a completely new form of communication and is actually closer to spoken than to written language. To prove her point, Johanna used a source that listed characteristics of formal language and showed that for each point chat language is almost the complete opposite. I told her and the class that I found the choice of topic both interesting and timely and very well suited for the course and the assignment, and I mostly praised the result, with the suggestion that one of the sections was underdeveloped and possibly misplaced.

If one sees the “scientific” essays the students in the Swedish 20-point course wrote as practice for the longer and more-complex essays that await all of them down the road when they have to fulfill the C-essay requirement, then one can similarly see their defense performances as a practice run for what lies ahead. At higher levels, at least from the C-level (60-point level) and up, these defenses become more serious, announced on a university’s calendar and sometimes open to the public. (See further discussion in Chapter V.) Basically, a Swedish dissertation defense follows the same format. Instead of being in the hands of a dissertation committee, the Ph.D. candidate works intimately with one professor, and the department appoints another professor to be the “opposer” at the time of the public defense. Many times specialists are called in from other universities, even from other countries, to serve as “opposers” during dissertation defenses, which are, by the way, scheduled and announced a long time before they actually take place and are always open to the public.<sup>27</sup>

With the exception of Vesna, the students in Christina’s writing class seemed well adjusted and highly motivated. In contrast to most American students in a low-level writing course, the Swedish students were taking the course by choice. The responses to my survey indicate that they cared deeply about writing. To the question “How important is writing to you?” 15 students marked the first alternative, “very important—for school, for my future career and to me as a person.” The three remaining students marked that writing is “important to me as a person.” As a whole, they were very positive to the course, now that they had come to the end of the semester. They had found it valuable to practice writing in many different genres and had enjoyed the freedom they had had to shape their assignments. A few of them thought that they would have benefited from

more direct instruction on how to write, with more attention to their language use from the teacher.

### Process Pedagogy and Teaching Philosophy

As should already be clear and as I will have reason to further develop and exemplify when I discuss the creative writing class I observed, the writing pedagogy at Södertörn relied heavily on process theory and practices. It would also best fit into the expressivist camp. The students' own writing was the focus at all times and outside texts did not play a prominent role in the writing segment of Basic Swedish, 20 points, not in the sense that the students had to wrestle with texts for their content. In the beginning of the semester the students had been assigned most of their handbook, *Skrivboken*, starting with the chapters dealing with pre-writing and paragraphing, moving on to chapters about the writing stage as well as punctuation rules and other intricacies, and finishing with a chapter called "Text Patterns," which is more or less a mini-course in business writing with form letters that provide the patterns for job application, curriculum vitae, scholarship application, request for interview, etc. This handbook served as a reference text, one to which the students could turn to find answers to questions they may have about their actual writing. As for other types of texts, the students worked with articles of their own choice for Assignment 3, which required them to rewrite the article so it would be suitable for younger readers; however, in this case they were engaging the language of the article, not necessarily its content. Before writing their own short stories, the students were *encouraged* (not required) to read some short stories on their own for "inspiration." Further, the students who chose to write a short research paper had to do a limited

amount of outside reading. Nonetheless, this is the extent of it. There was no reader assigned for the course; so the students had no texts to react to, discuss, and then write about. Their writing course had no theme or content focus.

When I observed Christina's class and studied the syllabus, I had moments when I felt as if I had taken a step back in time. When I first started teaching first-year composition (in the early 1990s), I taught in a remotely similar fashion although the textbooks that we used contained some texts that we assigned as models. My students were then expected to produce similar texts, a narrative essay, a descriptive essay, an argumentative essay, etc. The so-called "mode" differed with each new essay.<sup>28</sup> Some years later, when I began taking courses in my doctoral program, I was introduced to other ways of teaching writing: the use of texts not as models but as material for students to react to, as a part of their invention process; the use of ethnographic methods; and eventually to a cultural studies approach. These post-process literacy practices or ways of teaching writing—which would also, of course, include service-learning approaches—do not yet seem to have become common in Sweden.

By contrast, the writing assignments Christina and her colleagues had designed had a rhetorical sophistication that my own old assignments sadly lacked. Christina's assignments are varied, interesting, and rhetorically situated with a particular emphasis on audience. In addition, I find the inclusion of a creative-writing assignment intriguing. Institutions of higher education in the United States have in general created a perhaps unfortunate chasm, between creative and expository writing courses, that does not seem to exist in Sweden. Also, the Swedish writing instructors were not teaching "modes of discourse" but genres.

In the classroom Christina kept a low and nondirective profile, which was quite intentional. Asked about her teaching philosophy, Christina answered:

My teaching philosophy is based on my conviction that it is not possible to teach anybody anything but teaching means that you must provide opportunities for learning.

I create the environment, the respect and the group climate. I also try to keep in mind that I teach individuals in a gr[o]up and not a group. In teaching writing I must know how to speak with the person and teach the respons[e] groups how to use their words when stating questions. The respect and the listening are important.<sup>29</sup>

What I did not see and what I would have liked to come across was a critical inquiry into how well the tools the college provides actually are suited to the students' needs or how these needs are perceived. In other words, even though I tried to probe into the politics of the writing and rhetoric instruction, it struck me that the people I spoke with had never thought through a connection of this nature. In some instances, as I have already indicated and will further develop later, I could sense some tensions or even clashes between the democratic aims of Södertörn and the literacy instruction actually taking place.

#### A Creative Writing Course at Södertörn—First Observation

I have decided to include a discussion of the creative writing course at Södertörn to further illustrate how the boundaries that exist in the U.S. between disciplines and subdisciplines are not necessarily the same elsewhere. In the U.S. a creative writing



course would denote a course in poetry and short story writing or one of the two. In Sweden, *creative* stands for an approach or a stance that can be applied to different types of writing. Although the creative writing course at Södertörn technically was another lower-level course, the students in this class were even more advanced than Christina's students. A course in creative writing is a relatively new phenomenon in Swedish higher education, and there are still no programs in place that will take a student all the way to a doctorate in creative writing or even a master's degree but only a few isolated courses here and there. This particular course was offered on a half-time basis, which meant that the students received ten points for one semester's work. Remarkably enough, as I heard both from Ingrid,<sup>30</sup> the instructor, and from others, this creative writing course was the most popular course at Södertörns högskola, with a long waiting list. Of 1200 applicants only 18 had been admitted, based on grades and previous academic experience. By May when I entered the scene, the group of 18 had shrunk to 13.

Never having taken a single creative writing course in my life, I went to my first observation with some apprehensions. It did not help that I got lost and Ingrid had to come and look for me. This class met in the old building at Södertörn, a building that housed the library in addition to several classrooms. The students sat at tables in a horseshoe formation or a kind of semicircle. When I came into the classroom, they were writing. As I later found out, each period in this class started with five minutes of non-directed freewriting. Ingrid was a strong believer in freewriting and recommended her students to begin and finish every single day with five minutes of writing. Unlike what appears to be the rule in the U.S. for teachers of creative writing,<sup>31</sup> Ingrid (to the best of my knowledge) could not herself be classified as an established—that is, published—

creative writer. Her background was in the publishing and consulting areas. Instead she had arranged for a *real* author to make a guest appearance on campus.

I surveyed this group of students also, again not to obtain any statistically valid information but to complement my observations. Considering that I had learned about the long waiting list for this class, I was not surprised this time to find that most of the students were in their twenties: four were over 31, three were between 26 and 30, five were between 21 and 25; just one student was 20 or younger. They brought with them a wide range of experiences, both education and work experience. This course was offered on a part-time basis, and consequently these students officially held outside jobs beside their studies. Most of them were taking the course because they were either headed for a career that involved writing (at least one student planned to go into journalism) or testing the waters for a change of careers; the others saw their writing as a serious hobby and wanted a break from their other studies. Just one student claimed to have immigrant background (Greek). As for their educational background, eight students came from homes where one or both parents held a college degree; of the remaining five, two answered that both parents had completed high school and three that one parent was a high-school graduate. Thus, most of these students saw themselves as solidly middle class.

For the purpose of my project, the most interesting piece of information I gleaned from my survey in this group was a comment one of the students volunteered without my asking for it. In spite of placing herself in the middle class (although just one her parents had a high school education), this student—in the 26-30 age bracket—with a degree in engineering, made the following comment about her own wavering class identification:

The bad side of working-class turning middle class is that literature and arts is [sic] only considered NICE HOBBIES and intellectual masturbation, NOT a serious choice of career. The real job is to be an engineer. I'm looking/trying to get to the point where I've convinced myself that's not true, & hope writing courses will help me along, so that I'll one day be good enough for that. [The student wrote her answer in English; emphasis original] <sup>32</sup>

This insight fits in with working-class studies from the U.S. that illuminate the dichotomy between manual and intellectual labor. For example, in her dissertation “Writing as/or Work: Locating the Material(s) of a Working Class Pedagogy,” Jennifer Beech writes: “Country music is replete with messages that juxtapose manual and mental labor, physical work as honest and (by implication) intellectual work as dishonest, the working-class world as the world of reality and the academy as the world of play” (1). And Julie Lindquist elaborates on the same distinction: “The idea that *work* must be separated from—and indeed, must be defined against, *play*—pervades narratives of work. As thematic categories, work and play show little overlap; work is what must be done to make play possible; work time is thus distinct from leisure time” (90; emphasis original). What is interesting and may invite further studies is that the Swedish student is not referring to blue-collar manual labor but to engineering—white-collar work that requires a college degree—yet appears to view her possible switch from a scientific to a humanistic field as a change of class. According to this Swedish student’s experience, the intellectual work of engineering is acceptable to her family and friends, one would assume, whereas the intellectual activity of writing is not considered work at all but mere

play or a hobby and therefore unacceptable. Is it possibly so that to the working class all intellectual pursuits are mere play but that to some middle-class individuals the defining line between work and play goes between the humanities on one side and business/science/technology on the other?

During my first observation in this creative writing class the students were discussing essays they had written. *Essay* was here used in the sense of the genre or, maybe better, approach or method, as discussed by the Norwegian journalist and journalism teacher Jo Bech-Karlsen (whose book *Jag skriver, alltså är jag till [I write, therefore I am]* was one of the recommended readings for the course):

The personal in the essay goes back to the Frenchman Michel de Montaigne, the father of the essay, who in 1580 published a collection of essays under the humble title *Essais* (“attempts”). One of the signs of the essay is that it is dialogic; the essayist carries on a conversation with his or her reader. . . . The essayist is a writer who does not hide his or her subjectivity but, on the contrary, points to it. The essay is, consequently, not systematic or finished but *on its way*. (47; trans. mine; emphasis original)<sup>33</sup>

To stimulate discussion, Ingrid prodded the students one by one about their topics and their feelings about this exploratory and reflective way of writing and the nature of the sources they had used.<sup>34</sup> She had assigned them some essays (by Charles Lamb, for example) to use as models and inspiration for their own texts, but the students were not really required to use those essays. The titles of the students’ essays were quite varied, such as “The Love of Snuff,” “The Role of a Mother,” “Intuition,” “In Praise of

Ugliness,” and “Original Sin.” The student who had written about “Original Sin” argued that the implication in the destruction of the environment in the world today is a modern version of “original sin.” The students gave passionate personal testimonies about their mental journeys and their struggles to establish focus and structure for their essays.

For all the sincerity and interesting turns of these testimonies, there is a brief moment from my first observation that I want to place in focus: When Lena<sup>35</sup> complained that, although she had made forays into encyclopedias and other reference works for her essay on alcohol, she was not happy with the result because it still became only personal, Ingrid gave the thought provoking comment: “We’re only concerned with the process; the result is not even a part of this course.” Her answer was fitting, in view of the exploratory and tentative nature of the writing task at hand, but it was obvious that she intended for it to have a wider application. I have chosen to pick out this particular answer for two reasons: (1) it shows the level of commitment by Ingrid (and, as I have reason to believe, by other Swedish writing instructors) to process pedagogy; (2) it evidences once more how stress free it can be to teach writing and to learn to write on a pass/fail basis. Ingrid wanted her students to take risks, to explore, to reflect over connections between thought and language, and to play with metaphors, without worrying about the finished product. I am personally convinced that writing instructors in the United States, in spite of all their talk about a paradigm shift from product to process, can only teach process with an eye toward the product as long as they are expected to sort their students into groups assigned grades of A, B, C, D, or F at the end of every semester. Sharon Crowley thinks along the same line when she claims that the transition

from product to process never “stimulate[d] us to rethink the huge institutional apparatus within which composition instruction is delivered” (“Around 1971” 65).

Ingrid launched the class into a writing exercise that encouraged the students to continue their play: “Love is like . . . .” She displayed a transparency with suggestions such as “water,” “market,” “disease” and allowed us—yes, I wrote, too—to try two different versions to see where they would take us. I was surprised to find myself quickly composing two poems, one that begins with “Love is like a rain,” and another one that starts with “Love is like moss.” Ingrid encouraged her students to search for metaphors also while reading other people’s texts.

After this exercise the students were allowed to take a “work break” in small groups and read two short stories that they had written in groups, not collaboratively but by taking turns in a relay fashion. Both halves of the class had been given the same opening paragraphs and then received the instruction to continue the story. After the break Ingrid led a discussion about these stories with her class. Both of them contained one wildly dramatic and lurid section, and Ingrid had told me during the break that she was absolutely certain that these passages had been written by male students. Her suspicions were confirmed when she asked the writers to identify themselves. One of them confessed that he had consciously tried to make it hard for the person who was to follow him. Ingrid took the opportunity to guide the discussion over to different meanings of *creativity*. According to Ingrid, “creativity is not senseless originality.” Instead she wanted the students to realize that most of what is called literature consists of variations on the same themes with only small personal deviations. In our society, she said, creativity has been turned into a commodity, with our product-oriented view, whereas in

other cultures creativity can take completely other forms, such as mysticism in India or social structuring in China. Maybe the best way to use one's creativity, she suggested, is to "explore what the world looks like." She gave the students an assignment: "Write about periods in your life when you have felt especially creative." To guide their writing the students received a handout with a number of questions:

Important periods in your life?

Are there transitional phases? Critical thresholds that mark the periods?

Think about when you last made a decision. What/how did you/did you not do/go about it?

This [present] period in your life, when did it begin? What has been particularly important during this period?

Do you have a symbol for your life?

Do you have thoughts or images that "chafe" or recur?

What conditions need to be met for your creativity?

When are you the most creative? (trans. mine)

Ingrid said the students had to write, but turning the piece in to her was entirely optional.

#### Creative Writing Class—Second Observation/Participation

The next time I observed this class was the last class meeting for the semester.<sup>36</sup>

Because it was their last meeting, Ingrid spent some time summarizing the course content and emphasizing its purpose one more time. She talked about writing for oneself to develop one's own thinking; but, she said, writing is almost always done for the sake of communicating with someone else. She talked about classical rhetoric and the means by

which the rhetors gathered material for their speeches: quotations, poems, similes, anecdotes, examples, riddles, proverbs, jokes, etc. She said to her students that their essays would probably gain from having a quotation or something similar as its foundation. This class was quite intense with discussion, writing exercises, and more discussion; there was not a dead moment. The students and I received a handout with quotations about life and death and love to choose from as prompts for our own writing. I picked one from Seneca that said: "It is better to laugh at life than to complain about it." This time I found myself in a small group where we were expected to share our writing. The students took turns reading their very serious and philosophical mini-essays. Mine was down to earth and trivial, written from a mother's point of view, and I felt embarrassed to read it in front of the students in my group. I felt as if the students in this creative writing class had all the experience whereas I had none whatsoever with this type of writing. Not until Ingrid "threatened" that the ones who had not read their pieces to the small group would have to read to the whole class did I relent and read a portion of what I had written about how a sense of humor will help a mother of young children keep her sanity throughout a day of drudgery and sibling fights.

During the "work break" this day, the students gave one another feedback in their response groups on the last essays they had written. For this work session Ingrid gave them the following handout:

**Your spontaneous reaction?**

Are you touched or not? What in the text causes you to feel as you do?  
Do you stay interested the whole way through? Why? Why not?  
Do you see the whole picture?



**Is the work**

- Analytically sharp?
- Form conscious?
- Language conscious?
- Independent?

**As responder, point to:**

- Strong, supporting passages
- Weaker passages (Why are they weak? What would you like to see here?)

**Discuss the writer's questions, give your opinions about what the writer himself/herself has asked you to comment on.**

**Look at and compare/contrast the different group members' essays considering**

- composition/structure
- character and weight of the different sections: ethos, logos, and pathos (trans. mine; emphasis original)

Compared to the peer response questions I normally use in my composition classes, Ingrid's questions are simultaneously both vaguer and more sophisticated than mine, but her students were accustomed to taking their own initiatives, like the students I had seen in action in Christina's writing class.

During this last class meeting a substantial part of the three hours was devoted to a course summary and evaluation. Ingrid wanted to demonstrate to the students that "this is what we have done" by once more taking them through the different stages of the writing process and showing how these stages can be viewed in the light of classical rhetoric. She used Latin terms such as "inventio," "dispositio," and "elocutio" in her summary. She said that in their class they had placed the emphasis on the writing process or the "journey," not on the product or the "destination." As she said this, I recalled what she had told her students the previous time about how the result was not even a part of

this course. She also confessed that a “secret purpose” with the course design had been to teach students to write as a means to deepen their thinking. Then she turned to the students and asked them for input about the course design. As always in this class, student involvement was very high as Ingrid turned to each student and asked for her or his opinion. One question she had was whether the students thought that she ought to include more theory for the following semester, but she did not get a unanimous answer. Whereas some of the students thought that more theory would be useful, others said that students come to this course expecting to write and not to read too much theory. To the question about how their response groups had functioned, whether they had been “too nice,” Martina<sup>37</sup> gave the following memorable answer:

It would be good if we from the beginning could tell each other what we want to get out of the response. You have to have some training before you can give good response. Now we have reached a point where we think: How are *we* going to make this text better? Then *we* move onto the next text.

Such a cohesive, supportive writing group or response group willing to take on responsibility for *all* the group members’ writing is something I myself have only experienced in graduate school, so I marveled as I was listening to the discussion among these highly motivated undergraduates, some of whom were seriously looking for venues to publish their writing. It made me wonder—as I had wondered before—what Swedes do right to encourage undergraduate students to take so much initiative and responsibility for their own learning. How would students in American writing courses act if they had registered for the course by choice instead of by necessity?

### Analysis of the Creative Writing Course

Just as Christina's writing course, which was mainly a course in expository writing, blurred the boundaries between creative writing and composition in interesting ways with the inclusion of a short story assignment, I found that Ingrid's creative writing course, with its inclusion of rhetorical terminology and writing which was not pure fiction, also blurred those distinctions. In her "Introduction" to "Inquiring into the Nexus of Composition Studies and Creative Writing," Mary Ann Cain suggests that both fields would benefit from closer contact with each other:

If much of composition's vitality stems from its forays into other fields of inquiry, a dialogue with creative writing can add to that vitality. In turn, creative writing may find that a fresh focus on pedagogy and theory can help generate new contexts for writing "creatively" and new purposes for writing within those contexts that may more effectively move the study of writing outside the narrow confines of schooling and its traditional disciplines into a more active presence in the world. (71)

In the same vein, George Kalamaras asks for creative writing courses that "include other kinds of writing besides poems or stories" (81). What Cain calls "a more active presence in the world, Kalamaras refers to as "social responsibility" (80). Whereas Ingrid in her course opened the door to writing that was more than personal and more than just fiction, it may stretch a point to interpret her comment about how one should consider using one's creativity to "explore what the world looks like" as coming close to Kalamaras' "social responsibility"; it could, nonetheless, be a beginning.

Because I lack a background in creative writing and sensed that I needed an informed perspective to make sense of my observations, I asked Heidi Rosenberg—a creative writer herself and a teacher of both composition and creative writing in the U.S.—how she teaches a creative writing course at the introductory level. I wanted to see how her approach might be similar to or different from Ingrid's. Some similarities appear to be that the students both in Ingrid's and in Heidi's classes have previous writing experience and that the courses are voluntary. Further, both instructors use exercises during and outside of class time to let the students practice certain aspects of writing and to help them overcome writer's block. Such exercises are used in creative courses at the introductory level, Heidi said, but almost never in advanced creative writing classes in the U.S. Both instructors seem to be in the business of puncturing the myth of the creative writer as a different species from ordinary human beings. Ingrid discussed the nature of creativity with her students and pointed out that most stories are variations of the same plots and themes. Heidi said that she emphasizes revision, which counteracts the belief that inspiration is an almost mystical experience, and she also encourages writing that is based on lived experience. She says that she keeps telling her students, "Write about what you know." Both Heidi and Ingrid discuss writing as "craft" with their students and require them to read articles about writing. Nonetheless, this may be where the similarities end. Unlike Ingrid, who divides her course between fiction and essay writing, Heidi divides her course about evenly between poetry and fiction. In fact, when Ingrid's students discussed the course content during their last class meeting on May 27, 2002, some of them said that they would have liked to see at least one of their seminars devoted to poetry. And Heidi does not teach creative writing rhetorically or for the secret or open

purpose of training her students to become better thinkers. In Heidi's opinion it is not necessarily bad that creative writing and composition are different. She prefers to keep creative writing as a course that students take for enjoyment and not because it may be useful for them either for their academic life or for life outside of school.

Personally, I would like the discussion about the boundaries between courses in composition and creative writing to continue. So does Wendy Bishop, herself both poet and compositionist, who claims: "Whether we sanction it or not, when fact and fiction do blend, we need other ways of looking at and of teaching writing" ("Crossing" 188). Those who share this view here in the U.S. could learn something new from looking more closely at a creative writing course such as Ingrid's at Södertörns högskola.

I believe that my own students have to some degree benefited from my exposure to the Swedish version of creative writing courses. I find the Swedish approach to "creativity" as a stance or an approach more than as a genre reserved for specific courses to be sound and worthy of emulation. Over the years that have passed since I conducted my field research at Södertörn, I have become more open to incorporating some creative writing assignments into my first-year composition syllabus. In my English 101 classes during the fall of 2004, I gave the students two options for their last essay of the semester: (1) Discuss what makes the short story "The Courtship of Merlin LeBlanc" by Tim Gautreaux specifically Southern and (2) Write a sequel to the original story. Just as I had expected, most of the students chose the creative option, and in several cases the results were quite amazing. During the last class meeting some students volunteered to read their own short stories aloud to the class, and we ended the semester on quite a high note as some students told me that this assignment was their favorite for the whole

semester. By allowing the lines between creative and expository writing to blur, I had made some students happier writers without taking away from the main focus of the course, which was still on expository writing.

### Rhetoric at Södertörn

Ingrid, who was also teaching a rhetoric course during the spring of 2002, spontaneously invited me to stay and observe her rhetoric class that met at night, and I happily accepted her invitation. My presence went almost unnoticed because the class was at least a semi-public affair on this particular night. Ingrid's students were giving their end-of-semester, timed speeches, and she and another rhetoric teacher had combined their classes. One or two students from the other class had been assigned to critique each speaker, and, during the break and after class, the speakers met with their critics for a briefing session. Besides, some of the speakers had invited family members to attend their presentations; so I could have passed for some student's relative or friend. The audience being sizable, this class meeting was held in a small lecture theater and not in the more intimate setting of a classroom, and I sat beside Ingrid, who served as the timekeeper, approximately in the middle of the room.

During the course of the evening I listened to eleven elaborate speeches, four during the first part of the class period and seven after the break. Just as in the creative writing class, these students were mostly nontraditional students—age 25 or older—seven women and four men. And just like the creative writing course, this rhetoric course was offered on a half-time basis (10 points) but as a night class, and most of the students held full- or part-time jobs on the side. The students' enthusiasm was unmistakable. One

after the other, they stepped up and gave a speech that was crafted according to Aristotelean principles. This rhetoric class appeared to have had an almost religious impact on the students. They had now been enlightened and had the newly acquired rhetorical “tools” or techniques at their disposal, and they did their utmost to demonstrate the effectiveness of these tools. They had learned that rhetoric is the art to be persuasive by arousing their audience’s interest in what they had to say. So, they made use of catchy introductions, elaborate metaphors, compelling examples, well-chosen quotations, rhetorical questions, etc. But the tools were not just technical. Some of the students used rhetoric as a lens through which they saw everything around them: One student gave her speech about the rhetorical disposition of life itself; another student used her rhetorical tools to analyze an actual building, the City Library in Stockholm.

The performances left me with very mixed emotions. This group of students seemed more homogeneous than any of the groups I had observed earlier; and the speeches that flowed so eloquently from their mouths were indeed variations on the same theme, a praise of rhetoric. Were these tools really neutral? If not, whose interests did they serve? As I was listening, I was reminded of an event that I had witnessed many years earlier at Manchester Grammar School in England. That time I had found myself in the audience of a formal speech event—the final debate between two teams of boys of middle-school age. I had the feeling then that these highly accomplished boys had been groomed into an upper-class way not only in their way of speaking but also in their way of thinking. A similar, rather disheartening feeling came over me again, as I listened to these adult students performing rhetorical exercises at Södertörns högskola. Was this what it took to level the playing field? Was this what it meant to bring the university to

the people? As laudable as democratic efforts are, how can they work unless social contexts are taken into account? As it turned out, one student got herself into trouble because her speech was too long. Ingrid called time, and the student had to rush through her conclusion. Ironically enough, this student's speech was about stress. After the break, Ingrid shared with me what she had just found out: that this student had lost her job and was under a great deal of personal stress. In this situation the rhetorical tools had completely failed her. I decided that I needed to air my perceptions from this night during my interview with one of the rhetoric professors.

#### Interview with Lennart Hellspång

Lennart Hellspång is one of the professors at Södertörn who spends most of his time doing research and writing. He holds a doctorate in linguistics but has gradually turned his interest over to rhetoric and has even written several textbooks in this field, such as *Konsten att tala: Handbok i praktisk retorik* [*The art of speaking: Handbook in practical rhetoric*], published in 1992. My interview with him was my last face-to-face interview, and it turned out to be different from all my other interviews in regard to my own participation and positioning. When I read through my transcripts, I realized that I talked a great deal more during this interview than I had done during my earlier ones; also, I was more aggressively pushing a point. I wanted to know how to make sense of the information I had gathered through some of my observations, and because Lennart Hellspång was not a teacher whose class I had observed, I did not fear that he would consider my questions disrespectful or threatening.



We talked about the renewed interest in rhetoric as a discipline in Swedish higher education in general, and we discussed the function of rhetoric at Södertörn, especially in respect to the pronounced diversity mission of this college. Further, I wanted to know more about the research project “The Didactics of Rhetoric” that I knew Lennart Hellspong to be involved in. About his role in this project, Lennart said that he was specifically looking at the teacher role, “to see whether rhetoric, rhetorical concepts can give teachers—we have access to a group of teachers who teach rhetoric but also other subjects—whether they can provide teachers with tools for reflection to think about and develop their own teacher role.”

As I soon found out, Lennart was not only engaged in this project but had also recently become involved in a second rhetoric project titled “The Democratic Dialogue,” intended to research the value base in a diverse and multicultural society. Lennart talked about the changes that have taken place in Swedish society and outlook:

The Swedish school once had a stable Christian, national value base, but it is impossible today. Is there any value base around which people can come together? Well, it seems as if democracy, citizenship rights, and such things are what one points to.

When Lennart mentioned “democracy,” I took particular note since my whole project explores academic literacy in relation to democracy in theory and practice.

Asked about the funding for these projects, Lennart patiently explained to me that all Swedish academic research has become very centralized and that grant applications have to go through an institution called “Vetenskapsrådet” [The Swedish Research Council], which reviews applications and decides about funding. He said that the two

rhetoric projects he was working on had received grants through the educational science division of this central institution.<sup>38</sup> The objective was that this research would eventually have some pedagogical benefits through the texts that Lennart would write with students in mind and not “just for an audience of my colleagues.”

From this interview I also learned, however, that funded research projects have become the new way of supporting Ph.D. students in Sweden. One doctoral student who receives funding through the project “The Didactics of Rhetoric” is Ann Blücker. There are official Ph.D. positions at Swedish universities, Lennart said, but they are few and far between and therefore highly competitive. Another way to be admitted to a doctoral program as through the backdoor is to bring one’s own grant money, Lennart told me, and this is what has happened in Ann’s case.

When I asked Lennart if he thought that the rhetoric projects mattered to him personally or whether he had to fulfill the expectations of the person(s) who initiated them, he answered:

That’s a reasonable question. One can become involved in projects one doesn’t feel as happy about as one thought. One may have applied for a grant for something that one thought would stand a chance to receive funding rather than something one really wanted to do. I’ve had an earlier project dealing with parliamentary debates that felt like that. But these things I think, you know, I don’t feel that I have to make any such compromises.

Gradually, I steered the interview over to my experiences from the night when I had been listening to students’ rhetorical performances in the lecture theater at Södertörn:

Birgitta: Yes, I felt as if they had been brainwashed—the whole bunch. Then I started thinking. This is, as I understand it, Aristotelean rhetoric; it's a Western phenomenon, and it's not only a technique but also an ideology.

Lennart: Yes!

Birgitta: . . . and then I wanted to know how this rhymes with the multicultural engagement. Is there any instruction at all in other forms of rhetoric than the Aristotelean, Western form? I assume that there exist other traditions as well, which are maybe not equally good, but they would be supported by another ideology.

Lennart: That's a most interesting question. First I was thinking about brainwashing. Let's start there. It's quite nice. I think we have a very enthusiastic, instructional climate [. . . .] It's apparent that it reaches these students, and it's quite nice that they react in this manner, that they feel that they have received a new tool with which to understand and explain things. If one imagines two phases, the enthusiastic phase during which one rather uncritically accepts everything and tries it out, which would be followed by a more critical phase during which one raises your kind of questions, everything would be well [. . . .] Then this other question about rhetoric and multi-ethnicity or multiculturalism, it's very justified [. . . .] I believe, like you do, that [rhetoric] is not universal. It's looked upon sometimes as some form of metatheory for communication that could be applied in all times everywhere. It's part of the mythmaking about rhetoric also in this country. Kurt Johannesson, who is now professor emeritus in

the field and the one who has most contributed to making rhetoric known in the media, often portrays it in this manner, as if the rules that applied to the old Greeks apply, mainly unchanged, to this day. And this [view] in today's mass medial world one has reason to question. One can be fooled to believe that if one has a certain theory to reconstruct communication, that this idea can be generally applied, for that's something the researcher does, a reconstruction. One could also have an old Chinese theory and apply it. One can always apply theories anachronistically if they have particular richness. So, that's one thing, that one can make interesting—effective analyses. Another way is [to ask], what comes with the baggage?

After bringing up my point about Western and non-Western rhetorical traditions, I was ready to add class issues to our conversation:

Birgitta:       Okay, if I may continue . . . to me it felt something like cultural snobbery to swing around these metaphors. It's something of a return to an earlier academic pattern that I, personally, have a hard time reconciling with immigrant students and working-class students, who don't have an academic tradition behind them. What will now happen to working-class students who go home and practice their metaphors in the kitchen? What happens to the students who have gone through this education in relation to their [home] culture? [ . . . ] From sheer instinct I would have said that this is for a student elite, and here at Södertörn you're trying to attract a nontraditional student population.

Lennart: I believe that rhetoric is a subject that is easy to teach across social borders. It may sound slightly remarkable, but there are explanations for it. One is that the subject, after all, is a practical-skills subject in its core. And it deals with something that, I was about to say, the working class can do as well as the upper class—that is, to use communication as a means of influence.

Birgitta: But the Latin terminology—*inventio, dispositio, elocutio*?

Lennart: In one sense, there are some students who have thought, “Why should we have to use these terms?” [. . .] [W]hen I wrote my book, I used them. . . . Practically speaking, it’s easy to learn these terms. In contrast to other scientific terminology, this is almost a child’s game. But what you said about a world of snobbery, can’t it be a superficial snobbishness? Of course, it could be used in this way. That’s true. I haven’t even thought about it.

I went on to relate the parallel I had drawn between the student speeches I listened to at Södertörn and the debate between the two boys’ teams at Manchester Grammar School.

Birgitta: And then I had the feeling, these kids are brainwashed in some way, and it is a conservative societal pattern that has been forced upon them. It’s not just a technique but something completely different. The little boy who started said, “Gentlemen. . . and (hm!) . . . ladies!” They were eleven or twelve years old! So, then, yes. . . . there is something I’m not quite sure I want to take over, just buy wholesale. That thing about ideology and not just a technique is quite important.

Lennart: Yes, hmm, hmm. This is very interesting. There, there is some kind of parallel to the style rules for the scholarly essay—that is, the social meaning [. . . .] It is easy to turn class blind about what is one's own, when one is right in the middle of an educational situation. But what does it mean? . . . . I think this is a complication . . . . It is underproblematized by myself. I haven't thought very much about it. Because I've seen the positive side of it, I haven't thought very much about the problematic side. The positive side I have seen like this: This is a tool for the elite that one, if one now introduces it on a large scale in the schools, would make available to everybody. But, for the grant proposal for "The Democratic Dialogue," I looked into a study about Swedish working class, about the rhetoric of the Swedish Labor Movement. It was a big project, reported in three fat volumes by Kurt Johannesson, and from it one can see that, at the end of the 1800s, union leaders learn to speak, how one raises a proposition at a meeting and also the art of speaking. So, one could say that it is a form of rhetoric that is put to the service of the working class. But one must also raise another question: What happens with the working class and the leaders of the working class when they lay claim to this rhetoric? Things happen within it, and it may be something similar to what intellectual historian Ronny Ambjörnson writes in his book, *Den skötsamme arbetaren* [*The diligent worker*], in which workers who are often stigmatized as lazy, undependable, and drunkards turn dependable with [organizations like] Verdandi<sup>39</sup> and temperance societies and thereby

maintain their worth as working class. At the same time they do this a little bit on bourgeois premises, something like men saying, “You women are like this and this,” and so the women prove that they are the very opposite. So, then they are still to a certain extent buying into the men’s definition of the problems. And if the result is a bourgeoisification of the Labor Movement through the type of, the rhetoric one chooses to make use of, and if it also is so that a Swedish middle class . . . that immigrant students and others are assimilated into the Swedish middle class through the rhetoric instruction we practice here, what does it mean? What values are indirectly instilled in them? Incredibly important questions.

As I reflected on this interview, I could only hope that it would become the starting point for a continued and fruitful exchange about rhetoric and composition between my two cultures. If someone of Lennart Hellspång’s status and influence were to make a point about democratic values in relation to academic literacy, he could spark the issue into national discussion.

#### Analysis of Literacy Practices at Södertörn

Whereas the enthusiasm for “rhetoric” and writing instruction at a Swedish college like Södertörns högskola was noticeable and positive, the use and function of both oral and written communication definitely remain undertheorized. In a number of books and articles Brian Street has set up two contrasting views of literacy: the “autonomous” and the “ideological” models. Proponents of the autonomous model tend to disregard the social context of literacy (“The New Literacy Studies” 431) and see

literacy “as a neutral technology” (435). Against the “autonomous model” of literacy, Street pitches the “ideological” model. Adherents of this model

view literacy practices as inextricably linked to cultural and power structures in society. . . . Avoiding the reification of the autonomous model, they study these social practices rather than literacy-in-itself for their relationship to other aspects of social life. A number of researchers in the new literacy studies have also paid greater attention to the role of literacy practices in reproducing or challenging structures of power and domination. (433-34)

Without attention to the context of literacy and the power structures at play, Hellspong and Skoglund and others demonstrated an unexamined faith in rhetorical tools as equalizers, thereby inadvertently proving themselves to be adherents of Street’s “autonomous model” of literacy. The same comments that I made in my discussion of the introductory course at Södertörn apply to the rhetoric class I observed. The students who are presented with certain *tools* belong in a context that extends far beyond the classroom walls, and further theorizing about the nature of these tools and their use is necessary. The official view of the government is that extended schooling and increased communication skills will have benefits not only for individuals but also for the whole nation. This optimism comes close to what Harvey Graff has called the “literacy myth,” the pervasive belief that increased literacy levels and schooling will more or less automatically lead to gains in “socioeconomic development, social order, and individual progress” (16).



Likewise, the middle-class values that the Swedish educational system promotes, like the systems in the United States, need more conscious attention. Even Lynn Z. Bloom, who unabashedly embraces her own middle-class background as well as the basic middle-class orientation of writing instruction in the U.S., concludes her article “Freshman Composition as a Middle-Class Enterprise” by exhorting teachers of composition to be sensitive to the cultural diversity of their students: “[A]s teachers we, like our students are citizens of the world; all of us have an ethical as well as cultural obligation to respect the world’s multiple ways of living and speaking” (671). And Bloom goes on to raise the important question, “Is it utopian to strive to make public policy ethical as well as culturally responsive?” (671). If students are mostly expected to be socialized into a middle-class academic world, it should still be possible for them to go through such an acculturation on their own terms.

Not realizing that university teachers are in the business of transmitting middle-class values with their instruction, as in Britta Sjöstrand’s case, or talking about a class journey without fully acknowledging that it may hurt students or that some of them may resist undertaking such a journey, as Skoglund did, is not conducive to promoting democratic ideals.

Whereas I saw so much promise in the Swedish pedagogical environment with students who responded well to nonauthoritarian teaching methods and who showed initiative, engagement with the subject matter, and solidarity with other students—qualities that I consider essential for fostering a sense of democracy both inside and outside of the university setting—I also noticed some limitations to the democratic vision

in the unproblematic way that the *tools* of writing and speaking were viewed as equalizers.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This administrative position was part-time, and Crister Skoglund did not have an official title. According to Kajsa Sköldvall, he had invented the title “mångfaldsansvarig” (something like diversity ombudsman). The office itself officially dropped its name after it became a division of Information Services.

<sup>2</sup> In a joking tone, Crister referred to his office as “klassresebyrån” (the class journey office), a name that I saw as having a great deal of significance. Crister seemed to imply not only that education may make people switch from working class to middle class but also that such “class journeys” are desirable and unproblematic.

<sup>3</sup> After introducing my contacts I have chosen to refer to them mostly by their first names, thus honoring the Swedish democratic practice of using first names even in the interaction between people of different ranks (such as students and teachers).

<sup>4</sup> Crister made it clear that “diversity” had become a buzzword around Scandinavian universities. He had started with a vision, he said, but now that everybody was talking about “diversity,” he thought that the time was ripe for him to move on to other projects. He was, therefore, in the process of leaving his job as promoter of ethnic and social diversity to turn his attention instead to students with disabilities.

<sup>5</sup> The sentence structure in this brochure, with its sentence fragment, is not normal Swedish academic discourse. It is instead typical of the language used in advertising.

<sup>6</sup> As I explained in Chapter II, *Britta Sjöstrand* is a pseudonym.

<sup>7</sup> Since this is the first observation I discuss, I’d like to take the opportunity to explain that the students who are enrolled in a particular course at a Swedish university or college on a full-time basis stay together for the whole semester. They take all the required course components together and normally don’t take any other courses although some of them may hold (part-time) jobs. Not surprisingly, then, a group of Swedish students is likely to seem more cohesive than a group of American college students who take four, five, six or even more courses in different subjects during one semester.

<sup>8</sup> I suggest in Chapter IV that an adjective like “insecure,” when used over and over, may not only have a denotative function but may also limit the way instructors see students and the way students see themselves.

<sup>9</sup> Kajsa Sköldvall told me that the optimal class size was 18 students, but they would normally let 20 students in since they expected some students to withdraw during the course of the semester. If demand for the introductory course was high, up to three sections could be offered in one semester. During the spring of 2002 there was just one section.

<sup>10</sup> For a similar discussion and analysis of a working class home, see, for example, Mike Rose, *Lives on the Boundary*.

<sup>11</sup> Since I quickly realized that all my chores would hardly ever get done, I developed the sneaky habit of doing my homework with a novel hidden under my school book. When my mother approached, I would be busy studying history or German or whatever homework I had been assigned, but, when she left the room, I pulled out my novel.

<sup>12</sup> Shirley Brice Heath reports similar conclusions in *Ways with Words*.

<sup>13</sup> Like the German “wissenschaftliches Schreiben” (Foster 216), the Swedish term “vetenskapligt skrivande” means “scientific writing,” but is usually best translated as “academic writing” or possibly as “academic discourse.” According to Wilhelm H. Peterßen, *wissenschaftliches Schreiben* is used both about process, “a theme, a problem in the academic form and manner, that is, according to academic standards and principles, with academic methods and techniques” and about product, “texts composed with academic rules and formats” (qtd. in Foster 216). Nonetheless, there is an element of “scientific,” as in “having to do with science,” lingering in the meaning of the phrase “vetenskapligt skrivande.” It became obvious when I

discussed my project with some of my Swedish contacts that they regarded a qualitative study as not being “scientific” enough.

<sup>14</sup> These handouts were, naturally, written in Swedish. I have chosen to make direct translations into English.

<sup>15</sup> To reinforce the impression that these instructions were not unique for this particular course or even for Södertörn, I can add my own experience of communicating with students both in Sweden and in the U. S. When I started teaching in Louisiana I quickly realized that my college students expected more concrete directives than I had used when I taught at the high school level in Sweden.

<sup>16</sup> Whereas to me, as a Swede, explicit commands sound dictatorial and undemocratic, I am aware of the fact that an educator like Lisa Delpit advocates a direct, explicit teaching style in dealing with African-American students (168).

<sup>17</sup> In a follow-up e-mail interview, I asked Christina about her criteria for an acceptable essay. I asked her whether she and the other instructors discussed criteria and how much emphasis she placed on correctness *vis-à-vis* content. She answered that the instructors, at least informally, discussed their criteria for evaluating essays. As for correctness, she said that if she saw a problem, she would always begin with commenting on content before she mentioned correctness. Nonetheless, she expected students to improve during the semester so they would be able to adhere to standard rules for writing at the end of the course. To be acceptable, the essays had to show at least an awareness of an outline or structure. Further, Christina claimed that she looked at students’ way of handling response, how they gave response to their peers, and how they gained insight into their own writing processes. She found reflection about writing to be extremely important. From these responses, it becomes clear that grading on a pass/fail basis can have clear advantages over other grading systems. I don’t think I am the only one who has been bogged down with percentages that don’t sufficiently take students’ progress into account.

<sup>18</sup> All names are authentic unless otherwise stated. I asked my research participants whether they wanted me to use their real name or a pseudonym. These students all indicated that they preferred to be referred to by their real names.

<sup>19</sup> This discussion, of course, took place in Swedish. With the students’ permission, I taped the discussion, but, to obviate making my text too cumbersome, I have chosen to go straight to the English translation, unless I want to make a special comment about a Swedish word or phrase that is in some way interesting or problematic.

<sup>20</sup> Malin’s response here shows that, although academic writing instruction in Sweden has increased, imitation has not completely lost its importance.

<sup>21</sup> All the suggestions on the handout had something to do with language use, such as the difference between written and oral language, the frequency of words borrowed from English in a Swedish newspaper article, problems with translating from a foreign language into Swedish, and youth language, just to mention a few.

<sup>22</sup> In spite of its English title, *Big Brother* was a Swedish show, a rather controversial reality show that had originated in the Netherlands.

<sup>23</sup> In Chapter 17 of *Skrivboken* Siv Strömquist discusses the standard structure of a “scientific” report or essay. The three major parts are the introduction, the body, and the conclusion. Each part can then be broken down into chapters, sections, and subsections. On pp. 199-200, Strömquist gives examples of standard outlines for a “scientific” essay, one of them the following:

- 1        **Introduction**
- 1.1     Purpose
- 2        **Background** (earlier research on the topic)
- 3        **Method and material**

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4	<b>Results</b>
4.1	Results of survey
4.1.1	<i>Questions 1-7</i>
4.1.2	<i>Questions 8-15</i>
4.2	Results of interviews
5	<b>Discussion of result</b>
6	<b>Concluding part</b> (trans. mine)

<sup>24</sup> I may need to remind my readers that this discussion took part almost a year prior to the outbreak of the Iraq War. My impression is that the anti-Bush and anti-American sentiments have only grown stronger since 2002.

<sup>25</sup> Since this practice is not used in the U.S., I am at a loss for the best English word to use. My choice “opposer” comes close to the Swedish word “opponent.”

<sup>26</sup> This student did not want her real name used; so I refer to her by a pseudonym.

<sup>27</sup> To prove my point, I can mention that I received an e-mail in May 2004, informing me that Mona Blåsjö’s dissertation defense had been scheduled for a certain day and time in November.

<sup>28</sup> That I was still expected to teach the “modes” in the 1990s shows that some universities had yet to accommodate Robert Connors’ “The Rise and Fall of the Modes of Discourse,” which was published in 1981.

<sup>29</sup> Excerpt from an e-mail message, September 23, 2003.

<sup>30</sup> *Ingrid* is a pseudonym as the instructor asked me to withhold her real name.

<sup>31</sup> I owe this information to Heidi Rosenberg.

<sup>32</sup> This student wrote her answer in English, so I’m quoting her directly without translating from Swedish. I gave the Swedish students (who all know English well) my survey in English and told them that they could choose to write their answers either in English or in Swedish.

<sup>33</sup> Usually English has a more-diverse vocabulary than Swedish; yet in this instance Swedish has an advantage over English since Swedish reserves the word “essä” for the type of writing discussed here and uses “uppsats” for other types of essays. In English the word “essay” has taken on several meanings, and it is sometimes hard to make distinctions.

<sup>34</sup> In the discussion about her classroom observations, Mona Blåsjö says that this type of pedagogy (the teacher soliciting input from individual students) reminds her of high school (*Studenters skrivande* 232), but she admits that it leads to student involvement. I find the practice “democratic” for this very reason even though participation is initiated by the instructor.

<sup>35</sup> *Lena* is a pseudonym.

<sup>36</sup> The students were making plans, however, to continue to meet informally after the course was over.

<sup>37</sup> *Martina* is a pseudonym.

<sup>38</sup> The other three divisions (or scientific councils) are humanities and social sciences, medicine, and natural and engineering sciences. See <<http://www.vr.se/index.asp>>.

<sup>39</sup> According to *Bra Böckers Lexikon* (a Swedish encyclopedia), the radical student organization Verdandi was founded in 1882. Contemporaneous with the American Chatauqua movement with which it has shared some characteristics, Verdandi has played an important part in promoting nonacademic literacy through lecture series and publications.

## CHAPTER IV

## WRITING CENTERS

Writing centers cannot resolve the national confusion about literacy, but I believe that over time they can contribute to a deeper understanding of literacy and to more democratic approaches to literacy education. To do this, writing centers need to be more fully engaged with the paradox of literacy—the way that literacy both dominates and liberates, both demands submission and offers the promise of agency. (Grimm xiii)

## Where Do Swedish Writing Centers Come from?

The reaction in Sweden to the influx of first-generation college students has led to a number of initiatives: (1) introductory courses of the type discussed in Chapter III (2) mandatory short pedagogical courses for faculty (to help faculty members develop innovative classroom approaches);<sup>1</sup> and (3) writing centers. Seemingly from nowhere, writing centers have begun to spring up on one university campus after another. I will use my knowledge of Swedish writing centers to extend the understanding of American writing centers both of the past and of the present. Of particular interest to me is how writing center professionals view the position of service within their different systems. Both in Sweden and in the U.S., writing centers can be linked to efforts to democratize higher education; yet there are differences in the interpretation of what democracy means and how it applies to the institutional space called the writing center. Again and again one has reason to ask the same questions: What is the purpose of writing centers? Whom do they benefit? What does it mean to empower students? How does one best accomplish this feat—by equipping students to accommodate to academic discourse conventions or by equipping them to resist these conventions?

With my limited time, I had occasion to visit just one Swedish writing center in person, the writing center at Södertörn. To complement the picture so I can speak with

some confidence about Swedish writing centers in general, I have found it necessary to gather additional information. Through the contacts I made when I visited Stockholm University, I got access to a report about the activities of the writing center at this university—a writing center that was only in the planning stages when I paid my visit in May 2002. Other Swedish writing centers I have learned about through their web sites. During my interview with Crister Skoglund, I had heard that representatives from other institutions of higher education in Sweden frequently visited Södertörn to study the different initiatives that this college had implemented in its effort to attract new students, among them the writing center. From the additional information I have gathered, I have concluded that Språkverkstan—a word that literally means “the language workshop”—at Södertörns högskola has been widely imitated by other Swedish universities and colleges (both in name and in function) and that, consequently, my discussion about this specific writing center does have more general applications.

To avoid some confusion for American readers, I should explain that “Språkverkstad” is the indefinite form singular, with “Språkverkstaden” as the formal definite form. The more informal “Språkverkstan” (sometimes written “Språkverksta’n”) is actually a contraction. Without attempting to make too much of the difference in names, I see the informal “Språkverkstan” as an intentional choice in line with Södertörn’s conscious attempts to reach out to first-generation college students.

Since writing centers have existed for a long time in the U.S. but are still relatively new in Sweden, I arrived in Sweden with the preconceived notion that Swedish writing centers would more or less be copies of the ones with which I was familiar. Although “one important feature of ethnography is the open-mindedness of the

ethnographer” (Moss 157), I may have come to Sweden with the mind set of an American “imperialist” in spite of my best intentions simply to observe and to listen. Even though I am reluctant and embarrassed to admit it, the fact is that I had expected to find a greater awareness of American writing centers and conscious efforts to emulate American writing-center theory and practice among the Swedes with whom I came into contact. When I asked the questions—“Where did the ideas and the inspiration for a writing center come from?” and “Where did you look for models?”—I had certainly expected the answer “From the United States,” with some variations, either coming from or referring to Swedes who had visited an American writing center or who had at least read about writing centers in the U.S. and who had subsequently developed the desire and the knowledge to create similar institutions in Sweden. I should probably reiterate that the early 2000 political climate has created, if not outright anti-American feelings, at least strong anti-Bush feelings in Sweden. These sentiments, which may make Swedes less inclined to admit to any American influence than they would otherwise have been, became obvious to me from the very beginning of my interaction with faculty and students both at Södertörn and at other places. The climate reminded me of the Vietnam War era, and I am convinced that these sentiments have become even more pronounced after the Iraq War than they were when I did my research in Sweden in 2002.

Thus, instead of the answer I had expected to my questions about how Swedes had conceived their writing centers, I mostly encountered puzzled looks. What these looks and the answers I got either implied or explicitly stated was that the mission to recruit students without previous academic backgrounds had in itself created a situation that inevitably led to the establishing of writing centers.



### Språkverkstan at Södertörn

According to Kajsa Sköldvall, who was in charge of Språkverkstan at this time, even though this was only a small part of her job, the service of a writing center is regarded as a “quite natural component . . . at a college with strong ambitions to work toward social and ethnic diversity of the student population” (qtd. in Blücker 51; trans. mine). When I personally interviewed Kajsa Sköldvall, she elaborated on this topic:

The reason for Språkverkstan’s existence here at Södertörn has to do with the objectives of this school to be a college that caters to a diverse student population, that we expect [enrollment] by a higher percentage of students who are insecure for one reason or another. They can feel insecurity because Swedish is not their first language but also for many other reasons, and, if a college is to recruit this type of students, the environment they come to will have to be supportive of them.

Kajsa was careful and sensitive in her phrasing when she talked about the purpose of Språkverkstan. She said that the need for writing centers had developed with the more diverse student population; yet she did not use words such as “basic” or “underprepared” when she talked about the new type of students that Södertörn consciously attempts to attract. Instead she deliberately chose and consistently used the word “insecure”; nor did she want to single out one particular group of students, such as immigrants. Nonetheless, any adjective one uses has the potential not only to describe what one sees but also to confine what one sees and what image one wants to project.

Rachel Martin’s statement about students in adult literacy programs may shed light on how one may unintentionally limit one’s perception of students in various

contexts. According to Martin, “[t]he overwhelming number of times students’ self-esteem is assumed to be low in both traditional and radical writings about adult literacy” (33). Martin wants to challenge this somewhat simplistic view when she points out that “self-esteem is not a constant, independent of context, for any of us” (33). It seems safe to assume that Martin’s qualification about the students she is focusing on applies to other categories as well, such as working-class students, students with immigrant background, and first-generation college students as a whole. It is equally restrictive to generalize about and essentialize any group of students. As I have already discussed in Chapter III, the language in the brochures that students in the 40-point Swedish courses have produced for the purpose of recruiting potential students to Södertörn’s introductory program is very similar to the language Kajsa Sköldvall used during our interview. Since Kajsa had been the teacher for the students who created the brochures, they had quite possibly picked up the phrasing from her. Yet during my own observation of the introductory course, I did not get the impression that the students in this group felt particularly insecure. The fact that the students had voluntarily chosen to take the introductory course, and that they were taking this course for college credit, most likely explains the difference between these Swedish students and the students in an American developmental or transitional program, in which the students have been placed involuntarily because of low ACT or SAT scores. Certainly, some of the new Swedish students may feel “insecure,” but this adjective does not necessarily characterize all of these students, at least not all of the time.

### Språkverkstan and Early Writing Centers in the United States

During my stay in Sweden, I felt at times as if I had experienced a time warp so that I had made not only a journey in space but also a journey back to the time when writing centers were new in the U.S. Since writing centers are just now appearing on the Swedish academic scene, it is not surprising that they mainly have what Peter Carino calls a “supplemental” function. About the writing center as “supplement,” Carino writes that it mainly works to provide services for basic writers and that the focus is on grammar and mechanics (2-4). Yet Swedish writing centers do not completely fit this image. Tutors in the writing centers there may be willing to provide a service for “insecure” students, but their focus is not primarily on grammar and mechanics. The web site for the writing center at Södertörn informs students that “at Språkverkstan’s drop-in service you’ll get advice and tips from teachers of Swedish and rhetoric on how to get control of your language, structure an essay, improve an oral presentation or better your study skills” (trans. mine). Kajsa Sköldvall has also stated:

Students come to us with all kinds of questions. It may concern the structure of the essay, about how to get started, and about concrete formulations. Some students simply want their texts checked for language errors before they turn them in. The purpose of our help, however, is, of course, to help students help themselves—that is, we do not take upon ourselves the responsibility of being proofreaders, but we want to point to certain characteristics in a student’s text so he or she in the future will be able to pay attention to these matters. And we always give our advice in

dialogues with the students; we don't want to send a "corrected" version to them after the fact. (Qtd. in Blückert 52; my trans.)

### Positives of Språkverkstan

By listening to Kajsa and the other tutors and by visiting Språkverkstan, I collected first-hand impressions of how this facility was both similar to and different from American writing centers, and I found some positive features, starting with location:

#### *A. Location*

Unlike the horror images of the early writing center as a "first aid station" and a "grammar and drill center," located in a "windowless classroom" or even "closet" that Stephen North calls up in the now classic article "The Idea of a Writing Center" (437), Språkverkstan was both highly visible and easily accessible, having a central location on the third floor of Moas Båge, the main building at Södertörn. Every time before Språkverkstan opened, the teacher in charge put up two heavy but portable signs, one on the fifth and another on the third floor, announcing that Språkverkstan was now open.

#### *B. Language Workshop*

In line with the overall integration between oral and written communication at Södertörn, Språkverkstan not only offers feedback on written work but also provides students with opportunities to practice an actual speech in front of a tutor. In fact, the Swedish/Rhetoric Department, in cooperation with Språkverkstan, every semester offers noncredit courses for students who need help to overcome stage fright. Språkverkstan is also in charge of writing courses for students whose first language is something other than Swedish. Even though this type of "language workshop," instead of a more narrowly

defined writing center, would be unusual in the United States, it is not entirely unknown. John Trimbur describes the writing center at Worcester Polytechnic Institute as a “multiliteracy center that offers tutoring in oral presentations and visual design, as well as writing” (Foreword ix). Since this approach is not yet the norm in the United States, however, one could possibly see Swedish writing centers as forerunners in this particular aspect. Yet a less-flattering reason than innovative thinking also exists for the inclusion of courses to combat stage fright. As I heard several times during my stay in Sweden, from Crister Skoglund among others, the tabloid *Expressen* had recently run a survey, asking Swedes what they feared the most. Surprisingly, at least to many Americans, the most frequent answer was not death, sickness, old age, or even war, but public speaking. To overcome such widespread irrational fear has become a high-priority concern on Swedish university campuses.

### *C. Importance of Språkverkstan*

A third strength I noticed was the importance placed on the writing center. In all American writing centers with which I am familiar, students work as tutors. The three tutors who took turns in Språkverkstan, however, were all faculty members and not students. In my interview with Kajsa Sköldvall, I asked her about the possibility of using students as tutors. “We have discussed it,” she said. “It would be a possibility to use students from C- and D-courses in Swedish to work with this [. . .] But we try in other contexts to let students meet students [. . .] So far we haven’t done so in Språkverkstan, but we’ve had thoughts about it.” The teachers who work in Språkverkstan are assigned this work in place of teaching a regular course. According to Kajsa again, “We in Swedish look upon this as a course like any other course.” Kajsa said that she always

discusses possible tutors with the administrator who assigns courses to teachers and that her main concern is “that we don’t get completely new teachers.” To me, accustomed as I am to the view that the writing center and the first-year composition classroom are the places where graduate students begin their teaching careers, hers was a most remarkable statement. It shows that Språkverkstan is indeed taken seriously both by the administration and by the teachers who work there. Kajsa insisted that the small group of teachers who work as tutors on a repeated basis find the work very rewarding and have the feeling “that here you do something useful.” This remark would be rather controversial in an American context, linked as it is to understanding the purpose of writing centers as places where students learn to adhere successfully to academic conventions. For example, in *Good Intentions: Writing Center Work for Postmodern Times*, Nancy Maloney Grimm does her best to shake up her readers and undermine such “good feelings” (82). To Grimm, as well as to Bruce Horner and Min-Zhan Lu, assimilation or accommodation of students should never be the goal. Instead Horner and Lu want to see a pedagogy of “repositioning” (55), a concept that is similar to what Grimm advocates as the “democratic desire to understand and negotiate difference rather than the institutional need to manage or eliminate it” (82).

An additional strength of Språkverkstan is that it caters to students from various disciplines, who may be working at different levels and have varying needs. Even though Språkverkstan is run by the Swedish/Rhetoric Department, the students are by no means limited to this field. On the day I sat in with Britta Sjöstrand,<sup>2</sup> who served as one of the tutors in Språkverkstan, she and I had visits from four students: two students were writing a collaborative B-essay in Swedish; one student was working on a short essay for

an introductory-level rhetoric course; the fourth student, however, a woman whose first language was Finnish, came in with her C-essay for a business course.

### Marketing of Services

I learned from the tutors that they advertise the services of Språkverkstan by going into classrooms to give brief presentations at the beginning of every semester; they also place fliers in the library; and Kajsa Sköldvall has taken upon herself to inform all the teachers at Södertörn about Språkverkstan.

I picked up one of the little fliers. It is only 8 and 1/2 by 6 inches, then folded in half, to make the actual size of the flier approximately 4 and 1/4 by 6 inches. Yet its design looks quite professional in white with black text. The upper half of the front page is taken up by a big question mark, and under it is the question "Har du kört fast?" ["Are you stuck?"]. Below the question, inside a rectangle, one can read the exhortation, "Come to Språkverkstan!" (For a copy of the front page of this flier, see APPENDIX H.) On opening the flier, one finds a whole series of questions:

How do I become a better writer?

Is my sentence structure correct?

How do I set up a memo or a case?

What is supposed to go in the methods section of an essay?

Is there an academic language?

How should I organize my oral presentations?

How can I become less nervous when I make an oral presentation?

Does my language affect my grade? (Trans. mine)

At the bottom of the page, below these questions, the reader is assured: “No questions are too big or too little!” Centered on the third page, perfectly aligned with the question mark on the front page, is a big exclamation mark, followed by information about location and hours, plus Kajsa Sköldvall’s telephone number and e-mail address. On the back, in three short paragraphs, one gets additional answers to the question “What is Språkverkstan?” Although the last sentence—“If you want, you may turn in your written material ahead of time”—at first seems to contradict Kajsa Sköldvall’s assertion that “we don’t want to send a ‘corrected’ version to them” (Blückert 52), it apparently means that a tutor can look over a student’s text before she meets with the writer in Språkverkstan to discuss the paper.

### Writing Centers as Emergency Rooms

Differences in systems are important for the discussion about writing centers’ identity and the service they provide to institutions and to individual students. Because there is no first-year composition program either at Södertörn or at any other Swedish university, writing centers in Sweden do not run the risk of being identified as places mainly for freshman writers in need of remediation. Nonetheless, there will always be professors who view a writing center solely or chiefly as a remedial institution. According to Hans Strand, the consensus among Swedish university instructors is that their students’ writing ability has declined, or, rather, that they see a growing group of students whose writing falls short of academic standards (Strand, *Akademiskt skrivande* 5). Strand further reports that several professors at his university (Stockholm) have placed some form of writing center on their wish list, viewing it as a place like an



emergency room, to which they could send their weakest writers (*Akademiskt skrivande*, passim). As I will discuss later, this wish was fulfilled when Stockholm University opened its own Språkverkstad on October 16, 2002 (Bjerregaard).

### Negatives of Språkverkstan

In spite of all the positives about Språkverkstan at Södertörns högskola, there are also some negatives, such as its limited operation.

#### *A. Limited Operation*

First among the negatives (or arenas of needed improvement), the hours were severely limited during the spring of 2002. Språkverkstan was open just four hours a week—two hours on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. To my question whether the hours were sufficient, Britta answered with an emphatic “No.” In 2003 the regular opening hours had increased from four to six: Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday afternoons from 2:00 to 4:00. Additionally, in 2003 Språkverkstan offered assistance to students who were writing in English, from 10:00 to 12:00 and from 1:00 to 3:30 on Mondays.<sup>3</sup> The reason for English language instruction is that Swedish is the native language of about nine million people, and anyone who wants to make international contacts will have to learn to write academic papers and make presentations in a foreign language, most often in English.

#### *B. Limited Resources*

Second, to me, accustomed as I am to writing centers that are homey places seething with activity and several tutors working side by side, Språkverkstan at Södertörn seemed rather bleak and uninspiring. One tutor worked alone during the two hours the

center was open, and she could naturally serve just one student at a time, except when two students were working on a project collaboratively. Also, I was surprised to see that the room was completely void of resource material. Except for tables and chairs, there was absolutely nothing in the room. There were no reference books—not even a dictionary—and no computers. I should point out, however, that Språkverkstan was still comparatively new and was on schedule to receive more funding for the following academic year, a topic to which I will return presently. Kajsa Sköldvall assured me that some of the money would be used for basic equipment.

### *C. Tutoring or Proofreading?*

Third, I found the tutoring sessions I sat in on to be rather disappointing. In contradiction to the expressed objective to “help students help themselves,” the tutoring I witnessed consisted mainly, although not exclusively, of proofreading and editing. Maria and Petter, the first students who came in, both native Swedes, identified themselves as two of those “insecure” writers that Kajsa had claimed that Språkverkstan was intended for. I have no way of knowing, however, how spontaneous this feeling was, or whether these students had in some way been programmed to feel the way they did, as in a self-fulfilling prophecy. Maria said that she believed that she would have to write one more B-essay before tackling the C-essay requirement; and Petter confessed that the mere thought of writing a C-essay gave him “a stomachache.” Yet he planned to become a teacher of Swedish in the Swedish school system.

In all fairness to Britta, who was kind enough to invite me to join her in Språkverkstan, I must add that the semester was winding down and deadlines for all projects were quickly approaching. In two cases, she had been working with the same

students before; so this was not the first time she saw their papers. All the students who came in had papers that basically needed some fine-tuning and editing. Nonetheless, there was something in Britta's approach and underlying philosophy that made me believe that she was not genuinely invested in writing pedagogy after all. Apparently, to her, the best way to learn to write was through reading fiction because, as Petter was leaving, she admonished him, "Read a lot of books this summer." As I have already pointed out, she was the one who had come up with the idea to include a unit that combined fiction reading with writing in the introductory course. Also, when Britta discussed their texts with the students, she frequently motivated a choice of phrasing in esthetic terms—"it sounds beautiful" versus "not so beautiful"—instead of referring to the function or effectiveness of particular usage.<sup>4</sup>

### Open-House Policy

A point of importance to the staff at Södertörn that differs from the American practice I have witnessed was the emphasis on the open-house policy. In a way the function as emergency room was integral to Språkverkstan's whole identity. The tutors had developed a rather complex set of unwritten rules for how to distribute their limited services: They would allow as many as two students to prebook a session, but they found it extremely important to leave openings for students to drop in spontaneously. They always posted a sign-up sheet on the door when the center opened, so that students could sign up for a 20-minute consultation session. Only if no one else was waiting was a client allowed to stay longer. Also, a student could turn in, or submit electronically, up to four pages of a paper ahead of time so a tutor might have opportunity to go through the text

and perhaps write some comments before the student and the tutor actually met in Språkverkstan. The drop-in policy is entirely in line with the service ethos of Språkverkstan and other Swedish writing centers. In this respect, they fit the model of early writing centers in the United States as emergency stations, before theories about writing centers as places in their own right had developed.

#### Språkverkstan in Comparison to an American Writing Center

On Södertörn's web site, the information about Språkverkstan is brief, with most attention devoted to the center's hours and services. Significantly, however, one of the places where one can find this information is under the heading "Student Life" (i.e., as a service to the students). For comparison and contrast, I opened up the web site for the writing center at Southeastern Louisiana University, where I now teach, a university with about 15,000 students (and I assume that this writing center is in many respects typical of American writing centers). Southeastern's Writing Center is listed under "Academic Resources," and the following passage expresses its "instructional philosophy":

Instruction by Writing Center staff works from the premise that all writers—*expert writers included*—benefit from sharing and talking about their work on a regular basis with experienced and interested readers. That is the basic service we provide in the Center: the attentive ear of a knowledgeable but, more importantly, genuinely engaged reader. Because Center staff are not classroom teachers, we bring no pre-set instructional agenda to our conferences. Instead, we take our priorities from you, our users; our work at the Center, then, is always *learner-centered*. Center

instruction is also *responsive*. We expect you to come to us with a sense of something you want to accomplish. Our goal is to be respectfully responsive to those desires and to help you find ways to accomplish your aims as a writer. Tutorial instruction is *non-directive*. Our job is not to tell you what to do, but to raise alternatives, to foreground choices that might be made—it is up to you to make the choices right for you. And lastly, Center instruction is deliberately *non-evaluative*. We seek not to assess your abilities or to put a grade on your writing, but always to find ways to help you improve the skills and essays you bring to us, even if you are the strongest of writers. (Emphasis original)<sup>5</sup>

This instructional philosophy sounds assertive. It is obvious that this writing center strives to distance itself from the idea that it exists mainly to remediate the weakest writers. The philosophy statement starts by including “expert writers” and again at the very end turns to the students who would consider themselves “the strongest of writers.” The explicit users are far from the “insecure” students Kajsa Sköldvall talked about. Further, the members of Southeastern’s Writing Center staff want to assert their independence; they consider it liberating that they are not classroom teachers and, therefore, presumably less likely to succumb to institutional pressures. Much like the idealized portrayal of writing centers that North outlined in his “Idea” article as a desired alternative to the emergency stations, forgotten (or ignored) in the description of Southeastern's Writing Center is the fact that the students who find their way to it are part of an institutional context and usually come either because an instructor has sent them or because they are working on a paper that has been assigned by an instructor who

is waiting to evaluate and grade the paper after it is finished. To make it sound as if the students and their tutors in the Writing Center can do exactly what they want seems at best hopelessly idealistic and at worst deceptive.

Yet I believe that one major difference between any writing center pedagogy in Sweden and in the United States is in the difference in disciplinary status and disciplinary development. The same observation applies to writing pedagogy in general. Swedes, who lack the width and breadth and history of composition scholarship and who work outside the context of a specific writing program, find it easier to accept that the purpose of a writing center or a writing course is to be of service, first—in a spirit of democracy—to the students but, second, also to the institution. Hans Strand, professor at Stockholm University, expresses his belief that there are several good reasons to invest in writing support for students at the university level: (1) students need support to make the transition to academic writing; (2) future employers need employees who can write and communicate well; (3) it is in the university departments' best interest to assist their students with their writing because departmental funding is tied to the number of students who successfully finish their coursework and graduate, and many times the advanced essay requirement is the major obstacle; (4) a reputation as an institution where students learn to write well will benefit Stockholm University and give it an edge over other universities; (5) investment in writing support is completely in line with governmental directives (“Skrivstöd”). When these reasons for writing support were first formulated, they were intended as weighty arguments in favor of a writing center at Stockholm University, and they obviously had the desired effect. Of these reasons, especially the

second and the fourth points seem to go far beyond the scope of a writing center, at least from an American point of view.

Without doubt a relationship exists between funding and the way a writing center views itself and chooses to represent itself. I have chosen to include the following lengthy excerpt from my interview with Kajsa Sköldvall because I believe it provides an interesting contrast to the “instructional philosophy” of Southeastern Louisiana University’s Writing Center, quoted earlier. To my question about how Språkverkstan was funded, Kajsa answered:

Kajsa:           So we [the Department of Swedish and Rhetoric] get money; that money is reserved for the work of Språkverkstan.

Birgitta:       Do you somehow have to show results to receive continued funding?

Kajsa:           [hesitating; on the tape recording Birgitta and Kajsa can be heard speaking at the same time about how one “shows results”]

No one has demanded anything from us in any way, any formal “result,” and one may have opinions about that. But I think that this is somehow a part of the policy at the college; it’s viewed as an operation we’re supposed to have, and so . . . we who work with Språkverkstan notice that this is a service the students appreciate. So we do our own assessment.

Birgitta:       In the United States it’s often the case that this kind of facility has a rather narrow space; so when there are budget cuts, this is an area where they [administrators] think they can cut.

Kajsa:           I think the discussion here in Sweden—it’s discussed a lot that students today don’t bring [to the university] from high school the written skills

they need to be successful in higher studies. That's a . . . an increasingly larger group of Swedish young people [which] pursues higher education today. And with this we get . . . earlier it was a much smaller group who at an earlier stage had made up their minds that they were going to continue their education; it was self-evident to them to pursue higher education. But the objective that more and more people should go on to college means that we'll get a more multi—what do we call it?—I think you understand what I mean.

Birgitta: I understand. More diverse, with varying backgrounds and skills.

Kajsa: A more heterogeneous student population.

Birgitta: Earlier it was an elite.

Kajsa: Exactly.

Birgitta: I understand very well.

Kajsa: What is happening . . . here . . . in Sweden is that more and more [universities] realize that they have to offer a “college year” and an introductory semester. More and more universities are opening language/writing centers.

Birgitta: I think it was Britta who told me that Språkverkstan's services will be expanded in the fall.

Kajsa: We have received, applied for funding from “Rekryteringsdelegationen”<sup>6</sup> [the Special Committee on Recruitment to Higher Education], and we've applied for money from it to expand our open service; for that's what our



basic idea is, to keep an open house [. . .] We must always have room every time we are open so students can come spontaneously.

As Kajsa Sköldvall points to the service Språkverkstan provides and its commitment to marginalized students, the ones with insecurities who come from nonacademic backgrounds, it is evident that she sees this commitment as central to Språkverkstan's existence. In contrast, it is equally clear that Southeastern's Writing Center consciously wants to carve out a space for itself within the academic mainstream. Not only does this representation affect this writing center's status and image, but it also influences the funding allocated to it in a North American context. Whereas it is necessary for Språkverkstan, speaking both from a democratic and a financial point of view, to emphasize its service to underprivileged students, it is clearly in Southeastern's Writing Center's best interest to downplay this aspect of its operation.

#### Other Swedish Writing/Language Centers

Språkverkstan at Södertörns högskola may very well have been the first writing/language center in Sweden, but it has quickly had many followers. A web search led me to similar centers at the universities in Lund, Malmö, Linköping, Stockholm, Umeå, Uppsala, and Växjö, among other places. They are all linked to the efforts to broaden recruiting and increase diversity on college campuses and, therefore, funded by Rekryteringsdelegationen<sup>7</sup> [the Special Committee on Recruitment to Higher Education]—a government agency tied to the proposition *Den öppna högskolan* [*The open university/college*]. The underlying assumption is that increased recruiting to higher education ultimately benefits both society and individuals:

The government claims that a well-educated population is foundational to promote growth and prosperity and to strengthen unity and develop democracy in society. A good education increases the chances for the individual to live a more fulfilling life and strengthens the individual's position on the labor market. A broader recruiting means that the potential of many more people can be used in societal and professional life. . . . One can expect increased diversity to bring higher quality and increased creativity to educational offerings. Also for reasons of justice is it crucial that people get equal educational opportunities regardless of background.<sup>8</sup>

The Special Committee on Recruitment to Higher Education was granted an existence for three years, from 2002 through 2004. During this time it distributed 40 million Swedish kronor (approximately \$5.4 million) yearly to various recruiting efforts at universities and colleges, initiatives aimed at helping students make the transition from high school to university more smoothly. Classified as pilot projects, writing/language centers could be funded through this agency. As this work is being developed and evaluated, each institution will need to prepare itself to turn temporary solutions into permanent ones and find other ways to support its programs after the life of the Recruitment Committee.

#### Stockholm University's Språkverkstad

Through the contacts I had established at Stockholm University (which in May 2002 had yet to establish its own writing center), I was able to get access to a report about the activities at its Språkverkstad during 2003, written by project leader Rudi

Bjerregaard. Because I have reason to believe that what goes on in Stockholm is quite representative of Swedish writing centers in general, I summarize this report as follows.

Based on the records that the tutors had kept, the language center had reached about 1,000 students during its first 13 months of existence. The number of actual visits to the center was low—121 students had made a total of only 328 visits. So most of the students who had been in contact with the center had not been reached through individual tutoring but through various noncredit courses such as grammar courses, a short course for students writing C-essays, eight courses in public speaking, and a course in oral presentation for second-language learners. Of the students who had come to the center for individual tutorials, the largest group by far was made up of women who were nonnative speakers of Swedish (71 students), and the second largest group consisted of women who were native speakers (26 students); in all, 80 percent of the students who sought tutoring were women. Very few men visited the language center (24 in all), and of the few who came most were nonnative speakers (15 of the 24).<sup>9</sup> That the numbers are so low—at a university with an enrollment of *circa* 35,000 students—must be attributed to (1) limited hours of operation (8 hours a week of open house plus a couple of additional hours for students who make appointments)<sup>10</sup> and (2) the fact that Språkverkstaden is so new that it is just beginning to make its existence known. Bjerregaard estimates that it will take two to three years for a language center to get fully established.

The most frequent request that students at Stockholm University's Språkverkstad made during 2003 was for help with grammar, followed by outlining, choosing the best word or phrase, and the specific demands of academic writing. As for being helped, the students were overwhelmingly positive, with approximately 97 percent answering "yes"

to the question “Did you get the help you wanted?” The students felt that not only their writing skills had been strengthened but also their confidence. They had found the staff members both knowledgeable and friendly.

Språkverkstaden at Stockholm University is run by “Studentbyrån” [Division for Student Affairs] and has its own administration. Its activities are divided into four domains: (1) written presentations; (2) oral presentations; (3) evaluation/marketing; and (4) collaboration with, among others, the Department of Scandinavian Languages, the Office for Student Health, the Office for Students with Disabilities, the Library, and the Study Skills Program. Four language consultants and two Swedish instructors help students with their written presentations, and Rudi Bjerregaard himself leads the courses in public speaking.

Looking to the future, Bjerregaard expresses his hopes that Språkverkstaden has proved so valuable for broader recruiting and diversity at Stockholm University that it will become a permanent fixture, supported by the university itself the day the Special Committee on Recruitment to Higher Education ceases to exist.

To put the numbers from Stockholm in perspective, I can mention that the statistics from an average American writing center, with many more hours of operation and several tutors working at the same time, look very different. For example, the Writing Center at Southeastern Louisiana University (with a student population of a little over 15,000 students in 2003) recorded over 2,100 individual writing conferences with close to 1,100 students during the same time-frame (the spring and fall semesters of 2003). This center was open over 40 hours per week and employed 32 student tutors. Because the Southeastern Writing Center is well established, it does not have to rely on

testimonies from satisfied clients to justify its continued existence. Instead, it tries to emphasize its service to courses other than English, even though about 60 percent of the tutorials relate to English classes and the majority of the students come for help with the essays they write in their first-year composition courses. Unlike Språkverkstaden in Stockholm and other Swedish writing centers, the Southeastern Writing Center does not offer courses for students; however, writing center staff will give workshops as needed, to include going into a classroom and talking about documentation of sources or whatever an instructor has requested. Most freshmen are introduced to the Writing Center through orientations given to their first-year, mandatory English composition classes; so additional marketing is not really necessary. As for gender distribution, the Southeastern Writing Center director, Jeff Wiemelt, told me that approximately two thirds of the students who come for one-to-one tutorials are women.<sup>11</sup> So, in regard to gender distribution, there were clear similarities between Stockholm University's Språkverkstad and Southeastern Louisiana University's counterpart.

#### Web Sites from Other Swedish University Writing Centers

Språkverkstan at Södertörn and its marketing strategies seem to have served as models for the web sites of language centers at other Swedish universities. The most frequently used name is "Språkverkstad," but there are some exceptions. The center at Lund University is called "Studieverkstad med språkservice" ["Study workshop with language service"];<sup>12</sup> and the one at Växjö University goes by the name "Textverkstad" ["Text workshop"].<sup>13</sup> The one in Växjö may come closest to an American writing center because Växjö's focuses primarily on written texts; yet, like other Swedish

writing/language centers, it offers courses for students as an essential part of its operation. The Växjö “project” falls into three different parts or stages of development: (1) the writing center itself (which provides help with various questions about writing, word processing, reference books, and individual tutorials; keeps models of academic essays from different departments on file; and offers short writing courses); (2) introduction to various academic discourse communities (which involves a plan for teachers of Swedish to meet with a teacher and a student representative from each discipline to map out the special requirements for particular fields, with the help of textbooks, exams, instructions for assignments, etc., to determine the expectations for students’ own papers and essays); and (3) assistance to students as they move from lower levels to the most-advanced levels of higher education (this third stage is devoted to the reading and writing of advanced academic essays; even Ph.D. students can enroll in two short writing courses for 5 points or course credits).

The web sites for the Swedish writing centers basically follow the same structure as the one in Växjö. After the name of the center and a welcome, one usually finds a list of questions that identify the kind of help a student is likely to find at the center. There are, however, some notable differences in both content and stylistic levels between the web sites of the older and the younger universities. The first questions on the web site for the language center at Lund University (the second oldest university in Sweden) are as follows (in translation): “How do I outline my essay? How do my arguments become clearer? How do I write a bibliography? How do I quote?” These are all rather formal questions that, undeniably, call attention to important choices one has to make in the writing of academic essays. In contrast, the first four questions on the web site for the

language center at Umeå University (a younger university) are much more informal: “Help—how do I begin? What’s the difference between a paper and an essay? How do I make my text flow better? When do you actually use commas?”<sup>14</sup> In their mix and tone these questions come close to the questions in the little flier from Språkverkstan at Södertörn; they seem purposely chosen to illustrate the philosophy that “no questions are too big or too little!”

The two extremes may be the web sites for the language centers at Uppsala, the oldest Swedish university (founded in 1477), and Linköping, a university of recent origin. The one for Uppsala University’s Språkverkstad (like Stockholm, Uppsala has chosen the more formal version Språkverkstad as its name) is brief and (especially in Swedish) quite formal:

Are you writing an essay? Are you going to give an oral presentation? Do you have problems with your outline? Do you want feedback on the language of your text? The language center is open to all students who themselves feel a need for help with written and oral presentations.

The language center helps you with

outline

structure

transitions (Trans. mine)<sup>15</sup>

The web site for Linköping, on the other hand, is more lengthy; and its tone is chatty and informal. Its writing/language center claims to be “a place to go for students who find it tough to be the ones who misspell, write strange sentences, don’t understand what’s important in a text or who find it terrifying to speak in front of others” (trans. mine).<sup>16</sup>

Instead of questions, it offers brief profiles of two students who have benefited from the center's services: Johan, who is dyslexic, and Marin, who is an immigrant with such a multilingual background that she has no real first language. By focusing on one student with dyslexia and another student who is a nonnative speaker, this web site clearly places the language center on the university's margins. This is the story about Johan:

Johan read in his student e-mail that Språkverksta'n existed.<sup>17</sup> Open two afternoons a week, a place you can go to when you feel like it and have time, to get help with your language.

- Nowadays I e-mail the texts I write to Hasse<sup>18</sup> once a week. He corrects them, we write a list of words I usually misspell and when I come here I get help to practice spelling.

Hans Blomberg nods where he sits across the table. He is a university instructor and a kind of language dad you can turn to with all sorts of problems.

- Språkverksta'n is a kind of service facility, the students themselves decide what they need to work on and how much time they can put in.

Some come only one or two times, others once a week. (Trans. mine)

A footnote on the web site adds, however, that even though Språkverksta'n was originally intended to help students with immigrant backgrounds, students who were native Swedes soon began to show up. Further, the service function is underscored, even to the point that the web site documents how a student can send in a text for proofreading on a regular basis and then come to the center and work on spelling. In this context academic essays seem to have been reduced to a matter of formality, if correct spelling is



the most important concern. Yet one should notice that the instructor is not the one who pushes the spelling exercises; he takes his clues from the students and sees the center as being a service to them and is willing to work with them on what they consider important. One might add, however, that someone or something outside the students must set the standards for them so that they feel a deficiency in a certain area. Yet, to counter any assumption that language correctness is the only or main concern of this writing center, I can point to the unorthodox sentence structure in the text on the web site itself, such as “Open two afternoons a week, a place you can go to. . . .” This particular statement, which lacks an independent clause and, therefore, can be labeled as a sentence fragment, is not even represented as a direct quote. Another example, which would have language purists cry “comma splice,” comes from the quote attributed to Hans Blomberg: “Språkverksta’n is like a service facility, the students themselves decide what they need to work on . . . .” The informality or chattiness on an official web site like this one supports my claim that Swedish academic writing instruction is not of the type that has been labeled current-traditional<sup>19</sup> in the United States. It also proves that service, as provided by a “first aid station,” is one thing, but a “grammar and drill center” (North 437) is another; the two do not necessarily go together. “Service” can have a democratic ring to it, but “grammar and drill center” lacks democratic connotations.

Also, worthy of some attention is the fact that Linköping’s writing center has a “language dad” who seems to be quite satisfied with his job. Even though I did not study academic writing instruction in Sweden from a gender perspective, I more-or-less subconsciously registered that most of the instructors I came in contact with were women. The three tutors in Språkverkstan at Södertörn, for example, were all women.

Yet without the mass education of American first-year composition programs, Sweden does not need the part-time employees who have become the subject of controversy in the U.S. and, consequently, does not run the same risk of turning composition into an enterprise run by an underclass of women. Nor does the image of a nurturing language dad necessarily raise eyebrows in Sweden, where males for several decades have functioned in traditionally female roles in the surrounding culture to a larger extent than is the case in the United States.<sup>20</sup>

### Democracy and Service

Clearly, Swedish writing centers should be seen as one of the many initiatives that have been launched in the name of democracy even though much more needs to be said to clarify the different meanings of *democracy*. The Swedish government supports writing center activities in an attempt to increase the participation in, and thereby the diversity of, higher education. Yet when the government supports such initiatives not only for the sake of individuals but also for the supposed benefit to society as a whole, and business and industry put pressure on academic institutions to produce a workforce that fulfills market needs, one can easily perceive these democratic efforts as undermined, from the individual point of view. If business managers value correct and clear prose, is that what writing center tutors should concern themselves with the most?

Looking back at the requests the Swedish students brought to Stockholm University's Språkverkstad, I have to ask again what the main purpose of a writing center is or should be. Students most frequently asked for help with grammar, outlining, choosing the best word or phrase, and the specific demands of academic writing. From

this list of requests one can ask some thought-provoking questions: How does one reconcile a student's desire to produce an essay that fulfills the academic requirements with the student's desire to think independently? What is lost if all students' linguistic efforts are trimmed and cut to fit into the same academic mold? Can new student groups add anything of value to the academy, or is it just a matter of their accommodation to the thought patterns that are already established?

In the U.S., writing centers have turned into a battlefield between different purposes. And the issue of service—to students and to institutions—lies at the center of this controversy. Although I have tried to probe my Swedish contacts about resistance against a position of service, I have not—yet—been able to detect any resentment. Certainly, I do not want to make light of the point that writing programs and writing centers have been, and still are, in the business of changing students by controlling (or eliminating) undesirable features in their language. Instead, I firmly believe that professionals in the newly established writing centers in a country like Sweden need to be prepared for the conflicts that may lie ahead as new groups of students increase their presence in the academy.

I have found much of value in Nancy Malone Grimm's book *Good Intentions*. I am happy, for instance, that Grimm sees institutions—both universities at large and the writing centers within them—not just as restrictive places but also as places that make critique possible. I concur with her in that she does not simply point out problems with the unequal distribution of power in writing centers but offers solutions, such as making student tutors co-researchers and co-presenters with herself. And I fully agree with Grimm that good intentions are not enough. In the Swedish context, which differs very

much from the American in that the tutors are all instructors or language consultants and not peer tutors, power relationships are different but still need to be examined. The tutors who work in the Swedish language centers do not seem to question their purpose, which is to facilitate students' assimilation into the academy. Sooner rather than later, they need to increase their awareness of whom they are ultimately serving and begin to examine how democratic the literacy practices in Swedish higher education really are.

Yet, "good intentions" at least ought to be better than bad intentions. Visiting a young writing center like Språkverkstan can become a reminder to Americans that both students and teachers can experience joy and enthusiasm within a system of service. A similar point was made already in 1985 by Jeanne H. Simpson: "[W]e must not lose either the energy or the commitment that characterized our initial stages" (39). In light of my first-hand contact with an early writing center in Sweden, I believe that we in the U.S. could benefit from being reminded about the value of both "energy" and "commitment." Too much emphasis on resistance can lead to a form of paralysis or defeatism that does not benefit anyone, and least of all the students for whom writing centers were initially established.

As I have pointed out earlier, democracy is a concept that has been, and still is, open to diverging interpretations. Those who want to perform the service of giving students access to the techniques or tools for successfully playing the academic game are motivated by the democratic intentions of leveling the playing field. This, the desirability of a level playing field, is where I place the Swedish language centers today, as well as the Swedish introductory courses. Those who want to change the academy itself and its ways of expression are motivated by a different set of democratic intentions, which, as

justified as they may be, can still act against students' expressed interests when an instructor or a tutor follows an agenda that counteracts what students want to get out of a course or a tutoring session and what students consider important. Also, a change on the micro-level not backed up by changes on the macro- or institutional level will never work. Consequently, both approaches—unquestioning service and stubborn resistance to service—can be just about equally “good” or equally harmful to students.

Maybe Sweden will be spared the American confusion about literacy that Grimm refers to in the epigraph to this chapter. Yet a better balance between domination and liberation, between submission and agency (Grimm xiii), would be desirable in both nations. Right now Swedish educators at all levels appear to see only the liberating effects of literacy initiatives. If they would open their eyes to the social context and issues of class, race, and gender, they might be able to see their task as more complex than they do today and begin to think more deeply about power relations.

#### Why Writing Centers?

One question that remains to discuss is why Swedish universities have so readily accepted writing centers when the same universities have shown no inclination to introduce mandatory first-year composition courses, as American universities did when students were first considered lacking in academic literacy skills in the late 1800s. One answer to this question can be that the administrative challenges of creating a mandatory writing course are considerable. Because the Swedish university system, like the systems in other European countries, is set up for early specialization, there is no natural space for a first-year writing program. This question came up when I visited the Department of

Scandinavian Languages at Stockholm University and had opportunity to discuss curricula with a few of the faculty members:

Birgitta: I have run into a difficulty that I somehow have to come to grips with in this discussion about “freshman composition.” The equivalent would be a required course in Swedish for all students who begin studying at a university before they are allowed to enter their major fields of study.

Hans Strand: I don’t think it is very controversial, theoretically speaking, here in Sweden, but everybody would consider it good [tape unclear]. The problems would be administrative. And so, generally speaking, it would be considered good, but then nothing happens anyway; but it’s not a controversial issue.

Because writing centers do not present a threat to the existing structure but are instead seen as its support system, they do not cause administrative problems of the same magnitude as mandatory writing programs, which would indeed require a complete restructuring of Swedish higher education.

A second answer could be that Swedes do not like mandatory courses even though Hans Strand was of the opinion that the idea of a writing course for all students was not controversial in itself. As Crister Skoglund told me, the introductory course at Södertörn quickly became a voluntary course and not a mandatory one, unlike the Norwegian course that had served as its model. From a Swedish perspective, the bridging courses would forfeit their democratic purpose if they were required. The services that writing centers provide are completely voluntary, as contrasted to a required writing course. Even all the courses that are offered through Swedish writing centers, mostly on a

noncredit basis, are voluntary and intended to raise students' self-esteem instead of breaking it down, as often has been the case with American first-year composition courses in what has been called their gatekeeping function. "At the minimum, English teachers are gatekeepers, influencing decisions about who will succeed to higher levels of education and greater degrees of prosperity," writes James Berlin (*Rhetorics* 177). Quite possibly, U.S. educators do not always realize the potential for control and dissemination of ideas—both for good and for bad—that the mandatory first-year composition courses offer. As I will discuss in the next chapter, in Sweden a somewhat similar control enters the picture with the C-essay requirement toward the end of a student's undergraduate program, instead of at the beginning as in the typical United States university requirement for a first-year course in writing. Some Swedish writing centers, like the one in Växjö, have already begun to expand their voluntary support for students at different levels, all the way through the Ph.D. level. This, to me, would be a desirable development for all writing centers, and not just in Sweden.

#### Writing Centers and WAC/WID

Basically, the Swedish writing centers fall under the same model as other European writing centers, moving toward collaboration with WAC (Writing Across the Curriculum) and WID (Writing in the Disciplines) programs. From Olga Dysthe's speech in Groningen at the first conference for the EATAW (European Association for the Teaching of Academic Writing) and from recent postings on the EATAW listserv, I have understood that Europeans are not eager to introduce any equivalents to American first-year composition programs. Instead, they want to implement and institutionalize

collaboration between content area instructors and writing instructors. Such teamwork can take various forms: either writing “specialists” teach short writing courses to students within the framework of the content area courses, or writing specialists give courses for and support to the content specialists in regard to writing instruction. Such collaboration can be anchored in writing centers. So, for example, the second stage of the project plan for the writing center in Växjö calls for joint efforts between teachers of Swedish and teacher and student representatives from all disciplines. This is a form of WAC that university writing teachers in the U.S. do not know too much about even though it exists.<sup>21</sup> The American university system, with its courses neatly packaged, preferably into three semester hours each, is not so flexible as the Swedish system is in terms of employment structures. Yet in the name of democracy and service to students, American university writing teachers may have to give up general composition programs and move in the same direction as Europe.



## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The second initiative is beyond the scope of my dissertation.

<sup>2</sup> I remind my readers that *Britta Sjöstrand* is a pseudonym.

<sup>3</sup> The information comes from Södertörns högskola's web site.

<sup>4</sup> The reading-writing connection is a research field in itself, which is beyond the scope of my dissertation.

<sup>5</sup> *Southeastern Louisiana University*. 3 April 2003. 10 March 2004 <<http://www.selu.edu>>. Path: Academics; Academic Resources; The Southeastern Louisiana University Writing Center; About Our Center; Our Instructional philosophy.

<sup>6</sup> This governmental committee will be discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>7</sup> For a complete list of the "projects" involving "language workshops" that are funded by the Special Committee on Recruitment to Higher Education, see <[http://www.rekrytering.gov.se/Rekrytering\\_hm/sprakverkstader.htm](http://www.rekrytering.gov.se/Rekrytering_hm/sprakverkstader.htm)>.

<sup>8</sup> <[http://www.rekrytering.gov.se/Rekrytering\\_hm/riktlinjer.htm](http://www.rekrytering.gov.se/Rekrytering_hm/riktlinjer.htm)>

<sup>9</sup> The gender distribution at Stockholm University's Språkverkstad would make for an interesting study: Do other writing centers have a similar gender distribution? Are the male students at Swedish universities better writers/speakers than the female students? Are the women more ambitious? Or are the women less reluctant to seek help? Higher enrollment by women (as is the case at least with Southeastern Louisiana University, where women now comprise >60% of undergraduate enrollment) can explain some of the lopsidedness but not all of it.

<sup>10</sup> Yet this was more than twice the number of hours Språkverkstan at Södertörn was open in the spring of 2002, after about five years of operation.

<sup>11</sup> I obtained the statistical information for Southeastern's Writing Center from its director, Jeff Wiemelt, via personal e-mail messages on July 31, August 2, and August 4, 2004. Wiemelt has since then left his position as director for the Southeastern Writing Center to take on the even more-challenging position as director for the first-year composition program.

<sup>12</sup> See <<http://www.lu.se/info/studverkstad.html>>.

<sup>13</sup> <<http://www.hum.vxu.se/textverkstad/>>

<sup>14</sup> <<http://www.umu.se/studentcentrum/projekt/sprakverkstad/sprakverkstad.html>>

<sup>15</sup> <<http://info.uu.se/fakta.nsf/sidor/sprakverkstad.id6F.html>>

<sup>16</sup> <<http://www.liu.se/utbildning/studentliv/trampolin/2002/4/sprakverkstad/>>

<sup>17</sup> My guess is that this information was sent out in a mass e-mail to all (new) students.

<sup>18</sup> "Hasse" is a common Swedish nickname for *Hans*. Whereas American nicknames are often abbreviated forms of longer names, such as "Bob" for *Robert* or "Sam" for *Samantha*, Swedish has a peculiar predilection for two-syllable names; therefore, a man named Lars is often called "Lasse," and Per becomes "Pelle." Familiarity between instructor and student, as in this use of nicknames, is not at all unusual in Sweden.

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<sup>19</sup> I am using “current-traditional” here in the popular sense that “learning to write is learning matters of superficial correctness” (Berlin, *Writing* 61) even though Robert Connors among others has challenged the whole concept of a “current-traditional” rhetoric (*Composition-Rhetoric*).

<sup>20</sup> Here I am writing from personal experience. Maybe it would be safer to say the South instead of the United States, because Louisiana is where I have lived for the past 26 years (and, even so, Louisiana is hardly a cross-section of the South). In perspective, nonetheless, one should observe that Sweden is at or near the top on women's advancement among industrialized democracies, including that Sweden's Parliament (*Riksdag*) is populated virtually one-half by women. The commitment to women's advancement is so firmly held in Sweden that it is the world's only monarchy which has simplified primogeniture so that the oldest child of the royal couple becomes the monarch regardless of sex.

<sup>21</sup> See the articles in *Writing Centers and Writing Across the Curriculum Programs: Building Interdisciplinary Programs*, ed. by Robert W. Barnett and Jacob S. Blumner, for examples.

## CHAPTER 5

## C-ESSAYS

[T]hrough the nature of the product itself has changed, the market demand for literacy instruction as a professional service has consistently depended upon the time-honored educational practice of “teaching to the test.” (Trachsel 49)

In this chapter I attend to the advanced academic essays that since 1993 (Högberg and Eriksson 1) have become mandatory for a bachelor’s degree in most fields of study in Sweden. Whereas in the United States college entrance examinations, as Mary Trachsel argues, have set the standards for academic literacy, there is no test in Sweden that fully corresponds to the American ACT and SAT exams. Swedish students may take a university entrance exam, the so-called högskoleprovet, to improve their chances of being accepted, but, at least to this point, it has not been required. Also, since no campus-wide, mandatory writing programs exist in Sweden—programs that have the function of either weeding students out or changing students’ language so it becomes more “academic” (or both)—the so-called C-essays in Sweden have come to fill a similar function, intentionally or not, and, therefore, contribute to an “institutionalizing of literacy” similar to the effect Mary Trachsel attributes to American college entrance examinations. These essays have sprung from the writing-to-learn movement, but, indirectly, they also serve as a form of quality control, and much time and effort in low-level courses are devoted to training students to write so they will be able to handle the C-essay requirement farther along. In spite of preparation in form of shorter essays, Swedish students still dread the C-essay requirement,<sup>1</sup> and for many of them a C-essay takes considerably longer time to complete than the ideal ten weeks (Strand, “Nightmare Essays”). From taking a closer look at C-essays, one gets a clearer picture of where the students in Christina Bergman’s

writing class (discussed in Chapter 3) were headed, why they were instructed to write their “scientific” essays in a certain way and also required to go through the activity of a mock defense.

#### Students’ Point of View

To gain a better understanding of the problems students have with these essays, a research project was carried out at Stockholm University under the leadership of Hans Strand. The unique twist of this project is that students played a big role in it as it is described as “a joint venture between the Stockholm University Student Union and the Educational Developmental Unit at Stockholm University” (Strand, “Nightmare Essays”). In this qualitative study, interviews with 64 students (eight students from eight different departments) were conducted, most of them via telephone, and recorded by two students. Half of the participants were men, and half of them were women; half of them had been able to complete their essays after five semesters, and the rest had not finished. Students from some departments had received more structure and help from their advisors than students in other departments. Not surprisingly, the departments that provided the most vigorous advising also had the most students completing their essays.<sup>2</sup> The result from Strand’s project was a long series of suggestions for improvements that have been published and shared with representatives for both students and faculty. Most of the recommendations concern an earlier start with the essay project and more structured advising throughout the whole writing process.

### Small-Scale Comparison of C-Essays between Universities

Completion of course requirements is in the interest of departments as well as of students, because Swedish university departments are allotted money from government agencies in proportion to the number of students who successfully finish their programs. Nonetheless, from the universities' point of view, completion of the essays is only one small part of the whole picture. Some studies that are more quantitative than Strand's in nature have also been carried out with focus on C-essays. *Den goda C-uppsatsen* [*The good C-essay*], edited by Ulf Bjereld, is a report about a project that involved the departments of Political Science in Gothenburg and Uppsala. The project had four goals: (1) to raise the quality of C-essays; (2) to make the defense seminar more valuable as a teaching tool; (3) to discuss the criteria for evaluation of essays and what counts as a "good" essay in the two departments involved; (4) to build a network between teachers at the two institutions (Bjereld 1-2). The research methods consisted of exchanging examiners/chairs for defense seminars between Gothenburg and Uppsala on four occasions and submitting three essays to blind grading by eight teachers, three from Gothenburg and five from Uppsala. The project quickly revealed some interesting discrepancies in the underlying assumptions behind the essay requirement between the two institutions: in Gothenburg, where the essay writing was viewed as an opportunity for students to learn how to conduct research and to write an academic essay (i.e., as an integral part of the educational program, the students received advising and assistance throughout the process); in Uppsala, where the essay was seen foremost as a test of students' ability to work independently, the students were advised mainly at the start of their projects. Conversely, the defense seminar was more important as a teaching tool in

Uppsala than it was in Gothenburg. The teachers from both universities found that they had something to learn from the approaches at the other institution (Bjereld 21). The blind grading experiment showed that the teachers from Uppsala were more lenient than the ones from Gothenburg, a result that led to fruitful discussions about criteria among the research participants and caused the department in Uppsala to raise its standards (Bjereld 18, 23-24).

Reading about this experiment in external examination brought back memories to me from my own high school graduation, when gentlemen in coat and tie traveled around to all the nation's high schools to sit in on small-group oral examinations. Normally, today, external examination is reserved for dissertation defenses when the "opposer" often comes from a different Swedish university and sometimes even from a university in another country, depending on the nature of the dissertation topic.

#### Government Initiated Research on Quality and Standards

Not surprisingly within a state-regulated university system, questions about whether the various colleges and universities in Sweden offer education of the same quality are frequently raised. From a Swedish social-democratic perspective, inequality is considered anathema, especially at a time when the government is supporting conscious efforts to recruit students from previously underrepresented groups. "To make it possible to seriously broaden the social recruitment to higher education it is important that all, not just the privileged upper or middle class have access to better information," writes Anna Hedborg in the "Preface" to *En akademisk fråga—en ESO-rapport om ranking of C-uppsatser* [*An academic question—an ESO rapport about the ranking of C-essays*; in

Härnqvist 3; trans. mine].<sup>3</sup> To answer questions about differences in the quality of Swedish higher education and to possibly alleviate fears that had surfaced in the popular press, Kjell Härnqvist, professor emeritus in the Department of Education at Gothenburg University, was commissioned by the government to research the issue. Härnqvist designed a research project that focused on the evaluation of thirty C-essays in history and thirty C-essays in economics from three types of institutions: old universities or research universities (Category 1), new universities (Category 2), and colleges (with undergraduate programs; Category 3). The essays were randomly distributed among six evaluators in a process of blind grading (Härnqvist 15). I should add that C-essays are graded in the categories of Godkänd (Pass), Väl godkänd (Pass with distinction or High pass), and Underkänd (Fail). The criteria the evaluators were instructed to use appear in an appendix in Härnqvist's report. They are "relation to prior research, definition of problem, understanding of theory, methodology, procedure and conclusions, and, finally, quality of language and formalities" (125).<sup>4</sup> Härnqvist states that his reason for choosing C-essays as the focus of his study was that they can be viewed as the "crowning effort" for studies leading up to the bachelor's degree (14). My reason for including this chapter on C-essays in my dissertation is similar. I have quickly become aware of the central role these essays play in Swedish higher education, and I have realized that the C-essay requirement has made academic writing instruction more crucial than what was previously the case. Also, as end products, C-essays can very well be viewed as representative samples of what in a Swedish context passes for academic literacy.

The conclusions from Härnqvist's research project are somewhat ambiguous. At first they appear to support the idea that students perform according to expectations—that

is, that the best essays were written at the research universities and that the essays of the lowest quality came from students at the smaller colleges. A more-penetrating analysis, however, reveals that the essays vary more according to disciplines than according to institutions. So, whereas students at Category 2 institutions outperformed students at Category 3 institutions in history, the result from economics was the reverse. Further, essays from one of the Category 1 universities received lower evaluations than expected, in both disciplines, whereas essays in economics from one of the small colleges received higher ratings than expected (131-32). So, Hjärnqvist concludes, "The outcome is likely to differ between disciplines and a large part of the deviation depends on differences in reputation and student input rather than on resources and quality of instruction" (132). In short, in many cases the Category 1 institutions may have attracted the best students. The explanations for the deviation of the institutions previously mentioned may well be that at the Category 1 university, with its large numbers of students, albeit of a high caliber, among the faculty members research was considered more important than advising on C-essays whereas at the small college, advising might have been the faculty's top priority, with inevitably (and not just surprisingly) positive results (Hjärnqvist 107). More vigorous advising would most likely have resulted in higher-quality C-essays.

#### Opportunity for Personal Interviews

As luck would have it, I discovered that two of my Swedish relatives, my sister's son Robert and my sister-in-law Ewa-Lena, were both, unbeknown to one another, writing C-essays during the spring of 2004 while I was in the process of working on my dissertation. It seemed almost too good to be true, and I decided to take advantage of this



unsolicited opportunity to gain a better understanding of what C-essays are and how students go about writing them. Consequently, I interviewed both my relatives about the process of writing a C-essay, and I was also able to get access to copies of their completed essays. Since these essays were written at different institutions and in different disciplines and were awarded different grades, they fit right into my discussion about quality and C-essays as a measure of Swedish academic literacy.

I wrote my interview questions in Swedish and submitted them to my relatives electronically. Then I gave them two choices: I would either make an appointment to call them, or they could send me their responses in an e-mail message. One of them chose to answer via e-mail whereas the other one answered in a telephone interview. The full text of the questions appear, translated into English, in Appendix H, but, in sum, they cover the extent of the advising process, the essay format, the defense procedure, and the criteria for evaluation.

#### Robert's Answers

My nephew Robert Rosander, 27 at the time of the interview, was a student at Örebro University, a university that belongs to the category "new" universities (Category 2 in Härnqvist's study), pursuing a degree in physical education/coaching. The essay he shared with me was written for one of his education courses. He chose to e-mail me his answers in Swedish. To my first question about advising, he replied that he and the other two students, who wrote a collaborative essay, were very pleased with the advising they had received. They had met with their advisor on ten occasions, evenly distributed over the semester. For each meeting the advisor had set certain goals for the group; in

addition, the students had had frequent e-mail contact with their advisor between the meetings. Robert did not know of any writing center at Örebro University. As for the length of the essay and other requirements and conventions, Robert answered that the Department of Education had printed and distributed booklets with information about C-essays. He said that 40-60 pages would be considered standard for this type of essay. (When Swedes talk about pages, however, they usually mean single-line-spaced text on A4 size paper.) The Department of Education in Örebro encourages students to collaborate in pairs or occasionally in groups of three. In answer to my third question about explicit instruction about academic writing conventions etc., Robert told me that he had referred to the printed material provided by his department, in addition to looking at other essays. Also, the department offers lectures on essay writing. In Robert's opinion, the advisor has the ultimate responsibility for assisting students with their writing process, but he admitted that not all advisors provide the same amount of help. They work in different ways, and some, he said, abuse their power (though he did not specify what he meant by power abuse). Robert felt that he had been well prepared for his C-essay by the writing he had done at lower levels. He said that, from early on, he had realized that memos and papers at the college level had to be written in a certain way. Nonetheless, he thought that the requirements varied substantially between departments. In the Kinesiology Department, where he had taken courses earlier, the instructors were less interested in form and more interested in content, he claimed. The situation was somewhat different in the Department of Education.

The defense of the essay, which at Örebro University is called "ventilation," has to follow certain rules: First the students must let their department know that they have

finished their essay. Then the department selects an examiner/chair, who will preside over the seminar and later determine the grade for the essay; the department also coordinates the defense between or among writers so at least two essays will be discussed or “ventilated” at the same time (the idea is that the writers serve as readers of and “opposers” for one another’s essays). The whole procedure takes about two hours per essay. Even for this event Robert felt that he had received sufficient practice prior to the “ventilation” of his C-essay:

We have read other students’ essays, opposed, been opposed and been required to do revisions. It feels almost as if this is the only thing we have done: written, written, and written. Phuuu! We have learned to give constructive criticism. . . . It’s not relevant to point out spelling errors, etc.; then you get away from the content of the essay. It’s always the instructor/chair who has the last word. (Trans. mine)

Robert further explained to me that technicalities, such as spelling errors and documentation problems, are handled very discreetly. The “opposers” give the writers a sheet with written feedback on such matters to refer to when they revise their essay.

On the topic of grading, Robert had the following insights to share: The chair is the one who evaluates and grades the essay. For the grade “Pass with distinction,” Robert thought that the most important quality is that the essay is well written and unified. “It has to have a thread,” he said. He was not quite sure why the essay his group had written did not receive a “Pass with distinction,” but he was still happy with the result. He said that essays rarely receive a failing grade because advisors are reluctant to allow students to defend weak essays, but failure does happen. He added that advisors cannot serve as

chairs for their own advisees' "ventilations," but they do chair other seminars. The defense is announced as a public event, and people who are interested in the topic of a particular essay may show up in addition to students who just want to learn about the procedure. He said that the way writers respond during the "ventilation" can have an impact on their grade; so it is an important event for several reasons.

Even though Robert thought that he had learned a great deal by writing his C-essay and earlier essays, he personally felt that he had been required to do too much writing over the years. As a future physical-education teacher, he believed that he would have been better served by more practical components. Yet he was happy with the way his essay had turned out and proud that he had been able to finish it in just one semester. Many students did not finish, he said. They had either dropped out or put off the essay to another semester, but then they would be on their own, he added. Advisors are required to assist students solely during the semester when they begin their work.

#### Ewa-Lena's Answers

Ewa-Lena Sjöberg, my sister-in-law, was 42 at the time of the interview. While working full-time in a managerial position for a laboratory at Örebro Regional Hospital, Ewa-Lena was enrolled in a program for Management and Organization in the Social Sciences Department at Växjö University, like Örebro a Category 2, or new, university. This program was specifically designed for long-distance studies at half speed (10 points/semester instead of the full-time 20 points) spread over four years. The students met face to face about once a month (on Fridays and Saturdays) for seminars and lectures. She wrote her C-essay during the spring semester of her third year in the

program. She chose to answer my questions via telephone. I took notes during the interview, and, after I had written out my notes, I sent Ewa-Lena my version of her answers (translated into English) to make sure that she would not feel misrepresented.

Ewa-Lena's advising experience differed significantly from Robert's; yet she, too, felt that she had been sufficiently prepared for the writing of the C-essay. Possibly because of the nature of the program, that it was in Social Sciences, and possibly because it was offered long distance, writing had already been heavily emphasized from the first semester. During the previous semester (fall of 2003) Ewa-Lena had written two 5-point essays about the structure and culture of organizations, one on theory and one on method. She was required to write a plan or an outline for the first essay, which she then revised for the second one. This plan would then become the foundation for the longer essay in the spring. Thus, a whole semester ahead of time, the students had chosen a preliminary topic for the 10-point essay that was scheduled to follow in the spring. They were expected to choose their research area (for empirical studies), describe and focus the problem, sketch the background, explain the purpose of the project, formulate questions and/or hypotheses, narrow down the topic, and plan how to pace themselves. According to the topics they had selected, they were divided into groups and assigned an advisor. Ewa-Lena's particular advisor (who also happened to be an administrator) was the advisor for only three different projects, which, according to Ewa-Lena, was an unusually low number. When I asked about collaborative essays, Ewa-Lena answered that in her program students were encouraged to collaborate with one or two other students to gain additional perspectives, but she also said that she thought a group was required to cover

more material than an individual writer and that the group members were expected to inform their advisor about each student's individual contribution to the essay.<sup>5</sup>

Ewa-Lena said that at least in her program the students were expected to initiate contact with their advisors; it was their responsibility. (Robert made a similar point about Örebro.) She made an appointment with her advisor, whom I call, as a pseudonym, Anders Gustavsson, in September, to discuss the formulations of her questions and the number of interviews that would be appropriate for her project, in an effort to limit and define her material. She found the meeting to be very productive. Also, once in the fall her writing group (i.e., the five students who had the same advisor) met without the advisor present to discuss problems they might have with their project. She made another appointment with Anders Gustavsson in November to discuss her progress. They exclusively discussed research procedures, and Ewa-Lena said that she never talked with her advisor about the actual writing of the essay at any time.

When Gustavsson became increasingly more difficult to hunt down, Ewa-Lena secured all his telephone numbers (home, work, cellular phone) plus his e-mail address. Still he neglected to respond to her repeated messages. Finally, she was able to make an appointment with him to discuss her interview questions over the phone in late January or early February. She claimed that this was the last contact she had with her advisor. She decided not to spend her energy on hunting him down any more, even though she treasured his advice; besides, she felt that she had a fairly solid grasp of what she needed to do. During the work with an earlier (5-point) essay, Ewa-Lena had called her advisor (a different person) three or four times. She thought that she was probably more persistent than most other students, who did not necessarily take all the initiatives she had

taken to get in touch with their advisors. One can compare Ewa-Lena's experience to Vesna's, as she told the small group at Södertörn about her problems (Chapter III). As a younger student, Vesna did not possess Ewa-Lena's confidence and persistency; nor did she possess Ewa-Lena's ability to work independently when the advising did not work out as planned. It is not hard to imagine that, had the roles been reversed, my nephew Robert's writing experience would have been far less satisfying; yet he, too, was what in the U. S. would be called a nontraditional student, who, supposedly, would be more mature than a student around 21. Ultimately, students in Växjö could turn to the program coordinator with complaints and calls for help. Ewa-Lena said she had contacted this person on one occasion (in January of 2004) when she had problems getting hold of her advisor, not to get Gustavsson in trouble but simply to raise the question whether a man who obviously had so much else on his plate ought to be assigned advising.

Ewa-Lena added that when she started the program, about 100 students were enrolled, but when the third year began, the group had been decimated to about 35. Most of the students who dropped the program disappeared in the middle of the second semester when they were hit with an additional 5-point essay requirement (and some of them were dragging along incomplete essays from the first semester). Only between 25 and 30 students remained to defend their 10-point essays at the end of the third year.

Asked about a writing center, Ewa-Lena answered that she was not aware of one at Växjö University. She added that her group had received some library science instruction with a lecture and hands-on activities to learn about search engines, etc. during one of their seminar days. From my internet searches, however, I have discovered

that Växjö University does indeed have a seemingly very active writing center, one that even offers writing courses for doctoral students.

As for length, Ewa-Lena said that the students had received rather vague instructions, just that the essay could become both too short and too long. By referring to earlier essays, they had concluded that the 10-point essay ought to be around 50 to 60 pages long. Ewa-Lena's own essay consists of 65 pages of single-line-spaced text, plus one page of source listings. She was not too sure on this point, but she imagined that a group would be expected to write a longer essay than a single author, and she believed that groups might consist of up to four members.

When I asked about the format, Ewa-Lena said that she had followed the rules for "samhällsvetenskaplig metod" (social sciences method), which is what applies to her field of study. She said that the foundation for using this method was laid already during her first year in the program. Ewa-Lena maintained that most students have the freedom to choose their own outlines (decide on the order), as long as they include the required elements. Further, Ewa-Lena said that individual advisors have some say about the format. Some are nitpicky and demand that students adhere to one specific format whereas others are more lenient and give the students more liberty to choose. She had at least a hunch that technicalities, such as documentation style, may be getting less important, likely because instructors/advisors have to deal with an ever-increasing number of essays.

To my question about the defense seminar, Ewa-Lena replied that, in her case, only the students who had the same advisor were present at the defense; so, her defense was clearly a much less public affair than what Robert had experienced, especially since



her group consisted of only five members. The other groups were larger because normally an instructor serves as the advisor for more than three projects. Ewa-Lena's advisor was absent on the day of the defense (for health reasons), so another man had been chosen to replace him. The students took turns opposing and defending their essays, spending approximately one and a half hours on each project. Ewa-Lena said that the students were expected to exchange essays about a week prior to the defense and that the designated "opposer" could give informal feedback to the writer(s) ahead of the scheduled defense date. Ewa-Lena herself had received an essay that left a great deal to be desired in content, method, and language, and she had expressed some of her concerns via e-mail so that the authors would be able to revise their essay and send out a new version in time for the actual defense. Still Ewa-Lena was pretty sure that this essay did not pass but would have to be rewritten and possibly defended once more. Second defenses are rare, she said, but some students may be told to revise their projects extensively. According to the instructions the students had received, the act of opposing should always be done in a positive spirit. No one is supposed to shoot down another student's essay; yet it can be hard to be positive, Ewa-Lena said, if an essay is so bad that there is precious little good one can say about it.

The defense follows a specific format, which is very similar to the mock defenses that the students of Christina's class were involved in, as discussed in Chapter III. First the examiner/chair asks whether the writer wants to add anything, maybe make some corrections and/or clarifications; then the "opposer" presents the essay—briefly discusses how it is set up, the background, method, formulation of problem(s), results, etc. Ewa-Lena herself had been asked about the possibility of remaining objective when she

studied a laboratory (her own field), even though she did not conduct her observations or interviews in the laboratory where she works. She had had to defend her choice of venue. The whole event, Ewa-Lena said, is “an exercise in argumentation.” As long as one can defend one’s choices, everything is fine. The students had previously been assigned some literature that informed them about how to read and critique essays. Ewa-Lena revealed that she had applied this information to her own essay while she was in the process of writing it, to make sure that she had covered all the angles.

Ewa-Lena’s opinion about evaluation and grading differed somewhat from Robert’s. She thought that the advisor had a great deal of power, even though someone else (most likely the program coordinator) reads the essays in addition to the advisor. In Ewa-Lena’s case the substitute for her original advisor read her essay, plus the program coordinator and, possibly, the program coordinator’s assistant. Whereas in Örebro advisors could not serve as chairs/examiners at the defense seminars of their advisees (a form of external examination), such restrictions did not seem to apply in Växjö. Ewa-Lena’s essay received the grade “Pass with distinction.” She added that this, the highest possible grade, is not an easy grade. Based on earlier experience she knew that about 20 percent of the students receive the grade “Pass with distinction” on any given essay. Yet she found the grading process to be very subjective, depending on the advisor’s preferences. The grading criteria had never been made explicit, she said. As for the weakest essay in her group, the writers did not seem to know very well what they were doing and why, in Ewa-Lena’s opinion. It was meager in content and also lacked focus, she said. If an advisor is a stickler for technicalities, a student will not receive a “Pass with distinction” if the essay has many technical errors. On the other hand, a more lenient

advisor will not focus so much attention on details. Anyway, a passing essay should cover all the required elements.

Asked about the usefulness of writing essays, Ewa-Lena replied that, although she did not like to write when she started, she had gotten used to it during her three years in the program. She had been required to write numerous papers and essays, all between 25 and 40 pages long (single spaced!). All this writing had actually helped her on her job, where she, in her managerial position, has to write a great deal. She realized that she had become accustomed to thinking about the reader and techniques for presenting her content in a form that could be easily understood. Further, she had learned the importance of structure, she said, and constantly found herself thinking in terms of “background, problems, consequences, results” (the required elements of an essay), even when these categories might not be totally applicable. Writing and thinking are intertwined, she said; these acts influence each other. Also, all the writing she had been forced to do has had another effect on her: she has become a more critical reader, one who does not swallow everything she reads but instead questions and evaluates the information.

### Examples of Essays

To make sense of Robert’s and Ewa-Lena’s C-essays and to be able to compare and contrast them, I will in part apply the afore-mentioned criteria formulated by Kjell Härnqvist. How successful does the essay appear to be in its “relation to prior research, definition of problem, understanding of theory, methodology, procedure and conclusions, and, finally, quality of language and formalities” (125)? Interestingly enough, Robert’s

and Ewa-Lena's essays serve as excellent examples of the two fundamental directions that these essays can take, a point that applies even to doctoral dissertations, in the U.S. as well as elsewhere: to what extent has the writing of the essay been mainly a learning experience for the writer(s), or to what extent is the essay a test of the writer's independence and perhaps even a contribution to the ongoing discussion within its field?

#### My Reading of Robert's Essay

As I have already stated, Robert wrote his C-essay for the Department of Education at the University of Örebro. His was a collaborative essay, titled "Utvecklingssamtal ur ett demokratiperspektiv" [which roughly translates into "Developmental conferences from a democratic perspective"], written by three male students: Dan Fredriksson, Marcus Kvarndal, and Robert Rosander. To situate my readers, I need to explain the nature and purpose of "developmental conferences," which is the topic of this essay. Since the 1980s Swedish elementary and middle schools have operated without formal grade reports.<sup>6</sup> When the report card system was abandoned, it was replaced with private conferences, popularly called "fifteen-minute conferences" because of the allotted time, for parents, teachers, and pupils. The reasoning behind the change was that a grade was seen as a very limited indicator of a child's performance. In a conference so much more could and should be discussed: the child's social adjustment, ability to work both independently and with others, speed, focus, ambition; and interests, etc. (Fredriksson, Kvarndal, and Rosander 13-14). These conferences, held once every semester, were usually scheduled in the evenings to accommodate both parents' and teachers' work schedules, and they were mandatory. More recently these conferences

have been renamed “developmental” instead of “fifteen-minute,” and in their essay, Robert and his coauthors claim that they have found the name change to have somewhat positively affected the nature of the conferences themselves. Instead of a monologue from the teacher about how Anders or Maria or Stanislav is doing in school, the conferences, at least sometimes, turn into true dialogues with more input from the parents. Dan, Marcus, and Robert see this development as positive from a democratic point of view, with increased involvement from all the concerned parties.

The essay, about 40 pages long (with 1 and 1/2 spaces between lines), has a clear focus. It is limited in scope in a way that I consider very appropriate for an essay of this type, at least if one considers the essay to be mainly a course requirement, written for the students' own benefit. This particular essay was originally meant to be a part of a larger project with the purpose of developing better guidelines for teachers in the Örebro region for how to conduct developmental conferences; however, because the students found that the project designers moved very slowly and did not provide them with contact teachers, as promised, fast enough (so they would be able to interview the teachers and write their essay in one semester), the students found it necessary to forge ahead and seek their own contact teachers outside the framework for the actual project. They interviewed 13 teachers, about equally divided between elementary and junior high school. They found that the interviewed teachers had different opinions about the purpose of the conferences: to some of them, the development of the student and the contact with the parents were, indeed, the most important aspects, whereas to other teachers, the informative aspect still was foremost in their minds. Robert and his coauthors conclude that what they have learned about their topic will serve them well as teachers who will themselves conduct

similar conferences in the future, and they express the hope that their essay will inspire more research (Fredriksson, Kvarndal, and Rosander 39).

The narrow focus of this essay is its strength as well its weakness. It is clear, but it is also simplistic. Although developmental conferences are an important part of the Swedish school system, the topic never seems to be of compelling interest to the writers. They go through the required elements, but they play it safe the whole time, never walking out on a limb or going beyond what may be expected of them. They do a decent job in all categories, and their focus on developmental conferences *as a democratic tool* gives the essay an edge that it would not have had without it. The main weakness that I detected falls in the area of theoretical awareness. An important source for the discussion of democracy is John Dewey. The Swedish students have read Dewey's book *Democracy and Education* in a Swedish translation, *Demokrati och utbildning*, from 1997. They never mention the fact that the original was published as far back as 1916. With this exception, however, they use their sources well, and the source material is smoothly integrated with the writers' own comments and observations. Also, they have sufficient outside material with their approximately 30 references.

The authors explain their methodology and justify their choice of using interviews instead of surveys by explaining that they determined that a few, but in-depth, interviews would give them a better picture of how teachers actually conduct their conferences than a survey could have done and that they also valued the opportunity to ask follow-up questions. The research procedure is competently and sensitively handled, with consideration of ethical concerns, such as the research participants' anonymity and their right to read the finished essay (Fredriksson, Kvarndal, and Rosander 21). Robert, Dan,

and Marcus chose to write their questions and actually mail them to the participating teachers before the interviews took place. They include their interview questions in an appendix but provide three sample answers to each question in the essay itself to show the breadth of their material. The conclusions they draw from their research are well founded. The language is what I would consider competent even though it is not perfect. The essay displays some errors in sentence structure, such as numerous comma splices,<sup>7</sup> a couple of sentence fragments, faulty use of prepositions, and some instances of awkward phrasing.

To structure their essay, Robert, Dan, and Marcus have opted for a simple version with headings and subheadings to guide the reader through the material. The main chapter headings, given in italics and larger size font are “Preface,” “Introduction,” “Purpose,” “Background,” “Our research,” “Report of results,” “Analysis of results,” “Discussion,” and “Conclusion.” Subheadings only occur in the middle sections “Background” and “Our research.” The one on background is by far the longest section and takes up approximately 15 pages. It covers various types of communication events when people meet face to face, some formal and others informal. After a discussion about communication in general, the authors move into the importance of communication and collaboration between schools and homes and the way by which this communication should encourage everyone’s involvement in line with foundational democratic values. The chapters and sections are not numbered.

As an example of what most Swedish undergraduate students are required to accomplish before they are awarded their bachelor’s degree, the essay is, nonetheless, quite impressive. It should leave no one in doubt about how seriously Swedish

universities take writing today. In the U.S., honors students write theses, but for all the other students there is no corresponding requirement; so their writing experience and competence as they graduate will vary considerably depending on their majors, on their institutions, and on their teachers. I do not have background information about Robert's coauthors, but Robert himself exemplifies the "new" type of college student, a student who does not come from a home with a strong academic tradition. His high school grades were good but not exceptional, and only with persistence and determination (e.g., he had to apply numerous times before he was admitted into the program)<sup>8</sup> has he reached his academic goal and has now earned his college degree.

#### My Reading of Ewa-Lena's Essay

Ewa-Lena's situation is different from Robert's. Not only is she older, but she also has about twenty years of experience behind her from working in a hospital laboratory, first as an assistant and then as a manager. So, when she chose her essay topic, she was not looking to some hypothetical future, but she drew upon her own experience. She titled her essay "I ackrediteringens fotspår . . . på gott och ont?" ["In the footprints of accreditation . . . for good or for bad?"].<sup>9</sup> She wanted to explore in what ways an accreditation process may influence and change what she calls the "organizational culture" of an institution, and the institution she selected was a hospital laboratory, but not the laboratory where she herself is employed. Basically, Robert's and Ewa-Lena's essays contain the same required elements: abstract, introduction, purpose, background, discussion about methodological choices, description of research procedures, interpretation of data, discussion, and conclusion. In both cases the authors



work with interviews, although Ewa-Lena adds elements of ethnographic observation. Yet, while reading Ewa-Lena's essay, I kept asking myself, "Is this essay really a representative sample of what Swedish universities expect from their undergraduates?" It is very independent, with thorough discussions and analyses, and, unlike Robert's essay, Ewa-Lena's essay clearly goes beyond fulfilling the requirements for a course. It makes a genuine contribution to a real-life nonacademic community as well as to a research community. She and I had some mutually beneficial discussions, for instance, about research methods, and I told her then that with all her work I thought her essay was good enough to pass for a master's thesis; at least it would have been in the United States.

To structure her essay, Ewa-Lena has opted for the intricate system of outlining used in Swedish dissertations. Not only does she number her chapters from 1 to 5, but she also numbers her subheadings and, in applicable cases, her sub-subheadings. The following is what her outline for Chapter 2, with the heading "Method" looks like:

- 2. Method**
  - 2.1 Procedure**
  - 2.2 Choice of method**
  - 2.3 Discussion about methods**
    - 2.3.1 Starting point
    - 2.3.2 Research method
    - 2.3.3 Qualitative research interview
  - 2.4 Cultural analysis**
  - 2.5 Data collection**
    - 2.5.1 Selection
    - 2.5.2 Primary data
    - 2.5.3 Secondary data
    - 2.5.4 Treatment of data
    - 2.5.5 Literature search and critique of sources
  - 2.6 Validity, reliability, and objectivity** (Sjöberg 2; trans. mine)

Until I got accustomed to this type of outline, with both the numbers and headings included in the actual text, I found it intrusive and distracting. Especially when the

sections are very short, I think that the numbers, the headings, and subheadings draw undue attention to themselves. Instead of guiding the reader through the text, they create unnecessary and sometimes irritating breaks. I have had the same experience when reading Swedish dissertations. Ewa-Lena's essay is an excellent example of what Swedes mean when they use the term "scientific" text. The text is set up in a specific way. The system lends itself to a breaking up of text that I would consider fragmented and choppy without many of the transitional devices that play such an important role in much American academic writing. By choosing this intricate outlining format, Ewa-Lena has more consciously positioned herself within the Swedish academic or "scientific" writing tradition and research community than Robert and his coauthors do.

Another observation one can make from the outline sample above is that Ewa-Lena's essay reflects a more general Swedish stance toward living up to the "scientific" requirements of academic research. Hers is a qualitative study; yet she has felt obligated to include a section called "Validity, reliability and objectivity." My reading of some other Swedish qualitative dissertations supports the point that Swedes follow more stringent rules for research than do Americans. Even a qualitative study, such as ethnography, has to be squeezed into a scientific paradigm, much like the proverbial square peg in a round hole. When, in my interaction with Swedish scholars, I mentioned the classroom ethnography I had conducted some years earlier, they explained to me that in the name of objectivity they could never imagine themselves conducting any form of research in their own classrooms.

The only weakness in Ewa-Lena's essay is in the last of Hårnqvist's categories, "quality of language and formalities." Even though Ewa-Lena had started thinking about

her topic and prepared for her research the semester before, she conducted her field research, analyzed her material, and wrote her 65-page single-spaced essay in one semester while working full-time and also functioning as the mother of three teenagers—small wonder, then, if the technical aspects of her work could use more attention. What I have had access to is not the final version of her essay but one close to it. It is somewhat sloppy in places, with inconsistencies in documentation and other careless errors. Like Robert, Ewa-Lena commits her share of comma splices, but, as I have reason to believe, a comma splice is not regarded as a major error in Sweden; it is not in the same league as run-on sentences and sentence fragments. I did point out to her that her list of references was very inconsistent in the amount of information given for each item (sometimes she gives the author's last name plus initial, sometimes the full name; sometimes the place of publication is omitted, sometimes the publisher, etc.), and she agreed that she had been forced to throw it together.

Yet, viewed in its entirety, for content more than for technicalities, Ewa-Lena's C-essay is a fascinating piece of work. It stimulates ideas that are relevant for my own study of literacy practices and the institutionalizing of such practices. The following excerpts from Ewa-Lena's concluding reflections should be enough to show the quality of her essay:

Consequently, accreditation can work for good or for bad. If there is receptivity to and need for structure and order in addition to enthusiastic management, the effects are likely to be positive. If the change, on the other hand, brings about conflicts and territorial contests that take over, the negative effects will probably outweigh the good ones. For the positive

effects to have a lasting influence it is important that the coworkers feel that they have influence and that their tasks are meaningful. Their own thinking must be stimulated to counteract the controlling influence of standardized routines, which, at worst, can cause the individual to stop thinking and only obey and follow rules without questioning their relevance.

[ . . . ]

In what ways can one prevent organizations from getting stuck in routines and, so to speak, returning to square one where the coworkers do not feel that they have a participatory role and also feel continuously controlled? How can management make the coworkers feel that they will continue to be a valuable part of the process? It would be interesting to study how different organizations have solved these problems. How have they managed to maintain the positive effects of accreditation and keep the negative ones at bay? One lesson that I believe one can learn from my research is that it is important to build from the bottom up, to watch the daily routines and let changes start from there. Especially in a technically complex organization this approach seems to be the key to successful change. (Sjöberg 64-65; my trans.)

Obviously, the graders of Ewa-Lena's essays were not nitpicky but graded her essay on content and depth of analysis more than on formal correctness.

Fittingly enough, all our projects—Robert's, Ewa-Lena's and my own—are in their different ways concerned with democratic principles, such as participation and the

question of who exerts power over whom. In their essay, Robert and his coauthors discuss the possibility that teachers become too controlling and leave too little room for parents and students to give their input in a conference situation. In her essay, Ewa-Lena expresses her concerns that the accreditation process in itself will take the initiative away from individual workers.<sup>10</sup> Reading their essays, I felt strengthened in my conviction that democracy is a core value in Swedish education and that educators in the United States may have something to learn in this respect.

### Writing as Socialization

An important function of academic writing is to socialize or induct new members into a particular discourse community in a form of apprenticeship. This is a process that necessarily takes both time and practice. From a democratic perspective, Mona Blåsjö defends the socialization process:

A democratic assumption is that everyone should have the same chance to enter the academic world. At least if one shares this assumption, it is hard to claim that students should not [be taught to] write in an academic fashion. In my opinion, higher education needs to offer students the possibility to enrich their literacy by adding academic literacy; otherwise some individuals will be locked out from academic knowledge. Only then will they be able to influence academic literacy. (Blåsjö 288; trans. mine)

Yet Blåsjö finds the socializing aspect of academic writing somewhat problematic because it seems to take for granted that individuals seek membership only in one group and that they are going to remain there (13). In Robert's case his sense of belonging in

the academy is only partial. As is evident from his comment about the value of essay writing—that he would have welcomed more practical activities that he felt had more relevance to his future as a physical education teacher instead of being required to write essay after essay—he does not envision himself as staying in the academy. He sees his education as leading to a job or career that will be of a different nature than some of the training he has received. Ewa-Lena, on the other hand, clearly feels more at home in the academy, and her managerial position is not in contrast to her role as a student writer; so she moves very comfortably between the two roles. She has found use for the writing techniques she has learned at the university on the job, and she has used her work experience to guide her writing and create meaningful writing assignments. Her response and behavior almost perfectly illustrate what Bakhtin contends about speech genres: “In most cases, genres of complex communication are intended precisely for this kind of actively responsive understanding with delayed action” (69). Bakhtin adds that what he writes about speech genres also applies to “written and read speech” (69). Academic writing at the advanced level would certainly fit in under the label “complex communication,” since every text is a link in a chain, building on what has been said before and connecting to what will be said in the future.

Also, in academic writing and in the acquisition of academic literacy (the socialization process) there are both tangible (explicit) and less tangible (implicit) elements. Some of the academic conventions can be taught in manuals; others remain a “mystery” (Lillis, “Whose ‘Common Sense’”) for the uninitiated whereas the ones who have mastered them more or less take them for granted. One can also note, in this context, the meanings of “academic discourse.” According to Joan Turner, “On the one

hand . . . academic discourse is a linguistic product whose rhetorical features can be analysed and taught, and on the other hand, it is a way of representing what is considered to be academic thinking” (150). One such implicit characteristic is complexity, which is so much more valued in the academy than in the world around it. Ewa-Lena, in her analysis and discussion of organizational culture has intuitively picked up on this value. Her topic is complex in itself, and her research does not yield any simple answers. Before she concludes that the positives of an accreditation procedure outweigh the negatives, she takes her readers through an in-depth analysis that thoroughly accounts for all the positive and negative effects that such a process entails. Robert and his fellow authors, on the other hand, seem mostly interested in keeping their discussion simple and straightforward and getting the job done.

Since, to most undergraduate students, the academy is a temporary locus, a means to a goal but not the goal itself, one can seriously question whether it is necessary that all students be socialized or expected to learn *all* its conventions as if they were going to remain in an academic environment for the rest of their lives. Naturally, this observation applies to Swedish and American writing programs and requirements alike.

#### The C-Essay as Quality Control

To return to the epigraph for this chapter, the quotation from Mary Trachsel, I would claim that the whole C-essay requirement has led to a form of institutionalization of Swedish academic literacy. Because a C-essay is so important, in Vesna’s words “such a big university thing,” students have to be prepared for it throughout their education; consequently, the teachers have to teach to the test. It is something like an accreditation

process, in which someone has the authority to mark students with a stamp of approval. The ones who produce a passing C-essay have mastered the task. As one can see, far from all students finish their programs, mainly because the essay requirement has proved to be a stumbling block. In her discussion about different views on academic writing—as transferable skills, as socializing, and as academic literacies (15)—Blåsjö acknowledges the value of the British “academic literacies approach,” or as it is also called “New Literacy Studies,” with its attentiveness to the relations between language and power, literacy and identity (Lillis, *Student Writing: Access, Regulation, and Desire* 25). Yet Blåsjö adds that she finds this approach too tied to the highly stratified British educational system to be applicable to a Swedish context (12) and that it is “somewhat idealistic and most relevant for the type of students and education that is the focus of this branch of study, that is, beginning students in an adapted environment” (16), such as the Open University in the U.K. In contrast to Blåsjö, I would claim that the academic literacies approach would add a new and valuable dimension to Swedish academic writing research at this transitional time when new types of students are actively recruited and admitted into higher education.

In the continued debate about C-essays, questions not only about access or fairness and equality in higher education within a democratic society but also about “whose literacy?” and “for whose benefit?” need to be raised. A C-essay course, like a speech course, is a tool. It cannot be enough to recruit increasingly larger numbers of students to higher education without further studies about their chances for success. A logical next step would be studies that correlate social class and ethnicity with the success rate and grades for C-essays. To the point, the results from my own, although admittedly



limited, research indicate that, although Robert—who does not come from a strong academic background—successfully completed his C-essay, Ewa-Lena—whose mother and grandmother hold university degrees—was even more successful and seems to have adjusted to academic research writing with greater ease and also benefited more from the assignments. One can also recall Vesna's struggles with her writing assignments. She was a student with an immigrant background, whose parents had not completed high school.

As much as I welcome an increased emphasis on writing in higher education, because I subscribe to the notion that writing and learning are intertwined and that writing is a powerful means of internalizing knowledge, I find it disturbing that so much time and energy should be spent teaching students to write in a particular way. What explains that, within an educational system that fosters students to take their own initiatives and become critical thinkers all the way up to the academic research essay, the *why* and *how* of academic discourse have received so little attention?

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The students Vesna (Chapter III), Maria, and Petter (Chapter IV) can serve as examples.

<sup>2</sup> I will discuss differences in supervision and the relationship between advisors and students in greater depth when later in this chapter, I analyze my own interviews with two students, who both completed their C-essays within one semester.

<sup>3</sup> ESO stands for Expertgruppen för studier i offentlig ekonomi [The expert group for studies in public economy]. This is a governmental committee. ESO commissioned Kjell Härnqvist to undertake a study concerning the quality of higher education, and Härnqvist chose to focus on C-essays.

<sup>4</sup> Härnqvist's report has a summary in English at the end. The criteria are quoted from this English summary.

<sup>5</sup> Even though "additional perspectives" may be one reason why departments encourage collaborative essays, I also suspect that advisers are happy to cut down on the number of projects they have to deal with every semester.

<sup>6</sup> Report cards are sent home for the first time at the end of eighth grade.

<sup>7</sup> Swedes are, as a rule, more tolerant of comma splices than Americans are; in other words, a comma splice is hardly considered a major error.

<sup>8</sup> He was finally admitted one semester when an unusually high number of applicants who had been accepted decided to pursue other options and, therefore, gave up their spots.

<sup>9</sup> "In the wake of accreditation . . ." would possibly be a more idiomatic translation.

<sup>10</sup> One should note that Ewa-Lena throughout the essay uses the word "medarbetare" [coworker] for the employees within the organization (the hospital laboratory). In her role as manager, she obviously views her own subordinates as coworkers.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

My dissertation was in the end an effort to construct a multifarious self. It was an attempt to claim a space for myself within the complex professional discourses I sought to participate in and to act within those discourses in a way that had real consequences in my life and the lives of others. (Yagelski 92)

#### Contact Zones

Chapter I introduced the box metaphor that I had borrowed from Mary N. Muchiri et al. Their article invites readers to imagine themselves packing what they see as essential to composition into a box that can be sent to and implemented in another country. What have I found so valuable in American academic literacy practices that I would like to export it to a country like Sweden? And what have I found from my research in Sweden that I would like to import into the United States? In my conclusion I sum up my main points and also try to answer the questions about how my two cultures could enrich or cross-fertilize one another in the area of academic literacy. My purpose has never been to create some form of synthesis, a one-size-fits-all approach to academic literacy or the teaching of writing in higher education that could be implemented everywhere. Rather, my purpose has been to show that, because cultural contexts differ, needs are different, and no literacy practices or courses in academic writing can separate themselves from their cultural contexts. Yet, as Mary Louise Pratt and her many followers<sup>1</sup> have shown, contact zone theory can lead to fruitful discussions and exchanges between representatives for different cultures. By coming into contact with one another and making efforts for mutual understanding, theorists and practitioners from diverse backgrounds can reciprocally influence one another's ways of thinking. The

result would, I hope, be a respectful interchange of ideas that can lead to new possibilities for both Swedish and American literacy research, composition research, and pedagogy.

### What Sweden Can Learn from the United States

Initially it was easiest for me to think in terms of what the rich American scholarship in literacy studies and in rhetoric and composition has to offer the new programs in Sweden, and I will share some of my insights in this final chapter.

#### *A. Complicating the Issue of Academic Socialization*

Even though from one perspective it is “democratic” to help students become acculturated or socialized into the academy by explaining and demystifying the conventions of its discourse, one should not view academic literacy exclusively as a one-way street if democracy is to be truly at work. Democratic aims can take divergent paths and work from different premises about the way to best serve students who are experiencing difficulties, especially since most of these struggling students are first-generation college students who do not feel at home in an academic setting. Peter Elbow has captured this conflict or democratic dilemma well in the following question: “How can we change the culture of literacy yet also help all students *prosper* in the present culture?” (126; emphasis original). Elbow’s solution is “to introduce the dimension of time . . . to work for the long-range goal of changing the culture of literacy, and the short-range goal of helping the students now” (126). Without doubt, the undemocratic option is to exclude those who are struggling to master the conventions of academic discourse. The democratic mission, however, is to work for “greater inclusiveness” (Durst 125) by

(1) initiating students into academic discourse with sensitivity to their divergent cultural backgrounds although the means for doing so are still open to debate, and (2) striving to extend academic discourse by allowing room for students' own language and experiences in the academy although the means for accomplishing this feat are also heavily debated. Swedes seem sufficiently prepared to do the first but need to enter into the discussion about the possibility of doing the second. Despite the democratic and participatory pedagogical practices I observed in Sweden, most of the recent writing research of which I am aware still focuses on how students can better learn to master academic discourse.

### *B. Questioning the "Scientific" Research Paradigm*

If the emphasis throughout the Swedish school system is on collaboration instead of competition, on the collective instead of the individual, resulting in the kind of dynamic group discussions that I observed with students taking on a great deal of responsibility and initiative, why are not these values maintained also when it comes to so-called "scientific" writing? In one sense they are, since so many C-essays are written collaboratively. Yet, there appears to be a gap in Swedish scholarship and practice between the democratic freedom in classroom practices and the unexamined and unquestioned acceptance of the so-called scientific method in the writing of research essays, theses, and dissertations. At this higher educational level, all of a sudden everything is outlined from above and the teaching seems to be something done to the student instead of a truly democratic and participatory activity.

The fact is that American scholars, at least within the field of rhetoric and composition, are experimenting with alternative, more inclusive, academic discourses and research procedures. For example, Christopher Thaiss and Terry Myers Zawacki

conclude that “the boundaries around disciplinary discourses are far more permeable than we indicate to students when we teach them to conform to the discourse conventions of their majors” (81). According to Helen Fox, “[C]ritics within our ranks are beginning to describe academic argument as too contentious, too limiting, lacking in beauty and inspiration” (126). Further, Sidney Dobrin identifies this move toward alternative academic discourses as clearly post process: “[T]he discussions of hybrid, alternative, and mixed discourses are explicitly part of the post-process era as they address issues not of individual writing processes, but of larger systems of discourse and the political, ideological, and historical environments in which discourse is produced” (51). Jacqueline Jones Royster aptly summarizes the status of present American scholarship about the nature of academic literacy and academic discourse conventions:

1. Academic discourse, like all language use, is an invention of a particular social milieu, not a natural phenomenon.
2. Academic discourse is not now, and quite likely never has been, an *it*. We recognize now that discourse in academic arenas is, indeed, plurally formed, not singularly formed, within the contexts of varying disciplinary communities as these arenas have been sites of social and intellectual engagement and as they have developed and changed over the histories of these engagements.
3. Academic discourses, even plurally formed, should *still* not be perceived as existing apart, above, or beyond the varieties of discourse around them. (25; emphasis original)

In a similar manner Swedes need to question academic discourse conventions and not just meekly accept that this is how “it” is done. This is where Swedes’ sense of collective action ought to come into play as more and more writers, both established researchers and students, begin to realize that academic literacy and academic discourse conventions are constructs, which can change over time, and that everyone should be welcome to participate in such changes.

I have found the rigid format employed in Swedish research essays and dissertations stifling and, as I discuss in Chapter V, resulting in writing that is predictable but seriously fragmented. To open up the format for so-called scientific writing would not only be a democratic move, but it would also contribute to an epistemological debate, about what counts as *scientific* or academic text and whether *scientific* writing must exclusively follow one model. I find it interesting but frustrating that Swedes seem to be stuck in a *scientific* and supposedly objective writing paradigm, in the humanities and the social sciences as well as the hard sciences. Even the qualitative research I have seen, such as ethnographic studies, displays this predilection for an assumed objectivity. One example is Ulla Moberg’s dissertation, *Språkbruk och interaktion i en svensk pingstförsamling* [*Language use and interaction in a Swedish Pentecostal church*]. In spite of the author’s claim to be a participant observer, she comes across as an outsider, and the dissertation has nothing of the rich and thick description that characterizes, for example, Beverly Moss’s study of African American churches. With its quantifiable elements Moberg’s dissertation comes closer to a linguistic study than to a true ethnography.<sup>2</sup>

Swedish academic research, even in sociological and humanistic fields, attempts to adhere to the definition of science that Tomislav Hengl and Mike Gould have to offer: “The most compact definition of science is that it is a collection of objective knowledge that was derived through systematic investigations that are well-described and can be repeated” (1). In a footnote, Hengl and Gould stress that the key words in this definition are “objective, systematic and repeatable” (1; note 2).<sup>3</sup> Such an uncontested faith in scientific or absolute objectivity was challenged in the United States a long time ago, not the least from a feminist perspective (see, for example, Harding and Haraway).

Also, as Mona Blåsjö told me, in Sweden a teacher-researcher would not conduct research observations in her own classroom or, as in Moss’s case, in a church of which she herself was a member. “We don’t do that here,” Mona said, when she and I discussed a classroom ethnography that I had conducted with my own students. In Swedish eyes such studies are considered too subjective and *unscientific*. As I mention in Chapter V, my sister-in-law, Ewa-Lena, was even questioned about the appropriateness of conducting a study of a hospital laboratory since that was her own field, although she did not study her own workplace. I know that I myself had reservations before I embarked upon my first classroom research project, not so much for fear of not being “objective” enough, but because I was not sure how I would juggle the tasks of being a teacher and researcher simultaneously. The outcome, however, was very positive, and I realized that this form of research can create the close connection between research and teaching methods that I find desirable and ultimately strive for. Any discussion about subjectivity and objectivity would have to include both pros and cons, but personal investment in research should not *à priori* disqualify the whole project.



Are there any sign of cracks in the scientific research paradigm in Swedish higher education? Can one find any *resistance* to the supposedly objective and impersonal way of presenting research and the insistence on the validity of research? How do democratic recruiting efforts fit into this picture? Will the new groups of students be permitted a space in the academy, or are they simply supposed to become assimilated into the academic environment without any chance to influence it in return? Is there a fear of the new types of students who are entering universities at this time, and is that fear being masked by the insistence on the “scientific” nature of academic writing, the rigid format, and the increased emphasis on rhetoric and writing? The initiatives to place more emphasis on the “tools” of writing and speaking are launched as democratic, but, if there is no room for alternative formats or different kinds of writing and speaking, and if all students are ultimately expected to write in the same way in their researched or so-called scientific essays, then their different social, ethnic, or gender backgrounds have virtually been erased. In stark contrast to Americans, Swedes deemphasize grades and standardized tests both in the years of schooling that lead up to higher education and in the assessment of academic courses; yet the rigid and formal nature of their academic writing seems to lend itself to quality control and an almost desperate holding on to standards that at least some scholars in the United States have begun to question.

### *C. Acknowledging Power Inequities*

Power relations in the use of language “tools” need to become more visible in the Swedish context. During my interviews with Crister Skoglund and Lennart Hellspong, I detected an almost blind faith in rhetorical tools (writing and speaking skills) as equalizers. Tools are not neutral. In the little article “Why College English?” Shirley

Wilson Logan stresses a similar point: “We must accept the truth that the linguistic and literary perspectives we promote are not value-free and expose the values embedded in our assumptions about what modes of expressions are proper or what texts have literary merit” (109). And higher education for new groups of students is no automatic guarantee for increased democracy. In Sweden there are parallels to the United States in the way the higher educational system has worked as an extension of mainstream upper-middle-class values. Although Sweden lacks the history of the United States as an immigrant nation, it is rapidly becoming one, and a disturbing trend is that, as immigration has increased, so have various manifestations of racism. Swedes may not have adopted a writing pedagogy like the one that in the U.S. has gone by the label current-traditional, a pedagogy that values rules and regulations for writing above the interest level of content or the strength of argumentation; yet, as I have pointed out several times, Swedes, along with Europeans in general, have adopted a very narrow definition of what counts as academic writing. Providing the “tools” is not enough. Questions must be raised about the nature of these literacy tools and the purposes for which people are expected to use them. Whose literacy? For whose benefit? These are two examples of such important questions.

#### *D. Making Room for the Personal in Academic Writing*

Is it only within the scholarly work in rhetoric and composition that theorists have begun to validate and make room for a more subjective, personal way of presenting ideas? As should be clear by now, this point is very important to me. Many American high school teachers tell their students never to use “I” in their essays; yet research articles in composition are frequently written in the first person. Yet the “personal” goes far beyond the use of the personal pronouns “I” and “we.” Writers of Swedish academic

essays and dissertations use first-person pronouns, but the exploration needs to go one step further: who is intended by this “I”? “Personal” has to do with investment, having a stake in what one writes. If the person who speaks to the readers is only presenting herself as the researcher, but not allowing the readers any glimpses of her in other roles, the writing is not personal in the sense with which I use the word *personal*. A “personal” writer allows her readers to see her as a real-life person with flesh and blood, with emotions as well intellect. But how about viewing academic writing, academic discourse in a fuller, more inclusive light? What if personal narrative is not viewed just as simple or nonacademic but could be allowed a space within academic discourse? Is it not possible as well to combine intellectual rigor with tempered passion?

What I would like to export to Sweden is a more personal approach to academic literacy—or at least a vital discussion and dialogue about what constitutes academic literacy and why, with special emphasis on what it means to include new groups of students and how to avoid institutionalizing literacy.

#### What the United States Can Learn from Sweden

Conversely, Americans could benefit from studying what I see as democratic literacy practices in Sweden and from importing some of the enthusiasm that characterizes writing research and the teaching of writing both in Sweden and in other European countries. Another point that Americans can learn from coming into contact with a country like Sweden is to question certain traditional practices and programs. Even though such questioning is already underway in some places and by certain scholars and teachers, it can become reinforced through increased influences from the outside.

### *A. Democratic Literacy Practices*

To a large extent I have consciously explored and discussed academic *literacy* through the lens of *democracy*. The combination of these two concepts continues to challenge and intrigue me even as this project draws to a close. In the process of my research I have unveiled certain *democratic literacy practices* that I would like to export from Sweden to the United States. For example, at Södertörn I was very impressed with the Swedish instructors' willingness to work together. Even though some of the collaboration was mandated from above, as in the planning sessions I saw taking place and in the shared syllabus for the three different sections of the writing course I studied, other get-togethers were quite voluntary and spontaneous. If Södertörn is in any way typical of a Swedish college/university, Swedish faculty members may have found means to combat the isolation and loneliness that Jane Tompkins finds only too characteristic of American higher education and reflects on in *A Life at School*:

People are isolated from each other and from themselves  
 by their individual interests, professional and personal  
 by their departments  
 by their crowded time schedules  
 by the physical distances between them  
 by the psychological distances between them  
 by the absence of a culture of conversation  
 by the belief that their welfare depends on the work they do in  
 isolation from one another. (191-92)

Tompkins describes her own efforts to create a sense of community at Duke University by fighting for, among other things, cappuccino bars where faculty and students would have opportunities to socialize among themselves or with one another. The instructors of Swedish and rhetoric at Södertörn often ate lunch together in groups in the crowded university cafeteria, and each department in Moas Båge at Södertörn is equipped with kitchen facilities: sink, range, refrigerator, microwave, coffee maker, table and chairs—an arrangement which makes it easy to prepare and share snacks. I view as literacy events both the formal and the informal meetings I observed, events that serve to nurture democratic and collaborative literacy practices.

Another manifestation of democratic practices was the inclusion of a part-time instructor like Christina in the planning sessions for the courses she taught. Since she knew already in May what she would be teaching in the fall, she had opportunity to make her voice count and did not have to feel invisible and on call, like so many part-time employees do at American universities.

Also in the relationship between instructors and students I saw practices in Sweden that I would like to export to the United States. One example would be the pass/fail grading system. The overall low emphasis on grades definitely contributed to a relaxed classroom atmosphere and a laid-back teaching style. I never heard an instructor punitively threaten a student with loss of points for a late essay, and the course information handouts I collected lack any information of the type that teachers in the U.S. usually provide, such as what the consequences will be if a paper is turned late and the percentages required for each grade level. In fact, the whole idea of evaluating writing in terms of percentages is foreign to a Swedish mind. Of course, I realize that exporting the

Swedish grading system to American universities would require a complete structural transformation which may come across as utopian. Fighting to implement a pass/fail grading policy for just writing courses, for example, would be rather meaningless, since students would then regard these courses as less demanding than their other courses and put in less than their best effort. The Swedish students I observed, who worked so hard for a mere “pass,” functioned within an educational system that deemphasizes grades and competition from the early years on.

Another positive outcome of the pass/fail grading system, as I see it, is that it can make it possible for teachers and students to place genuine emphasis on the writing process instead of the product. Even at the end of the semester, the Swedish students could be evaluated for the effort they had put into their works in progress, and there was, at least in the creative writing class, a clear sense that the students’ writing did not end with the conclusion of the semester but would continue beyond such a time boundary.

As I observed the Swedish students interact, I had many occasions to admire their level of maturity, motivation, and participation. I also marveled when I witnessed their sense of shared responsibility and interpersonal support. As Yagelsky claims, “[I]f literacy is participation in discourse, and if that participation is inescapably local . . . then literacy is inevitably about the complex and uncertain task of constructing a self or selves that can enter specific discourses in order to *act* in specific situations for specific purposes—academic or otherwise” (92; emphasis original). Based on Yagelsky’s definition of literacy as participation, I have concluded that many of the Swedish students I met were highly literate. Participation is also a key element in my understanding of democracy. So, one can claim that *participation* is the crucial testing ground both for

what it means to be literate and for what it means to live in a democracy, as a space where people are actively using their literacy tools to engage in meaningful discussions both inside and outside the academy.

My earlier analysis of the paradoxical pull in the concept of *democracy* itself continues to hold true. No doubt the larger societal structure plays a great role in people's way of thinking. The many years of Social Democratic government in Sweden have nurtured the collective, egalitarian aspect of *democracy*, whereas the capitalist system in the United States conditions people to think in individualistic terms. While I lived in Sweden, I had almost subconsciously picked up the utilitarian principle of the greatest good for the greatest number of people as a guide for how I lived my life, and I assumed, until I moved to the United States, that others to a large extent thought as collectively as I did.<sup>4</sup>

It may seem ironic and contradictory that the United States with its strong emphasis on individualism and its variety of school systems has created an educational climate with schools that are much more controlling than the schools in Sweden, in spite of Sweden's centralized educational system, yet maybe it is not so ironic. The Swedish society and its school system are more in tune with the goals that critical or liberatory thinkers find lacking in the United States. If democratic practices are built into the whole school curriculum, a centralized education system may not necessarily be an evil.

Aronowitz and Giroux discuss this possibility in *Education under Siege*:

It is important to view social control as having both positive and negative possibilities. That is, when linked to interests that promote self- and social empowerment, the construct of social control provides the theoretical

starting point upon which to establish the conditions for critical learning and practice. Similarly, the notion of power that underscores this position begins with the assumption that if social control is to serve the interests of freedom it must function so as to empower teachers and students. As used in this context, social control speaks to the forms of practice necessary for the demanding task of designing curricula that give students an active and critical voice, providing them with the skills that are basic for analysis and leadership in the modern world. (216)

As Sweden in general is more to the left on the political scale than the U.S., the revolutionary changes in the whole societal structure that some American literacy researchers and pedagogues are working for almost lose their meaning in a Swedish context. In his article “Liberating ‘Liberatory’ Education, or What Do We Mean by ‘Liberty’ Anyway?”—which critiques so-called liberatory or critical pedagogy—Jeffrey M. Ringer points to the strong need for analyzing critical pedagogy’s goal of “liberation”: “Because U.S. history is characterized by romantic visions of rugged, pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstrap individuality, it is all too easy to conceive of liberty as located primarily in the domain of the individual. And, in doing so, we potentially lose sight of critical pedagogy’s emphasis on the collective” (762). Ringer further discusses the democratic aims of critical pedagogy: “In this regard, liberatory pedagogy seeks to raise students’ critical awareness of systemic social injustice so that they can then effect change toward a more democratic society. And these visions of democracy are—apropos of the term *democracy* itself—cooperative, collective, and communal. They are not individualistic” (763). Ringer’s interpretation of critical pedagogy fits very well with my



own understanding of the Swedish version of democracy, and I believe that Ringer would share my claim that critical pedagogy does not seem all that radical from a Swedish point of view.

The terms “critical literacy” or “liberatory pedagogy” may not exist in Sweden, but the ideas definitely do, with the meaning that Durst puts into this concept:

This pedagogy . . . combines complex and demanding aspects of academic, civic, and personal literacy with the aim, not just of improving students’ abilities to communicate in writing, but of encouraging in students a reflective, questioning intelligence and a willingness to use that intelligence as fully participating members of a critical democracy. (37)

This is the same objective or vision that has contributed to the recent revitalization of rhetoric at Swedish colleges and universities.

### *B. Enthusiasm*

In my chapter on writing centers (Chapter IV), I stress that the enthusiasm I witnessed in Sweden over the establishing of writing centers is something Americans need to regain, the faith that writing centers can make a difference. A similar enthusiasm about academic writing in general is characteristic of both Sweden and other European countries. I have followed with interest the *dynamic* discussions on the EATAW listserv. Most recent has been the call for a formal organization of EATAW, which so far is more of a “club” than a real association, and a discussion about EATAW's purpose. The globalization of composition with greater inclusiveness of other perspectives could revitalize the discussion here in the United States. Sometimes our articles and presentations sound very tired, whiny, and pessimistic. Yes, fights are often called for;

but researchers and teachers also need to focus on the positive, and a conscious and sustained effort to look beyond the borders of our nation may give us a much-needed boost. Teachers of writing need to rekindle their enthusiasm and regain their faith in that, in teaching rhetoric and composition, they are doing something worthwhile. Also, the realization that some of the academic squabbles in the U.S. would be a luxury to the rest of the world can help American academicians regain a proper focus.

Instead of seeing the maturation of the field as a linear development from naiveté and innocence toward increasingly greater sophistication, I would like to sketch it as a cyclical formation. The field has certainly taken off, developed, and grown, but it needs to return to its roots now and then for sustenance and continued growth, as recognized in the commemorative issue of *CCC*, titled *A Usable Past: CCC at 50*. When Linda Flower and John Hayes first asserted that the writing process was not linear but “recursive,” their finding was slightly revolutionary; yet this point is now commonplace in higher education even though too many American schools to this day teach the writing process in a very linear and formulaic fashion of prewriting, writing, and revision. In a similar manner, any developmental process benefits from being viewed as recursive, with a great deal of overlap between stages and with continued attention to the source that first inspired a movement, a theory, or an action. Wendy Bishop shared reflections similar to these with her audience in her chair’s address at the CCCC convention in 2001, both about her own professional development and about rhetoric and composition as a field, when she spoke about both how enthusiasm can slowly fade and how it can be rekindled:

In the mid-1980s, Gary Olson published a useful teaching essay investigating the cliché. His research reminds me that what is clichéd and expected to me may be new or functional to my younger students.

There are also similarities to teaching innovations. As a young teacher, every new teaching theory and strategy was a delight, offered me insights. Then, I found myself helping new teachers learn to use an activity for the first time. I had to remind myself that what was beginning to sound like old news to me might still be new—not overworked nor mined out—for them.

Part of maturing within a field is to recognize this cyclical process.

(“Against the Odds” 326-27)

In addition to looking back on American roots, writing teachers can benefit from seeing the field develop and grow new roots in other places, under conditions that resemble the ones that earlier characterized the United States. I believe that observation of what is going on elsewhere in the world in terms of academic literacy practices, and observation of exchange of ideas with others who have taken up the role as “new teachers,” the profession can regain its own enthusiasm and revitalize the field as a whole.

### *C. Questioning Disciplinary Boundaries*

As a part of such a revitalization process, it can be intriguing to take stock and think about disciplinary boundaries. Like David Foster, I have found that “Cross-national study has the effect of making issues visible that are normally taken as givens, placing the familiar in new perspectives” and that “[i]nstitutional and systemic expectations” differ from one cultural context to another (*Writing with Authority* 6). A downside to being

identified with rhetoric and composition in the United States is the uneasy cohabitation in so many English departments between literature and composition, with compositionists being regarded as the “poor relations” (Beech and Lindquist). In the Swedish context, with literary studies and composition in separate departments, the split within American English departments does not exist. There may be other splits or other hidden hierarchies in Sweden of which I am blissfully ignorant, but the split between literature specialists and compositionists is not one of them.

Another instance of an artificial boundary, in my opinion, is the one between oral and written communication. In Sweden today the new emphasis on communication means *both* writing and speaking. Both are seen as equally important “tools” for success, not only in the academy but also for active participation in public life. Diana George and John Trimbur discuss the sometimes tense relationship between composition and communication in the United States in their insightful article “The ‘Communication Battle,’ or Whatever Happened to the 4th C?” When CCCC was established in 1949, one objective was to create an alliance between composition and communication. The yearly conferences included presentations in both areas, and first-year college communication courses that combined instruction in writing and speaking were in vogue (George and Trimbur 682-83). Yet, just about a decade later, the emphasis of CCCC had shifted to composition. George and Trimbur see several explanations for this development: one reason was that a group of speech or communication faculty had made a break with NCTE as far back as 1913 and begun to establish their own departments and professional organizations (684); another reason was that in the battle over what the first-year course should focus on, composition came out victorious since the need for writing instruction

was deemed to be most urgent (687). Since Swedish universities lack both mandatory first-year composition programs and separate communication departments, Swedes do not have the same institutional objections to viewing writing and speaking as elements of the same course or to offering courses in both oral and written communication within the same department as Americans often do. Although both an American university and a Swedish university may consider written and oral communication skills as equally important to its students, the Swedish university has an edge since it can coordinate its course offerings more easily because of the different departmental structure.<sup>5</sup>

A third boundary that one should not have to take for granted is that between creative and noncreative writing. Viewing *creative* as a stance, a positioning, instead of merely a term of genre, in the way Ingrid presented it to her students (as I have discussed in Chapter III), can allow writers to see and explore new possibilities both in the courses that focus on creative writing and the ones that are devoted mainly to expository writing.

#### *D. Questioning First-Year Composition Programs*

The fact that rhetoric and composition as a field to such a large extent has been linked to first-year composition courses in the United States should be a cause for reflection from a cross-national perspective. Instructors within American general studies writing programs often lack a clear focus and consensus even about the purpose and content of composition courses. They (or we, since I belong to this group) dabble with freewriting (which is important but could be transferred to content areas), reflective writing, creative writing, expository writing with and without sources (on topics that either the instructor or the students have a particular interest in), writing about literature (if that is what the instructor chooses to focus on), etc. These general, mandatory writing

courses may not be harmful, but they do not benefit all students alike since some students cannot see the use for them and, therefore, resist instruction. Writing instructors usually aim to develop their students' critical thinking skills, but they disagree about how best to reach this goal. Since there is no one formula for covering all the elements mentioned above, writing instructors need to think more about *what* they are doing and *why*. The amount of academic freedom varies greatly from one institution to the next, and I do not necessarily want to curtail academic freedom. Yet so many times I think that my own teaching would benefit from a clearer focus and better goal setting. Am I mainly interested in developing my students' critical thinking skills in a general sense? Should I mostly be concerned about the skills that will help students in future college courses or about the skills I assume students will need after they graduate? How do I know what they will need in the future? And because, in general, writing programs lump together students from different majors, those students are bound to need improvement of *varying* skills.

Yet there is, as I reluctantly admit, a beauty in these writing programs that throw together students with diverse backgrounds and diverse goals. It would not be half as interesting to teach or advise a group of just nursing majors, or business majors, or criminal justice majors, or history majors, who would be writing field-specific essays. Such programs have some positives, and I know that if I no longer taught in a general composition program, I would miss some of the fun assignments I now construct and the essays that I get in response to these assignments. Imagine, for instance, that I no longer could assign "write about a tradition" as a topic in a first-semester composition class but would have to gear my instruction toward a specific discipline. Then I would never get an

opportunity to read an essay like the one my student LaKeisha wrote in response to the assignment “write about a tradition.” She wrote about how sewing was a tradition that was passed down the generations as a gift to certain women in her family. This essay had a supernatural element to it that literally sent shivers down my spine as I read it.

With the general writing program, instructors are in a unique position to reach basically all incoming first-year students at the university, but the question remains how well we handle this responsibility and what the instructors have to offer. Seen in the larger context and for the benefit of the students, more discipline-specific writing would make more sense to most of them. First-year composition instructors might cut off the limb they are sitting on, in the sense that they may no longer have jobs if these programs terminate, but the students would be better served if they could see that writing is an integral part of their chosen major instead of a mandatory course that does not directly relate to anything else they are studying. Composition instructors need to stop treating traditional first-year university composition programs as some form of holy cow or, as Joan Mullin says, “cash cow”(220), since they to a large extent create funding for higher-level courses for a small number of English majors.

Composition instructors in the United States could benefit from taking a closer look at European approaches to academic writing. These approaches are not headed in the direction of first-year composition programs but attempt to spread the responsibility for writing instruction across the departments (WAC or WID). Composition specialists are needed, then, not to teach thousands of incoming students but to give shorter courses for students at all levels of academic writing; to give lectures and lead workshops; to produce instructional material for different subject areas; and, as Olga Dysthe said, as she

envisioned the future of writing instruction at European universities, to train and support the instructors in the various disciplines who would be teaching writing courses (“Mutual Challenge”).

Ideally, first-year composition programs will contribute to producing “fully participating members of a critical democracy” (Durst 37), but since most of the writing programs in the United States fall short of this goal anyway, this objective could perhaps more successfully be incorporated into WAC or WID programs.

#### Future Research

After Mona Blåsjö studied how students were socialized into the academic discourse communities of history and political science at Stockholm University, Ann Blückert has undertaken to research the academic socialization of law students in Uppsala. In future research Swedes need to pay much more attention to the social and cultural backgrounds of students. Researchers need to be willing to spend time on longitudinal studies both of individuals and of groups of students. Research like that of Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater, who followed a couple of students around from class to class to study how they learned to write in the academy, would be fruitful also in a Swedish context. Such research could serve to further the dialogue between Swedish and American scholars about the nature of academic literacy from a democratic perspective. Whom do the present conventions benefit? Whom do they exclude? What conventions and standards can we loosen up on? Can we make academic discourse more accessible without lowering standards? Can scholarly writing be combined with personal narrative to some or a larger extent? If Swedes do not want to replicate American studies, Swedish



composition and literacy researchers should at least want to pay closer attention to, and to emulate the research from, Britain's New Literacies approach. Blåsjö is clearly aware of this British research, but she too hastily dismisses it as being too linked to the British social class-structure to have relevance for Sweden.

#### Postscript

The type of ethnographic research I have been engaged in is rich and multifaceted; nonetheless, it can only catch a slice of a given culture at a particular point in time. Inevitably, situations will change, and some recent changes in Sweden are too important to ignore. One is political. After the Social Democrats lost power in the election of 2006, new educational policies may be in the making, but it is yet too early to tell what effect they will have on higher education.

Another change is that the time has run out for the Special Committee on Recruitment to Higher Education, which provided funding for Swedish writing centers, such as Språkverkstan, while the centers were run as experiments or pilot projects. Now the universities and colleges themselves have had to shoulder the financial responsibility for writing support. The writing center at Södertörns högskola still exists; however, it is no longer called Språkverkstan but Studieverkstad [study workshop], and it has moved to a location adjacent to the library (Södertörns högskola's web site). With extended hours of operation and more tutors, it has obviously become a permanent fixture at Södertörn, but I do not know whether all the other writing or language centers in Sweden have been equally fortunate.

A third and potentially powerful change is caused all over Europe by the so-called Bologna process, which was set in motion by the Bologna declaration in 1999 (Demstader). Its objective is to streamline higher education to facilitate the exchange of students and transfer of credits between different countries. In Sweden the most noticeable change so far is a recalculation of credit hours. Instead of the 20-point per semester system, or 1 point per week for full-time studies, from July 2007 onward Swedish students will earn 30 points per semester or 1 ½ points per week. This change appears to be mostly administrative. As positive as the offered mobility and increased opportunities for European students may seem, it worries me to think that the Bologna reform might curtail academic freedom. Because other European countries place much more emphasis on grades than Sweden does, I am afraid that if Swedish universities are forced to follow suit, students like the ones I observed at Södertörn, who operated within a pass-fail system, could lose what I considered to be their intrinsic motivation.<sup>6</sup>

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> For “followers,” see, e.g., the different contributors to Wolff, Janice M., ed. *Professing in the Contact Zone: Bringing Theory and Practice Together*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Without composition as a separate field of academic study, both Ulla Moberg and Mona Blåsjö would think of themselves and be referred to by others as linguists.

<sup>3</sup> Hengl and Gould’s text appeared in a posting on the EATAW listserv in July 2006, in response to a call for “useful links” pertaining to academic writing.

<sup>4</sup> The Social Democrats lost their majority in the election in September 2006; however, it is yet too early to tell what this change will mean for educational policy in the future. Nonetheless, changes of governments in Sweden rarely cause abrupt shifts in established policy.

<sup>5</sup> For example, The University of Southern Mississippi stresses, in its Quality Enhancement Plan, that it sees as its mission to “improve oral and written communication competencies” among students. See <[http://www.usm.edu/qep/QEP\\_plan.html](http://www.usm.edu/qep/QEP_plan.html)>.

<sup>6</sup> So far the new seven step grading scale is optional for Swedish universities, but some, e.g., Stockholm University, are in the process of implementing it. See “Bologna Process Facts.” Ed. Per Larsson and Paul Parker. Stockholm University. 9 Dec. 2007. 9 Jan. 2008<<http://www.su.se/pub/jsp/polopoly.jsp?d=8691&a=32407>>.

## APPENDIX A



## THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION REVIEW COMMITTEE  
NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Human Subjects Protection Review Committee in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 312.61), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Event Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months. Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: **R22042203**

PROJECT TITLE: **Colossus on Clay Feet: Academic Literacy from a Swedish Perspective**

PROPOSED PROJECT DATES: **04/26/03 to 04/25/04**

PROJECT TYPE: **Renewal**

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR(S): **Birgitta Ramsey**

COLLEGE/DIVISION: **Liberal Arts**

DEPARTMENT: **English**

FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: **N/A**

HSPRC COMMITTEE ACTION: **Exempt-Approval**

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: **04/15/03 to 04/14/04**

Gregory Epps, Ph.D.

HSPRC Co-Chair

The University of Southern Mississippi

4-16-03  
Date

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD  
HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION REVIEW COMMITTEE

1000 East University Street, Room 1000

Hattiesburg, MS 39402

Hattiesburg • Long Beach • Ocean Springs • Biloxi • John C. Stennis Space Center

## APPENDIX B

**Questions to guide my own classroom observations**

What level is the course? Is it a required course? How many students? Mostly male/female? Age range? Ethnic makeup?

Is the classroom equipped with computers?

Other observations about the physical locale: classroom location, size, colors, light, temperature, placement of desks (student and teacher desks)?

What appears to be the guiding philosophy/rationale behind this course?

What type of assignment is the class working on? Can I get access to course policy sheets/syllabi? Does the course have a specific "content" or theme?

Who is doing the talking? Does the instructor lecture about writing? Are the students discussing writing problems/strategies or are they reacting to the content of some text they have read in preparation for a writing assignment?

How much writing do the students do in the classroom/out of the class?

How engaged do they appear to be with the course material? Who participates in the class? In what way?

Do the students work in groups? If so, do they share their writing with members of their groups?

How are they assessed (on individual essays/portfolios; throughout the semester or on specific occasions, such as a midterm and a final exam; according to what criteria)? How are they graded?

Can I get access to some writing samples?

## APPENDIX C

**Student Survey**

Circle your answers or fill in short answers of your own.

1. You are
  - A. male.
  - B. female.
  
2. Which age group best represents you?
  - A. under 20
  - B. 20-25
  - C. 26-30
  - D. over 31
  
3. How would you best describe your ethnic/national background?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
4. Which choice best describes your educational background?
  - A. Both parents have college degrees.
  - B. One parent has a college degree.
  - C. Both parents are high-school graduates.
  - D. One parent is a high-school graduate.
  - E. Neither parent completed high school.
  
5. Mother's occupation? \_\_\_\_\_  
Father's occupation? \_\_\_\_\_
  
6. Why did you choose Södertörns högskola over, for instance, Stockholm University?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
7. Have you taken one or more of the introductory courses offered at Södertörn?
  - A. yes
  - B. no

8. If your answer to question # 7 is “no,” go on to # 9.  
If your answer to question #7 is “yes,” how would you rate the experience?
- A. very positive/helpful
  - B. somewhat positive/helpful
  - C. neither positive nor negative
  - D. somewhat negative/not very helpful
  - E. very negative/total waste of my time
9. Have you ever visited Språkverkstan (the Writing Center) to get help with a paper or a presentation?
- A. 3 times or more
  - B. 1-2 times
  - C. never
10. If your answer to question # 9 is “never,” go on to # 11.  
If you have visited Språkverkstan at least once, how would you best describe your experience?
- A. very positive/helpful
  - B. somewhat positive/helpful
  - C. neither positive nor negative
  - D. somewhat negative/not very helpful
  - E. very negative/total waste of my time
11. How important is writing to you?
- A. very important--for school, for my future career and to me as a person
  - B. important for school but not for my future career
  - C. not important for school but definitely for my career
  - D. important to me as a person
  - E. not important in any area of my life
12. In a short paragraph, describe the writing experiences you’ve had at the university level. (Address at least some of the following questions: How does the writing you do at the university differ from the writing you did in high school? Does the university, in your opinion, offer enough writing instruction, or would you like to see more emphasis on writing? Do you experience that you have too much or too little freedom to shape your writing assignments as you like? Do you enjoy writing? Do you see yourself as a weak or a strong writer?)

## APPENDIX D

**Questions about Södertörns högskola:**

Who took the initiative to the founding of this particular college (soon-to-be university)?

Who decided on its location? What does the location mean to the university?

What's the enrollment? (How many students have immigrant background?)

How would you assess the success of your introductory courses/basic academic year?

What's the enrollment in these courses?

Are these courses voluntary, or are certain students assigned to them? (If so, according to what criteria?)

How long have these introductory courses been offered?

What do you expect students to learn in these courses? How important is writing instruction?

Would you say that students with immigrant background are overrepresented in these bridging-the-gap (developmental/basic) courses?

How many of the students who take introductory/basic courses go on to complete their degree?

Where did you seek your inspiration and models for these courses?

Was (were) there (a) certain individual (s) behind these courses, or did the Swedish government initiate them? (Or did you influence the government to recommend/mandate other universities to follow your example?)

How would you describe the relationship between Södertörns högskola and other universities in Sweden?

Do students have any say in determining course offerings/course content?

**Questions about the Writing Center (Språkverkstan) at Södertörns högskola**

Has Språkverkstan been here from the very beginning (1996)?

Where did you look for models when you decided to open a writing center?

Where is it located (central location, tucked away)?

How well known is it? How do students find out about it?

Are the hours (4hrs/week) sufficient to meet the demand?



How many students use the services? Do they come because some teacher sent them or on their own initiative?

Do you keep statistics of the visits?

Do you have many students who come on a regular basis?

Would you characterize most students who come for tutoring as weak or accomplished writers?

What are the most common writing problems?

I have read your mission statement and about your policies. How well does your vision of the writing center fit in with the students' (perceived) needs? With other teachers' wishes?

How is the writing center funded? Do you have to justify your existence to some authority to retain funding? Show "results"?

How many people work as tutors? What training do they have? Have you considered peer tutoring?

How much do you use computers in the writing center?

### **Questions for writing instructors/researchers**

How do you define "literacy"?

What do you make of the fact that the Swedish language doesn't have a good word for "literacy"?

Who decides what "literacy" means? In whose interest does the definition work-- government's? teachers'? students'?

Do you regard literacy/writing instruction in Sweden as in any way politicized or controversial?

Do you experience conflicting goals/expectations for your work as a teacher of writing?

Do your students often/sometimes write collaborative essays? Are the so-called C-essays ever collaborative?

Who decides on the criteria for a passing C-essay (each department/individual instructors/some form of committees)?

What goals/objectives do you have for this class? What do you want your students to learn?

Do you see yourself as adhering to any specific writing philosophy/teaching philosophy?

Do you see your mission in the classroom primarily as providing skills training (equip students to meet some short-term goal (e.g., write an adequate essay, grammatically speaking) or as providing a space for critical thinking—or as some combination of the two?

How do you react to ideological conflicts (students not agreeing with you/one another)?

In what “stage” of the writing process do you spend the most time with your students?

How do you and your students use technology in the classroom?

What types of writing courses does this university offer: writing courses for Swedish majors/courses in professional writing (business writing, technical writing, etc.)?

How much collaboration goes on between instructors? Who chooses the textbooks and writes the course policies, syllabi etc.? Do you ever have pedagogical seminars for the department?

Do you ever meet with instructors from other departments (or do they come to you) who seem to be more or less “forced” to teach writing to help their students fulfill the essay requirement(s)?

Do you ever discuss criteria for the evaluation of academic essays across the curriculum?

Where have you sought your models? Do you have any favorite theorist/practitioner?

What is your particular area of research/expertise?

To what extent do you feel successful in your job?

Why did you choose to work at Södertörns högskola? Have you experienced any particular rewards/challenges?

Have you perceived a change in the ability to write among university students during your years as a teacher?

Is Sweden, in your opinion, experiencing a literacy crisis?

How monolithic of a term is academic literacy? Would you say that your idea of what constitutes academic literacy has ever changed or may be changing as we speak?

Would you say that I'm correct in assuming that the C-essays Swedish university students write is a form of test of academic literacy?

To what extent do these essays loom over and steer your writing instruction?

Do you see a need for extensive writing programs at Swedish universities (a Swedish version of Freshman Composition courses)?

**Specific questions for those faculty members at Södertörns högskola who are participating in the project Retorikens didaktik (the didactic of rhetoric)**

How did you get to participate in this project? Did you apply or were you "drafted"?

Who is behind the project with funding and directives? In whose interests is this project carried out?

Who decides the design of the project? How much can you shape it to suit your own needs/the needs of your students?

How does the fact that you're participating in this project affect you as a researcher and as a teacher? How has it influenced

- a) your understanding of literacy?
- b) your syllabus and actual classroom practices?

So far, do you feel "liberated" or "confined" by the project and its design?

How does your participation benefit your students?


Do you "believe" in the idea or do you feel obligated to live up to the expectations of those who are supplying the funding?

How easy is the emphasis on classical rhetoric to combine with the goal of attracting new groups of students? Is there anything in particular you can take from classical rhetoric and carry with you to one of the introductory/basic courses? Instinctively I would see classical rhetorical exercises as more geared toward students who are good writers when they come to the university than toward those who struggle; how can you prove me wrong?

## APPENDIX E

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# *Vill du?*



*En broschyr om  
introduktionskursen  
för studier på högskolan*

## APPENDIX F

Kerstin Zachrisson  
Svenska GK  
Grafisk form grupp II  
Vetenskaplig text del I

## Modersmålets betydelse

### 1. Inledning

#### 1.1 Bakgrund och syfte

Många människor saknar fullgott modersmål. Detta skapar problem både för dem själva och samhället. Språket har idag delvis ersatt börd och pengar, som klassmärke. En rättvis fördelning av språket är både ett rättmätigt och nödvändigt krav.

Modersmålsfattigdom är vanlig bland den så kallade arbetarklass<sup>en</sup> och underklass<sup>en</sup>. Detta gör det svårt att ta sig in på högre studier som leder till ökade valmöjligheter på arbetsmarknaden. *eller ta vikt den*

Idag när vi har många människor från andra länder, som bor i segregerade områden, där det knappt finns några svenskar. Barn till invandrare, vilka endast talar sitt modersmål, kommer ofta först i kontakt med svenska språket när de börjar skolan. Då riskerar de få svårt att hänga med i undervisningen i alla ämnen under hela skoltiden. *} mb*

Hur ska vi lösa problemet med att människor slås ut i tidigt stadium i livet, ofta redan i skolan?

#### 1.2 Definition av modersmål

Modersmålet är det språk föräldrarna eller eventuellt andra vårdnadshavare talar under barnets tidigare uppväxt. Detta är människans grundspråk. *?*

#### 1.3 Metod

Materialet i denna undersökning utgörs främst av boken: Det nya klassmärket av Per-Åke Strid, fil.mag. samt böckerna: Fult språk av Lars-Gunnar Andersson och Världens dåligaste språk av Fredrik Lindström. De var lämpliga eftersom de tog upp problemet på ett sakligt och lättfattligt sätt. Därutöver har jag reflekterat ur min egen verklighet hur viktigt språket är för den personliga utvecklingen. *konstr*

*Metod?*

#### 1.4 Disposition

*tempus?*

I det första inledande kapitlet presenterade jag bakgrund, syfte och metod. I (kapitel) två redogör jag ~~för~~ hur viktigt modersmålet är för människan. I kapitel tre presenterar jag tidigare undersökningar i ämnet samt min egen tes. I kapitel fyra diskuterar jag attityder kring vikten av ett bra språk.

## 2. Modersmålets betydelse för individen i samhället

### 2.1 Modersmålets betydelse historiskt sett

*delat*

Människan har nått sin framgång i evolutionen genom samarbete. Detta kräver ett språk. Man tror att språket från början hade en praktisk betydelse som att tala om jakt och tillverkning av redskap etcetera. Talspråket gav också möjligheter att tala om abstrakta ting, sådant som det ej gick att framföra med teckenspråk som tid och rum. Därur växte förmodligen religiösa föreställningar fram. Tack vare språket kunde människan skapa kultur och göra tekniska uppfinningar. Detta ledde till ett enormt framåtskridande för arten Homo Sapiens.

### 2.2 Orsaker till försämrat språk

Det har alltid funnits människor med dåligt språk: För femtio till hundra år sedan hade förmodligen många mycket sämre språk än idag, med tanke på det nuvarande utvecklade utbildningssystemet. Däremot var kraven på och behovet av ett välutvecklat språk inte lika stort som det är nuförtiden. Det var ett helt annat samhälle, det så kallade bondesamhället. En stor del av folket levde i en liten krets av släkt och kärnfamilj, där de gjorde sig förstådda inom den lilla gruppen. Denna bondebefolkning arbetade till stor del med enkelt kroppsarbete, som åkerbruk, djurskötsel och hemmet. I dessa sysslor var kroppskrafterna viktigare än språket.

I takt med att industrisamhället och senare informationssamhället utvecklades ökade även kraven på ett välutvecklat språk. Samtidigt flyttade allt fler människor med utländskt bakgrund till Sverige. Först kom arbetskraftinvandringen och senare kom olika flyktingvågor. Problemet med detta är segregationen med uppdelning av bostadsområden och arbetsmarknad för svenskar och invandrare.

## 3. Det är viktigt att grundlägga ett bra modersmål i tid

Språkutvecklingen börjar mycket tidigt. Före puberteten är språket mest utvecklingsbart. Äldre invandrare kommer alltid ha en brytning, hur mycket de än anstränger sig och studerar vårt språk. Författaren Per-Åke Strid menar i sin bok Det nya klassmärket att som vuxen är tiden förbi att tillskansa sig ett bra modersmål. Strid säger sig grunda detta på egna erfarenheter, som han inte exemplifierar ytterligare.

Jag tror också att det är oerhört viktigt att grunda ett bra modersmål och rikt ordförråd i späda ålder. Däremot tror jag till skillnad mot författaren att människan är formbar genom hela livet. Visserligen blir kvaliteten på språkbruket bäst om den införskaffas tidigt, men det är däremot aldrig för sent att utveckla sitt språk. Likt vuxna människor som kommer hit från andra länder och lär sig språket kan även vuxna svenskar skaffa sig ett bättre språk. Det kräver mer ansträngning.

#### 4. Språket det nya klassmärket

Jag tror anledningen att man ger upp inför vuxnas språkutveckling både modernmålsfattiga svenskar och invandrare handlar om socioekonomiska grunder. Det kostar att sätta vuxna i god svenskutbildning. Det viktigaste är små klasser där alla får chans att uttrycka sig så mycket som möjligt. Det samma gäller daghemsverksamheten, som Strid är så kritisk emot. I de flesta familjer idag behöver båda arbeta för sitt uppehälle och inte främst för att tillskaffa sig hög materiell standard, som författaren antyder utan. Därför behövs barnomsorgen. Däremot är det oerhört viktigt med små grupper där de vuxna kan kommunicera mycket med barnen.

Därmed blir det också svårt för de barn som föds här av invandrande föräldrar eftersom många inte lär sig svenska förrän de börjar skolan. Samtidigt finns det föräldrar som är analfabeter och ej kan sitt modersmål korrekt heller. Ett problem är också bristfällig eller indragen hemspråksundervisning samt att detta ursprungsspråk inte är gångbart i vårt samhälle. Därmed blir dessa barn halvspråkiga istället för tvåspråkiga. Det är vanligt att dessa barn får problem i skolan eftersom alla ämnen undervisas på svenska. I förlängningen leder ofta detta till att de ej kvalificerar sig till högre utbildning och blir utslagna på arbetsmarknaden. Vissa av dessa hamnar i kriminalitet på grund av sitt utanförskap. Tyvärr förklarar en del obetänksamma journalister detta med kultur. Det finns ingen kulturell kriminalitet utan det handlar helt enkelt om klassproblematik.

Det är viktigt att tala mycket och ofta läsa högt för barn för att ge dem ett bra modersmål. Både föräldrar och barnomsorg och skola har ett stort ansvar. Jag anser också att det går att tillskansa sig ett bra språk även som vuxen, fast det krävs mycket arbete. Bra vuxenutbildning är därmed viktigt.

#### Litteraturlista

Strid Per-Åke; *Det nya klassmärket*  
Andersson Lars-Gunnar; *Fult språk*  
Lindström Fredrik; *Världens dåligaste språk*

*Bm! Men du behöver lär  
om det igen  
Selenas information  
Hur skriver man  
ditt. lish?*

## APPENDIX G

Åsa Eriksson  
 Grundkurs i Svenska (med grafisk form), grupp 2  
 Skrivuppgift 10, version 1  
 Medium: Vagabond  
 Mottagare: alla reslystna

## Att resa i Indien- inte som på räls

När Aeroflots skruttiga plan landar med dunder och brak, drar vi en lättnadens suck. Äntligen är vi på fast mark igen. Tjugo minuter senare står vi utanför Bombays flygplats, omringade av nyfikna indier. Klockan är fyra på morgonen och det är kolsvart ute. Vi är skräckslagna och önskar att vi aldrig lämnat det ryska flygplanet...

Vid den lilla informationsdisken inne på flygplatsen får vi adressen till ett billigt hotell i stan. Mannen bakom disken ger oss stränga order om att ta en Pre Paid taxi, vilket betyder att vi redan innan betalar för resan och inga ytterligare utgifter kommer att dyka upp vid framkomsten. Vi får ett nummer på den taxi vi ska åka med, men innan vi ens hunnit börja leta kommer en man fram och kollar på pappret, sliter sedan till sig våra väskor och börjar gå mot en av bilarna. Vi tror det är chauffören, men det är en väskbärare som vill tjäna pengar, som blir aggressiv när vi inte på en gång förstår att han ska ha betalt. Med skakiga knän bär det sedan av i en helvetesfärd in mot Bombay. Genom bilrutan ser vi människor i högar ligga och sova utmed motorvägen, kåkstäder och kor som letar bland soporna.

Ta oss bort från Bombay, nu! Det är den första tanken denna första morgon i Indien. Vi tar en taxi till centralstationen och beger oss mot biljettluckan. En man står och hänger i dörröppningen till disken. "Kom in, tjejer så ska jag hjälpa er!". Vi går in bakom och förklarar vart vi ska, han skriver ned informationen och ber om pengarna. Biljetterna först, pengar sedan är vårt förslag men det går inte. Han får pengarna, ropar något till en man som tar emot pengar och pappret med

instruktioner. Mannen dröjer och vi börjar ana att dessa pengar är kastade i sjön. Men då dyker han upp med två tågbiljetter. Vi stressas på att uppsöka rätt perrong och vi rusar iväg. Eftersom tåget (som vanligt, förstår vi efter några dagar) är försenat har vi tid att läsa på biljetterna. Allt stämmer utom priset, vi betalade mannen tre gånger mer än det pris som står på biljetten... Det som gör oss förvånade är att dessa "biljettförsäljare" faktiskt gick och köpte tågbiljetterna till oss, istället för att försvinna med pengarna. En slags Robin Hood filosofi kanske?

Säker?

När tåget kommer, hjälper två unga indier oss att hitta rätt vagn och rätt sittplats. De förklarar att de plastförsedda britserna, som är tre över varandra, har var sitt nummer och att de flesta brukar trängas på den längst ned tills att det blir dags att sova. På denna tio timmars resa till Goa ska vi inte sova, så vi sätter oss till rätta och tittar ut över slummen i Bombays utkant och den vackra natur som tar vid. Mitt emot oss sitter två välklädda män, den ena bor på Nya Zeeland och är hemma på besök, den andra ska till sitt hus i Goa. De frågar intresserat om allt mellan himmel och jord och när de får höra att vi inte har bokat hotell i Goa tittar de frågande på oss. De tycker det är vansinnigt att två tjejer ska komma till en främmande stad mitt i natten utan att ha någonstans att ta vägen. Det bestäms att husägaren ska hjälpa oss med taxi och hotell. Vi tittar slött ut genom vagnens gallerförsedda fönstergluggar och blir minst sagt förvånade när en stenbumling flyger in och träffar min vän på armen. Vi lär oss därmed att se upp när vi närmar oss städerna, eftersom barnen står där vid rälsen och kastar sten mot tågen.

Goas stränder är precis vad vi behöver efter dessa första dagar i Indien. Tågresan hit gör att vi drar oss för att åka vidare och passar på att under någon vecka åka mellan de olika stränderna. Från Goas huvudstad



Åsa Eriksson  
 Grundkurs i Svenska (med grafisk form), grupp 2  
 Skrivuppgift 10, version 1  
 Medium: Vagabond  
 Mottagare: alla reslystna

till första stranden åkte vi taxi, men bestämde oss för att åka lokalbuss till de andra stränderna. Prisskillnaden är otrolig, bussresan kostar 2,50 och samma sträcka med taxi 40-50 kronor. Bussen avgår från ett gathörn lite då och då, det finns inga exakta tider. När vi kommer till en busstation och ska byta buss, är det bara att lyssna på de skrikande männen som springer omkring och försöker få folk att fylla deras bussar. På bussen står också namnet på den stad eller ställe den ska till. När bussen är full och börjat rulla kommer en liten pojke och plockar in pengarna. Turister betalar förstås mer än lokalbefolkningen.

När det är dags att lämna Goa och åka till den gamla ruinstaden Hampi beger vi oss till tågstationen för att köpa biljetter. Kösystemen är obefintliga och det är vassast armbågar som får biljetter först. Vi knuffas omkring ett tag innan vi står på oss och kommer fram till luckan. Vi säger vart vi ska och att vi ska åka andra klass utan luftkonditionering. Antingen var vagnen full eller så gick inte önskemålet fram för vi får biljetter till den allmänna vagnen. I guideboken går att läsa att det ofta är vild trängsel och kapplöpning för att få tag i platser. Boken tipsar om att leja en bärare som letar upp och håller plats för några slantar i ersättning. Och visst har boken rätt, fullständigt kaos utbryter när tåget kommer in till perrongen. Det är människor överallt som hänsynslöst knuffar och tränger sig. Till slut lyckas vi få en plats på en träbrits, utan en bärarens hjälp. Vi somnar nästan direkt av utmattningen, som ovan turist i Indien tar det på krafterna att hålla samma tempo som invånarna.

Efter Hampi åker vi norröver mot Bombay och Rajasthan. Vi bestämmer oss för att gå till en resebyrå och boka biljetter, vi vill vara säkra på att få platsbiljetter och vi

orkar inte slåss med ett femtiotal indier utanför en biljettlucka. Våra biljetter hämtas dagen efter och vi hamnar snart på nattåget mot Bombay. Den resan visar sig bli mycket obehaglig för min vän. Hon tar britsen närmast golvet och på natten vaknar hon av att en man står lutad över henne. Trots att hon skriker och knuffar in honom i väggen, cirkulerar han i närheten hela natten. Det är de övre bäddarna vi frågar efter nästföljande gång det ska åkas nattåg. Dagen efter spenderas på tåget, som anländer först på eftermiddagen i Bombay. Tiggarna driver omkring i vagnarna och vill ha pengar. Magra unga flickor med små barn på armen gråter och pekar på sina magar och det dåliga samvetet kommer över mig när jag känner hur min mage hänger över byxlinningen. Många av medpassagerarna (som mestadels är män) ger tiggarna en liten slant eller något att äta. Försäljarnas verksamhet på tågen tycks gå bra. De säljer te, frukt, nötter, soppor. Chaitet är det strykande åtgång på. Eftersom allt är väldigt smutsigt på tåget, dammet ligger tjockt över britsarna och matrester och insekter frodas, så undviker vi att äta så länge det går. En annan anledning till att hålla sig borta från mat och dryck är bristen på rent vatten och att toaletterna är täckta av urin och stinker.

I Bombay pustar vi en stund och tar sedan en taxi till den tågstation där tåget mot Ahmedabad avgår. Det är rusningstrafik och taxin blir stående i en bilkö. Vi har rutorna neddragna och det tar inte många sekunder innan en smutsig liten flicka springer mot bilen och kör in sin magra arm genom rutan. Hon grabbar tag i min väns arm och gråter. Sedan lättar trafiken och flickan drar tillbaka armen.

Resan mot Ahmedabad går smärtfritt och vi anländer klockan fyra på morgonen. Men det är inte här vi ska stanna, vi är på väg till Udaipur i Rajasthan och måste byta tåg här. Vi står villrådiga på perrongen och undrar vart vi ska börja. Att se villrådiga ut

Åsa Eriksson  
 Grundkurs i Svenska (med grafisk form), grupp 2  
 Skrivuppgift 10, version 1  
 Medium: Vagabond  
 Mottagare: alla reslystna

är väl det sämsta för två tjejer mitt i natten på en indisk tågstation. Det är vi helt medvetna om, men omständigheterna gör att detta tillstånd inte går att dölja. En man kommer fram och frågar var vi ska, vi säger vart och att vi bara väntar på att tåget ska komma. Han säger att det är bättre att åka med hans buss, den går strax till skillnad från tåget som vi skulle behöva vänta på i flera timmar. Han ska skjutsa oss till bussen som är mycket bekväm och snabb, det tar endast fem timmar att komma fram. Eftersom vi har varit i Indien i nästan tre veckor vet vi att det kommer ta långt över fem timmar, tidsuppfattningen här tycks handla om önskemål snarare än verklighet. Och beträffande bekvämligheten, ja det får man ta med en nypa salt.

Vi kapitulerar och hoppar in i hans riksha (mopedtaxi). Först bär det av till en liten resebyrå, som är som ett hål i väggen, sedan mot bussen. Den avgår nästan i tid och är faktiskt riktigt fräsch! Det är första gången vi åker långfärdsbuss. I en hiskelig fart bär det av. Varje gupp gör bussen till en studs madrass, vi flyger upp i luften och studsar fram och tillbaka i sätena några gånger efter landningen. Vid varje litet gupp... Och görs till hysterisk indisk musik på högsta volym. Alla indier är oberörda, de har väl varit med förut. Trots den höga hastigheten hinner vi, till vår förskräckelse, se alla krockade bussar, bilvrak och överkörda kor som ligger utmed vägen. Vi anar att vi ligger risigt till, men väljer att tänka på något annat.

Bussen var en lek med döden och en väldigt obekväm sådan, men trots det var det smidigare än att ta tåget. Och detta resonemang för vi när det är dags att ta sig från Udaipur till Delhi. På en resebyrå köper vi bussbiljetterna och tar sedan en riksha till bussen. Stoppen är många och det behövs verkligen. Utrymmet för benen

är i det närmaste obefintligt och knän och leder värker och är stela. Musiken uteblir till vår stora glädje.

Vi når Delhi ca fem timmar för sent. Det tar lång tid att ta sig fram genom staden, då trafiken har hunnit tätna. Till slut kommer vi fram till den stora turistgatan och letar upp ett hotell. Vi har svårt att gå, speciellt i trappor eftersom våra knän nästan förtvinat under den långa resan upp till huvudstaden, men efter en (iskall) dusch och lite mat börjar kroppen bli sig själv igen.

Det är snart dags att lämna Indien, men innan måste vi skaffa oss visum till Vietnam som blir nästa stopp. Den kalla duschen känns långt borta efter några minuter i den öppna rikshan. Avgaserna tränger fram tårar i ögonen och hettan gör att svetten forsar på kroppen. Men vi kommer dit vi ska och det går relativt fort, även om taxichauffören har svårt att hitta i ambassadområdet. Han frågar alla han ser tills vi är utanför rätt ambassad.

Det ultimata transportmedlet är utan tvekan taxin, luftkonditionering och mjuka säten. På väg ut mot flygplatsen lutar jag mig tillbaka i allt det mjuka och njuter av kylan. Det är himmelriket. Då tänker jag att när jag blir miljonär ska jag åka taxi genom Indien.

*Åsa Eriksson  
 Skrivuppgift 10  
 Vagabond  
 Mottagare: alla reslystna*

## APPENDIX H

södertörns  
högskola  
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE



**Har du kört fast?**

**Kom till  
Språkverkstan!**

## APPENDIX I

**Questions to Ewa-Lena and Robert Regarding Their C-Essays**

1. How much **advising** and **assistance** did you receive (answer, if possible in hours)? How many times did you meet with your advisor? How were the occasions distributed over the semester? Was the advising mandatory or voluntary? Was it sufficient? Does your university have a writing center that students can come to for extra help with their essays?
2. What **instructions** have you been given for the **length** of the essay? Are the instructions and requirements the same for individual and collaborative essays? Is three the largest number of authors allowed?
3. The essays I have seen seem to follow a very specific **format**. Why is the format so important? How did you learn to write in this manner? Do you have a book that gives you the format? Did you receive any explicit writing instruction, or did you simply look at earlier essays? What do you think of the format—did it help you or hinder you in your writing? Are any deviations allowed?
4. Can you tell me a little about the **defense** of your essay? How did it work? How long did it take? Who were present? What do “opposers” look for? How have they been trained? How constructive was the critique you received? Do you remember any specifics? What happens after the defense? Have you yourself served as “opposer”? If so, how was that experience?

5. Who **evaluates** and **grades** the essay? What separates a passing essay from one that passes with distinction? How common is it that an essay is considered failing? Is the essay graded strictly on content, or does linguistic correctness also count? How fair is the grading? Do all universities and colleges go by the same standards?
6. Is the essay requirement **meaningful**, in your opinion, or should it be abolished? In other words, did you learn anything from the experience? How many of the students in your class/group did not finish the 10-point essay in ten weeks?
7. Feel free to add any comments of your own that you think will help me to better understand the importance of C-essays and the work you did with your particular essay.

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